



ANGLICAN
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COVID-19

Survival and Recovery Tips

Using all of life skills to address
stress & anxiety & build resilience



Anglican EdComm
Level 2, St Andrew's House
464 Kent Street
Sydney NSW Australia 2000
(61 2) 9265 1623
info@edcomm.org.au
edcomm.org.au

COVID-19 Survival and Recovery Tips

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This work is based on the published research work of
Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatte.

The opinions expressed in this discussion paper are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the view of Anglican EdComm or the Sydney Anglican Church Diocese.

'Capacity for resilience is not genetically fixed ... it is not determined in childhood.' (Reivich & Shatte, 2003, pp.3-5)

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Survival & Recovery Tip 1

Stress, Resilience and Learning my ABC

*Using 'all of life skills' to address stress and anxiety, and to build resilience.
(Reivich & Shatte, 2003, pp.3-5)*

The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted life as we used to know it. As Australians emerge from lockdown having learnt new Zoom skills, to teach online, to reclaim their gardens and to replace many other normal life activities in some way, we have also introduced hyper-hygiene practices and social-distancing, and are now learning what the 'new normal' will be like. Much has changed in a short time. Much has been stressful for both adults and children.

While Christians have a firm hope in God's faithfulness and his ultimate control in all that happens, we are not immune to the effects of stress in our bodies. At EdComm's Agora: *Anxious Heads, Troubled Hearts: Exploring anxiety in self and others*, Clinical Psychologist Valerie Ling talked about how to recognise stress-induced anxiety in adults and children. She assured us that anxiety is treatable and gave us some ideas about how to look after ourselves in stressful times. You can view Valerie Ling's presentation at edcomm.org.au/anxiety

In this booklet we will build on this advice, teaching readers practical skills they can employ in their own lives and in their classrooms to build resilience and reduce stress. The first three skills: *Learning My ABC*, *Avoiding the Eight Thinking Traps* and *Detecting Icebergs* will help you to better understand how your mind works as well as help you to build accurate and realistic thinking. The four remaining skills: *Challenging Beliefs*, *Putting it into Perspective*, *Calming and Focusing* and *Practicing Real-Time Resilience* will help you to identify the true cause of problems and accurately assess where you have control and how to process issues outside of your control.

Skill 1: Learning your ABC



Most of us believe that adversities or stressors (A) lead directly to emotional and behavioural consequences (C). But this is not how our body works. It is not the things that happen to us that cause feelings and behaviours, but rather our thoughts or beliefs (B) about the events that drive how we feel and what we do.

For example: I may think that being in lockdown makes me feel restless and annoyed. It is, however, thinking that 'I hate not being able to go the gym because of lockdown, I just need to get out', rather than thinking 'Not going to the gym has saved me all this money and I can do free workouts at home. What a win!', that results in me feeling restless and annoyed.

This pathway from emotion/behaviour (C) to belief (B) is not always obvious but is much easier to see when an event 'pushes our buttons' challenging us in an area where we are sensitive. This will be different for different people. It may be age (because I'm too young or too old), gender (because I'm a woman or man), race (I'm from a different ethnic group), or work-life balance, just to name a few areas, where you may be sensitive.

This ABC skill is designed to develop your insight into your own thoughts. It asks you to listen to your thoughts, identify the self-talk and understand how your thoughts affect your feelings and behaviour and hence your stress responses.



Let's Begin: Understanding your ABC



See table on page 7.

1. **Describe the adversity** objectively (who, what, when and where) – Record in Row A.
2. **Identify the consequences** (emotions and behaviours) during and resulting from the adversity – Record in Column C.
3. **Identify your in-the-moment ticker-tape beliefs** (the thoughts you have in the moment – self talk – these directly affect the emotions and behaviour in response to the adversity) – Record in Column B.
4. **Cross check** – Identify a belief for each consequence.
5. **Challenge your beliefs** where they do not align with healthy 'why beliefs' – personal (me vs not me), permanent (always vs not always), and pervasive (everything vs not everything). Check that they align with an understanding of life based on the Bible. While Christians experience the same range of emotions, our understanding of events should be informed by our Biblical worldview.

For example: 'It is all their fault' may change to 'I'm not perfect. I wonder what I may have contributed'; 'This is too much to bear' may change to 'I know God is in control and has promised that we can rejoice in our suffering because it builds character' (Romans 5:3).

Resilient people see adversity in terms of seeing that external factors also contribute to the adversity, the adversity will not always be there, and it affects only some things.

The Relationship Between an Emotion and a Trigger Belief



Table showing Belief-Consequence couplets

B-C CONNECTIONS	
BELIEF	CONSEQUENCE
Violation of your rights	Anger
Real world loss or loss of self-worth	Sadness, Depression
Violation of another's rights	Guilt
Future threat	Anxiety, Fear
Negative comparison to others	Embarrassment
Insult to our self-esteem	Feel devalued

(Reivich & Shatte, 2002, p.75)

Use this table to [work backwards](#) from the emotion you experience after an adversity (C) to the belief that was responsible for the emotion (B). Things that challenge our resilience are different for everyone, but the B-C relationship is the same.

A Worked Example

Paul joined a prestigious law firm and moved, with his wife and baby, to a new city. He selected this firm because it had the reputation of being family friendly and allowed employees to find a work-life balance. Six months into the position, Paul believed that he was doing well at work and felt a close camaraderie with the other lawyers.

At this time his daughter, Mary, began experiencing one respiratory infection after another. His wife, Jody, missed a lot of work taking Mary to doctor's appointments or caring for her because she was too ill to go to daycare. One morning Jody called Paul at his office and asked if he could take Mary to a doctor's appointment, because she was worried that her boss was becoming annoyed by the number of times she left early or came in late. When Paul mentioned to one of the partners that he needed to leave early to take his daughter to the doctor, the partner said snidely, 'Don't make it a habit'. Paul reacted with a flood of emotions. He felt a mixture of anger, guilt, embarrassment, even shame, and was bewildered by the complexity of his reaction. 'I pride myself on being a pretty straightforward, what-you-see-is-what-you-get, kind of guy. I usually have a good sense of why I'm feeling the way I do and I think I'm pretty resilient. This just threw me. I couldn't understand why one sarcastic comment, would trigger so many emotions.' He did take Mary to the doctor but was upset about it for much longer than was warranted (Reivich & Shatte, 2003, pp.84-86).

Here's how Paul used the ABC to unpack his reaction. This gave him clarity about what to talk to his boss about.

A. ADVERSITY	
Paul took a job in a family-friendly law firm and moved his family to a new city to do so. His wife asked him to take his daughter Mary to the doctors as she had been undertaking this ongoing task and thought her boss was unhappy about it. Paul was upset by the snide remark from one of the Partners at his firm when he was told 'Don't make it a habit'.	
B. BELIEF	C. CONSEQUENCE
The company have misled me and betrayed me. (Violation of my rights)	Anger
I want to help with my daughter's illness. I don't want to let my wife down. (Violation of other's rights)	Guilt
They'll think I'm not committed. (Negative comparison to others)	Embarrassment

Now it is your turn. Remember you will get better at this with practice.

You can use the ABC My Adversity template included in [Appendix 1](#) (page 58).

A. DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERSITY	
A. TICKER-TAPE BELIEFS	B. CONSEQUENCES

Reference

Reivich, K. & Shatte, A. (2003). *The Resilience Factor. 7 Keys to Finding Your Inner Strength and Overcoming Life's Hurdles*. USA: Broadway Books, Random House.

Survival & Recovery Tip 2

Stress, Resilience and Avoiding the Eight Thinking Traps

*Using 'all of life skills' to address stress and anxiety, and to build resilience.
(Reivich & Shatte, 2003, pp.3-5)*

The human brain is amazing! Scientists are still discovering more about how it functions. Our brains process and help us to understand the world in which we live. Information input from our five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste and touch provide a constant stream of information that must be filtered and integrated to help us make meaning of the world. The sensory input, however, is far greater than our capacity to process it, so our thoughts about the world are an interpretation of the input, and even the input itself is filtered through what a person notices. It is well known that two people watching the same incident will report some differences about what happened. While 'what happened' is an absolute, every person that sees it will have noticed slightly different things and then filtered the information slightly differently. Psychologists tell us that during this process we make fairly predictable 'thinking errors'. These errors directly interfere with our resilience and with how we handle the setbacks and stresses in our daily lives (Reivich & Shatte, 2002, p.96). Using the ABC exercise (refer to Recovery Tip 1), we can both identify and then avoid thinking traps.

Eight Common Thinking Traps

1. Jumping to conclusions
2. Tunnel Vision
3. Magnifying and minimising
4. Personalising
5. Externalising
6. Overgeneralising
7. Mind Reading
8. Emotional Reasoning

As you read the thinking traps, try to remember the last time that you fell into each trap yourself. Most of us will have experienced all of the traps at some time but we each tend to be most vulnerable to two or three of the traps. A thinking trap is most often experienced when dealing with 'push button' adversities.

Thinking Trap 1 – Jumping to conclusions



Making assumptions about the relevant data, for example: thinking 'I must have done something wrong'. At the EdComm Agora [Anxious Heads, Troubled Hearts: Exploring anxiety in self and others](#), Clinical Psychologist Valerie Ling talked about her experience in school where she had the thought 'I must have done something wrong' every time a teacher wrote 'See me' on her workbook. She acknowledged that the teacher may also have wanted to praise her work but her first thought was a negative one.

One other common example of this kind of thinking is how we respond when we pass a colleague in the playground or corridor and they do not acknowledge us. We often think: 'She/he doesn't like me' or 'I wonder what I did this time to offend him/her'. But perhaps they are just having a bad day or are quickly planning their next lesson as they walk.

We may notice that others also jump to conclusions. I experienced this kind of thinking from parents when I interviewed a student about an incident that she had witnessed at school. The next morning her parents were in my office wanting to know why I was implicating their daughter in the incident. They knew their daughter well enough to know that she wouldn't have been involved but perhaps they did not know me well enough to trust the process I was following or my judgement in the situation. Whatever their reason, they jumped to a conclusion without any evidence.

[To counter this kind of thinking](#) we need to collect relevant information and determine what evidence the conclusion is being based on. It also helps to think generously about others and in the case above take the initiative to say hello!

Countering this thinking trap helps us to gain control of our emotions and be more realistic, measured and loving in our responses.

Thinking Trap 2 – Tunnel Vision: Always seeing the negatives



We have noted that because the sensory input in any situation is far greater than our capacity to process it, we selectively notice some parts of it and screen out other aspects. If a person intuitively notices only the negative or the positive aspects of a situation or their environment, we say they have tunnel vision. The information that we pay attention to stems from our habit of preferring evidence that supports our theories about ourselves and the world.

Consider the following story:

Deputy Principal Alf is presenting a talk giving instructions and encouragement to the school's 86 staff on the day they return to face-to-face teaching after teaching online during the COVID-19 lockdown. During the presentation, Alf becomes aware of the following. Sam, Meg and Fred have not maintained eye contact throughout the presentation. Meg and another colleague, Tammy, each ask questions he has already answered. Halfway through the presentation one of the HODs, Rhi, answers her ringing mobile phone, leaves the room and does not return. This is followed by quite a lot of looks and gestures across the room between various staff. Two other HODs, frequently make comments to each other and at one point one of them asks an unhelpful question while the other one yawns. Some of the teachers appear to be distracted by something on their laptops and one has nodded off to sleep in the back corner. Alf concludes that his presentation is poor and not appreciated on so many counts. He sees only this perceived negative interpretation of what he observed. Alf believes that he is a poor presenter and that the staff should already know the information he is presenting.

Like all of us, Alf could not process everything that was happening around him. His mind automatically took shortcuts by sampling the information and screening out extra information. Unfortunately this screening was through a negative tunnel. He selectively ignored positive indicators of engagement like the nodding in agreement, the smiles of many of the participants, the interested glances, the general eye contact and the informed questioning. Alf is a victim of tunnel vision which led him to a wrong conclusion, made him feel badly about himself and his role in the school, and so also drained his resilience.

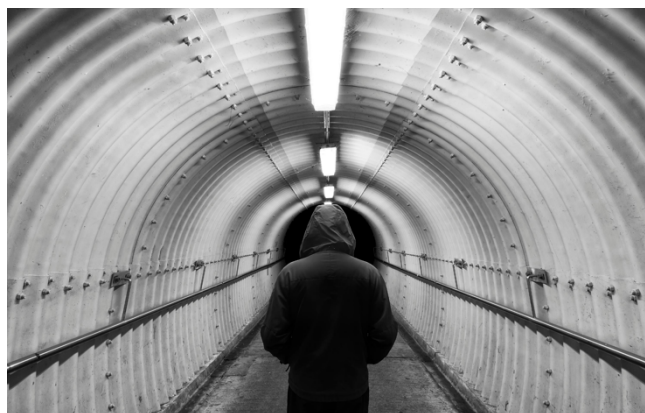
It is worth looking at what was really happening:

- The phone call Rhi received was about a child in her class whose family had just lost a grandparent to COVID-19. After a long call she was too upset to return to the meeting.
- The two HODs were discussing how they could make some of this information easily available to parents and students at various points of the presentation. One of them had only one hour's sleep the previous night as her baby was teething.
- The teachers on their laptops were actually taking notes.
- The looks and gestures between staff were because they knew how sick the grandparent of Rhi's student was and had guessed the content of the phone call by Rhi's initial reaction.
- The teacher who nodded off has sleep apnoea.

Tunnel vision is generally negative, but some people may develop styles that tunnel their vision for the positive. If they were presenting in the story above, they would see only the positive and be unaware if there was a level of non-engagement in the room. Their self-esteem may not suffer but the staff may also ignore the information.

To counter tunnel vision, it is important to ask:

- What else may explain my observations?
- How important is this in the big picture?
- What does Alf believe about himself that may have fuelled his negative tunnel vision?
 - Does he believe that he is a boring presenter?
 - Does he believe that this information was better served by some other form of communication?



Thinking Trap 3 – Magnifying and Minimising: Extreme optimists and pessimists



Unlike people with tunnel vision, magnifiers and minimisers have registered a balanced account of a situation but overvalue or undervalue some aspects. Think about how you recount your days activities over the dinner table or to a friend. Do you first tell the negative or the positive? If your focus is on the negative, this tends to affect your mood and sap energy and resilience. This mindset may also affect your relationships.

When we are generally drained or having a tough time, it is easy to see only the negatives. When you can see the distress of your students when they return to school after the lockdown, but feel helpless to help them, you may feel like a bad teacher. You did your best with preparing online lessons, but the students just didn't complete the work and those who did seem not to have learnt anything.

To counter maximising and minimising it is helpful to:

- recount only the facts of a situation: what was said and what was done
- look at alternative explanations, both positive and negative.

Resilience comes from an accurate appraisal of the situation and an acceptance of what I can and what I cannot influence.

You might ask:

- Were there any good things that happened?
- Did I do anything well?
- Am I overlooking any problems?

Thinking Trap 4 – Personalising

Personalising is the tendency to attribute problems to one's own doing.

This explanatory style is a risk factor in the development of depression. It is compounded if the cause of the problem is attributed to a characteristic the person also sees as fixed. A teacher who blames themselves for their students' loss of learning during the online learning program that they were obliged to offer during the COVID-19 lockdown period, may also believe that their poor technology skills are to blame and this has resulted because they were born in the wrong generation. Now they are being required to continue to use some online lessons, the teacher believes they are a failure as a teacher and should resign.

This teacher has personalised the situation and has not considered many other variables that may have affected the students themselves during this unusual learning time. Students may have had poor access to technology, may have been in a noisy environment that was not conducive to doing schoolwork, may not have understood instructions or may have been generally unmotivated and distracted. Moreover, they have seen their lack of tech-skills as a fixed entity rather than an opportunity to learn these skills and grow in competence.

To counter personalising it is helpful to consider:

- other contributing factors in the situation
- what you can control or use as a learning opportunity
- how much of the problem is really due to you.

Thinking Trap 5 – Externalising

Externalising is when the blamers fail to see what they have contributed to the problem. In our situation on the previous page, this is the teacher who can think of all the reasons the students did not learn without considering what they themselves may have contributed. They may blame a lack of time for preparation, a lack of training, lack of clear expectations, lack of support, unhelpful parents, disinterested students ... the list goes on.

To counter externalising ask:

- What part did I contribute?

Thinking Trap 6 – Overgeneralising

Overgeneralising is seeing the cause of a problem either as a generic issue that happens to everyone or a personal issue because of a personal inadequacy. Overgeneralisers use references to 'always' and 'everything'.

The teacher who believes that all students are equally IT literate and so should always cope equally well with distance-learning, or that the school always asks too much of them in crisis situations. They may feel that everything went wrong when they engaged in online teaching.

To counter externalising ask:

- Is there a narrower explanation?
- Is there a specific behaviour that explains the situation?

Thinking Trap 7 – Mind Reading

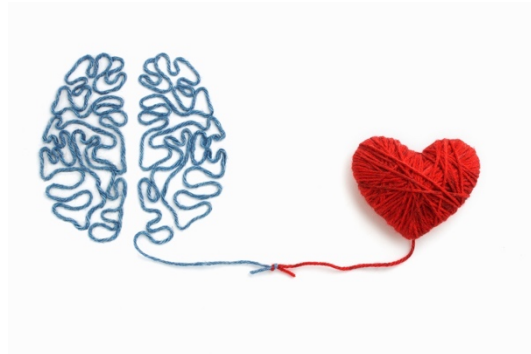


Mind reading results in jumping to conclusions. We sometimes think that we know what someone else is thinking so do not hear what they are telling us or jeopardise a conversation by making wrong assumptions. We may also hope that someone knows what we are thinking and get frustrated when their actions are not in line with our thoughts. This response to mind reading is really based on good listening and good communication.

To counter mind reading ask:

- Did I communicate clearly?

Thinking Trap 8 – Emotional Reasoning



Emotional Reasoning is our estimate of the level of threat from any situation and is determined by our perception of three aspects of the situation:

1. How dangerous the threat is
2. The probability that it will actually occur, and
3. How close in time it is to us.

If one of these factors changes in our reasoning, increased anxiety can lead to emotional reasoning which is less realistic than evidence-based thinking and increases anxiety unnecessarily. In the current COVID-19 pandemic, any one of these three aspects can and does change regularly. This increases our anxiety and we respond with reasoning based more on emotion than on fact.

To counter emotional reasoning:

- Ask 'What are the facts?'
- Slow down and check the evidence on which you have based your conclusions (Reivich & Shatte, 2003, pp96–115).

To avoid thinking traps it is helpful to use the ABC skill that was outlined in *Survival & Recovery Tip 1*.

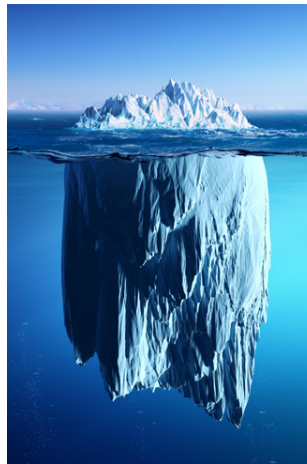
Reference

Reivich, K. & Shatte, A. (2003). *The Resilience Factor. 7 Keys to Finding Your Inner Strength and Overcoming Life's Hurdles*. USA: Broadway Books, Random House.

Survival & Recovery Tip 3

Stress, Resilience and Detecting Icebergs

*Using 'all of life skills' to address stress and anxiety, and to build resilience.
(Reivich & Shatte, 2003, pp.3-5)*



Icebergs are deeply hidden beliefs that contribute to over-reactions. They are fixed beliefs that are not often conscious, but that can affect our reactions – feelings and behaviour – in the same way that our 'in-the-moment beliefs' do. They are usually formed in childhood and often reflect the core values of our parents. They are not necessarily good or bad and can be modified.

In most situations our in-the-moment beliefs hold the key to our reactions, but at times our emotional response to a situation seems too intense or even inappropriate and our self-talk does not explain our reaction. It is possible that our reaction is stemming from an underlying deeply-held belief about how the world ought to operate or how we feel we ought to operate within it. Many personality clashes and rifts between couples are due to differences in these iceberg beliefs. By learning the skill of detecting icebergs, we can better understand our core values and evaluate them against Biblical values.

Many Iceberg beliefs fall into one of three categories or themes: achievement, acceptance and control.

For example:

- **Achievement:** 'I must never give up' or 'Failure is a sign of weakness'.
- **Acceptance:** 'She has never liked me', 'What matters most is to be loved', 'Asking for help shows you are not a good leader' or 'Relationships matter more than truth'.
- **Control:** 'Emotions are a sign of weakness', 'People just can't be trusted' or 'If you want things done properly, you should do them yourself'.
- **Others:** 'Honesty really matters', 'A woman is as good as a man' or 'Disorder is sign of poor work ethic or bad character'.

Once activated an iceberg belief scans the environment looking for other examples of violation. We notice and confirm evidence that confirms our beliefs.

Spotting Icebergs

After completing an ABC (see Survival & Recovery Tip 1), check if the C's are out of alignment or proportion to the B's. If so, you may have an iceberg. If you are struggling to make a simple decision also check for a clash of icebergs.



If two iceberg beliefs contradict each other it can be difficult to make a decision. For example, if a woman trying to decide whether to apply for a promotion to a senior leadership position believes both that 'A woman should be as career driven as a man' and 'My children must come first', she may find she has a decision paralysis or is conflicted and unable to make the decision. Once she understands the source of her paralysis, she can problem solve around the implications of her possible choices.

Let's return to [Alf's continuing story](#) (See *Survival & Recovery Tip 2*). We will use this to practice spotting icebergs:



Alf's boss Gertrude had been present for the presentation Alf gave to the staff on their return to school. In fact, Gertrude had emailed Alf during the previous week and asked him to prepare the presentation and given him explicit instructions about what to say and how to say it. Alf had prepared the presentation ahead of time and taken his presentation into school to go over it with Gertrude when the lockdown lifted but Gertrude was not in her office.

During the lockdown period Alf had keenly watched the nightly COVID-19 updates announced by both the Prime Minister and the Premier, and was more up to date with his COVID-19 information than Gertrude was and so he used the most current information in his presentation. He was also aware that the returning staff were nervous about their return to school and the possible health risks they perceived and wanted to keep the mood of the presentation light. He used fun graphics and cartoon clips in his presentation together with the most up to date information. He had conspired with the music and drama staff and together they had written a song about hand washing, social distancing, cleaning rooms, keeping parents outside the gate and saving up hugs for another time. Together they taught the song to the staff before morning tea.

Alf's presentation started fifteen minutes late because the first person to address the staff went fifteen minutes overtime. This meant that Alf's presentation also went fifteen minutes overtime and into morning tea. Ralph had made a conscious decision to continue because it was during this time that the song was taught and practised and he felt that to cut this out after the effort that had gone into producing and preparing it would show disrespect for the staff involved.

Gertrude was furious. She left the room and returned to her office. She was so upset that she decided she had to go for a 'calming-down walk' on her secret trail through the streets around the school. When she returned to her office two clerical staff members complained about having their time wasted so Gertrude sent for Alf and ranted at him for ten minutes.

Spotting an Iceberg

1. Was Gertrude's reaction out of proportion to the event that caused it?
Yes
2. Was the quality of the C's mismatched to the B category?
Yes

Let's do an ABC Check

A. DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERSITY	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Alf had not stuck to the script she had given him o Alf had made light of a serious situation o Alf had involved other staff without permission o Alf had gone overtime 	
B. TICKER-TAPE BELIEFS	C. CONSEQUENCES
How dare he disobey my clear instructions Violation of your rights	Extreme anger and upset Felt undermined and disrespected
He has to turn everything into fun and he treats the staff just like a class of students Negative comparison to others	Embarrassment
He could have emailed me to get permission if I was not in my office Violation of your rights	Anger
He should know that the staff are entitled to their morning tea time Violation of another's rights	Guilt

When Gertrude looks at the ABC she should see that her response was far too strong for the adversity and her consequences were not matched to her in-the-moment beliefs. Both of these outcomes indicate that she is dealing with an underlying belief or an iceberg.

To find her iceberg she needs to ask the following questions:

- What does that mean to me?
- What is the most upsetting part of that for me?
- What is the worst part of that for me?
- What does that say about me?
- What's so bad about that?

i/ He didn't follow my script

- What does that mean to me? He feels his ideas are better than mine.
- What is the most upsetting part of that for me? I've trusted him but he didn't respect my authority.
- What is the worst part of that for me? People will think I gave him permission and think badly of me.
- What does that say about me? **I want ultimate respect and control. ICEBERG**
- What's so bad about that? It doesn't align to what I say about distributed leadership.

ii/ He made light of a serious situation (non-aligned B)

- What does that mean to me? He really doesn't know how to address staff.
- What is the most upsetting part of that for me? Staff still respond well to him.
- What is the worst part of that for me? Staff do not respond so well to my presentations.
- What does that say about me? I'm just old school and boring.
- What's so bad about that? **No one appreciates me. ICEBERG**

iii/ Alf had involved other staff without permission (similar to i/ above)

iv/ Alf had gone overtime

- What does that mean to me? He knows I like to run a precise show.
- What is the most upsetting part of that for me? He did it anyway and I had to field the complaints.
- What is the worst part of that for me? It felt like he had more control than I did.
- What does that say about me? **I want ultimate respect and control. ICEBERG**
- What's so bad about that? **I cannot trust him to get it right. ICEBERG**

Now that Gertrude has some insight into why she reacted the way she did and the iceberg beliefs that fuelled her reaction she can set about challenging and changing these beliefs.

As a Christian she believes that we all get it wrong sometimes and forgiveness matters (perhaps she should apologise to Alf), it is important to trust others (she needs to consider what this really looks like) and that ultimately God is in control not her, she can only do her best.

Reference

Reivich, K. & Shatte, A. (2003). *The Resilience Factor. 7 Keys to Finding Your Inner Strength and Overcoming Life's Hurdles*. USA: Broadway Books, Random House.

Survival & Recovery Tip 4

Stress, Resilience and Challenging Beliefs

*Using 'all of life skills' to address stress and anxiety, and to build resilience.
(Reivich & Shatte, 2003, pp.3-5)*

In the first three tips of *COVID-19 Survival and Recovery Tips* we have explored how to better understand our reactions to things that stress us. We have used the ABC exercise to examine the relationship between our thoughts and our responses, and learnt how to unpack our response (emotions/behaviour) to an event by naming our 'in-the-moment thoughts' and our emotional and behavioural responses. We learnt how to identify eight thinking traps and how to uncover our icebergs or deeper hidden beliefs. The self-analysis these skills encourage us to do is also the groundwork for the change skills that follow.

If we want to develop into people who view the world more accurately and become better problem solvers who are less at the mercy of their emotions and more able to respond to adversity well, we need to be willing to change beliefs and thinking patterns. To do this we must first believe that such change is possible.

The Seven Steps to Change Beliefs:

Testing the accuracy of beliefs about a problem and finding a solution that works.

1. ABC the adversity: the who, what, when, where and why of the adversity (see COVID Tip 1 for clarification).
2. Pie chart the causes: the why beliefs – how much did each cause contribute to the adversity?
3. Identify your explanatory style.
4. Be flexible: consider alternative beliefs.
5. Be accurate: with evidence for each belief.
6. New pie chart with new beliefs based on evidence.
7. New solutions.

To begin this exercise, we will return to the story of Alf and Gertrude (see *Survival & Recovery Tips 2 and 3*):

Gertrude had not asked Alf to do the staff presentation until the Friday morning before staff returned to school full time. He was still working on the room changes to accommodate COVID-19 Safe Restrictions, how to cover six staff who would continue to teach from home and answering many parent enquiries. He was not able to begin work on the presentation until Saturday. His wife had been so patient throughout the time of the COVID-19 home learning, doing more than her share of the home-schooling of their three children, while trying to maintain her own work from home duties, and had enabled Alf to work relatively undisturbed. Alf had promised her he would give her a day off for her birthday on Saturday. He cannot use Sunday to prepare the presentation as he is fully committed to running the technology for the four services at his church which will take all day this week because a Zoom lunch and Family Fun afternoon has also been arranged.



Know your beliefs – the in-the-moment and/or the iceberg beliefs and your ‘why’ beliefs about the causes of the adversity. ‘Why beliefs’ are most common after failure, unexpected events and interpersonal conflicts.

Let’s ABC Alf’s new problem.

1. ABC the adversity to discover the 'why beliefs'

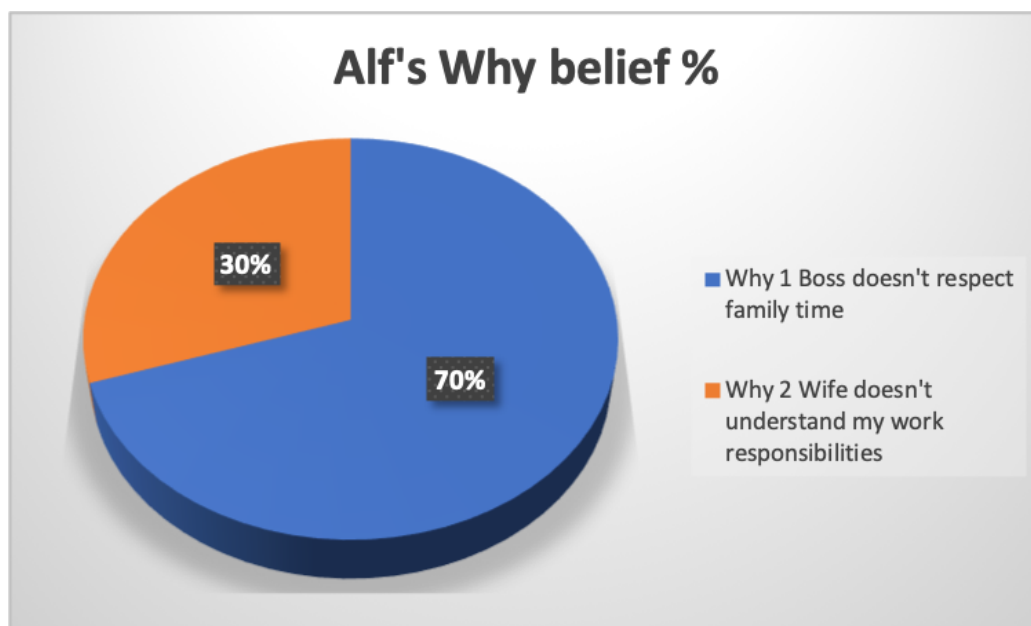
A. ADVERSITY	
My boss has asked me to prepare a presentation for the staff for their return to school on Monday. This means that I will have to work on Saturday when I promised my wife could have a day off for her birthday and I could manage the children.	
B. BELIEF	C. CONSEQUENCE
I'm starting to get really angry Description	I was angry and couldn't focus on the work at hand on Friday
My wife is going to be so upset What next belief	
My boss doesn't respect my family time Why belief	
My wife doesn't understand my responsibilities at school Why belief	

When we challenge our beliefs, we need to focus on our 'why' beliefs.

2. Pie chart the 'why' beliefs

Alf considers each 'why belief' and quickly estimates what percentage they each contribute to his adversity (the actual numbers are not important). He decides 'why belief #1' contributed about 70% to his distress while 'why belief #2' accounted for the remaining 30%.

You can pie-chart your Why Beliefs following the steps included in [Appendix 2](#) (page 59).



3. Identify your explanatory style

This is your learned response to adversity or the way you habitually explain the good and bad things that happen to you.

Explanatory style can be described in three dimensions;

- **Personal** – Me, not-me
- **Permanent** – Always, not-always
- **Pervasive** – Everything, not-everything

Our explanatory style limits our problem solving by drawing us to a subset of the real causes and so can blind us to an explanation that is obvious to others.

A 'Me, Always, Everything' person automatically thinks they caused the problem (me), that it is lasting and unchangeable (always) and that it will undermine all aspects of life (everything). An example is: 'I got a C because I'm not smart'.

A 'Not Me, Not Always, Not Everything' person believes that other people or circumstances caused or contributed to the problem (not me), that it is changeable and will not last (not always) and that it will not affect much of their life (not everything). An example is: 'I got a C because I did not understand some key concepts' (Reivich & Shatte, 2003, pp.41-42).

When Alf checks his [explanatory style](#), he discovers the following:

Why belief #1 – My boss doesn't respect my family time

Totally due to me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Totally due to other people / circumstances
Will always be present	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Will never again be present
Influences everything in my life	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Influences just this one situation

Why belief #2 – My wife doesn't understand my work responsibilities

Totally due to me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Totally due to other people / circumstances
Will always be present	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Will never again be present
Influences everything in my life	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Influences just this one situation

When Alf looks at his 'not-me' responses he should see that he has not taken any responsibility either with his boss or his wife. In fact, both of Alf's responses are 'not-me, always and everything'. This is not a healthy place to be. Alf needs to come to a realistic understanding of the situation, to take responsibility and to work out what he himself can control.

4. Being flexible

Because we are usually blind to causes that lie outside of our explanatory style, this is a difficult step. Alf needs to look closely at his 'not-me, always and everything' responses and consider what other causes may have contributed to his adversity. He can test these alternative beliefs in the accuracy part of the exercise.

Alf came up with the following 'alternative beliefs':

- I have a hard time saying no to my boss.
- I'm not good at time management. If I could limit the length of time spent solving everyone else's problems, I would have more time to spend with my family.

Let's look at his alternative beliefs on his explanatory scale.

Alternative belief #1 – I have a hard time saying no to my boss

Totally due to me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Totally due to other people / circumstances
Will always be present	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Will never again be present
Influences everything in my life	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Influences just this one situation

Alternative belief #2 – I'm not good at time management with other staff

Totally due to me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Totally due to other people / circumstances
Will always be present	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Will never again be present
Influences everything in my life	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Influences just this one situation

Alf now realises that if these alternative beliefs are also true, he is in a position to **change** some of his stress factors.

You can check your explanatory style by following the steps included in [Appendix 3](#) (page 62).

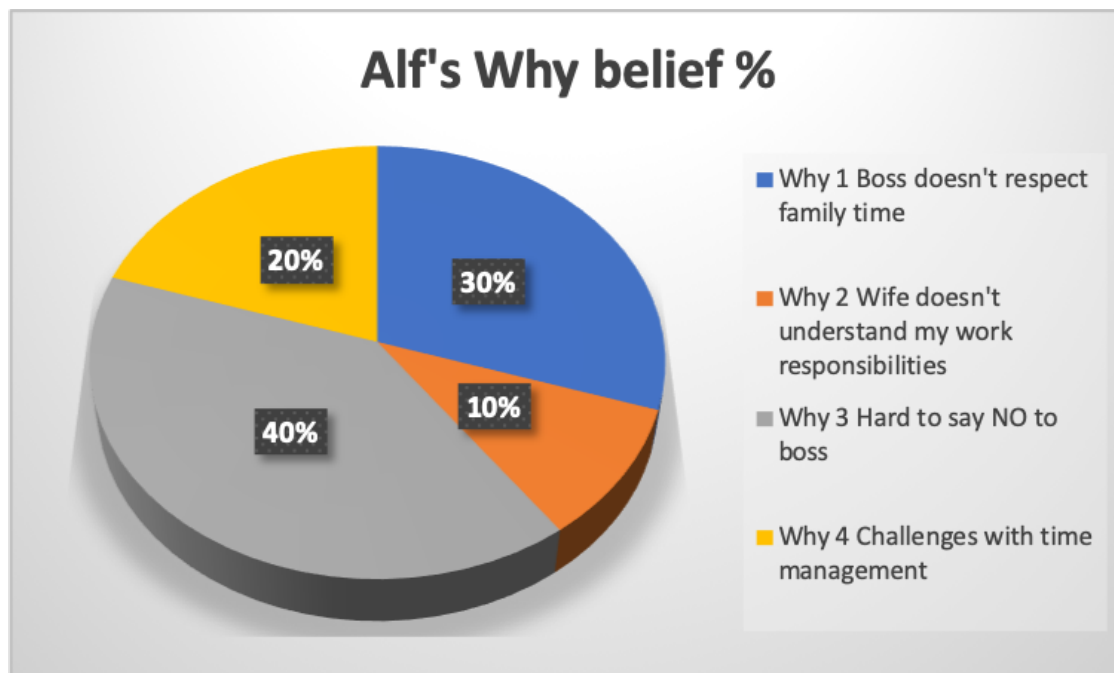
5. Being Accurate

Alf now needs to collect evidence and check the accuracy of all of his beliefs.

WHY BELIEFS	EVIDENCE FOR	EVIDENCE AGAINST
Belief 1 Boss does not respect family time	Last minute request to prepare presentation	Last term she gave him time to settle his child into school
	Expectation of number of night events	Boss expected he could prepare on the Friday
Belief 2 Wife does not understand work responsibilities	She gets upset when he misses a child's sports match	She gave him space during lockdown
		She doesn't complain about several nights a week at school
Belief 3 Alf has hard time saying no to boss	Recent example	It is only his boss, he stands his ground with other people's requests
	He takes her place at a lot of night events when asked	
Belief 4 Alf is not good at time management	Spends long hours working beside staff outside of his job description	When uninterrupted works efficiently
	Finds it difficult to work productively when upset	Managed a Masters' degree while teaching

You can consider the evidence for your Why Beliefs by following the steps included in [Appendix 4](#) (page 63).

6. New Pie Chart



7. New Solutions

The absolute accuracy of each section is not important. What matters is that Alf is now in a position to [see what he can control and change](#) and so become less stressed and more resilient. He can work on the [60% of the causes](#) that he has 'owned' and even consider how to [address the other two 'why' issues with better communication](#).

Reference

Reivich, K. & Shatte, A. (2003). *The Resilience Factor. 7 Keys to Finding Your Inner Strength and Overcoming Life's Hurdles*. USA: Broadway Books, Random House.

Survival & Recovery Tip 5

Stress, Resilience and Putting it into Perspective

*Using 'all of life skills' to address stress and anxiety, and to build resilience.
(Reivich & Shatte, 2003, pp.3-5)*



The 'What if' Syndrome

Do you ever lie in bed with your mind racing, not able to get to sleep? This may have happened as COVID-19 took hold in Australia: how bad would it get here; most of our vulnerable older people will die; mum's in a nursing home, she will have no chance if it gets into her care home: will I ever see her again now they are locked down; home learning is chaos with my kids, they'll be so far behind when all of this is over; I'm not a qualified teacher – I couldn't even help with second class Maths today ... this chain of catastrophic beliefs can produce intense anxiety.

When we look at the 'anxiety' mechanism in the human body and how it is the result of the flight or fight response to danger or a threat, we know that it should be a helpful mechanism. When it gets out of perspective, however it drains us physically, psychologically and emotionally.

Putting it into perspective is a skill that, by changing your beliefs about a future threat, brings anxiety down to a manageable level – a level proportional to the threat. Like **Challenging beliefs**, this skill is based on accurate knowledge, but it addresses the 'what-next belief' or our beliefs about the future. It too is affected by explanatory style. Those with an 'always and everything' style are more prone to catastrophise. As well as helping the pessimistic people, this skill can also help the overly optimistic people to become more realistic.

To see [how catastrophic thinking begins](#), let's spend a little more time with Alf.

Alf was upset when he went home after his first day back at school, doing his presentation that he perceived didn't go so well and being the object of his boss Gertrude's rage. He wasn't his wife's favourite person after not fulfilling his promise on her birthday. Things at home were tense.

He spent the evening preparing the staff devotion for Tuesday morning and went to bed at his usual time. At 3.00am he awoke in a sweat. He had forgotten to email the parents their instructions about not entering the school gate under any circumstances and what streets they could queue their cars in while they dropped off their children. He had also forgotten to cancel the ten 'Prac' students who were due to start their Teaching Prac in the morning.

He could see it now: hordes of caring parents swarming in the gate and wanting to attend the Infants and Primary assembly; angry residents working from home out in the street in their pyjamas yelling at the parents who were queuing in the streets that had been restricted then calling the police who would then come into the school; Gertrude would be even madder with him and he would be put on report and lose any possibility of getting the promotion he had applied for; Prac students arriving at the school in defiance of Government Regulations they had forgotten to read, then dispersing quietly into various staff rooms spreading their COVID germs. They were probably symptom free and would spread the virus unawares for days. Teachers from all faculties would become ill and most others would have to isolate for weeks. Imagine if the teachers gave the virus to their old parents.

Alf's heart was racing. What would he do? If he got out of bed now and sent the emails most parents and Prac students would not see their emails before they left for work in the morning and his wife would be woken up and be even more furious with him as she needs her sleep. Alf was also feeling guilty for feeling so out of control as his devotion was about resting in the peace of God. It was impossible to get back to sleep or to get up out of bed! Perhaps he should just ring in sick tomorrow and catch up on his sleep.



Adversity: Alf forgot to send the email to all parents with their instructions about not entering the school grounds and which streets they could queue in to drop off students

Consequences (emotion): extreme anxiety; **(behaviour):** frozen into inaction.

Five Steps of Putting it into Perspective

1. **Write down** the 'in-the-moment what-next' beliefs. Put them into a chain, then enter them into a table.
2. **Estimate** the probabilities of the worst-case fears.
3. **Generate** best-case alternatives.
4. **Identify** the most likely implications.
5. **Problem solve** the most likely.



1. Write down 'in-the-moment what-next' beliefs

- If I hadn't been so unfairly treated, I would not have forgotten what I had to do.
- I can't get up and do it now, my wife will explode; I'm in enough trouble with her already and she has no patience with losing sleep.
- Even if I sent the emails now, no-one would read it in time.
- Those ten Prac students probably haven't realised they cannot come into the school under the present restrictions.
- They are probably symptom-free COVID-19 super spreaders.
- They will be in the various staffrooms spreading the virus before anyone can stop them.
- Teachers all over the school will get sick and most staff will have to self-isolate. We'll have to close the school again, but the government say schools have to be open for face-to face teaching.
- If we cannot staff the school, we will lose our license and have to shut down.
- I can't even practice what I preach – how can I rest in God's peace when I have made such a huge mistake?
- Perhaps I'll be too sick to go to work tomorrow.

Table: Putting it into Perspective

Adversity: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Alf forgot to email parents about instructions for return to school 2. Alf forgot to email Practicum students making sure that they do not come to do their practicum teaching block 				
Step 1 Worst-Case Beliefs	Step 2 How likely?	Step 3 Best-Case Beliefs	Step 4 Likely Outcomes	Step 5 Solutions
1 * Parents will queue in prohibited streets	99%	I miss out on my promotion, so I take my long-service leave and head for an extended holiday in Hawaii. While there I find a school that begs me to take over as headmaster, gives my family a palace to live in and pays me double what I am earning, as well as plane fares for the whole family to Australia twice a year.	Many parents and prac students will know what they must do. Alf will have to contact all parents and prac students first thing in the morning. He will also instruct some teachers to meet parents at the gate and other teachers to do traffic duty and put barricades in some streets.	Arrive at work early and send emails. Designate staff not teaching first period to duties on the gate or the streets. Tell his boss Gertrude as soon as he arrives at school together with his plan to deal with the issue.
* Residents will become angry	80%			
* Residents will call police	50%			
* Police will come to school	20%			
* The boss will be angry with Alf again	70%			
* Alf will be put on official report	1%			
* Alf's chance of promotion will be ruined	1 in a million	The school is closed and some staff do get sick, but not very sick. They are all given a year's holiday on full pay where they do not have to prepare lessons and a guaranteed job in a new school with very motivated and well behaved students and parents who never challenge the status quo.	The office staff will meet any prac students at the gate and send them home with an apology. Gertrude will probably have a serious chat with Alf.	Send a special thank you to staff who helped out. Be in touch with the prac students and their institutions within the week to set out an alternative plan.
2 * Prac students will come into the school	50%			
* Prac students will be silent COVID spreaders	1%			
* Staff in all staffrooms will get sick	1 in 1000			
* The rest will have to self-isolate	1 in 5000			
* The school will need to close against government regulations	1 in 10 000			
* The school licence will be withdrawn	1 in a million			

It is easy to think this way because the events logically follow each other and each event is possible.

2. Estimate the Probabilities of the Worst-Case Fears

Remember to under-estimate rather than over-estimate, and enter your estimate in the chain of events table.

3. Generate Best-Case Alternatives

Understanding the relatively low probability of the extreme outcomes happening is often not enough to ease the stress for the person. They also need to construct an equally low probability best-case scenario. This process helps the person to think outside of the worst-case thinking rut and may also make them laugh. This releases endorphins which will help to settle the anxiety.

4. Identify the Most Likely Implications

The most challenging implication is explaining what happened to Gertrude after his confronting meeting with her the previous day.

5. Problem Solve the Most Likely

It is likely that if the Police do come to the school they will be understanding because of the current situation. They may even help with traffic duty. Perhaps Alf could call them to ask if they would do that. It is also likely that many parents will have been watching the news and will know that they are not allowed to enter the school property and they will help to tell other parents. It is also likely that the Universities have already contacted their Prac students giving them clear instructions that their Practicums have been temporarily cancelled. Students may also have been talking to each other or watching the news which has made it clear that no adult other than teachers are to enter school properties.



Now it is time for you to put a personal adversity into perspective.

You can use the Putting into Perspective scaffold found in [Appendix 5](#) (page 64) to help you.

Survival & Recovery Tip 6

Stress, Resilience, Calming and Focusing

*Using 'all of life skills' to address stress and anxiety, and to build resilience.
(Reivich & Shatte, 2003, pp.3-5)*

A stressful situation — whether something environmental, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or a looming work deadline, or psychological, such as persistent worry about teaching online or class discipline — can trigger stress hormones that produce well-known physiological changes. A stressful incident can make the heart pound, breathing quicken, muscles tense and beads of sweat appear.

This reaction is known as the 'fight-or-flight' response because it evolved as a survival mechanism. The near-instantaneous sequence of hormonal changes and physiological responses helps someone to fight the threat or flee to safety. Unfortunately, the body can also overreact to stressors that are not life-threatening, such as financial pressures, work pressure and family difficulties, and this stress reaction can become ongoing or chronic.

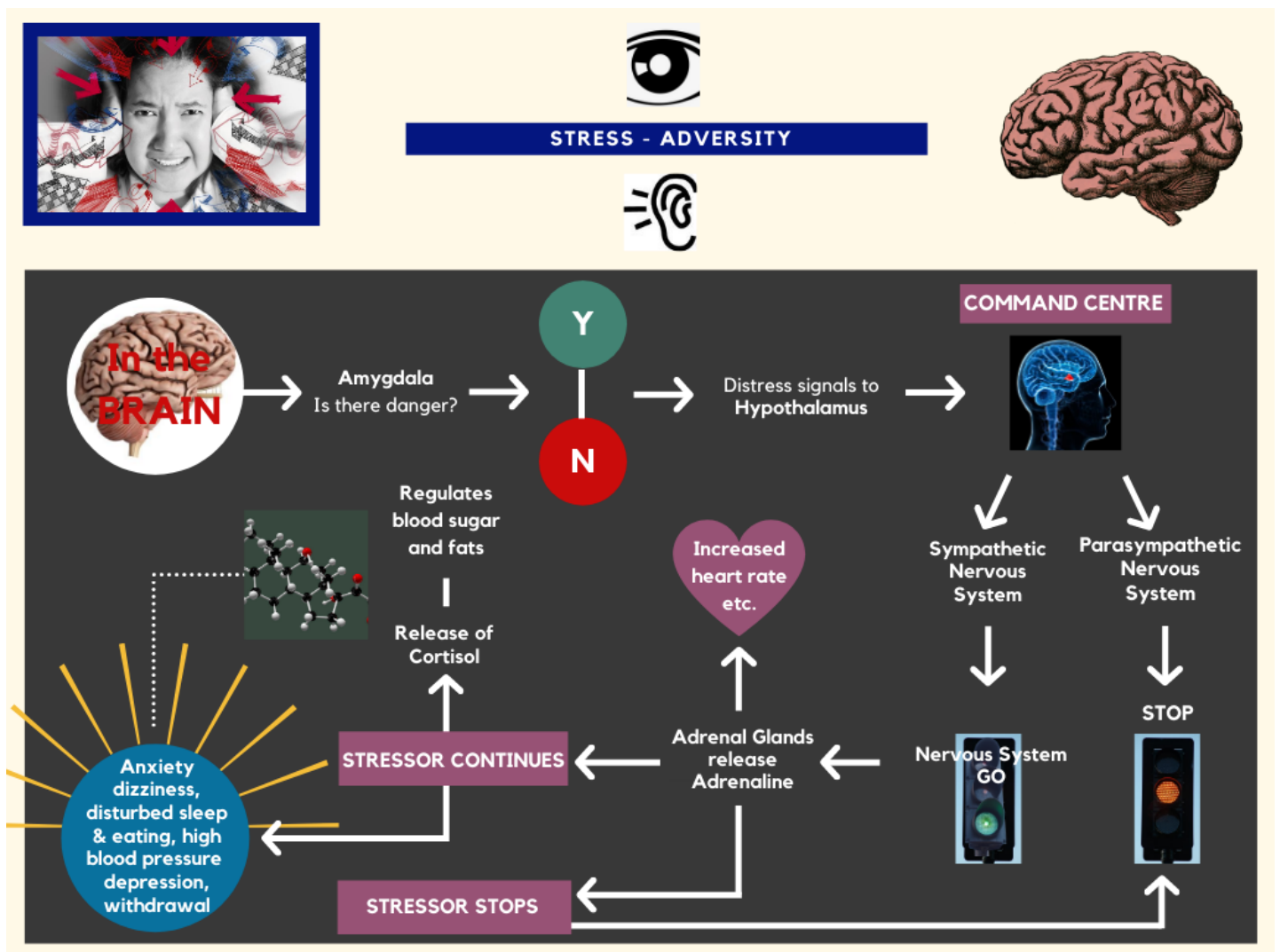
The Fight or Flight Response

Repeated activation of the stress mechanism and chronic stress can have long-term effects on health. It may contribute to high blood-pressure, artery-clogging deposits and cause brain changes that may contribute to anxiety, depression, and addiction. Some research suggests that chronic stress may also contribute to obesity, both through direct mechanisms (causing people to eat more and reactive fat storage) or indirectly (decreasing sleep and exercise).

The diagram below outlines the stress 'fight or flight' response and how it may lead to anxiety. In this body system, when the danger is passed, Cortisol levels decrease and the Parasympathetic Nervous System then dampens the stress response and the body returns to normal.

However, the fight or flight mechanism is not a conscious process and it may remain activated. Some people are not able to resolve the stress and they also experience chronic low-level stress that keeps Cortisol levels in their body high. When this is happening, psychologists say that there is an anxiety disorder that needs to be addressed. Addressing chronic low-level anxiety is important because after a time, this state has an effect on the body and can damage blood vessels and arteries, increase blood pressure and raise the risk of heart attacks or strokes. It also contributes to the build-up of cholesterol and fat tissue and so may cause weight gain both through increases in appetite and increased storage of unused nutrients as fat.

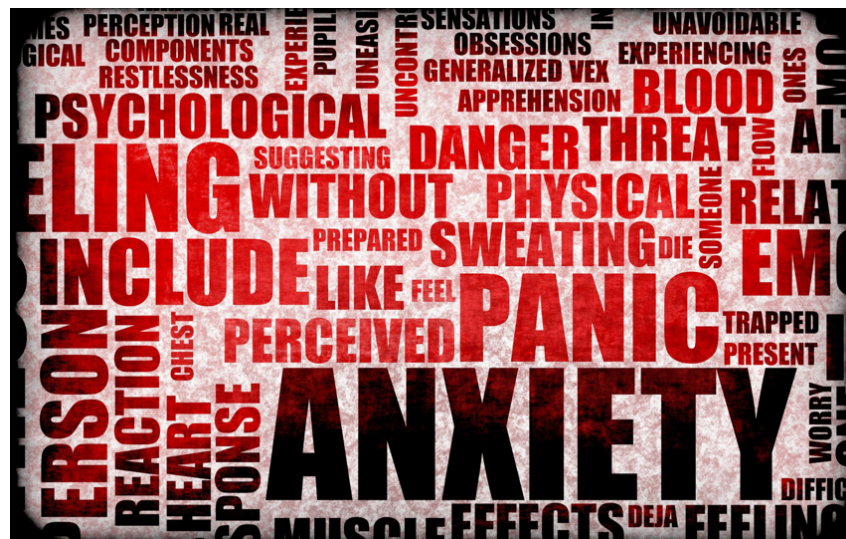
Diagram showing the 'flight or fight' response path to anxiety



Some people may also experience Panic Attacks and very disabling anxiety that stops the flow of normal life.

In *COVID-19 Survival and Recovery Tips 1 to 5* we learnt the importance of our beliefs, both our 'in-the-moment ticker-tape beliefs' and our deeper hidden 'iceberg beliefs', and how it is our beliefs that fuel our emotional response to any situation. We learnt how to challenge these beliefs, assess the health of our Explanatory Style and recognise common Thinking Traps so that we can build our resilience and respond well in stressful situations.

There may, however, be times when our stress response is overwhelming or we may have entered a chronic anxiety state and we need to de-escalate our stress response quickly. You may find some of the following suggestions work for you.



Responses to Stress

Dr Herbert Benson, Director Emeritus of the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital, has devoted much of his career to learning how people can counter the stress response by using a combination of approaches that elicit the relaxation response. These include deep abdominal breathing, focus on a soothing word (such as peace or calm), visualisation of tranquil scenes, repetitive prayer, and tai chi. Using these techniques will help you to change the way you react to stressors by increasing your ability to control how your body and mind react.

The following activities will each reduce your body's response to stress. Each activity needs to be learned and practiced. Some activities will work better for you than others so choose what works for you.

Deep Breathing

When anxiety is present breathing tends to be faster and shallow. We breathe in our chest rather than our diaphragm. This type of breathing decreases the amount of oxygen entering the body which sends a warning signal to the brain. This causes more Adrenaline to be released, which fuels the vicious cycle of stress. When breathing rate is 12-14 breaths per minute anxiety is present; when it reaches 20+ breaths per minute an anxiety state has been reached.

Practicing deep breathing will help to reduce an anxiety state. Practice at least once a day is recommended.

Physical Activity

Exercise discharges the build-up of Cortisol in the body. It will also help to deepen breathing and relieve muscle tension. Movement therapies such as yoga, tai chi and qi gong combine fluid movements with deep breathing and mental focus, all of which can induce calm (Harvard Health).



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

The body cannot simultaneously be in a state of relaxation and stress. Sitting in a relaxed position and progressively tensing and relaxing muscle groups, usually starting from the hands or toes and working systematically up the body, helps to release frozen muscles and refocus thoughts. It is best to do this with gentle music and an instructor. You can find free programs on the internet that will direct you.

Re-focusing using mental games

- **Positive imagery:** Take a few minutes to imagine your favourite beautiful location. See it in detail in your mind and appreciate its wonder for a few minutes.
- **Categories games:** Use each letter of the alphabet to name a fruit, animal, country etc.
- **Rhyming:** Select a word and see how many rhyming words you can find in two minutes.
- **Memory:** Name all of your school teachers or walk through your childhood home remembering as many details as possible.
- **Song lyrics:** Recite lyrics from your favourite songs. Also try the ones you sing at church as they contain helpful truths.

Mindfulness

Practising mindfulness is a way of keeping your mind on the present rather than dwelling on the past – the details of the adversity or the future imagined possibilities and imagined implications. There are many programs to help you with mindfulness.

Social support

Confidants, friends, acquaintances, co-workers, relatives, spouses and companions all provide a life-enhancing and supportive social net. Remember the idiom; ‘a problem shared is a problem halved’.

A common response to anxiety is withdrawal. A feeling that you don’t have enough energy to deal with other people and to put on a happy face! Or perhaps you don’t want them to see you in such a vulnerable state. Sometimes being with other people is just the boost you need; at other times they will help you to bear the load and you will be loved and blessed.



Normalise activity

It is important to keep normal routines and activities going.

Thought re-framing

When the initial level of stress has calmed down use coping statements like:

- 'Anxiety is not dangerous – it's just uncomfortable. I am fine.'
- 'I'll just continue with what I'm doing or find something more active to do.'
- 'This may seem hard now, but it will become easier and easier over time.'
- 'I can be anxious and still focus on the task at hand. As I focus on the task, my anxiety will go down.'

(Valerie Ling, 2020)

Remind ourselves:

- our identity is in God
- God is faithful and unchanging, and His love never ends
- God's mercies are new every day
- God has been faithful to His people throughout history
- our hope is not based on things we can see (2 Corinthians 4:18)
- God knows everything about us; the hairs on our head are numbered (Luke 12:7), not a tear goes unseen (Luke 12:7).

Take time to recall the message of the Bible – that our hope is not based on things seen, but on the unseen (2 Corinthians 4:18).



Seek help

If you feel like you are not making progress or if you find you are avoiding things, your sleep and/or eating is disrupted, you cannot concentrate and you are constantly exhausted for no real reason, or you are having panic attacks, visit your doctor and ask for a mental health plan. This will entitle you to ten sessions with a Psychologist for reduced costs.

Anxiety disorders respond well to Cognitive Behaviour therapy.

COVID-19 Specific Help FACE COVID (Russ Harris)

- **F** = Focus on what's in your control
- **A** = Acknowledge your thoughts & feelings
- **C** = Come back into your body
- **E** = Engage in what you're doing

- **C** = Committed action
- **O** = Opening up
- **V** = Values
- **I** = Identify resources
- **D** = Disinfect & distance

The website has more details under each heading.

Survival & Recovery Tip 7

Stress, Resilience and Practising Real Time Resilience

*Using 'all of life skills' to address stress and anxiety, and to build resilience.
(Reivich & Shatte, 2003, pp.3-5)*



Calming and focusing are skills that we can use anytime and anywhere especially when our emotional response leads to symptoms of anxiety. They help us to get through the moment but they do not address the thoughts and beliefs that contributed to the stress and caused the emotional response.

Real-time Resilience is also a fast-calming skill, but it works by addressing counter-productive beliefs at the time they occur. It can be used following Calming and Focusing or by itself. What it adds to Calming and Focusing is an in-the-moment deep understanding of the complexity of the situation. Using Real-time Resilience, however, is dependent on you having mastered Challenging Beliefs and Putting it into Perspective (Tips 4 and 5). It is like a speed dial exercise using a skill that you have already practised and mastered. It asks you to have a real-time internal dialogue addressing counterproductive thoughts by working toward an accurate understanding.

As you learn this skill it is helpful to use three [tag lines](#):

1. [Alternatives](#): A more accurate way of seeing this is ...
2. [Evidence](#): That's not true because ...
3. [Implications](#): A more likely outcome is ... and I can deal with it

1. Alternatives

The goal is to find one other way of explaining the situation that is more accurate than your initial belief. Consider challenging any statements based on 'me, always and everything' explanatory style beliefs.

Remember Alf from Tips 2 and 3. He is called into Gertrude's office where she berates him after his presentation to the staff. His in-the-moment thoughts are: 'She is so moody. She always has to take it out on me'; 'I just can't do anything to please her'. Alf could reframe his thoughts, as a more accurate way of seeing this is that 'She may have had a bad day and she didn't seem to appreciate the light-hearted approach I took to address staff stress levels'.

2. Evidence

The goal is to be as specific and detailed as possible and to be aware of leaning toward a confirmation bias, where it is natural to find evidence to support your own view. Alf could say: 'That's not true because last week she praised the talk I gave online to parents'.



3. Implications

Putting it in Perspective asked you to list the worst-case beliefs and the best-case outcomes, then identify the most-likely outcome. In Real Time Resilience you identified one of the most-likely outcomes and one thing you could do to implement it.

When Alf thought 'Now she will never support my application for promotion', he could respond with 'A more likely outcome is she will want to talk about this when she calms down before deciding whether to support my application for promotion. So I will wait a few days and talk to her about my application'.

Some Common Mistakes

When people are first practicing using Real-Time Resilience skills it is common to make some mistakes. If you are aware of these and alert to them, you will soon recognise and correct them.

1. **Pollyanna Optimism:** Unrealistic optimistic beliefs that are not tied to the facts. Alf may have thought: 'I really don't have a problem with the way Gertrude is treating me, it is just the way she is'. Remember the goal is accuracy not happy thoughts.
2. **Dismissing the grain of truth:** Underneath the exaggerated belief statement in our 'in-the-moment belief' is usually a grain of truth. Alf may not find it easy to please Gertrude. It is important that Alf acknowledges the truth and thinks of a way to change it for the better.
3. **The blame game:** This is often experienced by people who either personalise ('me') and blame themselves or externalise ('not me') and blame someone else.
4. **Minimising:** Trying to see the situation as insignificant is not helpful. If Alf minimised his thoughts he may think: 'So what if she is angry with me? She can berate me all she likes. It is only words and they cannot hurt me. If she doesn't support my promotion application this time, there will always be more opportunities and she will have forgotten this by next time'. This thought will not help Alf to be resilient because it is dismissing the reality of the situation. Alf needs to work on what is most likely in the situation and how he can respond in a resilient way.



The Way Forward

Like all skills the more you practice the better you will get. As you practice remember to use the tag lines and try to be detailed and concrete when finding and using evidence. Use what works for you and check for common mistakes in your approach.

Most of the problems we face day-to-day do not need us to use the fast skills so don't be afraid to take time to unpack and analyse the situations that you face and consider how you will respond. Resilience sometimes requires immediate action, but often it does not.

Survival & Recovery Tip 8

Using Resilience Training with Children including Students

*Using 'all of life skills' to address stress and anxiety, and to build resilience.
(Reivich & Shatte, 2003, pp.3-5)*

While COVID-19 has largely spared children from the most severe symptoms of the disease, their lives have been turned upside down.

It is understandable if your children or students are feeling anxious. This may be due to fear of sickness for themselves or their family members, new restrictions, uncertainty, school closures, adapting to home-learning, living in a family who has reduced or lost their income, or even experiences of violence or abuse in their home. Their world has been turned upside down. Children, especially younger children, might find it difficult to understand what they are seeing online or on TV, hearing or experiencing, so they can be particularly vulnerable to feelings of anxiety, stress and sadness. Research has shown that increases in mental health disorders occur as a direct result of any disaster like floods, fires and earthquakes. After a world pandemic we can expect children to be distressed and so should be proactive in dealing with heightened levels of stress and anxiety in our homes and classrooms. A focus on the mental health and the well-being of children is just as important as taking precautions against the virus. The school community as well as the home can provide psychosocial support to help children to cope with those stresses, recover and adapt to the new reality. It is also an opportunity to model our trust in the God of history and the hope we have in Christ.

The best way to help children is to firstly take care of yourself. [Self-care](#) during these COVID-19 recovery times is not selfish because it enables us to be there for the children as a stable, calm and soothing adult. So if you have turned straight to Tip 8, it's time to go back and challenge yourself by engaging with Tips 1–7. Much of this Tip assumes that you have a solid understanding of the terminology and practices contained in the previous Tips, especially Tips 1 to 4. Because these practices will be used to help children, they will not follow the same step by step process contained in the earlier sections. The processes are distilled into the core of the practices in a child/youth friendly framework.

Today's children are experiencing, anxiety and depression on an unprecedented scale. Valerie Ling states that in 2015 before the COVID-19 pandemic, 'one in fourteen young Australians (6.9%) or 278,000 children aged 4–17 experienced an anxiety disorder' (Ling, 2020). The latest estimate from the *2020 Mental Health Report* increased the number of children and adolescents experiencing anxiety disorders to 591,000 (estimated for 2017). These numbers are pre-COVID. Perhaps more than ever children need to learn how to solve problems, negotiate relationships and persevere in the face of adversity. They need to be taught resilience (Reivich & Shatte, 2003, p.253).

Four essential skills that will help children to cope with difficult times

1. ABC an adversity
2. Challenging beliefs
3. Putting it into perspective
4. Real time resilience

1. ABC an adversity

In order to deal well with adversity and to become resilient, children must first learn the connection between their thoughts and their feelings and behaviours. As the adult in the situation, whether parent or teacher, we may not see the 'adversity' as significant, because by definition the reaction of the child to the adversity is disproportionate to the situation. At this time we need to focus on the adversity that is meaningful for the child, not our understanding of its significance. If something is disrupting a child's normal patterns, we need to pay attention.

Normalise and externalise

It is especially important for teenagers to normalise the situation, to know that it is normal to feel anxious in these times.

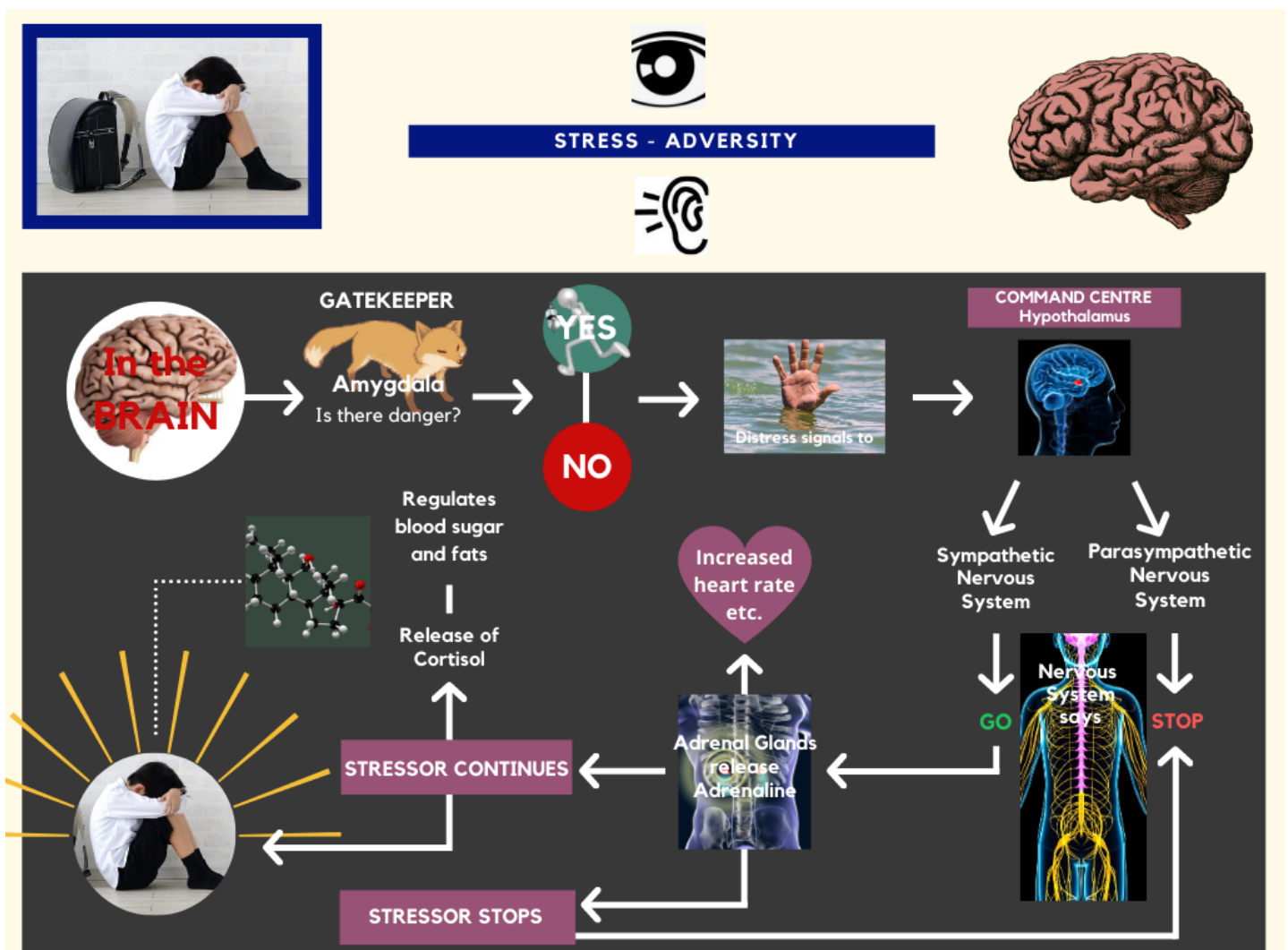
It is helpful to explain how the 'fight or flight' response works. This helps to normalise the situation and reminds children that 'we are all in this together' as our television keeps reminding us. The following script and diagram may be helpful.



SCRIPT – The fight or flight mechanism

We are made by God with an amazing body. Everyone has an inbuilt mechanism that is designed to warn them when they are in danger and should take action, either by fighting or by running away. It is called the fight or flight mechanism. After taking the child on a journey through the diagram, point out what part thoughts play in this mechanism and how they cause feelings and behaviour. You are now ready to ABC their self-talk.

Diagram: Fight or Flight Response

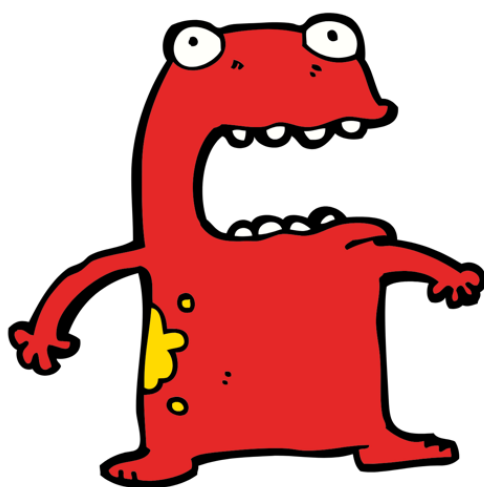


ABC ing the Adversity

To ABC an adversity, first ask the child to describe their 'adversity'. What are they worried about? Valerie Ling suggests that it helps young children if they can externalise their fears to something like a scary monster or scary animal. She also suggests using a picture of a thermometer to help the child express the degree of their distress by referring to the numbers on the thermometer. While the actual numbers do not matter, if you take the child back to this exercise after working through the problem with them and they indicate a lower number, you have an indication that the stress the child is feeling is decreasing.

This may be a new skill for you as we usually ask: Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How did you feel? type questions. These are A and C questions and we want to learn to ask B questions like 'What you were thinking at the time', 'What did you say to yourself at the time?' Helping the child to verbalise their 'self-talk' helps us to be able to show them the relationship between their self-talk and their beliefs, then between their beliefs and their behaviour or feelings. This helps the child to understand that their feelings and behaviour are not a direct result of what happens to them but rather how they understand and interpret what has happened.

You will probably both need practice at this!



Finding the facts in the adversity – Who? What? When? Where?

When the child describes the situation to you, work together to unpack the facts. Replace 'never' with 'did not', 'always' with 'did not', 'everything' with the name of the object affected and so on.

Aligning the B's and C's

Now check to see if the B's (beliefs) align with the C's (consequences – feelings and behaviours). Check using the B-C connections table in Tip 1. If the response is not in agreement with the beliefs you have uncovered, there is probably some other beliefs at play. Ask 'Is there something else that you were thinking?' or 'Did the situation remind you of something else?'

Checking Why and What-Next Beliefs

Children need to think about the causes of a problem so they can decide what they can control and to think about what-next so they can develop a plan to handle the most likely outcomes. You may need to ask questions to help the child develop their why and what-next beliefs.

Checking in on Self-fulfilling Prophecies

Children need to understand that their beliefs may cause the outcome they don't want to happen. For example if they say to themselves: 'Nobody likes me' and withdraw as a result, they may find that they end up without friends.



2. Teaching Children to Challenge Beliefs

Generate Alternatives

First we need to help the child to recognise their own explanatory style (me/not me; always/not-always; and everything/not everything). Together work through two or three adversities and the first thought the child has. Look for any patterns and make them explicit. Then help them to generate some more resilient alternatives.

Remember resilient people see adversities in terms of 'not everything, not always and not totally me or someone else'. A child who see things in terms of 'everything' may react to a COVID-19 school closure for example by thinking: 'Everything is ruined'; 'I can't see my friends'; 'I can't play soccer'; 'We will miss out on our Canberra trip'; 'I can't learn online because my internet always drops out and I always lose my work'.

If you recognise the child has an 'always/everything' style, you have an opportunity to help them to recognise examples of things that were not ruined by the school closure to see that there may be some advantages to the closure and to name times when they have learnt well online.

Now you can help the child to generate accurate alternatives based on facts. In this scenario the more accurate beliefs may be 'Some things are not the same – I can't see my friends face-to-face for two weeks, I can't play soccer for a short time this year, and we may miss out on our Canberra trip'; 'My internet drops out sometimes and then I may lose my work, but a lot of my work online is OK and some other kids have the same issue'. These beliefs are much less stressful than the original ones.

Looking for Evidence

With younger children you can play the detective game here and go on a search for a list of suspects and find clues or evidence to figure out whether their thoughts are accurate. Remember there is a tendency to collect evidence that supports your beliefs so you can try asking the younger child what their best friend would say or asking an adolescent to look for evidence that would disprove their belief. This is not too hard when addressing fears about COVID as there are good and accurate sources of information readily available.

Problem Solving

1. Make a list of the beliefs you have identified.
2. Use the evidence to cross off any beliefs that are inaccurate.
3. Now consider what the child can and cannot control in the beliefs that remain.
4. Work to help the child identify two or three concrete ideas about how they might help to solve the problem.

3. Putting it into Perspective

Catastrophising is a common problem experienced by adolescents so the skill of Putting it into Perspective is especially important for them (Reivich & Shatte, 2003, p.278). When children catastrophise they experience fairly intense and negative feelings as well as feeling drained and overwhelmed so it is important to complete this step.

This skill is the same as the adult version. You can check back to Tip 5.

1. Generate worst-case beliefs
2. Generate improbable best-case beliefs
3. Identify likely outcomes and a plan of attack

4. Real time Resilience for Children

When children can generate alternative beliefs, find evidence and identify likely outcomes, they are ready to practise real-time resilience. This takes time.

Explain to the child that there are some situations in which they have to fight back against their negative thoughts in order to disarm counterproductive thoughts.

They can use the tag lines:

- That can't be true because ... (Evidence)
- Another way to see this is ... (Alternatives)
- The most likely thing is ... (Putting it in perspective)

The pitfalls for children:

- Happy thoughts not based on evidence
- The blame game – It is all ___ fault
- So, who cares? ... Dismiss the problem altogether



In the meantime ...

Having an open, supportive discussion with children and bringing them back to Russ Harris' Acronym for FACE COVID can help them understand, cope and even make a positive contribution for others.

UNICEF outlines eight steps in having an open, supportive discussion:

i / Ask open questions and listen

Start by inviting the child to talk about the issue. Find out how much they already know and follow their lead. If they are particularly young and haven't already heard about the outbreak, you may not need to raise the issue – just take the chance to remind them about good hygiene practices without introducing new fears.

Make sure you are in a safe environment and allow the child to talk freely. Drawing, stories and other activities may help to open up a discussion. Most importantly, don't minimize or avoid their concerns. Be sure to acknowledge their feelings and assure them that it's natural to feel scared about these things. Demonstrate that you're listening by giving them your full attention, and make sure they understand that they can talk to you whenever they like.



ii / Be honest and explain the truth in a child-friendly way

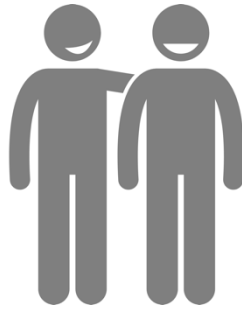
Children have a right to truthful information about what's going on in the world, but adults also have a responsibility to keep them safe from distress. Use age-appropriate language, watch their reactions and be sensitive to their level of anxiety.

If you can't answer their questions, don't guess. Use it as an opportunity to explore the answer together. Websites like Russ Harris www.actmindfully.com.au and the Australian Government Coronavirus sites or international organisations like UNICEF and the World Health Organisation are great sources of information. Explain that some information online isn't accurate and that it's best to trust the experts.

iii / Show them how to protect themselves and their friend

One of the best ways to keep children safe from coronavirus and other diseases is to simply encourage regular handwashing. It doesn't need to be a scary conversation. Sing along with *The Wiggles* or follow this dance to make learning fun.

You can also show children how to cover a cough or a sneeze with their elbow, explain that it's best not to get too close to people who have those symptoms and ask them to tell you if they start to feel like they have a fever, cough or are having difficulty breathing.



iv / Offer reassurance

When we're seeing lots of troubling images on TV or online, it can sometimes feel like the crisis is all around us. Children may not distinguish between images on screen and their own personal reality, and they may believe they're in imminent danger. You can help children cope with the stress by making opportunities for them to play and relax, when possible. Keep regular routines and schedules as much as possible, especially before they go to sleep, or help create new ones in a new environment. Remind children that God cares about them and they can talk to Him.

v / Check if they are experiencing or spreading stigma

Remind children that everyone deserves to be safe at school. Bullying is always wrong and we should each do our part to spread kindness and support each other.

vi / Look for the helpers

It's important for children to know that people are helping each other with acts of kindness and generosity. Share stories of health workers, scientists and young people, among others, who are working to stop the outbreak and keep the community safe. It can be a big comfort to know that compassionate people are taking action.

vii / Look after yourself

You'll be able to help children better if you're coping too. Children will pick up on your own response to the news, so it helps them to know you're calm and in control and trusting God.

If you're feeling anxious or upset, take time for yourself and reach out to other family, friends and trusted people in your community. Make some time to do things that help you relax and recuperate.

viii / Close conversations with care

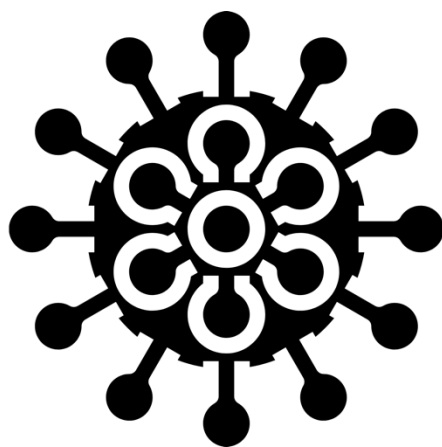
It's important to know that we're not leaving children in a state of distress. As your conversation wraps up, try to gauge their level of anxiety by watching their body language, considering whether they're using their usual tone of voice and watching their breathing.

Remember all children need structure, predictability, empathy and love, and all can benefit from learning lifelong resilience skills.

COVID-19 Specific Help FACE COVID (Russ Harris)

- **F** = Focus on what's in your control
- **A** = Acknowledge your thoughts & feelings
- **C** = Come back into your body
- **E** = Engage in what you're doing

- **C** = Committed action
- **O** = Opening up
- **V** = Values
- **I** = Identify resources
- **D** = Disinfect & distance



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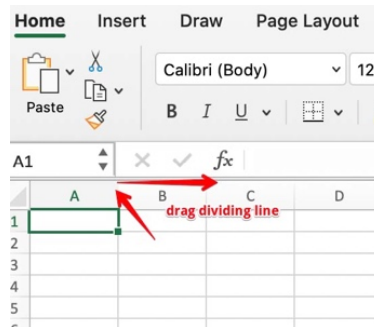
Unicef (2020). How to talk to your child about Coronavirus. Retrieved from: <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-talk-your-child-about-coronavirus-covid-19> Accessed 16/06/20, 3.00pm

Appendix 1 – ABC of My Adversity

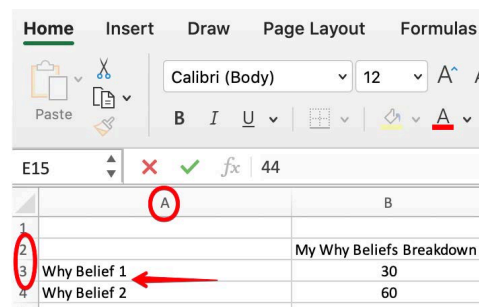
A. DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERSITY	
C. TICKER-TAPE BELIEFS	D. CONSEQUENCES

Appendix 2 – Pie Charting My Why Beliefs

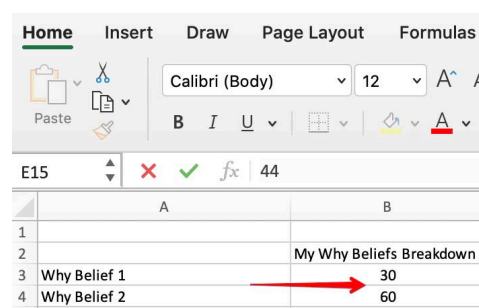
1. Open an Excel Spreadsheet
2. Extend the first column width by dragging the divider between A and B to the right.



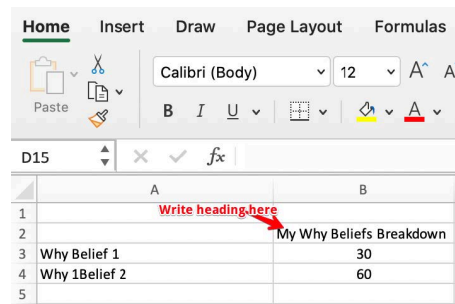
3. In Column A, on line 2 or below, type in Why Belief 1 from your ABC exercise – name the belief; then do the same for Why Belief 2 on the next line. You can add as many Why Beliefs as you like but it is better to keep this exercise focused on two or three key Why Beliefs.



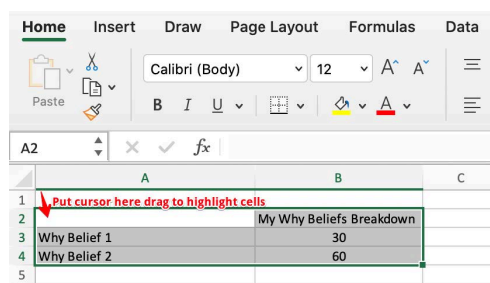
4. Estimate what **percentage** of the cause each belief contributed to the adversity and type each in the B column beside its Why Belief.



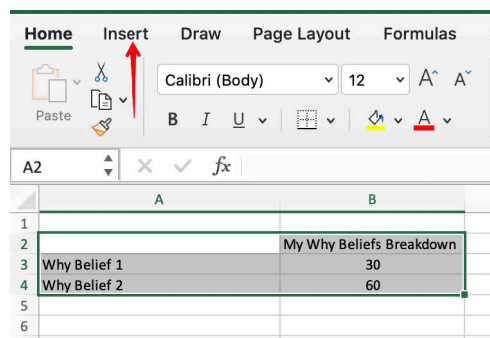
- Put your **title** in the cell above the percentage numbers.



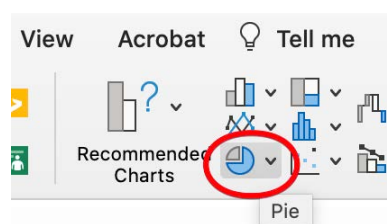
- Highlight** the area you want in the graph by putting your cursor in the cell above the 'Why' heading and dragging the shading over the area that you want to include.



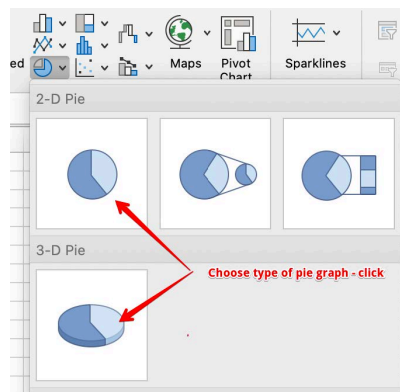
- Click the **Insert** button at the top of the Excel page.



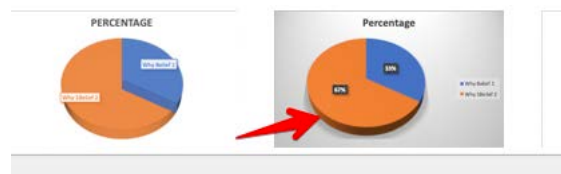
- Then click the down arrow beside **Recommended Charts**.



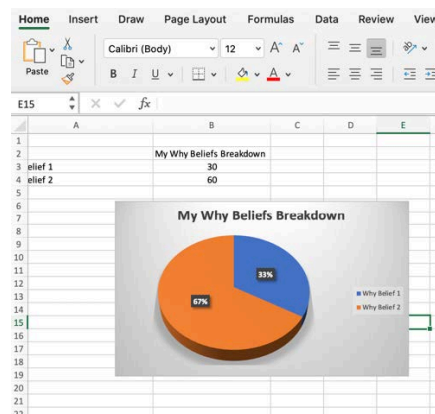
9. Click on the 2D or 3D pie image.



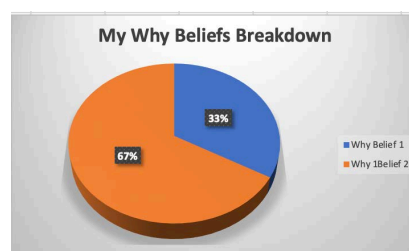
10. You will then see pictures of labelling options. Click on the option you want.



11. The labelled pie chart will appear on your Excel page. You can drag it to wherever you like on the Excel page.



12. You can screen shot the pie diagram if you like.



Appendix 3 – Discovering My Explanatory Style

Why belief #1 –

Totally due to me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Totally due to other people / circumstances
Will always be present	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Will never again be present
Influences everything in my life	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Influences just this one situation

Why belief #2 –

Totally due to me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Totally due to other people / circumstances
Will always be present	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Will never again be present
Influences everything in my life	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Influences just this one situation

Alternative belief #1 –

Totally due to me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Totally due to other people / circumstances
Will always be present	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Will never again be present
Influences everything in my life	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Influences just this one situation

Alternative belief #2 –

Totally due to me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Totally due to other people / circumstances
Will always be present	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Will never again be present
Influences everything in my life	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Influences just this one situation

Appendix 4 – Understanding the Evidence for My Why Beliefs

WHY BELIEFS	EVIDENCE FOR	EVIDENCE AGAINST
Belief 1		
Belief 2		
Belief 3		
Belief 4		

Appendix 5 – Putting it into Perspective

Adversity:				
Step 1 Worst-Case Beliefs	Step 2 How likely?	Step 3 Best-Case Beliefs	Step 4 Likely Outcomes	Step 5 Solutions