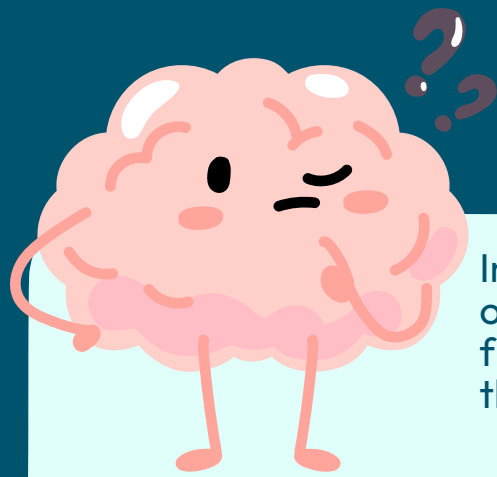




Understanding the
Brain





Before you understand anxiety, you need to understand the brain

In order for us to understand anxiety and help our child to have an understanding too, we firstly need to have some knowledge of how the brain works.

We often get bombarded with information about the physical body of the child, child development and milestones but when do we get information about the developing brain?

We just don't! And yet, for our child to be functioning in this overstimulating, confusing, fascinating world they need to have a brain that functions together as a whole!

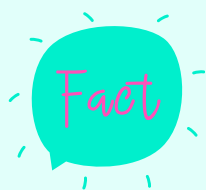
The brain is shaped by our experiences!

Ever heard your parents literally come out of your mouth?

You hear yourself saying things that your parents said to you and you feel yourself cringe?

That is, at least in part, because our brains are so influenced by our parents - so what we do as parents really does matter!

The good news is that our brains are capable of amazing things, they can learn new things and adapt continuously. However, a brain is not classed as 'mature' until a child is around about 25!! Surprised? Yeah, I bet!

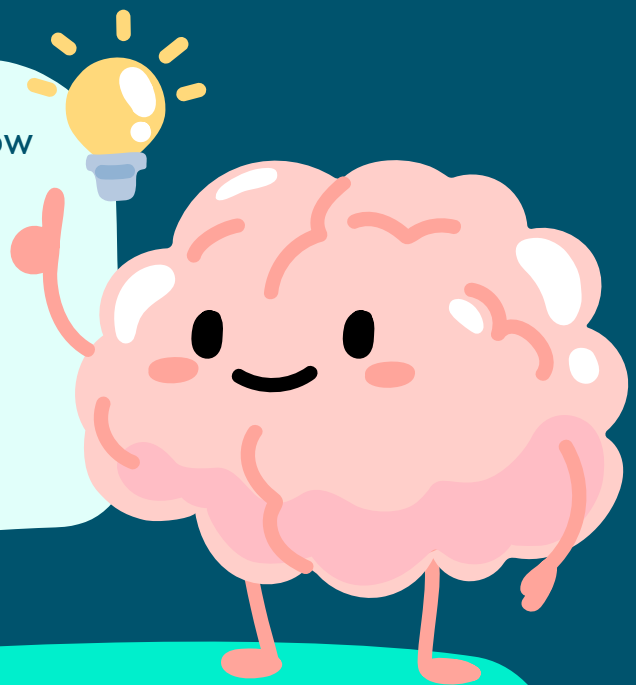


Here in the UK we are conditioned into an idea that a 'child' reaches 18 and they are a fully functioning adult!

Congratulations! You made it!
Well, according to the way our brain develops, not quite!
We've a little way to go yet!

So let's think about our parenting style and how it has been influenced by our own parents.

This is a first important step, we need to think about our own way of parenting and the triggers this might cause.



1

A parent who **wraps their child in cotton wool**, never allows them the freedom to try out new things, make choices and decisions will inadvertently support a child to feel anxious, that the world is a frightening place and that the only way to counteract that is by having a small world that can be controlled enough to feel safe.

2

A parent who is **able to 'attune' to their child**, recognise and validate feelings whilst also supporting the child to try new things, will support a child's confidence and sense of self.

3

Parents who **talk to their child about their emotions and feelings** will support a child to recognise feelings within themselves and others and so have a higher level of emotional intelligence.

4

Parents who **deny feelings and shut them down** ensure that the child is confused and often unable to identify feelings either in themselves or in others.

Do any of these sound familiar to you?

It is important to begin to think about the type of parenting you experienced and which of these areas are not particularly helpful to the development of your child's brain.



Now. A word of caution!

This isn't a 'this is your fault' statement. You have arrived here because you recognise that something is going on with your child and you want to help them to manage it.

That is so important!

They need you to help figure this out, you are so important to them! And so, to help them, there needs to be an element of figuring out what triggers you. If you can recognise and manage your emotions, your child will learn that emotions aren't 'bad' and that they can be managed.

They can learn that a whole brain approach is something that is helpful and that it can be learnt and that things can change. We as parents won't always get it right, that's ok! If we recognise this and are willing to work to change it then your child will learn that even if things go wrong they can be repaired, which is another vital skill in integrating the brain into a 'whole' thinking processing brain.



Let's move on to think about how the brain can work as a 'whole' and how you can support that.





Think about being sat on a beach, the beach is quiet, relaxing and enables you to be able to think, think of this as the beach of well being. Our brain is acting together as a whole, we feel at peace with the world around us, we are able to think about those people in our lives and have an understanding about their perspective on the world.

Ok. So you have the sea wall full of rocks on one side of the beach which we will think about as a 'rigid' area, non moving.

On the other side you have the beach front with shops, fairground, slot machines and we can think of this as 'chaos'. Now think about being drawn away from your beach to either side, a place of chaos which depicts a complete lack of control, or rigidity which depicts too much control.

Bouncing back and forth between the two leads to overwhelm and not the calm 'whole' place of the warm, relaxing beach.

This is like the brain! If the brain is not operating as a 'whole' then it is not all working together and we are bouncing between rigidity and chaos.



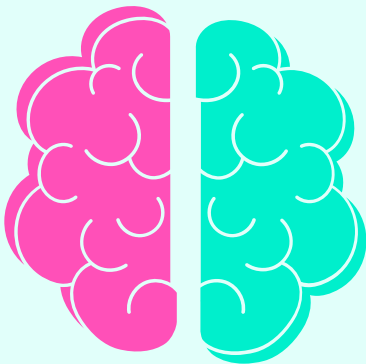


Children also have their own beach!

If we think about our child at nursery and asking the child to share a toy or 'play nicely' and they have a complete meltdown = chaos. Our child blankly refuses to join the other children on the mat as they want to continue playing and cannot see that there is now something else they need to take part in before crying uncontrollably = rigidity.

What we can do in these situations is to gently recognise that your child's feelings are overwhelming and that it's really hard sometimes, and so guiding them back to the calmness of the beach. This helps the child integrate the whole brain.

Right so we've covered a lot, but lets have a look at the 'whole' brain. We have a left side and a right side of the brain that carry out very different functions.



- **The left side** likes words! It likes order! It loves making lists! It is quite literal.
- **The right side** is much more focused on emotions, eye contact, facial expressions, tone of voice are all things that enable us to hold onto meanings and how an experience feels. It is this side of the brain that children will be making most use of during their first 3 years of life.



More left brain, right brain.....

When your child begins to ask a hundred questions, particularly the 'why' question signals that their left brain is beginning to 'come on line', so to speak.

When I was experiencing overwhelming anxiety, any amount of 'logical' thinking would've gone right over my head! Not focusing on the emotions would've left me feeling that I wasn't being understood, heard or listened to. Saying things like 'you'll be fine', 'there's nothing to be scared of' would've been completely unhelpful.

So what would be helpful?

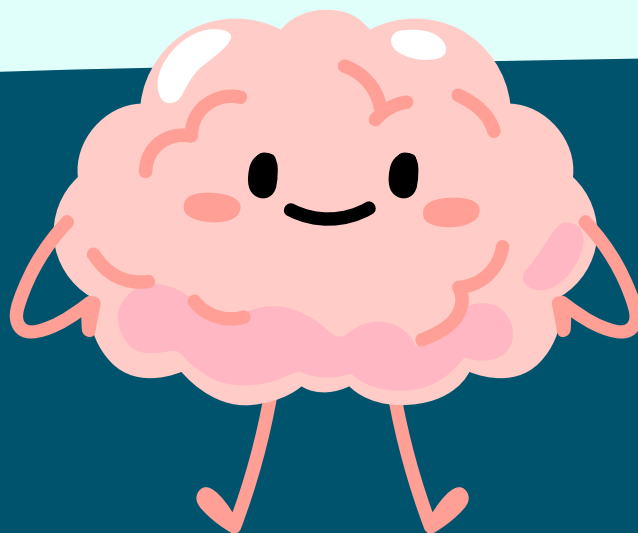
Rewind the story!

When did this 'fear' begin to rear its head?

I enjoyed school and being around my friends at primary school. The change of going into a much larger school wasn't the trigger either. The trigger was going to a concert at 11, without an adult, having a nosebleed that I couldn't control and feeling that my aunt who was picking me up would leave without me.

So how did this translate into school? The amount of people, the noise, the moving around the school, feeling out of control and worrying that the school bus would leave without me if I didn't get there in time. All of these things were my triggers.

Having an adult 'narrate these' real fears so that I could get out of my RIGHT emotional brain and into my LEFT logical brain and then integrate the both so that my whole brain could come together enabling me to make sense of the event and diminish the fear eventually gave me the 'evidence' to step away from the overwhelming anxiety and return to the 'beach' of well being.



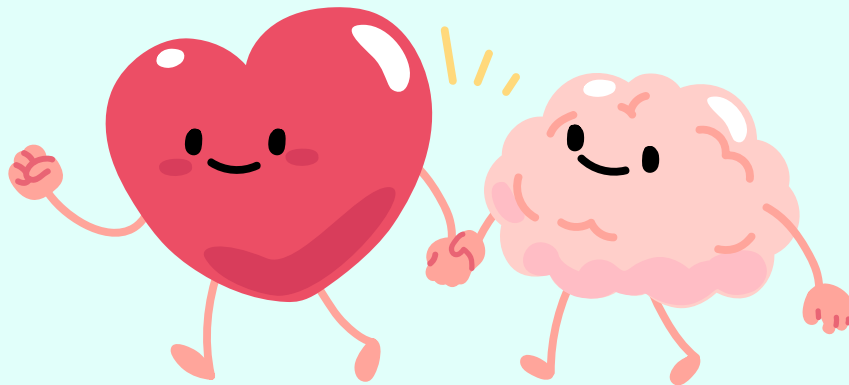


Final words...

Stepping into the emotion with the child will help you 'attune' to the child, basically get on the same wavelength as the child, enabling them to feel understood.

This is so important! You will never get to the 'words' and a conversation unless you have joined them in the feelings first.

This leads us nicely into our feelings of anxiety activity that you will receive tomorrow.



Notes



Notes

