



EXAM ANXIETY

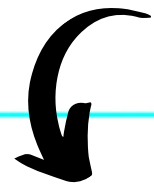
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Who Am I?

this is me!



Education Mental Health Practitioner

BSc Psychology

Postgrad low-intensity CBT-informed interventions for common mental health difficulties in children & young people.



Introduction

What is anxiety?

Causes of anxiety?

Our own thinking styles

How can you help?

- Growth mindset
- Importance of lifestyle
- Acts of compassion
- Reframing

For Young People, Exam Anxiety Can Feel Like...

I have so much revision to
do for my A-levels

I am not going to get
my predicted grades.

My stress is causing me to
have arguments at home.



The amount of work I
have from school is piling
up and I am finding it
hard to keep up.

I just feel like crying
all the time

What Did Exam Anxiety

Feel Like for You?



What Is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a normal process that everyone goes through.

It is defined as "a feeling of worry, nervousness or unease about something with an uncertain outcome".



THE FLIGHT OR FIGHT RESPONSE

Evolutionary biological mechanism designed to protect us from threats

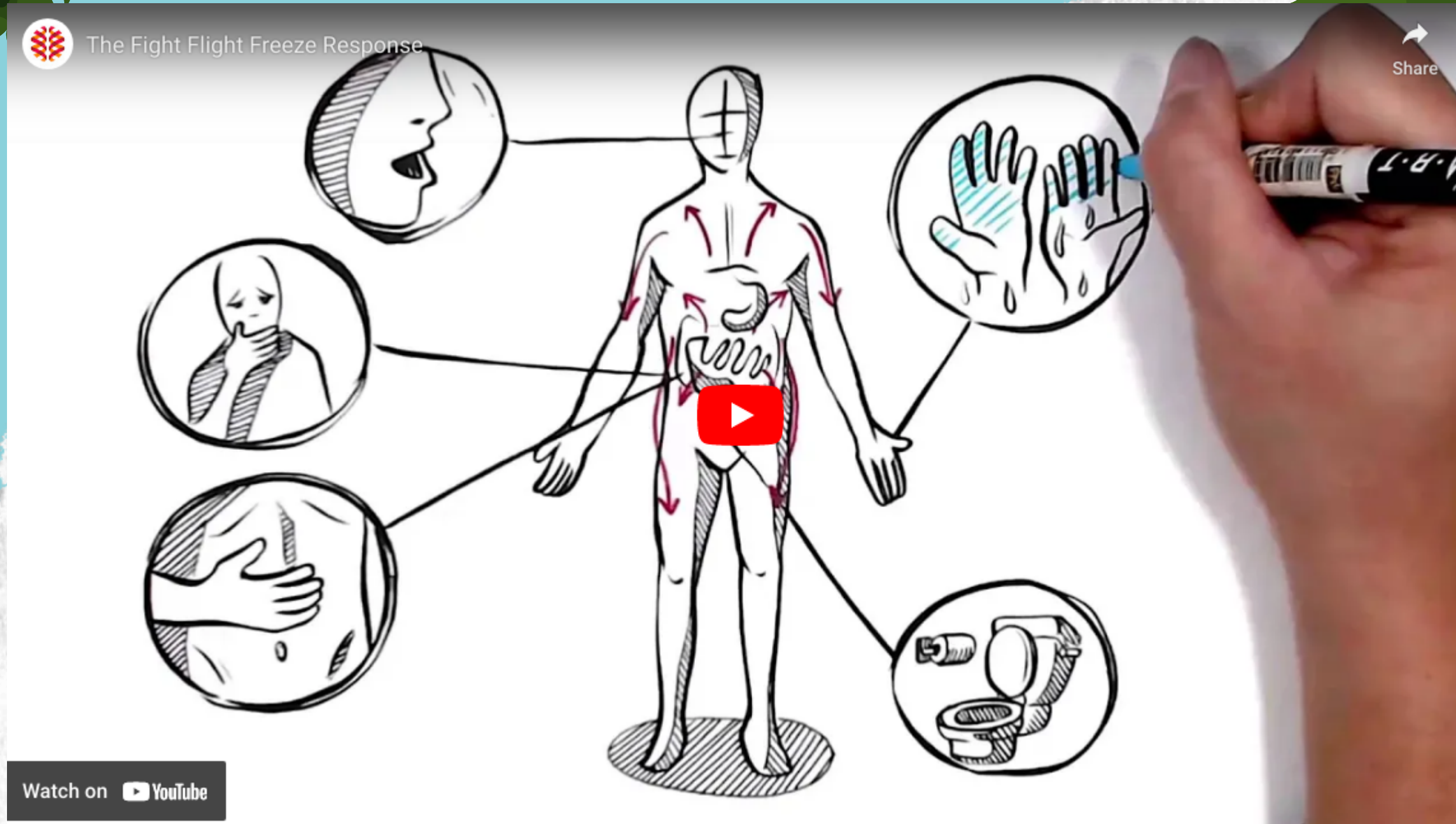
It is less needed nowadays but it is still helpful sometimes. Can you think of any situations?

To rescue us from danger our bodies will automatically prepare us to run away or fight the impending threat.

A series of biological changes occur:



THE FLIGHT OR FIGHT RESPONSE



https://youtu.be/jEHwB1PG_-Q

Components of Anxiety:

Physical Sensation

Associated with
adrenalin - preparing
the body for action in
response to flight/fight
response

E.g. sweating, heart
beating faster,
trembling, feeling sick,
feeling dizzy or
hyperventilating

Anxious Thoughts

Over-estimate "danger"
"My family will be so
disappointed in me"
"I'll never get into uni"

Underestimate ability to
cope

"I can't do this - there's
too much work"
"I'll have a panic attack in
the exam"
"Everyone will think I'm
stupid"

Anxious Behaviours

Avoid worrying
situations -
procrastinating,
calling in sick on
practice tests

So you don't get the
chance to learn if it's
as bad as you think it
will be or cope

High

Performance

Low

Zone of delusion

Ideal Zone

Optimal performance

Boreout

Comfort

Stretch

Strain

Burnout

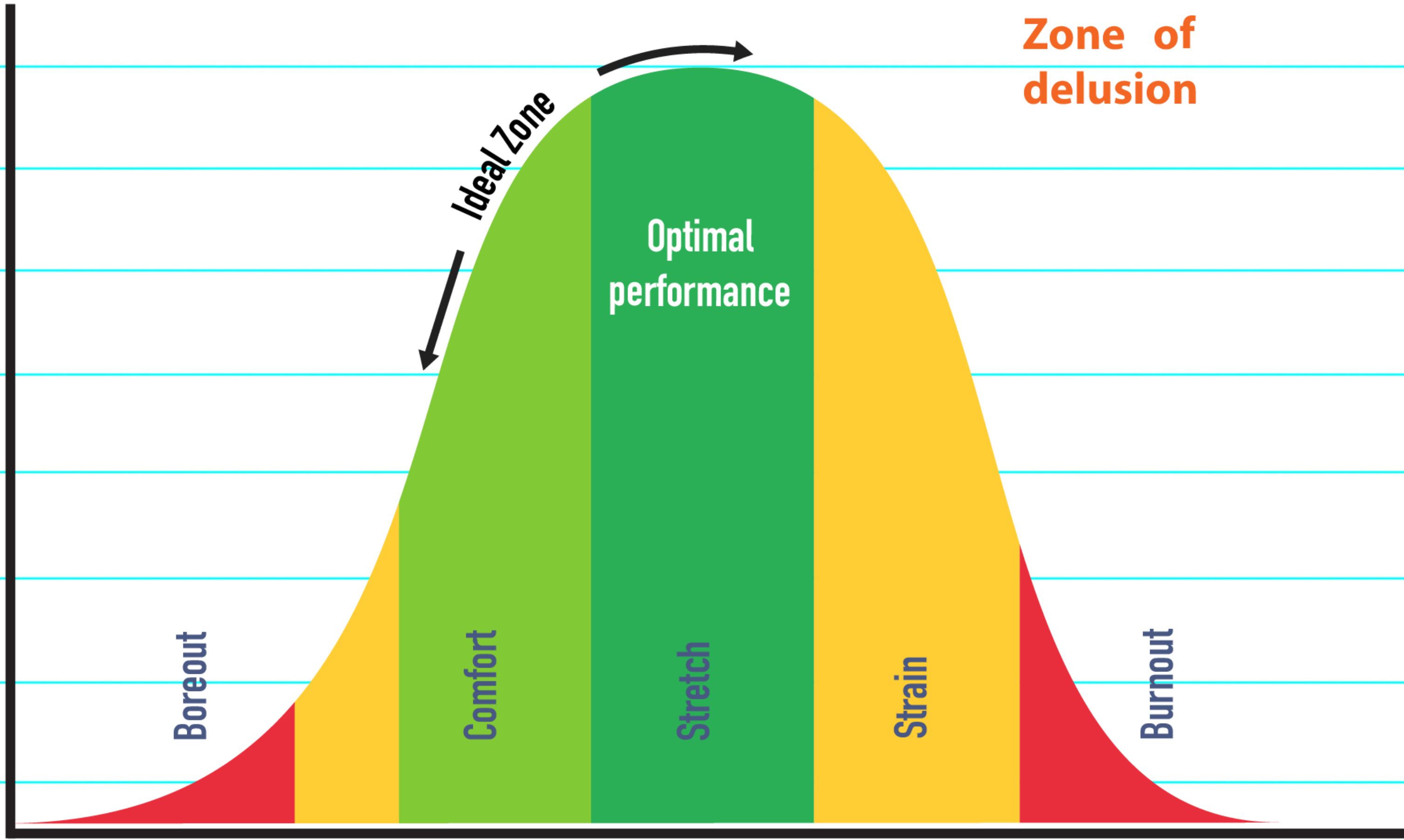
Low

Moderate

High

Very high

Pressure



A piece of white lined paper with horizontal lines is centered on a background of a dense, black and white abstract pattern. The paper has a slightly irregular, torn edge. The text is printed in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

**Can You Think of Situations When
Some Anxiety May Be Helpful?**

Causes of Anxiety



Genetics

Just like physical characteristics, we can also inherit psychological traits. These tend to be in the form of tendencies. For example, some children may have a higher likelihood of developing a short temper, impulsivity or being laid back. This interacts with social/environmental factors and creates a genetic predisposition.

Anxiety can run in families. Developing anxiety increases when a parent or sibling also experiences. About one third of anxiety in childhood can be explained by genetics.

The Other 2/3rds?

- Adverse life events
- **Learning by example.** Observing parents, carers and siblings is how children learn to keep themselves safe. Children learn from other's responses.
- **Learning from reactions.** Parents can show concern over how their child can cope or involvement in scary situations. Inadvertently, parental response can add to the fear. For example, if Joe pets a dog in a park, does his dad smile, look comfortable and join in? Or does he look serious and nervously watch in case the dog growls?

Negative Thinking Styles

You may notice these in yourselves or in you young people.

They happen to us all and are extremely common!



I make negative predictions about what might happen in the future even though I have no way of knowing this.



I make judgements about things even though there is no evidence or facts to back this up.



I always think that the worst thing or that something really bad is going to happen.



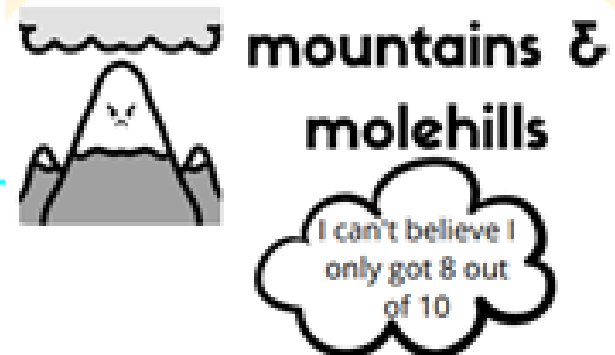
I put a lot of pressure on myself to do well and set unrealistically high expectations for myself.



When I have my negative glasses on, I only see the bad things and don't notice any of the good things.



If I notice negative feelings in myself or by body, I automatically think that it means something bad is happening.



I tend to take more notice of the negative things in a situation and down play the positive things.



Some things trigger my negative memories which makes me think something bad will happen again now.



I usually think things are either really good or really bad with nothing in between.



I assume I know what other people are thinking and this is usually negative things about me.



I notice positive things about other people but then compare myself negatively to them.



I am very critical of my own abilities and about myself.



**What Can You Do to Support Your
Young Person Through This?**



B

The Back Up Team

Perhaps notice if you have an attachment to a particular outcome - are you worried about the outcome of your child's exams?

If you were in their shoes, how would you like to be feeling?

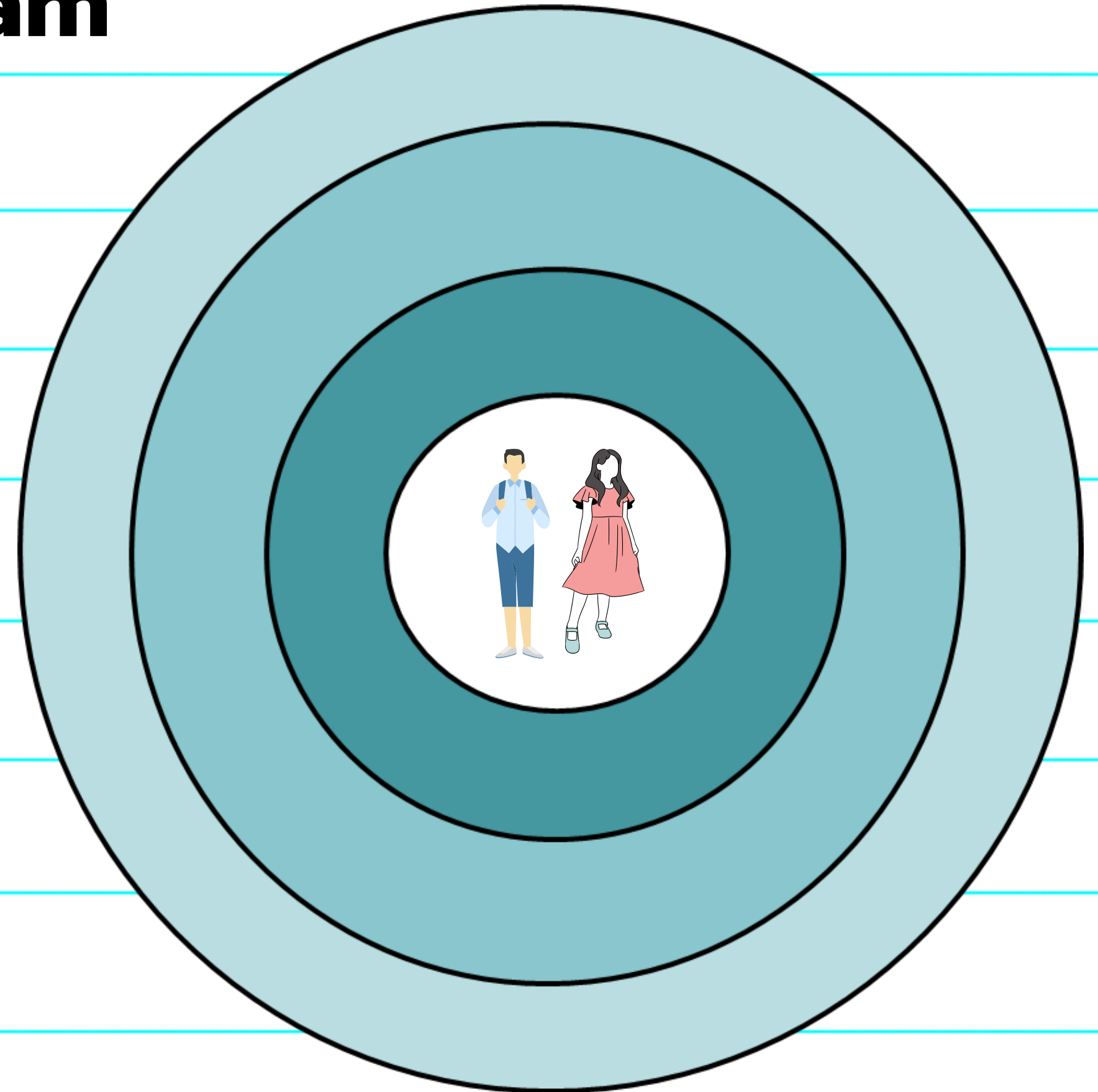
It can be helpful to create a back up team with your young person for exam season.

Useful Phrases::

"How would you like me to be during this time?"

"What would be helpful for me to do?"

"How can I help to make this less painful?"



Acts of Kindness & Compassion

Showing your young person that you have confidence in their abilities to get through their exams and cope with the stress can have a greater effect than expected. This ties into what we spoke about earlier - learning from those around us.

If they know we have faith in them, they are more likely to have faith in themselves.

How Can We Show Kindness & Compassion?

Encouraging post-it-notes on their pencil case, bathroom mirror etc. 'You've got this!'

Praise them for their hard work/revision

Put together a care box for them to use when things are particularly stressful

Making a snack/cup of tea/hot chocolate whilst the revise

Plan something fun for their revision break. E.g. favorite meal, watching a TV series together



Growth Mindset

Support your child in building a growth mindset.

Although we may want our child to achieve top grades, we may inadvertently add extra pressure by sending a message that grades are what defines success.

If our child excels, parents will understandably be proud.

However, be mindful of praising unchangeable outcomes. Instead, praise behaviors, hard work and effort. Even if they haven't done as well as they wanted. This creates a positive mindset that they can change, improve and have control over their abilities. It reduces the thought of 'I have to get an A for people to be proud of me'.

Equally, avoid praising personality traits like "You're so intelligent".

Frame the exam as a chance for them to show their year-long hard work instead of seeing it as a one-chance saloon.



The Importance of Routine - Sleep

Exam seasons can cause our young people to burn the candle at both ends

However, trying to squeeze in as much revision in the small hours can affect our performance and the likelihood that we'll experience stress. When we're tired, our emotional cup can spill over much more easily.



Lack of sleep affects our ability to concentrate.

Try to ensure your young person goes to sleep/wakes up at the same time each day.

Try to encourage your young person to avoid devices roughly 1.5hrs before bed

Instead, help them plan a relaxing routine. This may include a bath/shower, hot chocolate, skincare, reading a non-exam related book, journaling.

Encourage keeping their study space separate from their sleeping space.

The Importance of Routine - Diet

The food we eat affects our brain function and ability to concentrate.

It's important that we eat a balanced diet from all of the food groups and that we eat regularly. Their brains are working hard and need fuel to think!

During exam season, revision can take priority. That leads to young people skipping meals or grabbing 'speedy' foods on the go.

Try to emphasize the importance of meal times and eating together, framing them as enjoyable and an opportunity to refuel.

Encourage your child to eat breakfast as this will help their concentration.

Try to encourage healthier meals/snacks. High sugar foods cause short-term boosts in energy, but the drop in blood sugar can cause tiredness/sluggishness.

By all means, occasional treats are great rewards for hard work and effort.

For exercise, perhaps family walks or bike rides to boost energy, endorphins and ensure they feel sleepy at night.



Thank You!

