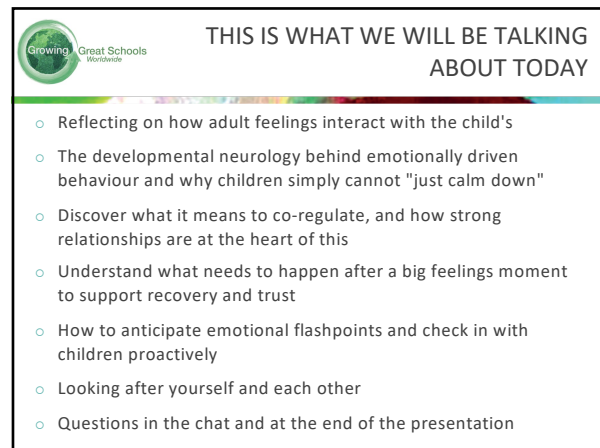





RESPONDING TO BIG FEELINGS
DR SUE ROFFEY

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THIS IS WHAT WE WILL BE TALKING ABOUT TODAY

- Reflecting on how adult feelings interact with the child's
- The developmental neurology behind emotionally driven behaviour and why children simply cannot "just calm down"
- Discover what it means to co-regulate, and how strong relationships are at the heart of this
- Understand what needs to happen after a big feelings moment to support recovery and trust
- How to anticipate emotional flashpoints and check in with children proactively
- Looking after yourself and each other
- Questions in the chat and at the end of the presentation

2




WHEN EMOTIONS RUN HIGH

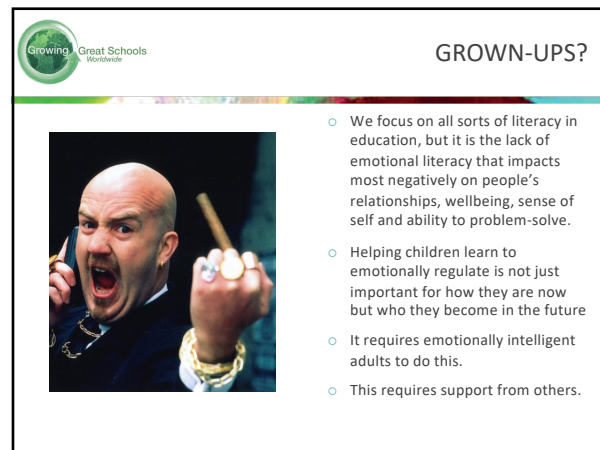
In every interaction there are the feelings/needs of the adult and the feelings/needs of the child

How someone feels about a child having a meltdown will depend on:

- what else is going on for them
- how they think about the situation
- the knowledge they have about child development
- the strategies they have learnt that enable them to cope
- What they have learnt about co-regulation



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GROWN-UPS?



- We focus on all sorts of literacy in education, but it is the lack of emotional literacy that impacts most negatively on people's relationships, wellbeing, sense of self and ability to problem-solve.
- Helping children learn to emotionally regulate is not just important for how they are now but who they become in the future
- It requires emotionally intelligent adults to do this.
- This requires support from others.

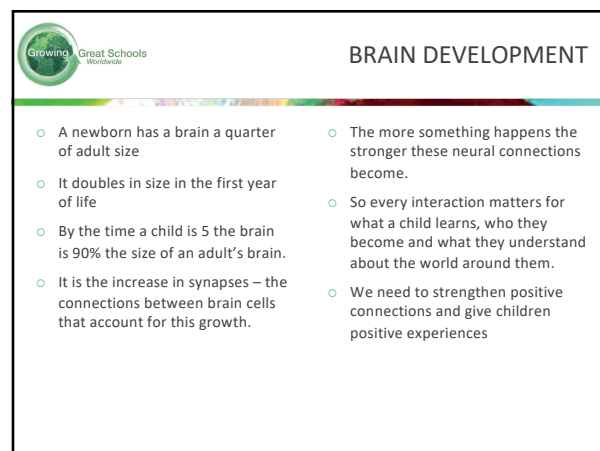
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OVER A MILLION NEW NEURAL CONNECTIONS A SECOND




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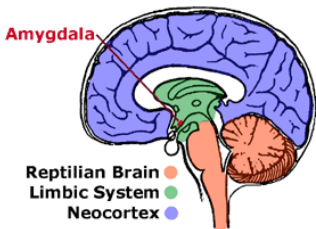

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

- A newborn has a brain a quarter of adult size
- It doubles in size in the first year of life
- By the time a child is 5 the brain is 90% the size of an adult's brain.
- It is the increase in synapses – the connections between brain cells that account for this growth.
- The more something happens the stronger these neural connections become.
- So every interaction matters for what a child learns, who they become and what they understand about the world around them.
- We need to strengthen positive connections and give children positive experiences

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THE DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE BRAIN

The Evolution-Designed Brain



Amygdala

Reptilian Brain

Limbic System

Neocortex

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BASIC BRAIN SCIENCE

- The reptilian brain takes care of keeping someone alive.
- The neo-cortex is the part of the brain that deals with language development, thinking skills, problem-solving and decision-making.
- The limbic system is responsible for emotions, memory, motivation and behaviour
- The limbic system develops faster than the neo-cortex.
- This means that emotions for young children are dominant
- They are not yet able to be rational

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PERCEIVED THREAT

- Within the limbic system is a small organ called the amygdala. This is primed to respond to threat and ensure survival
- The amygdala is the seat of emotional memory so if something has happened before that the person **perceives as a threat** they are more likely to react.
- This can include fear, frustration, excitement and other big feelings that can be overwhelming.
- Reactions are to fight, freeze or flee. Reactions are impulsive
- NONE of this is deliberate
- But children need to learn to regulate these big emotions to keep themselves and others safe.

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**DEVELOPMENTAL LEVELS:
DIFFERENT REASONS FOR SIMILAR BEHAVIOURS**

- Two Years: Children get very frustrated as they want to do more for themselves. They do not always have the words to express how they feel. Giving them other ways to communicate – sign language, widgets as well as limited choices might all help
- Three Years: Social skills are still immature so having to share, take turns may result in dysregulated behaviour. Constant talking, modelling of positive social behaviours might help
- Four Years: The neo-cortex is better developed now and dysregulated behaviour more likely to be an outcome of stress and anxiety. What else is going on in a child's life?
- Five Years: Sometimes pressure leaves a child exhausted and less able to self-regulate. Separation anxiety can also be a cause.

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**RESPONDING TO AN AMYGDALA
MOMENT**

- When a young child is dysregulated they may be screaming, crying, throwing limbs about and sometimes themselves.
- The adult needs to be on hand but not increase the perceived threat. This means not invading the child's space with body, fingers or face – standing back and speaking in a low slow voice
- It is easier to respond to requests to DO something than to STOP something.
- If the behaviour is unsafe it is best to either persuade the child to move or move others.

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STAGES OF SUPPORT

- **Acknowledge:** *I can see you are feeling very upset about this*
- **Validate:** *It isn't surprising you are upset – its normal to feel cross when you have to leave something you are enjoying.*
- The child will feel heard and this can make a difference
- **Contain:** *You're OK – I'm here – we've got this.*
- Model regular breathing, state calmly what you would like the child to do, once they have recovered a little you can give a friendly reassuring touch if this is acceptable to the child
- **Comfort:** *That was a tough one. What would help you feel better now? A hug, read a book, quiet time somewhere?*
- **Congratulate:** *Well done for getting the better of that big feeling.*

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WHAT ELSE HELPS

- Take nothing personally – whatever the child says and does
- Distraction techniques can work
- Stay calm! Breathe. This won't last forever
- Repeated reminders – state calmly what you want to happen, using I sentences
- Refer to behaviour that is unwanted, remind the child they are loved.
- Look after yourself.
- Ask for support

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ANTICIPATING FLASHPOINTS

- We are all most likely to be emotionally dysregulated when we are exhausted, overwhelmed, isolated, hungry, anxious or when lots of difficult things happen in a short space of time.
- Same for kids!
- **Check** in on unmet needs
- **Change** is hard – more so for some than others. Give **clear** warnings of transitions.
- Use visual and gestural **clues** for children who do not have sufficient language. Also helpful for those who do.
- Tune into a child's interests and strengths to **choose** the most useful distraction technique

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AFTERWARDS COMFORT AND CONVERSATIONS

- **Toddlers** – brief interactions talking about feelings but also saying (broken record technique) that *feeling angry is OK but hurting people isn't*. A cuddle helps with calm and reconnection
- **Pre-schoolers** – Also value comfort. Although they are becoming part of a social world, children are still very ego-centric and may think that you being cross about their behaviour means you don't like them.
 - Start with reassuring them that they are wanted and loved – then you could say why their behaviour was unacceptable.
 - Use I statements rather than you statements and refer to the child rather than others 'I was concerned you would get hurt'.
 - When they have calmed down it may be possible to ask what else they might have done.
 - Referring to books about feelings you have read together might help

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RESTORATIVE CONVERSATIONS

- **Relationship, Respect, Responsibility, Repair, Re-integration**
- What happened there?
- What went wrong? Did anyone get hurt?
- What were you feeling then? What are you feeling now?
- Is there anything else you could have done?
- Would that have been better?
- What could you do to make this better now for everyone?

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LEARNING THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS

- Children learn 'how to be' and 'how to live together' not through what they are told but by watching, listening and copying
- They learn through experiencing positive, connected relationships
- The way significant people in their lives manage challenges, difficult situations and strong emotions provides a blueprint for a child.
- What we do matters more than we think.

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WHAT HELPS THE ADULTS STAY CALM?

- The way you think about something. - beliefs are powerful
- How well you are
- What else is happening in your life
- How supported you feel
- Stress happens when demands exceed resources – so what demands might you reduce and what resources can you increase
- Leaders can make all the difference to developing a supporting culture by giving people agency, acknowledging their input, ensuring they feel emotionally safe, focusing on belonging, respecting their ideas, trusting them and building strengths.

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 YOU MAY NEVER KNOW THE
DIFFERENCE YOU MAKE



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 MORE INFORMATION

- growinggreatschoolsworldwide.com - information, research, good practice and links with others who seek an education to meet the needs of the whole child and every child.
- PLEASE JOIN US
- Contact sue@sueroffey.com



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