



COPING WITH TWIN EPIDEMICS

Social-Emotional Well Being In Middle Schoolers

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Anxiety and Wellness

- *“You either get bitter or you get better. It’s that simple. You either take what has been dealt to you and allow it to make you a better person, or you allow it to tear you down. The choice does not belong to fate, it belongs to you.”*

Josh Shipp

- *“Anxiety is the handmaiden of creativity.”*

T.S. Eliot

Agenda

- > What is stress and anxiety?
- > A few sobering statistics
- > Why is this particularly relevant now?
- > A Developmental Perspective
- > The brain and adaptability
- > Fostering emotional adaptability through parent self care
- > Tips for developing emotional adaptability in children
- > Some Resources
- > Conclusions



Some Definitions

➤ **Eustress**

➤ **Distress**

➤ **Anxiety**

➤ **The body's
alarm system**



Statistics on the Anxiety Epidemic

Several recent studies have documented a marked increase in reported cases of anxiety in children and teens:

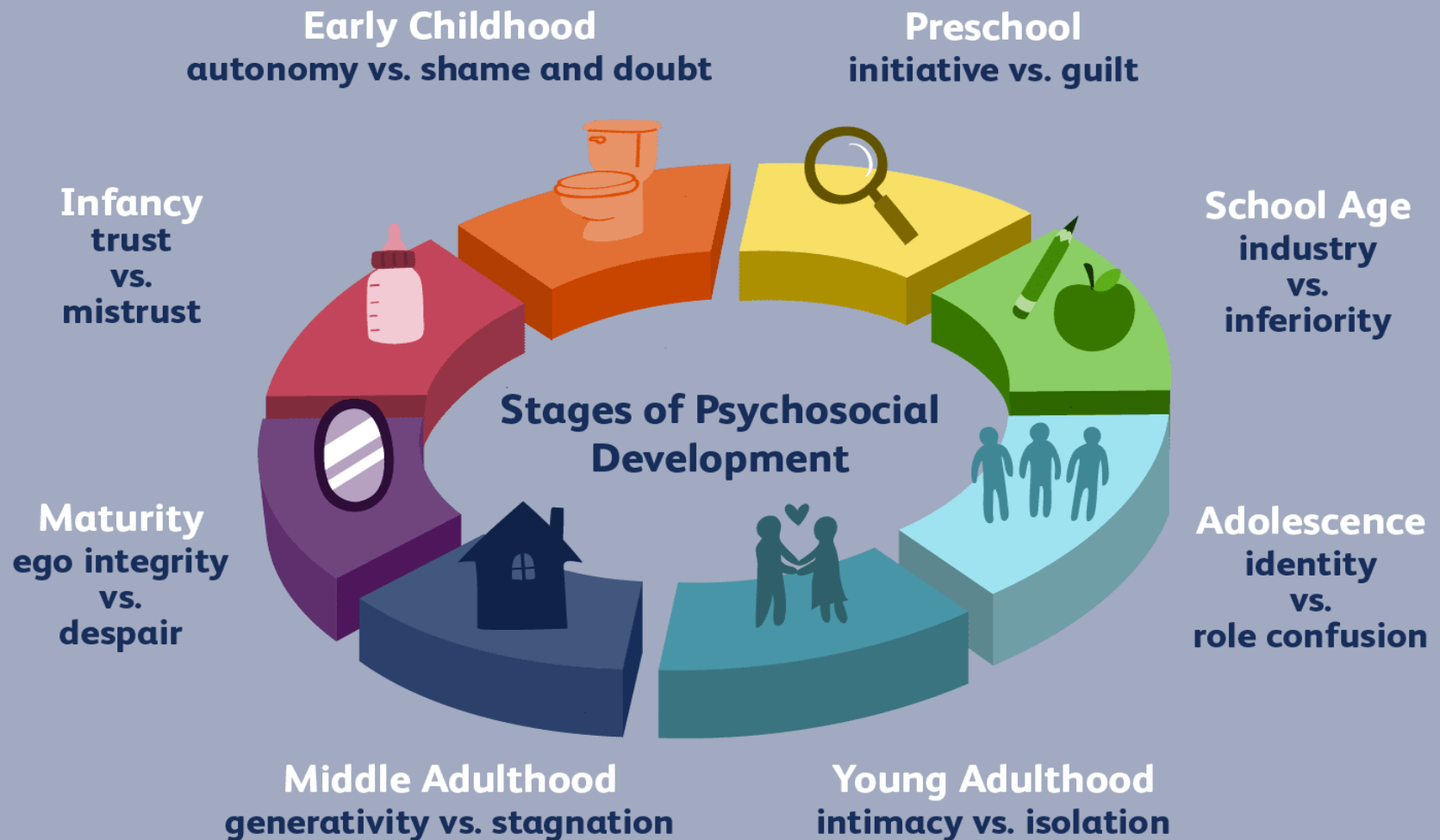
- Nearly one in three 13 – 18-year-olds meet criteria for an anxiety disorder (Centers for Disease Control, 2017).
- 30% of Wilton High School students report “above average” levels of anxiety and depression (Dr. Suniya Luthar, 2017)
- Direct link found between childhood stress and risk for adult depression (Univ. of New Hampshire, 2003)
- 36% of 12-17-year-olds reported high levels of anxiety during pandemic (Zhou et al., 2020)

What is Going On?

There are obvious factors (loss of connection, inconsistent schooling, societal stress) that have exacerbated stress ... but this has been increasing long before the pandemic. Why?

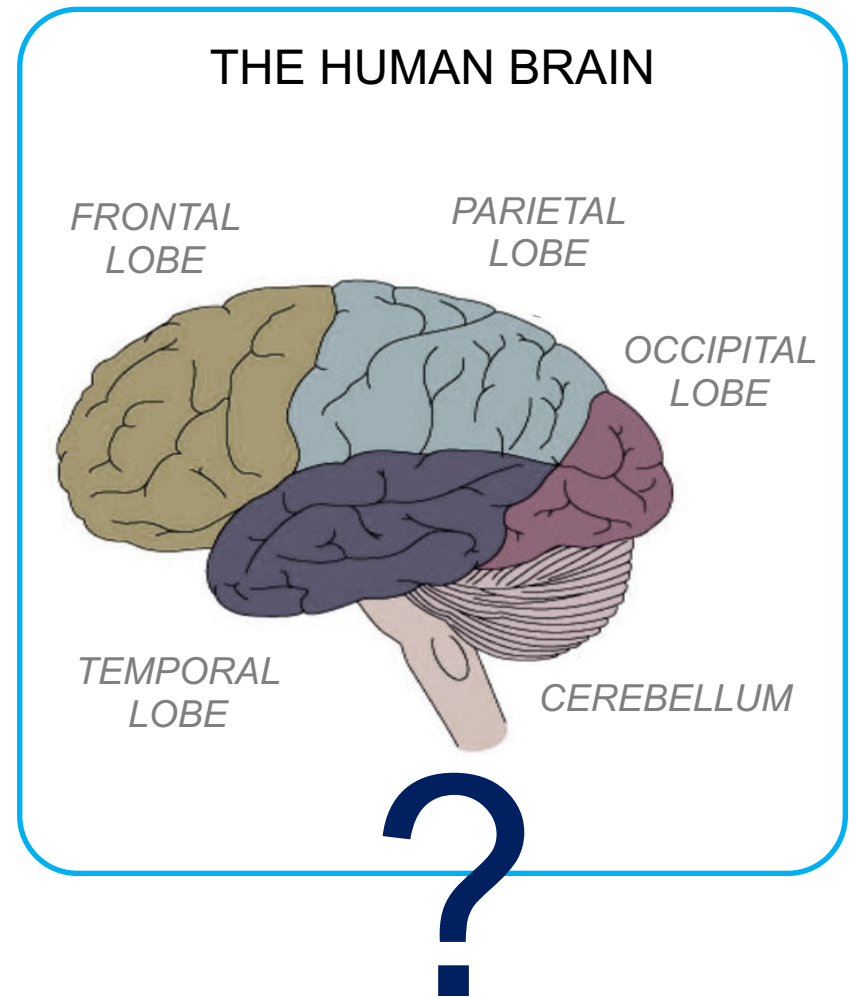
- Technological Changes
- The Hygiene Hypothesis and the Psychological Immune System
 - “Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors.”
- The Developmental Model

Typical Psychosocial Development



The Human Brain & the Unknown

- > The human brain hates the unknown
- > The human brain hates to be reminded of our lack of control
- > Unknown + lack of control = triggered emotional centers
- > Triggered emotional centers = rigidity and reduction in logic
- > Thus, we need to maximize predictability
- > And we need to stay in the present to focus upon what we can control



Adaptability is:

The human capacity to face, adjust to and ultimately learn from life's experiences and challenges.

FLEXIBILITY

RESILIENCE

SELF CONTROL

It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent. It is the one that is most adaptable to change.

Charles Darwin
naturalist, geologist and biologist

Modeling Adaptability Through Self-Care

- > Acknowledge the bumps in the road
- > “First, put on your own oxygen mask...”
- > Focus on what you can control
- > “Stay Present” – Mindfulness!
- > Take time to relax
 - + Take some “ME” time
 - + Regular sleep, exercise, diet
 - + Pick your “turn off” time
- > Socialize (safely)
- > Turn to others for help



10 Ways to Support Emotional Adaptability

1. The importance of play

- Play = Time without purpose
- Support as much social connection as possible

2. Routines + Predictability = CONTROL

3. Validate the “losses” – lead with empathy

4. Clear rules and expectations

5. Humor as #1 antidote to stress

“Laughter is the best medicine”

Proverbs, King James Bible

10 Ways to Support Emotional Adaptability

6. Lots of repetition - slow pace
7. Expect dysregulation and regression
 - Connect before correct
 - Go “Low and Slow” – co-regulation
8. The importance of sleep
9. Put stressors into perspective
10. Promote awareness of feelings
 - > “Name it to tame it” – RULER (Marc Brackett)

When to Seek Help

- Appetite or sleep problems
- Frequent physical complaints
- Prolonged depressed affect/hopelessness
- Nightmares
- Apathy
- Threats of harm to self or others
- Body image distortion
- Running away
- Strange thoughts or unusual behaviors

Some Resources

BOOKS

- “Raising Resilient Children” *by Robert Brooks and Sam Goldstein*
- “Permission to Feel” *by Marc Brackett*
- “Rising Strong” *by Brene Brown*
- “Building Resilience” *by Kenneth Ginsburg*

APPS

- Headspace; Stop, Breath, Think; Smiling Mind

WEBSITES

- <https://positivepsychology.com/resilience-activities-worksheets/>
- <https://www.edutopia.org/resilience-grit-resources>



Some Conclusions

Change = Stress

Stress is inevitable

Stress is not a bad thing

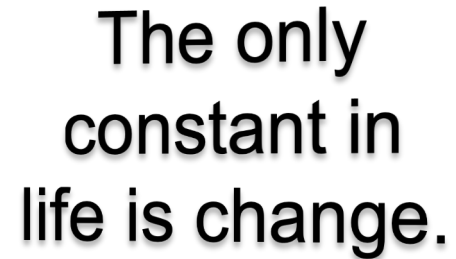
> Stress management = resilience

Stay in the present

Focus on what you can control

Model calm

Self care and self compassion are the keys!



The only
constant in
life is change.

Heraclitus of Ephesus
Ancient Greek philosopher

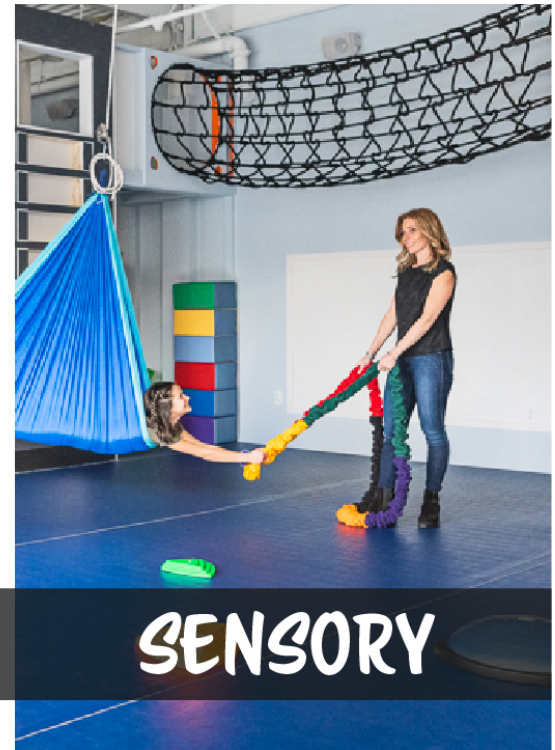
Sasco River Center: Who We Are



TESTING



THERAPY



SENSORY

Sasco River Center is a collaborative and multidisciplinary center for evaluation & treatment of developmental concerns
Merger of Sensory Kids & The Southfield Center for Development
Locations in Darien, Stamford & Wilton

