



# PARENTING YOUR ANXIOUS CHILD

Helicopter, Drill Sergeant, or Consultant:  
What's Your Parenting Style?

Loudoun County Public Schools

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**School refusal is challenging and we can help**

**We're all anxious, so let's get better at being anxious, so we can help each other and our children to get better at being anxious.**



## Agenda

- The problem of child anxiety
- Parenting styles as a response to the problem
- Use a Parenting Model... a plan is better than no plan!
- Supportive Parenting for Anxious Childhood Emotions (SPACE)
- Addition Tools and Strategies
- Questions & Resources

# The problem of child anxiety

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## What is Anxiety and how it can become a problem?

- Anxiety is the system that alerts us to danger, helps us avoid it, and when necessary, helps us take steps to escape from it.
- Anxiety is an essential survival system that is “hardwired” into every person’s nervous system. To be human is to have and know anxiety.
- Anxiety can impact us behaviorally, cognitively, emotionally, and physiologically.
- Anxiety becomes a problem for kids when they begin to misinterpret things or situations that do not actually pose a real danger.



## The Problem of Child Anxiety

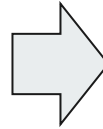
- For some children, *anxiety is triggered* internally by worry, obsessive thoughts, or panic attacks, *even when there are no external triggers* for those responses.
- Anxious *children try their best to cope with the hard things of life*, just like the rest of us.
- However, kids for whom anxiety is a problem become *increasingly hyper responsive to lower levels of “threat”*, and often they choose *coping strategies that are not adaptive*.



## Two Sets Of Skills That Regulate Anxiety

### Self-Regulation

- The child's ability to calm themselves



Children learn to self-regulate based on the example we provide them as well as the direct guidance we give them.

### Co-Regulation

- Healthy co-regulation comes about through a secure parent-child attachment
- Teach kids about their feelings, and provide them with the skills to effectively share emotional experience with others.



The challenge for parents of an anxious child is to withstand the child's temporary upset while regulating their own anxiety and related emotions.



## Family Accommodation - A Natural Response To Child Anxiety

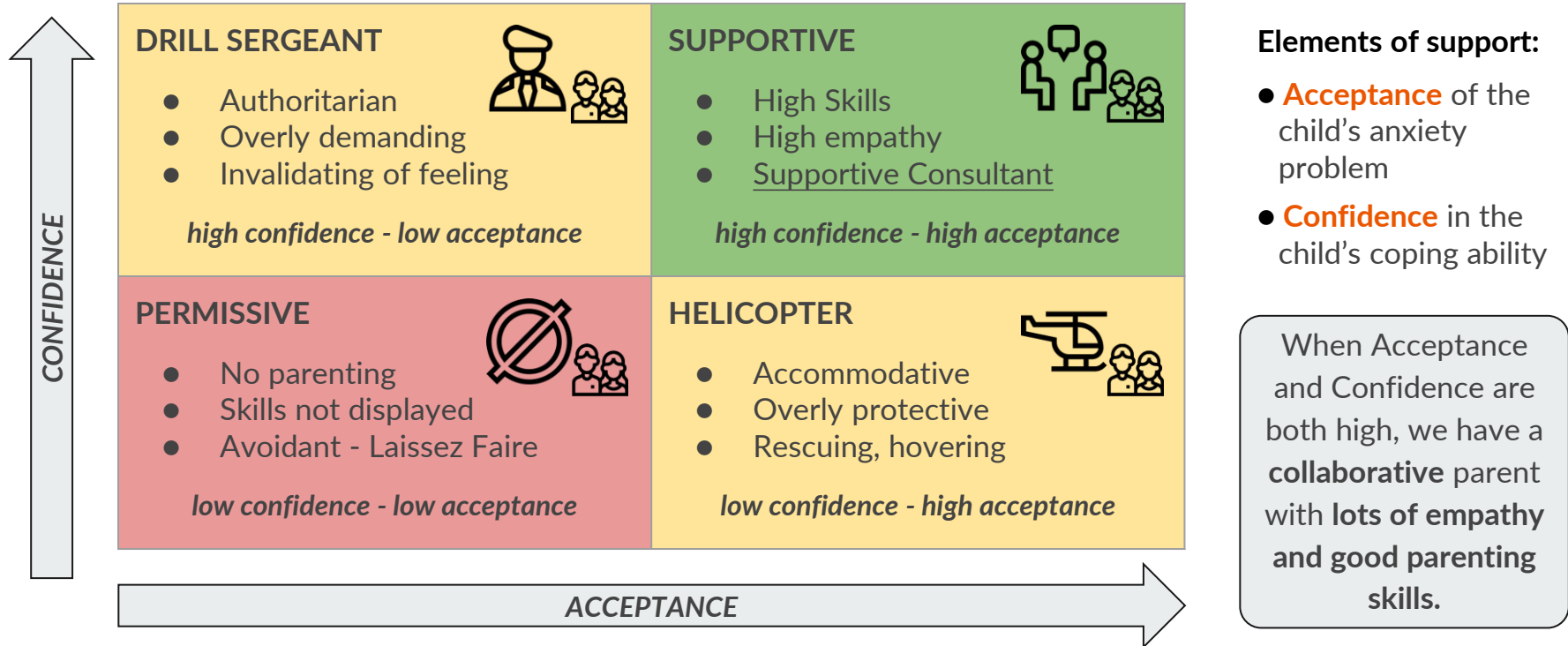
- Families accommodate to help the child and reduce their distress – in some cases it is the child who imposes accommodation
- **However, family accommodation leads to more, rather than less Anxiety**
- Family accommodation occurs in virtually all cases of child anxiety and comes in two forms:
  - ❑ **Participation** in behaviors relating to the anxiety (e.g. speaking for child)
  - ❑ **Modification** of family routines (e.g. Parent comes home early from work)



# Parenting styles



# Parenting Styles And The Elements Of Support





# Characteristics of Parenting Styles

## Drill Sergeants Demand

- Bark out orders directing the life of their child and expecting compliance
- Turn up the volume & threaten
- Command their troops to follow their instructions

## Permissives Do nothing

- Let children raise themselves
- A misunderstanding of the parenting role
- Do not hold kids accountable, they simply let them run free

## Helicopters Protect

- Whenever trouble arises, these parents hover over and rescue.
- They feel uncomfortable imposing consequences
- They do students' thinking & work for them

## Consultants Sympathize with the Situation

- Kids need thoughtful guidance & firm, enforceable limits. Listen & offer choices.
- Listen and respond with genuine empathy, and let the real world consequences do the teaching
- They ask who owns the problem

# Supportive Parenting for Anxious Childhood Emotions (SPACE)

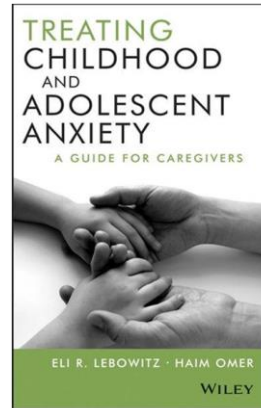


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# SPACE - An Effective Treatment Model For Child Anxiety

## Supportive Parenting for Anxious Childhood Emotions (SPACE)

- What to do when anxiety takes over the family
- School phobia and school refusal
- Working with highly dependent young adults (Failure to Launch)
- Parental support and protection
- Creating and maintaining family boundaries



Some parenting models can improve your skills to prevent child anxiety:

### Love & Logic - 1977

Oppositional & defiant behavior

### The Incredible Years - (70s & 80s)

Oppositional & defiant behavior

### Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) - 1976

Basic parenting program



## **SPACE - Use Supportive Statements**

Parents need to integrate two distinct messages in order to be supportive.

### **Acceptance**

“I accept that you are afraid and acknowledge that what you are feeling is real and legitimate. I am not trying to deny your experience or to belittle it.”

### **Confidence**

“I have faith in your ability. I know you can cope and believe you are strong enough to face this challenge successfully.”



## SPACE - (With the Love & Logic strategy of “Enforceable Statements”) Use Enforceable Statements

Enforceable statements tell kids *what you will do or allow...* rather than trying to *tell them what to do*.

When we set limits in this way:

- We avoid looking like a fool when we can't get our kids to do what we say.
- We share some control with our children. As a result, they are much less likely to resist in order to regain control.

### **Examples...**

*“I’ll listen as soon as your voice is as calm as mine.”*

*“My car is leaving as 8 am.”*

*“If you clean your room, then we can go shopping.”*

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# SPACE - Break the Family Accommodation Cycle

## Supportive Statements

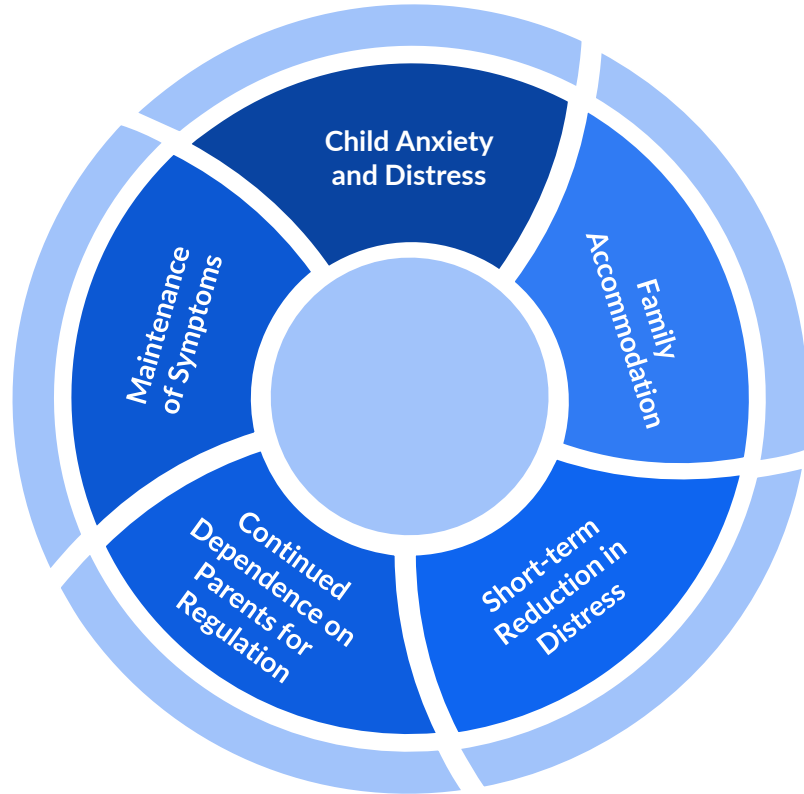
Acceptance of the problem & confidence in the child's ability to cope

## Enforceable Statements

What you will do or allow

## Fade-out Accommodations

Tackle them one at a time



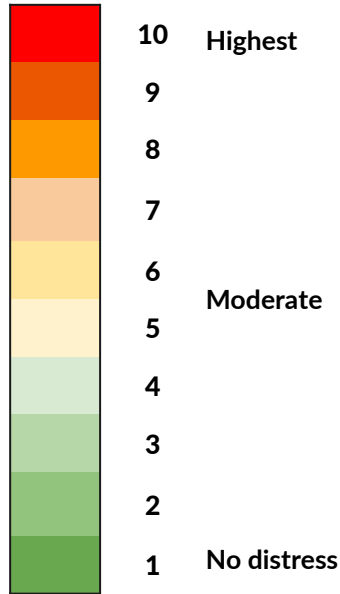


# Additional Tools & strategies





## Subjective Units of Distress Scale (SUDS)



### Scaling

Asking your child to rate their distress on a scale from 1 to 10 can be helpful because we begin to expose the child to the idea that their anxiety is not just on or off, they can experience varying degrees of discomfort.

### Re-interpreting Anxiety

Your child's problem is not how much anxiety they have, but rather how willing they are to be anxious.

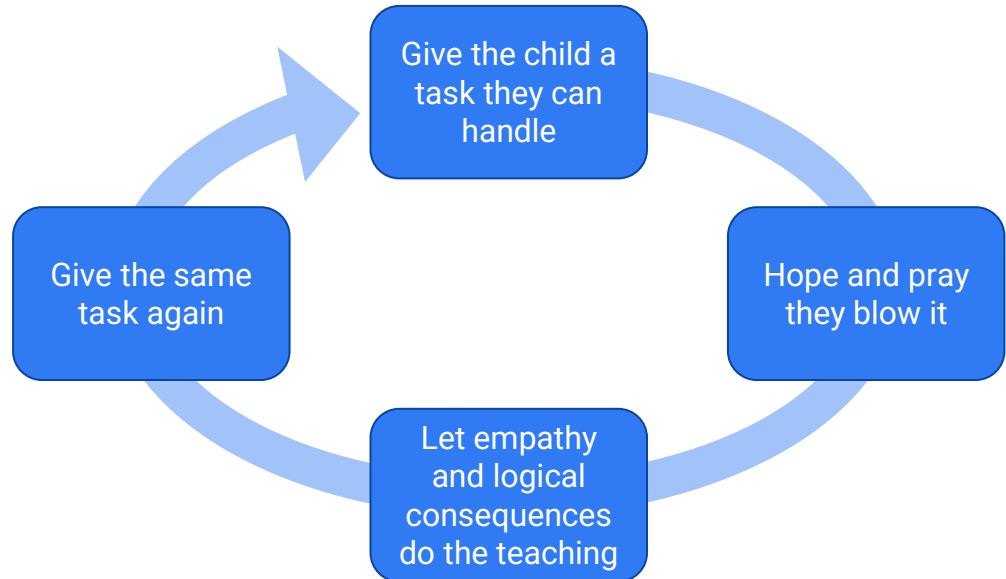
# Love & Logic - Four Steps To Responsibility

## Active problem-solving

Kids learn to think for themselves when appropriately challenging tasks are part of their daily routines

## To fail & try again

It's essential for development





## Key Takeaways

- **We're all anxious, so let's get better at being anxious, so we can help each other and our children to get better at being anxious.**
- **Avoidance** and **family accommodation** leaves you stuck, and may actually make the problem worse.
- Know your **parenting style** and strive to become a **Supportive Consultant**.
- What you focus on becomes your reality, so **be thoughtful about your parenting**. Use a parenting model to improve your skills. **Get a plan and stay on message**.

# Questions



# Resources

Treating Childhood and Adolescent Anxiety:  
A Guide for Caregivers, Eli R. Lebowitz

Breaking Free of Child Anxiety and OCD, Eli R. Lebowitz

Rethinking Treatment for Anxiety and OCD, Eli R. Lebowitz  
<https://youtu.be/ExVvAn9hcjY>

<https://www.spacetreatment.net/>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N\\_XWugbkWOM&t=2179s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_XWugbkWOM&t=2179s)

Parenting Teens with Love & Logic, Foster Cline & Jim Fay

Parenting with Love & Logic, Foster Cline & Jim Fay

Helicopter, Drill Sergeants and Consultants, Jim Fay & Charles Fay

