

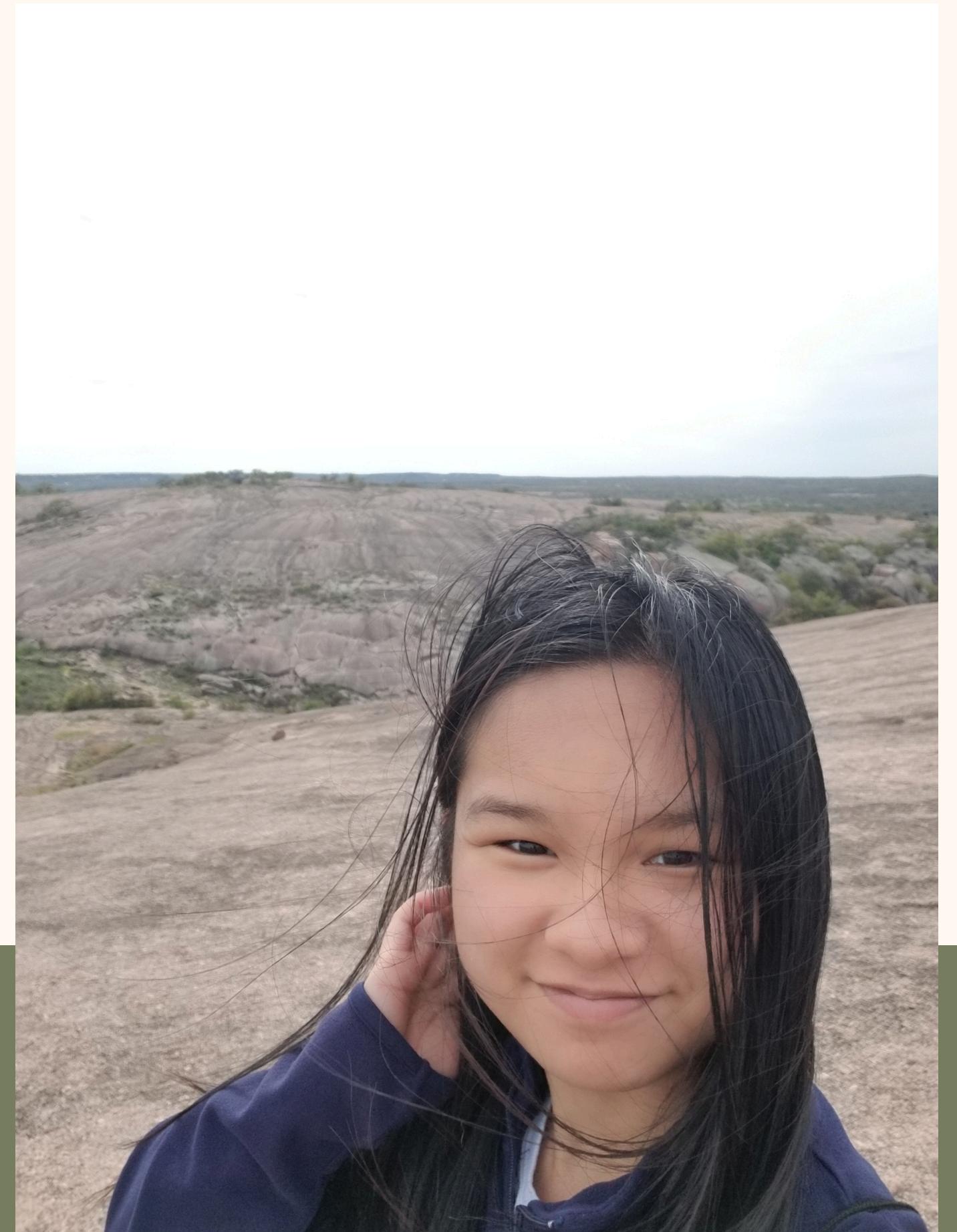


# **SUPPORTING ANXIOUS KIDS: WHAT EVERY PARENT SHOULD KNOW**

Presented by: Amber Nguyen  
School Psychologist Intern  
Supervisor: Dr. Ellen Verret

# About me!

- Currently a student at University of Houston- Clear Lake
- Graduated from the University of Houston with a bachelor's degree in Education and a bachelor's degree in Psychology.
- First year at Fort Bend ISD
- 6<sup>th</sup> year in Education
- Picture: Top of Enchanted Rock San Antonio



# PRE-PRESENTATION SURVEY



# WHAT IS ANXIETY?

- Anxiety is a feeling of worry, fear, or unease about future events.
- It's a natural response to stress and is common in situations like exams, speaking in public, or meeting new people.



# WHEN ANXIETY BECOMES A CONCERN

- Occurs frequently or most days
  - Anxiety is present on a regular basis rather than in response to isolated stressors. The child may appear persistently worried, tense, or on edge across multiple situations and settings, with little relief between episodes.
- Constant or intrusive “what-if” thoughts
  - The child experiences repetitive worries about potential negative outcomes that are difficult to stop or ignore. These thoughts often interrupt concentration, play, or learning and may lead to repeated reassurance seeking from adults.
- Increases over time rather than improving
  - Instead of decreasing with experience or reassurance, anxiety intensifies or expands to additional situations. Avoidance behaviors may increase, and fears may generalize beyond the original concern.



# CHARACTERISTICS OF ANXIOUS CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS



The essential feature of anxiety in children is their inability to predict what will happen next and who will be there to ensure safety and stability – they cannot provide that for themselves

- Different depending on the age of the child
- Will look a bit different if the anxiety is about school performance
- Will look a little different if the anxiety is about separating from a person or place that makes them feel safe
- Different if the anxiety is about having to interact with other students or other adults – learning groups or substitute teachers
- Kids who are anxious because of a trauma either ongoing or a one-time trauma that is over

# WHAT IS THE SAME ABOUT ALL OF THEM?



- They experience discomfort either physical – stomach or headaches – lumps in their throats or a feeling of not being able to sit still
- Or mental – they have ongoing worries mostly about what is going to happen to them or to other important folks in their life – including pets
- They are often hyper alert – they startle easily because anything that is unexpected or out of the routine could be perceived as a possible threat to their safety or the safety of others on whom they depend
- They are distractible – not because they have an attention disorder – but because they are constantly scanning the environment for potential threats

# CAUSES OF ANXIETY

- Stressful events (like exams or family problems).
- The week before a holiday break, a Monday, a Friday, the week after a holiday break.
- Could be a test; could be a substitute; could be a project; could be an assignment that is not clear to them
- Someone coming behind them could startle them or trigger an increase in their anxiety





# ELEVATING LEVELS OF ANXIETY

- With young children, the adult will have to learn to notice the beginning stages of the anxiety
- In older children, they may be able to tell you when they are anxious and whether it is just a free-floating anxiety or whether it is tied to a specific event like an exam
- With lots of kids, giving choices is good, but with anxious kids, choices may make them more anxious because their anxiety makes it so hard for them to **make a decision**

# REDUCING ANXIETY

- Identify a safe person
  - Because highly sensitive children are deeply affected by change, even small shifts can impact this relationship.
  - Have a planned alternate safe person in case the primary person is unavailable.
- Provide routine and structure –anxious kids do not do well in low-structure environments – they want routine and notice when and how things are going to be different
- During periods of lowered anxiety, give the child a way to communicate with you about periods of heightened anxiety



# WHAT TO DO WHEN ANXIOUS CHILD PANICS, SHUTS DOWN, OR WITHDRAWS?



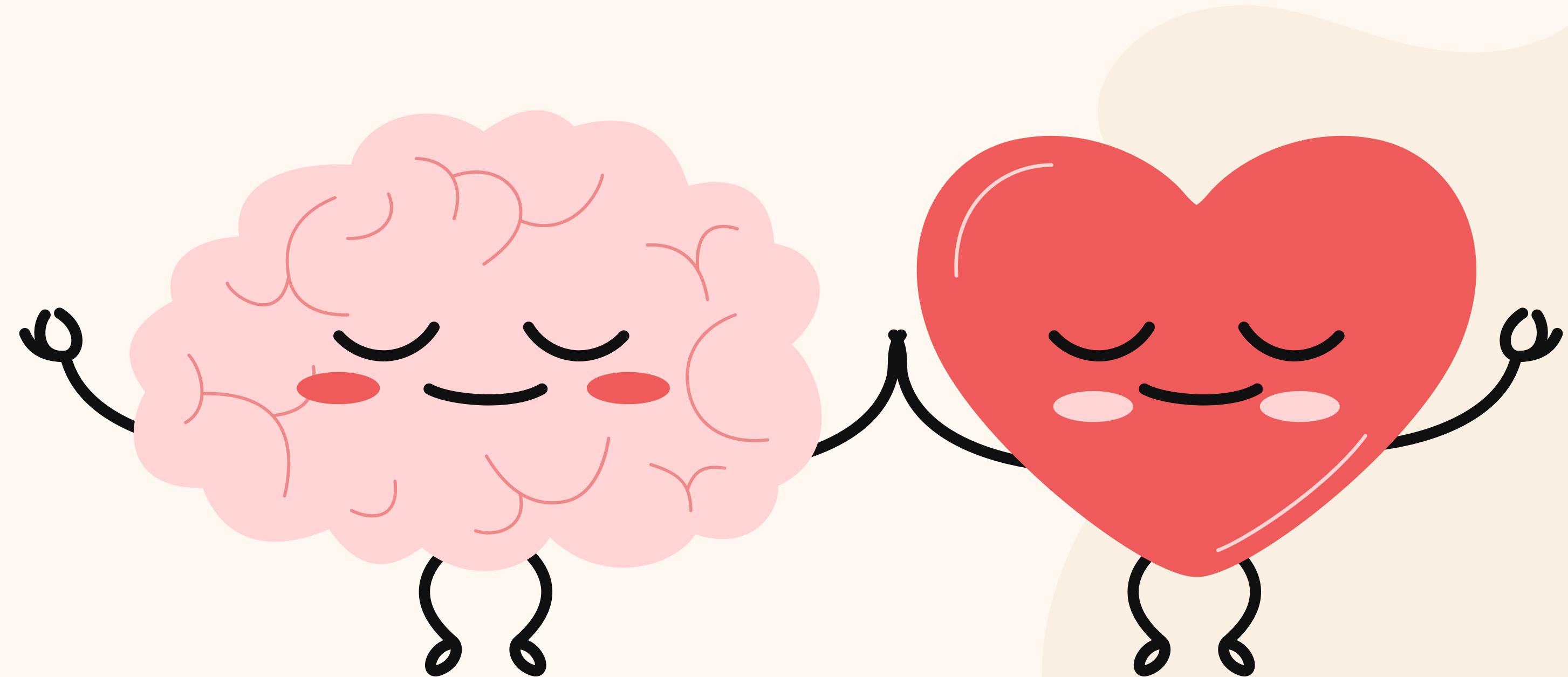
- All the adults need to remain calm – stay close but do not crowd your student – look for signs that your student is calming
- Draw on your previously established trusting relationship with the child..."We are going to figure this out together" or another statement that reassures the child they are not alone – that you are present with the child – questions may not be great at this point
- Let the child know they are safe – trusted people are in control and will make good decisions about the situation
- The withdrawal or shutting down may be a protective behavior or mechanism for the child and if you want them to use another skill, teach it and model it for them during periods when they appear to be less anxious



# SUPPORT

- Support your child in facing worries with coping tools instead of immediately removing the stressor.
  - Resisting or avoiding anxiety can actually make it stronger over time.
- When anxiety is supported early, children are more likely to develop strong emotional skills that benefit them long-term.
- Supportive parental responses can strengthen coping skills and reduce anxiety over time.

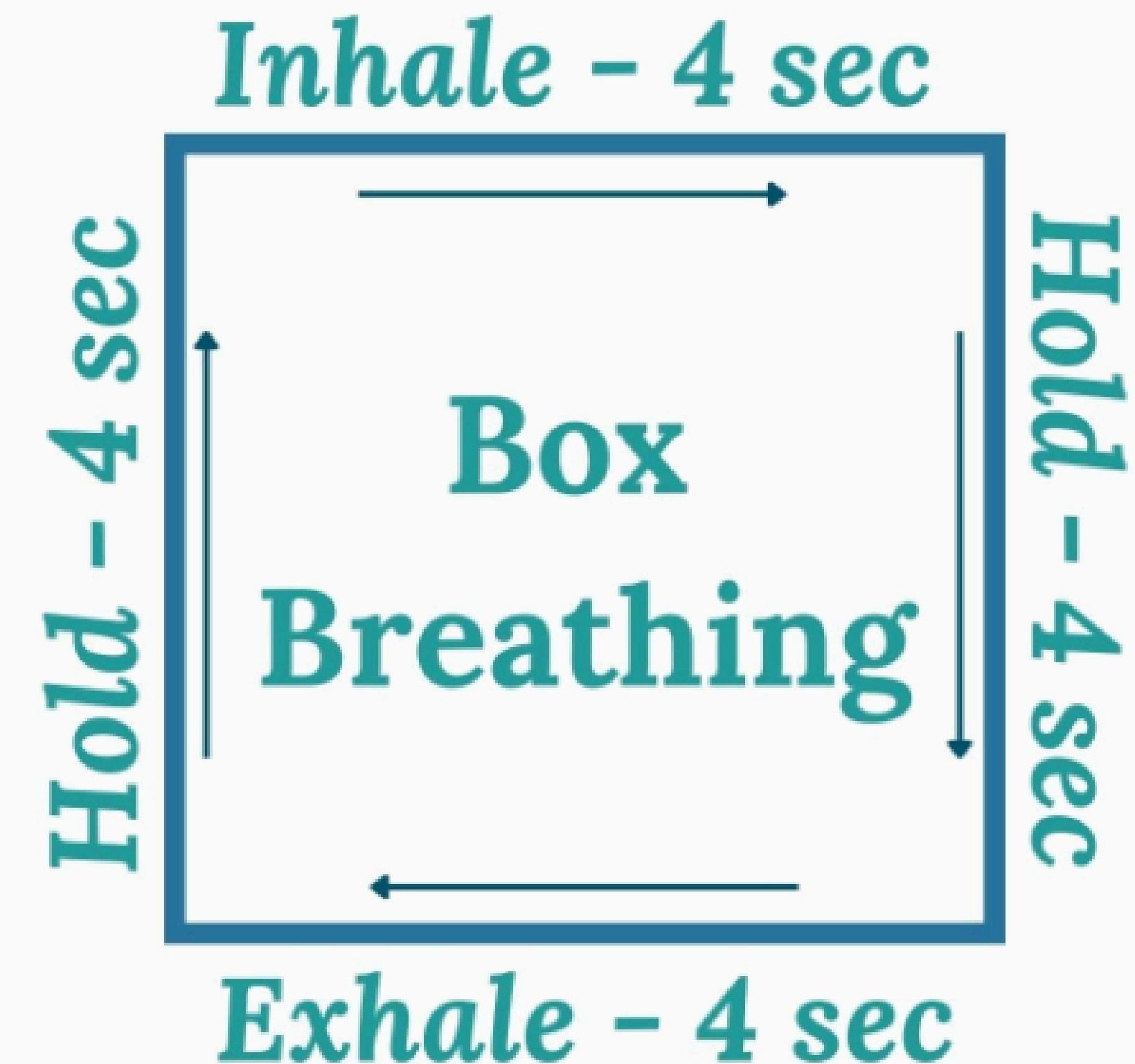
# COPING TECHNIQUES

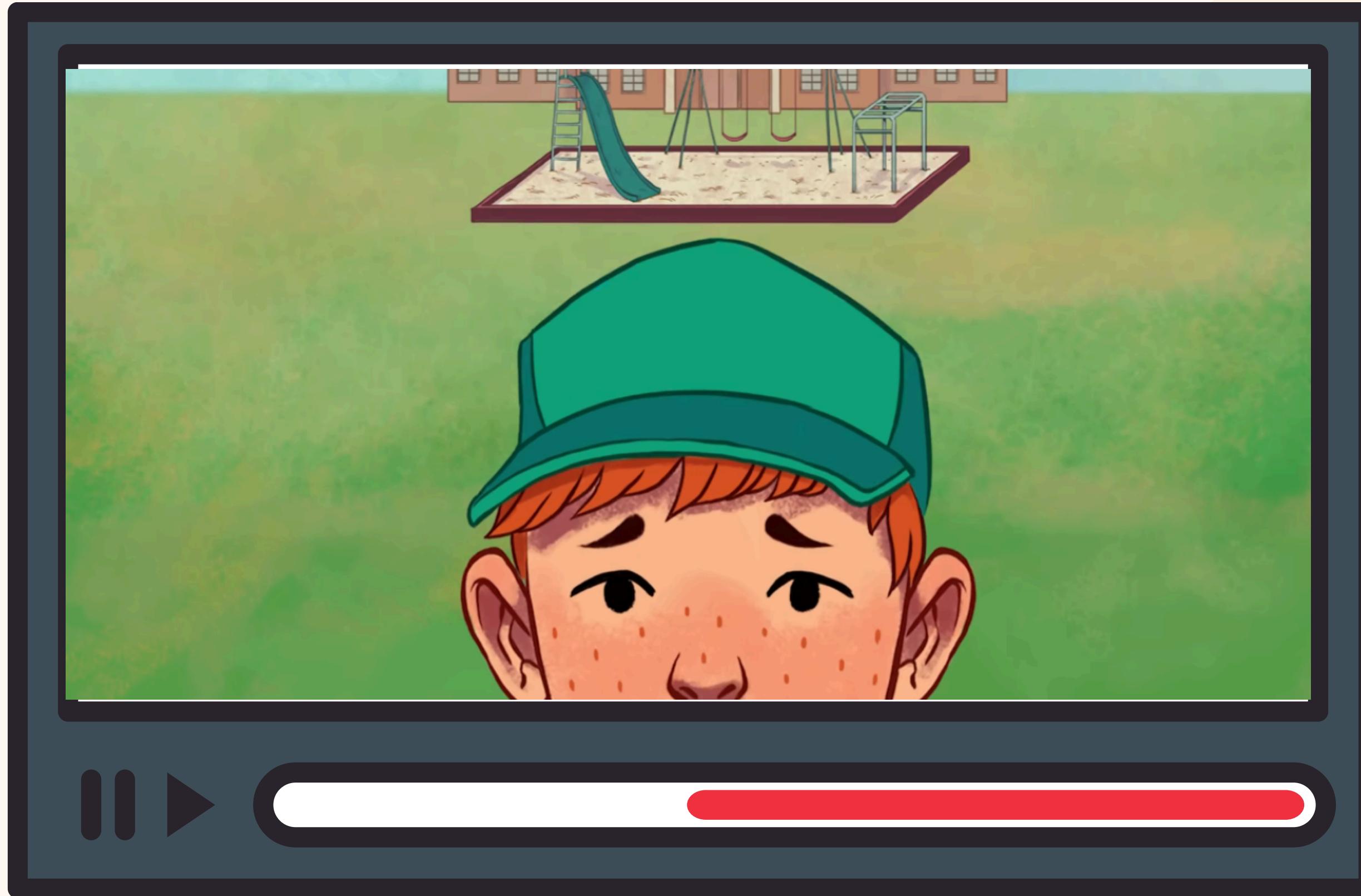


# 3-3-3 GROUNDING RESET

.....  
**quickly calm your mind when you feel  
anxious, panicked, or overwhelmed**  
.....

- 1** Take a couple of slow, deep breaths.
- 2** Name 3 things you **see**.
- 3** Name 3 sounds you **hear**.
- 4** **Move** 3 body parts (e.g., arm, ankle, finger).
- 5** Take a couple of slow, deep breaths.





**YouTube Video: Managing Worry and Anxiety for  
Kids | Social & Emotional Rap Education**

# CONCLUSION



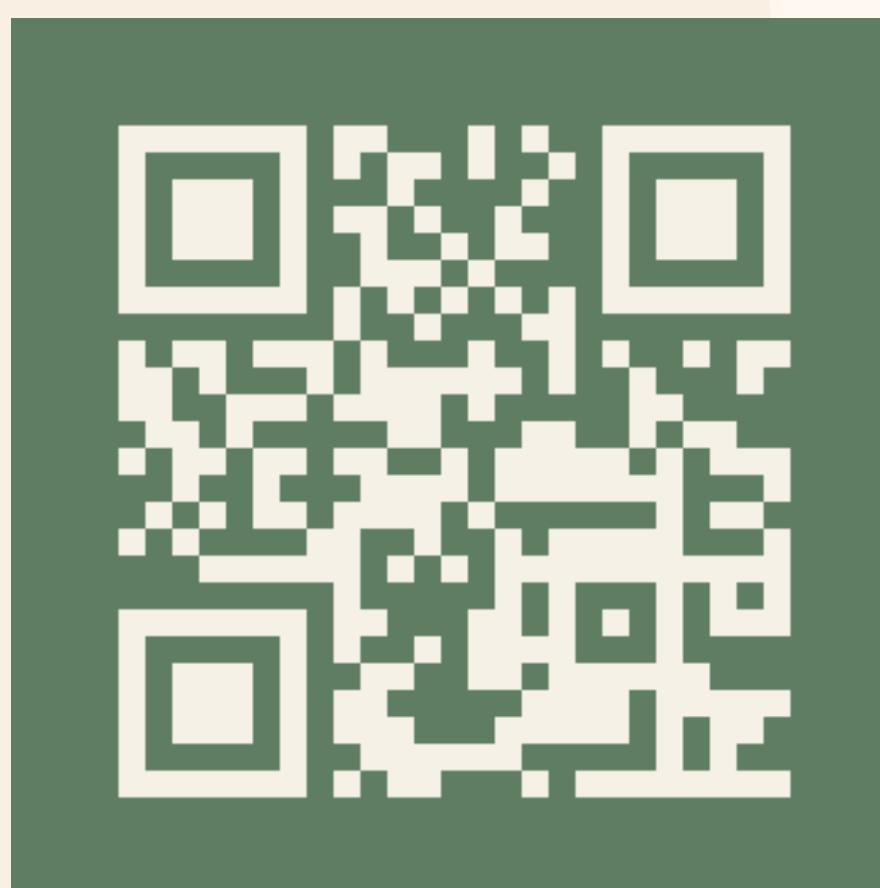
- Anxiety is common in children and teens, and it is manageable.
- Understanding your child's triggers can help reduce anxious responses.
- Teaching and practicing coping strategies builds resilience and confidence.
- Parents play a key role in supporting their child's emotional well-being.
- You are not alone—support and resources are available when you need them.

# RESOURCES

Child Mind  
Institute



ADAA



NAMI



# QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, CONCERNS



# AFTER-PRESENTATION SURVEY



# THANK YOU

