



Counseling Corner Newsletter, Week of May 4, 2020

Dear Parents,

In part 2 of understanding how anxiety effects our brain, my hope for us is to strive for better self-understanding and appreciation.

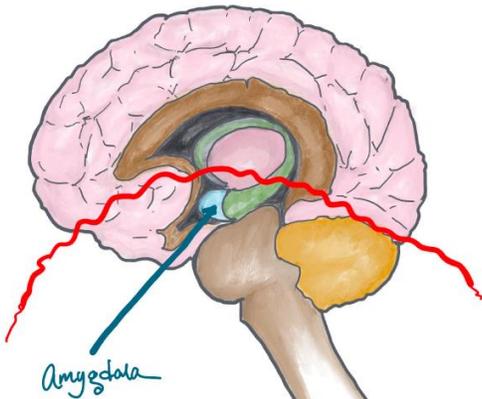
For most issues and struggles that people have in mental health, self-awareness and self-understanding is the beginning of change and personal growth. Developing healthy and lasting habits that eventually transforms into character, begins here as we begin to discuss and appreciate the little idiosyncrasies of who we are.

Thank you for being a part of the process!

We experience anxiety if we PERCEIVE there is imminent danger. Our perception of danger varies with our life experience.

When danger abounds, Amy the Guard Dog (our Amygdala) bounds into action and takes over to protect us!!

Understanding Our Brain and Anxiety, Part 2



During an “amygdala override,” any higher cognitive ability above the red line is not optimal.

When danger abounds, our brain was built with an instinctual ability to protect and take care of our body. Dangers or imminent threats trigger “Amy the Guard Dog” (your amygdala) to survive in fight or flight mode. When survival is the most important issue, your amygdala will override all other cognitive abilities and functions. We can call this survival mode an “Amygdala Override,” or “Guard Dog Override.”

Typical cognitive abilities that go out the window during an amygdala override are critical thinking, remembering things, being logical, or being self-reflective or self-aware. So, in practice, you can’t reason and rationalize with someone when they are having a panic attack, or undergoing an emotional melt-down. When they are in the red, their only behavior is to escape from the situation they are in, or to fight their way out of that situation.

So, a lecture, instructive suggestions, or any verbal interactions with more than 4 word is not going to stick, is not going to calm them down, and in some cases, may prolong the emotional meltdown. THE FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS DURING AN EMOTION MELTDOWN IS TO IMPLEMENT COPING SKILLS TO CALM AND SOOTHE THE OUR GUARD DOG, OUR AMYGDALA.

CONTENTS

- What is Anxiety/Panic Attack
- Understanding Our Brain and Anxiety, Part 1
- Reframing the Issue
- Tips /Techniques

Tips and Techniques

Last week, we talked about Soothing Amy the Guard Dog by implementing coping strategies, such as breathing exercises, doing something relaxing, playing, enjoying a hobby, taking a break, or rest. Once Amy the Guard Dog, our Amygdala, de-escalates and calms down, we can begin processing or trouble-shooting the anxiety-provoking situation by accessing the Hippo (memory) and Owl (executive functioning) parts of our brain. Let's discuss them in a little more detail.



The "Hippo" or the Hippocampus is that part of the brain that helps us remember. It is where our memories are stored. A hippo never forgets (just like elephants), and this part of our brain helps us to remember on a much deeper level.

During an Amygdala Override, the Hippo is not helping us to critically think and analyze our past experiences. Let's say we are afraid of spiders, and when we see a spider, our amygdala will reflexively pull away and run. However, if we are able to utilize the "Hippo," we will remember which spiders are poisonous or which is absolutely harmless.

The Hippo will also remind you what has worked and what has not worked in the past when you are dealing with an issue.



The "Owl" or the cerebral cortex of our brain is in charge of executive functioning; such as planning, making decisions, critical thinking, or even personality preferences.

The Owl works in conjunction with the Hippo to critically think and analyze not just our memories, but also our ability to assess the present situation and make the right decision. The Owl part of our brain also helps us to plan or to prep for life, including anxiety-provoking situations.

The Owl will also help you conceptualize and help you think of creative ways to solve the problem. If you're stressed about being overwhelmed, the "Owl" part of your brain will suggest a schedule, and prioritize for you a "to-do" list. If it is a big project, your "Owl" will also help you chunk it into manageable pieces for completion.

When all three of these areas of our brain are working collaboratively together, it results in our increased ability to handle stress, solve problems, and develop grit and resiliency.

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