

Help...My Amygdala's Been Hijacked!

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Stress is all around us as we navigate this new world filled with a myriad of tasks we have never encountered before (at this capacity) and now must do it within the confines of our homes. As we try to manage a schedule filled with meals, household chores, academics and working from home our plates are overflowing....and so are our emotions! So, what do we do about it? Where does stress come from and how can we learn to better manage it, so it does not ruin our lives and cause even more duress?

Have No Fear, the Amygdala is Here!

The amygdala is the part of the brain responsible for processing incoming stimuli. This is also the part of the brain where emotions are given meaning, remembered and attached to associations and responses. There are two amygdalas in each person's brain, one in each hemisphere or side of the brain. The amygdala is like a palace guard. The palace guard watches over the palace, protects it from intruders and alerts the palace if there is danger. In this way, the amygdala keeps us safe by identifying when there is threat by responding with a fight, flight or flee response. When you feel threatened and afraid, the amygdala automatically activates the fight-or-flight response by sending out signals to release stress hormones that prepare your body to fight or run away.

Stress Makes You Take Action

When stress makes you feel strong anger, aggression, or fear, the fight-or-flight response is activated. It often results in a sudden, illogical, and irrational overreaction to the situation. You may even regret your reaction later. Psychologist Daniel Goleman calls this the "hijacked amygdala." When the amygdala is hijacked it releases two hormones: cortisol and adrenaline. Cortisol prepares the body for the fight-or-flight response while adrenaline stimulates the body systems, so they are ready to respond to the threat. The release of these two chemicals can often result in an irrational or inappropriate response.

AMYGDALA = PALACE GUARD!



AMYGDALA COMPELS YOU TO:

1. SOLVE THE PROBLEM CAUSING THE THREAT.
2. ESCAPE FROM THE THREAT.
3. COPE WITH THE THREAT.
4. DEFEND YOURSELF THE BEST YOU CAN.
5. AT ANY COST, SURVIVE.

What to Do

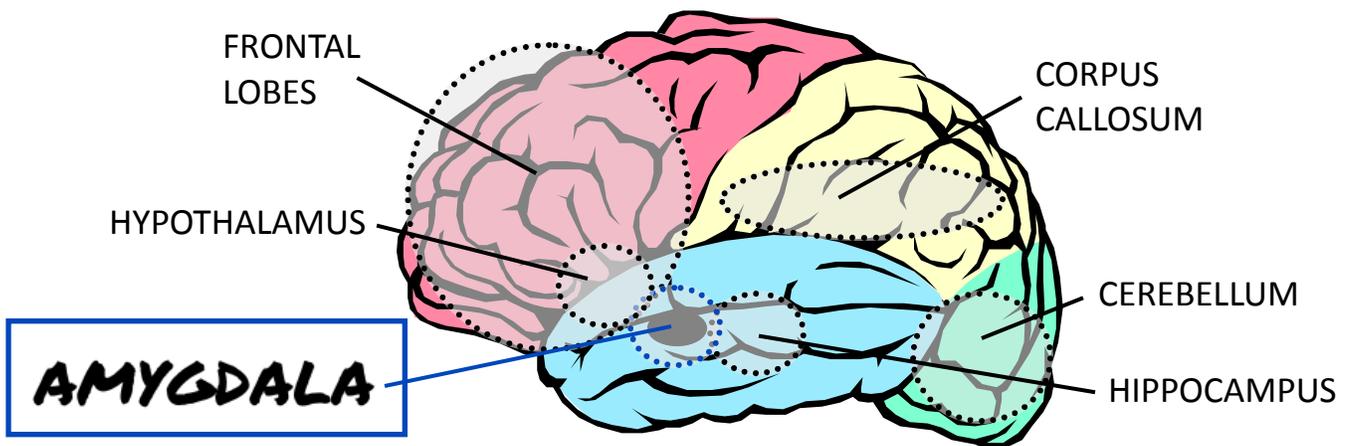
So, what do you do when you are stressed, your amygdala is hijacked and your child cannot, or will not, participate in their online classes, needs your support or wants another snack? HELP!

The first thing to do is to acknowledge that you are becoming stressed, your amygdala has been activated and your body is responding. Now take some deep breaths. Research shows that breathing is the one thing that connects the body and the brain. So, take a few deep breaths and possibly walk away for a moment if destressing is needed. Recognize that your child's amygdala

has also been activated and is not responding in a logical, rational manner. Perhaps both you and your child need a break. Take a walk, play a game, or get some exercise. Movement helps calm the mind. Engage in some mindfulness activities to reduce the stress and get grounded. When calm, think about a rational solution to the situation. Talk about alternative ways to handle the situation with your child. Develop a system for letting each other know when you are feeling stressed to avoid future blow-ups.

It takes time to adjust to this new “normal.” The more we practice effective ways of managing our stress, the less our amygdala will become hijacked and hopefully, the new normal will be a little calmer and more peaceful on all fronts.

BASIC BRAIN ANATOMY



THE BRAIN MADE
RIDICULOUSLY SIMPLE!



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