

Youth Alive Trust & Mana Ake present

PARENTING BIG EMOTIONS

7th May 2026

111 Seaview Road
New Brighton, Christchurch
7pm - 9pm

An evening
with Clinical
Psychologist:

Catherine
Gallagher



Karakia to self-regulate, gifted by Mero Rokx 2021

Hā ki roto

BREATHE IN

Hā ki waho

BREATHE OUT

**Kia tau te mauri
e kokiri nei**

SETTLE THE MAURI THAT
STIRS INSIDE OF ME

**I nga piki me
ngā heke**

THROUGH THE UPS
& THE DOWNS

**Ko te rangimarie
tāku e rapu nei**

IT IS PEACE THAT I SEEK

Tihei mauri ora

Evening timeline

7pm Introductions

7:10pm Catherine

5min BREAK

Catherine, continued

8:45pm Wrap up, mingling, Q&A



Mana Ake – Stronger for Tomorrow provides mental health and wellbeing support for children in primary school years 1-8 across Canterbury and Kaikōura.

Mana Ake kaimahi (workers) are employed by one of 13 NGO providers and support schools, families and whānau when children are experiencing issues that impact their wellbeing such as managing emotions, friendship skills, self-esteem, and coping with change.

youth alive trust

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- Basketball
- Multi-Sports
- Make Bake Create
- Kotirotiro Girls Club
- Intermediates Club
- Surge Teens Club
- Drop-In
- Dance Fit
- Youth Workers in School
- Counsellors in School
- After-School Care
- Holiday Programmes
- Family Fun Night
- Kite Day
- Mana Ake
- Tuning into Kids
- Amplify School of Music
- Instrument Lessons
- Youth Bands
- Recording Sessions
- Gigging
- RISE Performing Arts
- Parenting Seminars
- Volunteer Placements



FRUSTRATION... IT'S GOOD FOR THEM

Catherine Gallagher Dorahy

Clinical Psychologist

To grow and develop a child needs...

safety, love, food water....but they also need experiences of frustration and other negative emotions.

Why?



Emotions help
us interpret,
survive and
hopefully thrive
in a world that
is both
beautiful and....

Volatile

Uncertain

Complex

Ambiguous



HOW?

Emotions teach us:



Connection with others is vital

- Being in the presence of safe people was designed to settle us and it feels good
- Being isolated and alone is generally aversive, especially when we are in pain

(unless this aloneness is at the end of the day, our kids are in bed, and we have just tuned into a new Netflix series! 😊)

Emotions teach us:

What we like
(move towards/hold onto)

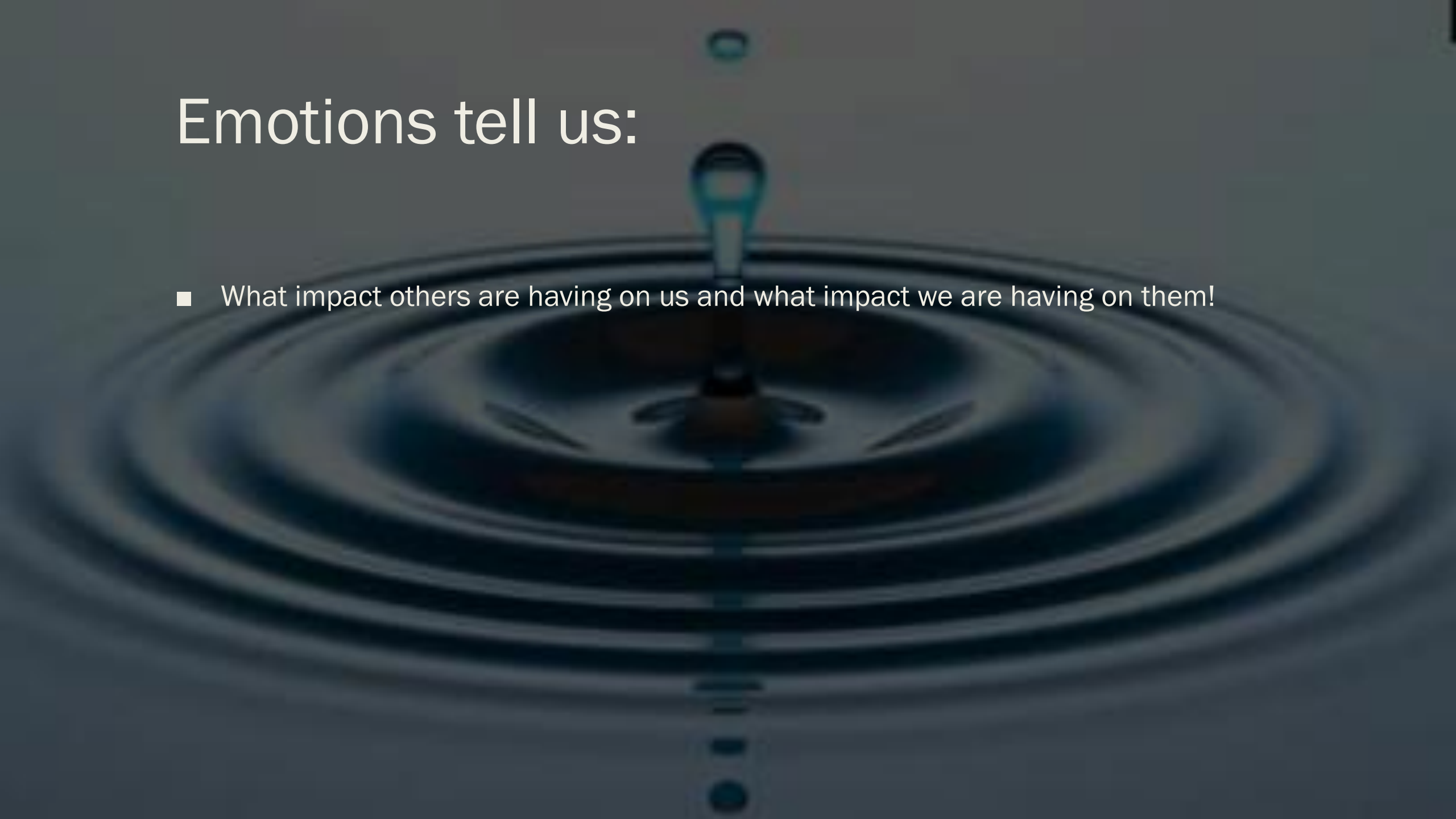


What we don't like
(stay away from/let go of)



Emotions tell us:

- What impact others are having on us and what impact we are having on them!



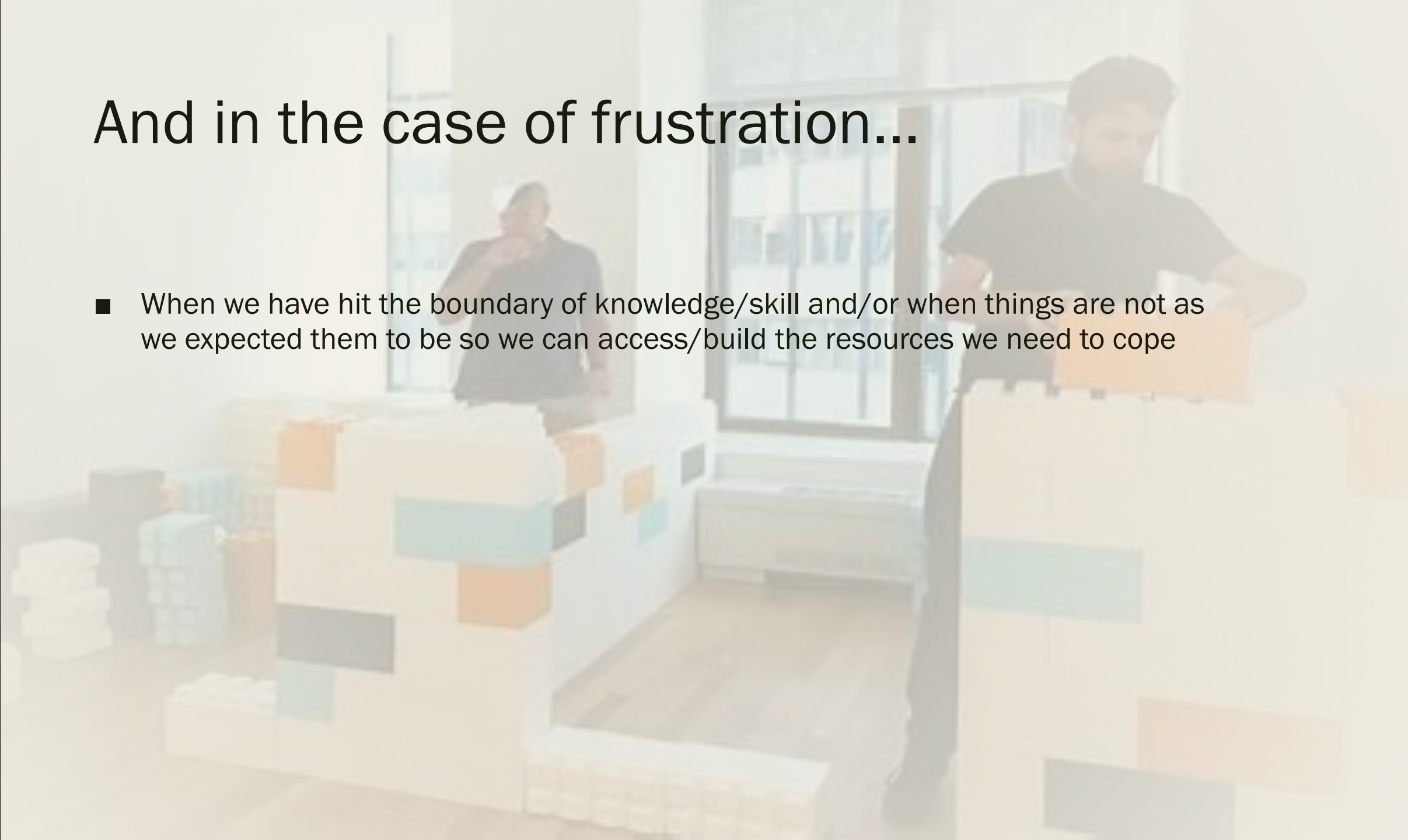
Emotions tell us:

- What we might need to do in a certain situation (rest, reach out, hit out)



And in the case of frustration...

- When we have hit the boundary of knowledge/skill and/or when things are not as we expected them to be so we can access/build the resources we need to cope





WHAT ARE SOME
EXAMPLES OF
'FRUSTRATING'
THINGS...

FOR US?

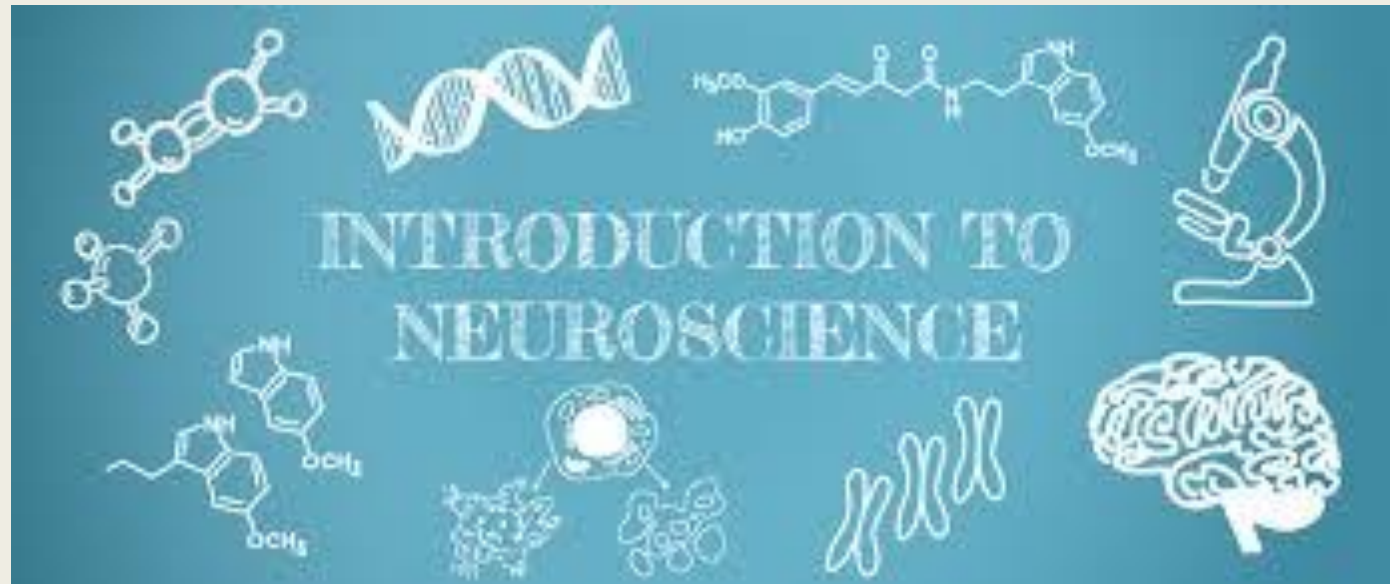
THERE IS A TANTRUM BREWING IN ME



**THE LIKES OF WHICH THIS HOUSE HAS
NEVER SEEN**

FOR OUR
KIDS?

To sum it up...



- Emotions (including frustration) aid prediction, an action that is at the centre of all functioning within the brain/Nervous system
- When the prediction is accurate, we feel good/safe/prepared...
- When a prediction 'error' occurs, we feel unsettled/ill prepared/frightened/**frustrated** and the brain jumps into action to react in the now and learn for the future

To put it simply

- A child needs experiences of frustration (aka not knowing) to build templates for how to handle life that are reasonably accurate for life (not what we would like life to be), for who they are (not who we would like them to be) and for who they have around them supporting them
- This helps them not only cope in the moment, but also build a sense of confidence that tough stuff can be got through- a very important lesson for life



If neuroscience didn't convince you...

- BIOLOGY shows us that plants who have had to fight a little bit for survival actually grow firmer roots and are ultimately more sturdy.



But wait ...there is more 'evidence'

- Even Disney reinforces this message...as the princess might end up with her prince, but this only happens once she's gone through a little hardship first.



So grownups...you have a choice

- Protect your kids from life or prepare them??

(rhetorical I hope 😊)



Some caveats

- Before we begin to look at what adults can do to help children with 'frustration'...

CAVEAT



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1) Dose matters

- Frustration is more likely to be 'constructive' when it is in bite sized chunks. We are not talking about leaving your children out in the cold and dark and getting them to fend for themselves!





2) History matters

- If kids have experienced previous trauma, then even small amounts of stress/frustration can have greater impacts and different ‘triggers’ can have out of proportion responses.
- Family history can also be important to consider as this can impact on what is seen and experienced by children and how resourced caregivers can be in the face of their children’s frustration/upset.

When all is said and done

Although it is vital to understand what factors might be impacting on a child at any one time, our aim is to support them to function to the best of their ability in their particular bodies, family systems and wider social contexts.

Although there might be the need for additional supports and accommodation, the key message is the same, **all kids need to be allowed to experience frustration (with support) and not be rescued from it...**

So where do parents and caregivers start?



You start with
you!



IF PARENTING YOU DO

THEN CRY YOU MUST

- Supporting a child who is frustrated and stressed is frustrating and stressful...
- We can't pour from an empty cup and neither can you support your child well, if you are collapsing under your own stress

In filling your cup...

You settle your own NS's and this is vital, not just to help you think clearly and not fly off the handle, but it also helps at a basic neuro-biological level.

Our NS's talk to each other to know how safe we are.

We can pull a child into our calm and not get pulled into their storm

To do this...we need to have some 'calm' for them to borrow!



I'll just wait here patiently

until everyone is quiet

What builds 'calm' in the moment

- Breathe and slow down
- Try and understand what is going on as often what we struggle with is the brain's attempt to PS
- Have a plan that involves key players (more on this soon)
- Have back up... we all need to have people who have our backs. (NB make sure the people in your corner actually help regulate you!!)
- QTIP (quit taking it personally 😊)
- Reduce other stressors
- Realistic expectations*

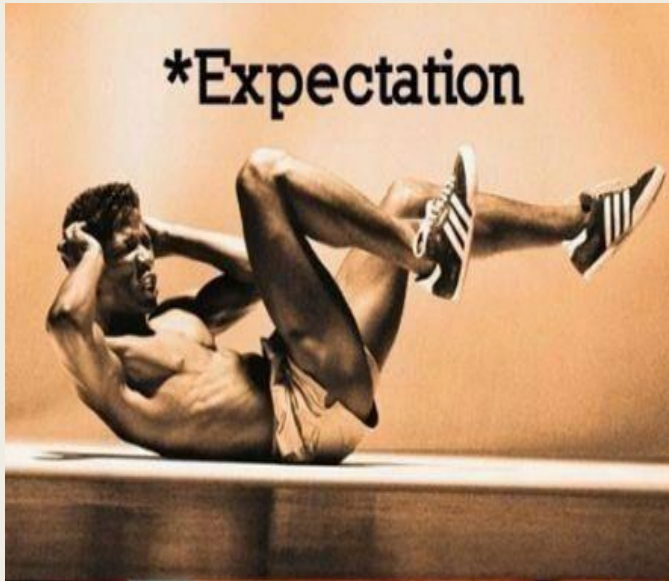
What I think I look like



What I actually look like



***Expectation**



***Reality**



Expectation
vs. Reality

What to be realistic about...

Being an AIROR is bloody tough

Who the child in front of you ACTUALLY is

Rupture and repair... you get do overs

There will be times when you might not like the child

There will be times you might not like yourself!!!

You might need help

You will feel judged (partner, friends, parents, yourself!)

(remember the brain and it's love of prediction)

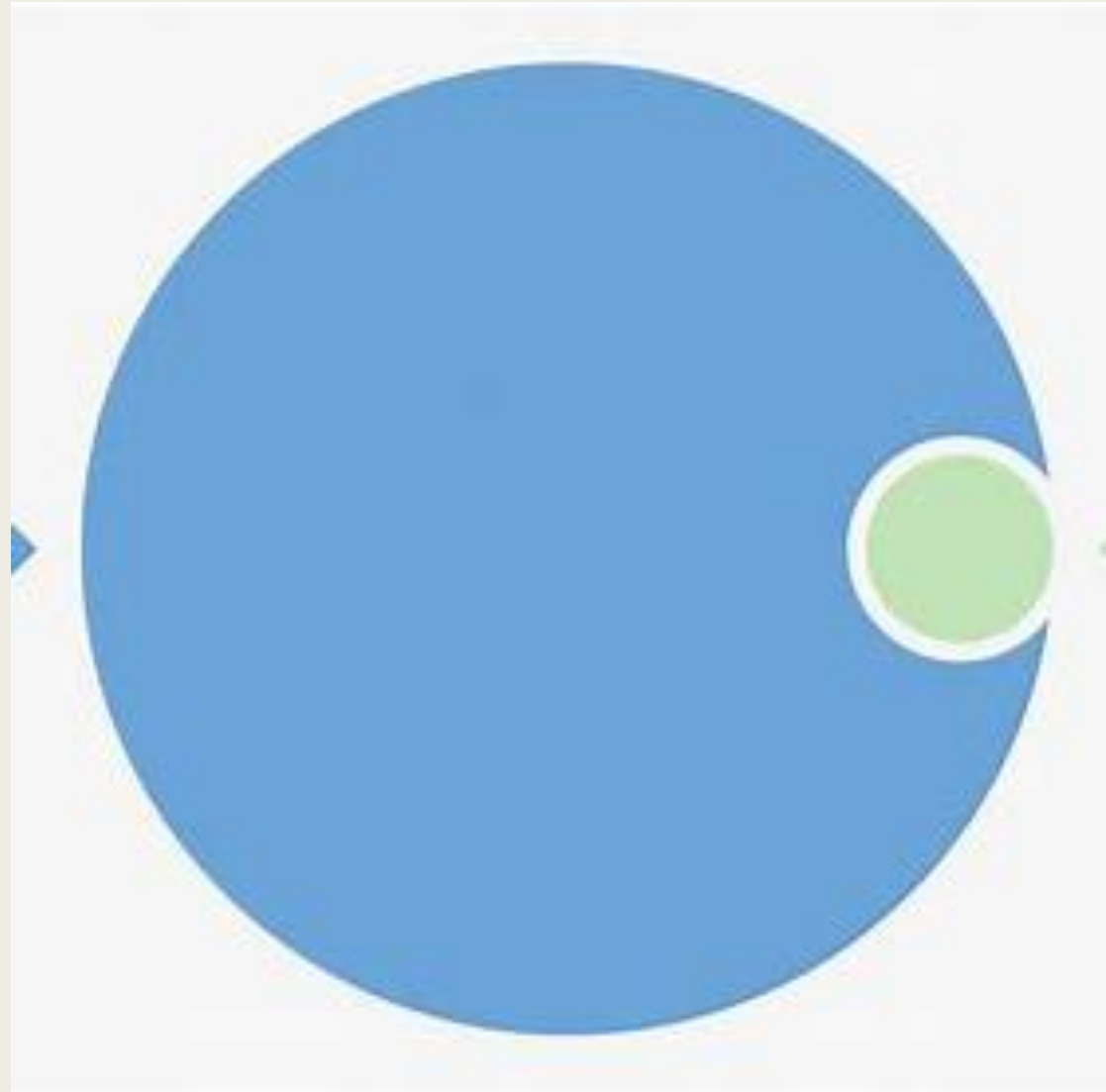
What you actually have control over *

How hard it is to actually take care of yourself!!!**



Circle of influence

- If all we focus on is stuff we can't control then it can feed our anxiety and our sense of powerlessness. Your 'circle of influence' can feel small but it is mighty!!





Easy' Self-Care

- Relaxing and self-soothing activities, e.g., exercise, sleep and eat well, social contact). Do things important to you.

'Hard' Self-Care

- Do I actually do any of the stuff I know I SHOULD?*
- Check in with yourself...regularly
- Catch what you tell yourself... including the tone you use!
- Connect with people you actually like!
- Ask for help- professional and personal
- Try and understand rather than just react**

Ask yourself ...

- What's one piece of self care I actually do?



- What's one piece of self care I know I should do...but don't?



A close-up photograph of a woman with blonde hair, wearing a dark jacket, pulling at her hair with both hands. Her expression is one of intense stress or frustration, with her eyes closed and a pained grimace. The background is a dark, solid color.

SO...BACK TO THE KIDS (AND OUR PLAN)

A large part of being a mom is
staring at your kids like this until
they start acting better



WHAT DO THEY NEED US TO HAVE IN OUR PLAN

As sometimes our
existing strategies wont
always work,,,

1) Learn about frustration



- We have learnt that frustration is necessary, but we need to remember that it is one step in an important journey, it isn't an end point.
- We parents and AIROR need to support our kids to take the steps to move through it.
- If we can try and remember this then when faced by our child's big emotions, it is easier (NOT easy!!) not to take them personally and to stay calm...ish' as we can **plan** for our role as external regulator



2) Know yourself

- Look after yourself and have ways to stay calm'ish' (both generally and in the moment)





3) Know your child

- What is their temperament
- What typically upsets them ?
- What things do they find hard?
- How much stress are they under generally?
- What are their 'go to' responses?
- What usually helps....



IN THE
MOMENT



**BUILD ON WHAT'S
ALREADY IN THIS KETE**



Identify and validate emotions

Also remember:

- The power of 'drop and run'
- Once acknowledged we can communicate that this will pass and they will be OK
- Often reactions have been a child's attempt to problem solve*

But these
'solves' ...

Can create problems
for other people

Can be short term
fixes

Can create additional
problems for the child

Find things to 'turn down' the NS so the thinking brain can engage

- Take a breath (start with you!)
- Distraction
- Taking a moment out, a change of location
- A shower
- A run
- A bounce
- A weighted blanket
- A hug
- ...



Offer choice

- Aka. Play 'squash'
- Keep it simple
- Remember that in the middle of a tantrum, they are in the downstairs or more primitive part of their brains and so reasoning and expecting wise choices can be asking for trouble
- They will chose 'wrong'
- Have clear boundaries and follow through on consequences- warm rock
- We are in for the long game, it can get worse before it gets better
- Prioritise your 'calm'



- The message we want kids to get is that feelings are helpful to us and all feelings are valid...it's just that some ways of expressing those feelings don't work so well for them and they are other ways to get our needs met.
- In other words...show them another way





OH AND DID I SAY...

Breathe and stay calm 'ish'

WHAT HELPS OVER TIME

- The importance of providing opportunities for practice through scaffolding and not rescuing





OVER TIME...

- Say no!
- It's important to provide a context/reasons, but it isn't your job to make your 'no' easy for them to hear. Remember they need to practice moving through frustration, not avoiding it!

OVER TIME...

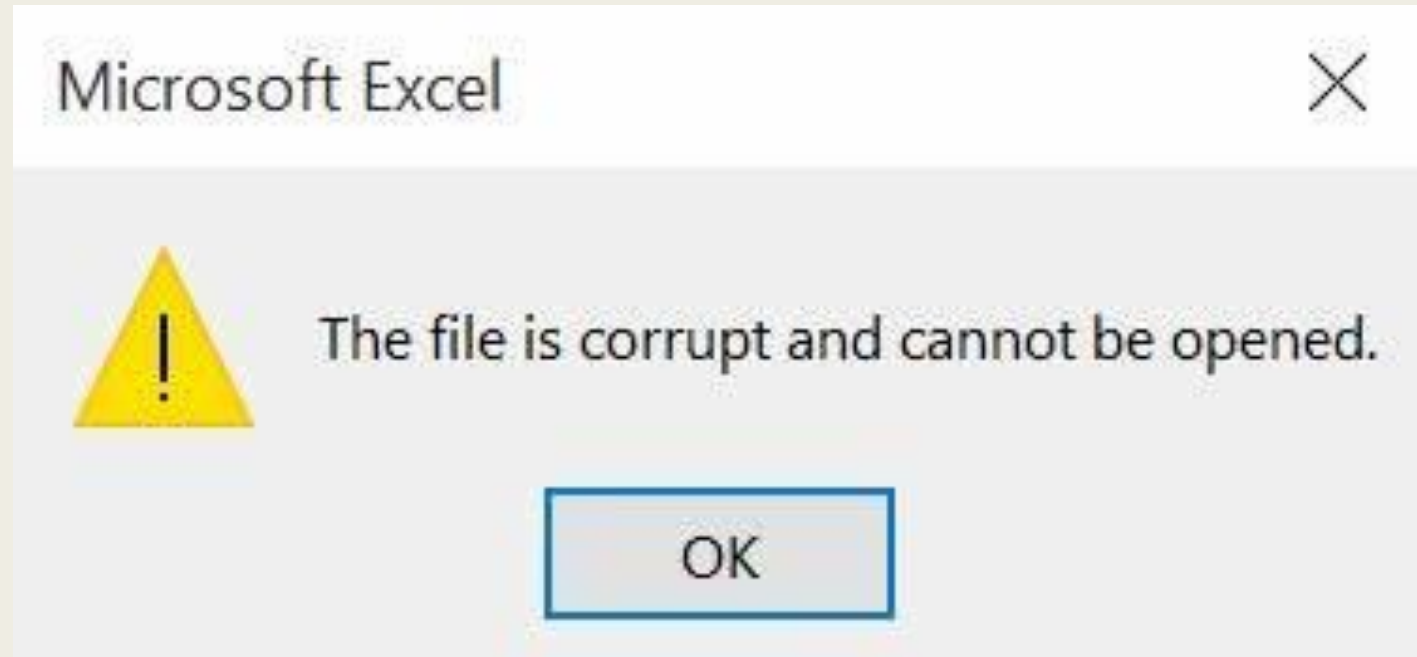


- Plan for predictable challenges/changes/people

But also plan for the fact that unpredictable things happen (and even throw in a few for practice)

- Try and not immediately remove the problem, even if you have a really good solution!!!
- Provide 'just enough' support so they can complete the task themselves (aka try and not rescue...it's S000000 hard!!)*

A wee example...



OVER TIME...

- Allow for a debrief...but not too soon or too much!
- Celebrate effort
- Model managing your own frustrations
- Turn the page
- Try and reduce additional stressors where you can
- Build a village, as you and your child might need additional supports
- Keep up your regular parenting...all children need love safety boundaries



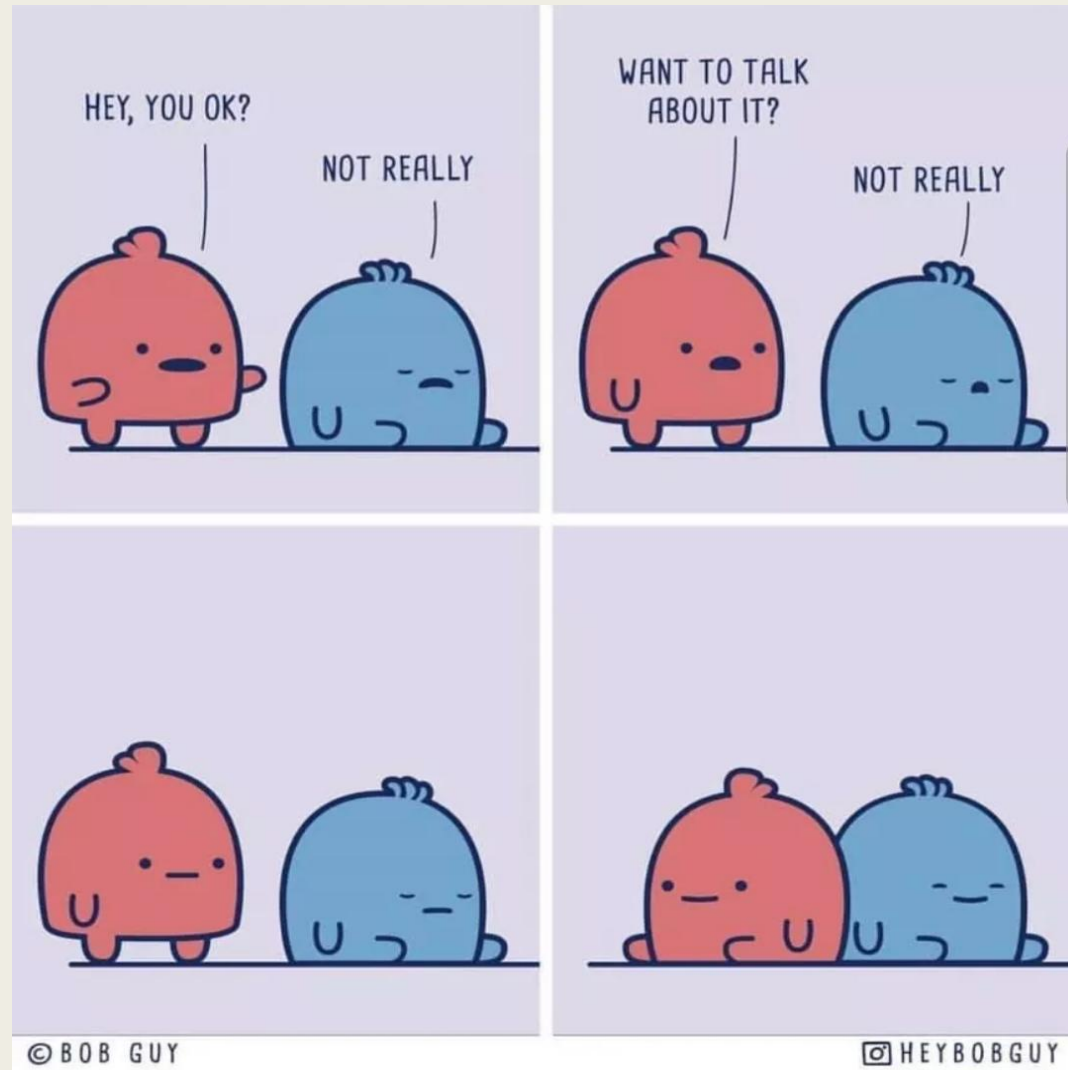
Some thoughts around different developmental stages



All of the above remains important, but there are some specifics to keep in mind

- Toddlers often respond best to redirection and direct comfort being offered
- Preschoolers need to build their coping basics (e.g. deep breathing identify feelings),
- Primary school age need support around problem solving and planning- take a break and come back to task. Brainstorming together can help
- Older adolescents often benefit from being listened to, being given space, having the boundaries and logical consequences being made clear.

Whatever the age...empathy always helps



A quick thought about fairness...

“That’s not fair!”

- A cry that is so familiar as a parent...but can still strike fear into our hearts.

What if they are right?

- Somewhere in modern life we have decided that life should be fair and where better to set up that expectation than within our home.
- It's interesting to note that other generations did not seem to have that same bother...boys got everything...oldest boys did even better out of the deal!! Now of course I'm not advocating for a return to male privilege ...but we've somehow got the message that far from being character building...dealing with unfairness is harmful.
- It is simply just not the case!!!!!!



- In reality...your job as a parent isn't to be fair...but to provide the support each child needs when they need it.
- This will mean that some children get more at certain times and that this is ok.
- Just remember... just because our children tell us something...doesn't mean it's TRUE. We get to decide this stuff as parents...and it's often our own selves that we need to convince that we aren't doing harm.



Something to think about

- Love is never something that has to be rationed and there always needs to be a lot of this to go around....but unfortunately we've got love confused with stuff and attention and they aren't always the same thing.

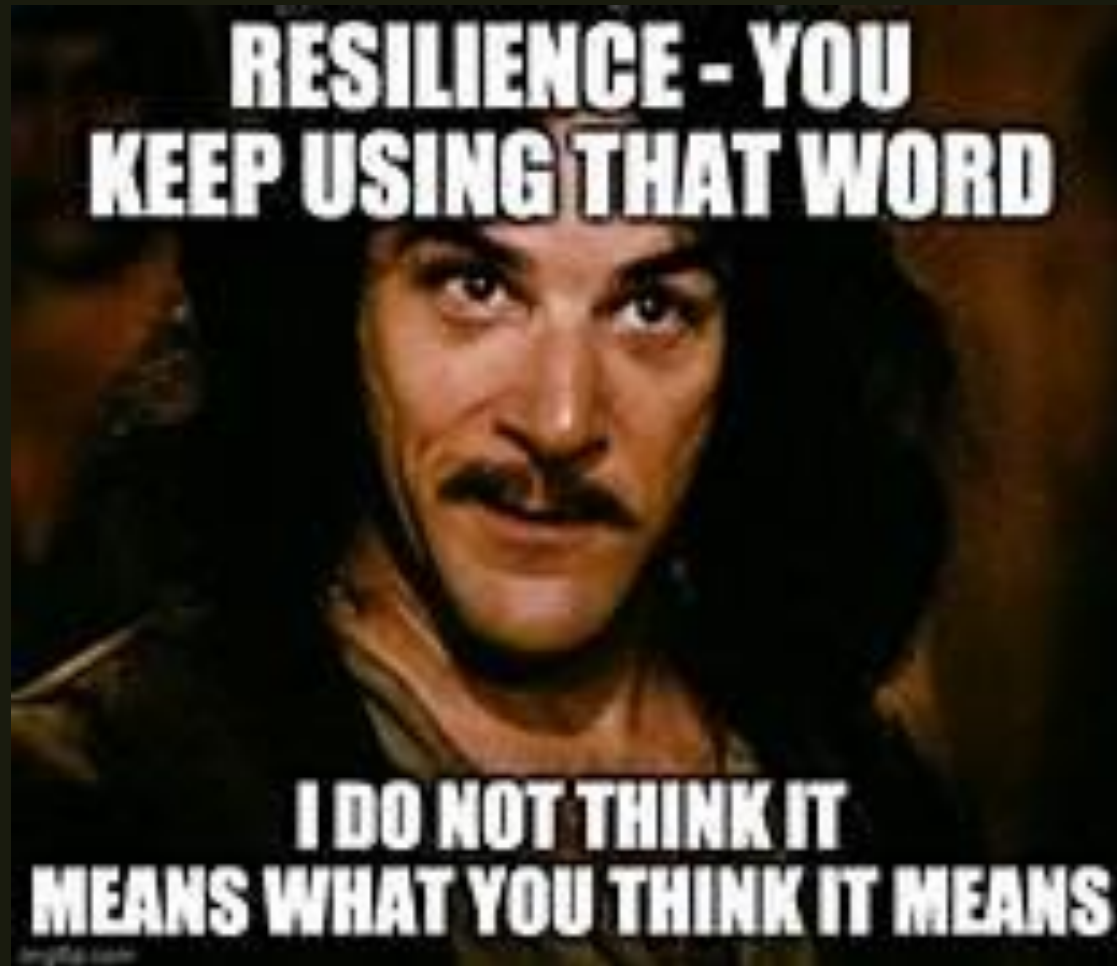


A final word on ...The 'R'word... Resilience

- A lot of what we are talking about might sound a little bit like resilience.



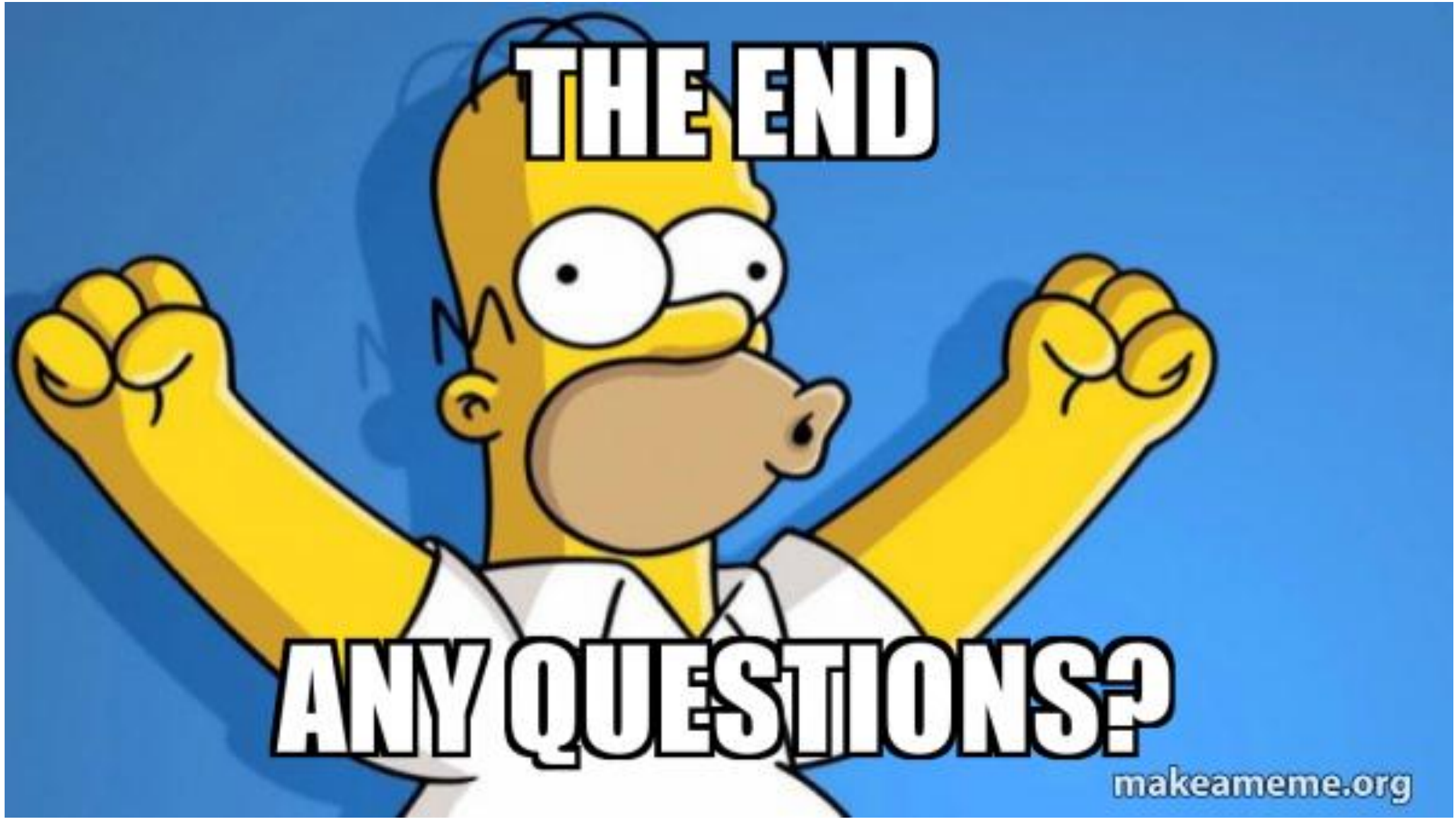
Some things to know about resilience



- It doesn't sit within a person. We aren't resilient or NOT. Of course some more stable factors influence resilience such as temperament, learning ability, early environment etc. But a lot is also influenced by circumstances that can change.
- Resilience can look like being able to stay calm, showing perseverance, humour and grit. But resilience can also involve someone looking a bit shaky and knowing how to ask for help.
- Someone who looks calm...isn't always coping. As shutting down or shoving down feelings can help in the crisis, but over time this can be less helpful.
- Being open to learning new ways of coping and understanding what is happening can be really helpful, but remember...often when we are under stress, it is normal to revert to form as this is where our brain can feel safest. This is where children need the adults around them to be as calm, clear and forgiving as possible .

A take away from today





THE END

ANY QUESTIONS?

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Thank you!

- Mingling in the foyer
- Q&A with our team
- Resources tables
- Tea, coffee, slices!

"Parenting Big Emotions" Seminar
May 2026 feedback



E atawhai ana mātou

Te whakatōkia o ngā kakano i ruia mai

E nga māhuri tōtara e tipu ana mō āpōpō.

Nā tātou katoa hei awhi te kaupapa,

Hei mana ake te tū tauira tonu ai.

Haumi ē, Hui ē, Tāiki ē.

Mana Ake

karakia

*We nurture and protect
the seeds sown near and far,
so that they may grow into mighty totara
for a not so distant tomorrow.*

*We embrace our responsibility,
To encourage students on a path of lifelong learning.*

Unified, Together, Strong