What survival looks like...

IN SCHOOL

In collaboration with Beacon House Therapeutic Services & Trauma Team

© Helen Townsend 2017 www.innerworldwork.co.uk
The fight-or-flight response (also called hyperarousal, or the acute stress response) is a physiological reaction that occurs in response to a perceived harmful event, attack, or threat to survival.

Do you know where I learnt to be brave?
In School, it's a really scary place.
Something unexpected and very frightening happened to me that made me fear for my safety. As a result, my brain and body are ‘stuck in trauma time’ as a way to protect me from the scary thing happening again. It’s like my brain can’t learn that I am actually safe right now.

To cope with the feeling that I’m constantly in danger, I swing between different survival modes to keep safe when I feel scared.
Why is it so important that you know this?
The part of my brain activated to help me **survive**, is different from the part of my brain activated when I’m **calm**.

I can only learn properly when the calm part of my brain is activated. When I’m in a **survival** state it takes over from my calm brain and I struggle to learn. If I don’t feel safe, you won’t be able to teach me.
The problem is, it's really hard to see when I'm in survival mode.

I look very different to how I feel inside and often I can remain in survival mode for so long, that it seems like part of my personality.

I would love your help to feel safe so I can learn. For you to see that I am in a survival state and it's not a personality trait. I really want to learn, I really want to feel ok.
Freeze
What I look like in Freeze...

- Not interested, bored
- Confused, forgetful
- Talking about something else
- Hard to move through the task
- Not listening
- Staring into space, daydreaming
- Clumsy
What I am aware of...

- My brain is slowing down
- Trying to think of something safe
- I can't do this
- Feeling deeply anxious
- I can hear you're getting frustrated
- Starting to shut down
- I feel under attack
How my body feels ...

- Frozen brain
- If I don't move, you can't see me
- Everything feels like a dream
- Under attack
- In a fog
- Disconnected
- Numb
What's happening in my Inner World...

-I can't bear your rejection
-I need to feel safe
-Shame, I hate myself
-I'm scared I don't know what's going to happen
-When I fail at this you'll send me away
-When you realise I can't do this, you won't want me in your class anymore
You can help me feel safe with the following...

- Do the task with me
- Deep breathing
- Tell me I'm ok & that I'm safe
- Ask me to push my hands down under my seat & lift myself up off the chair
- Gently wonder where I've gone & welcome me back to the room
- Make the task smaller & more predictable
- Tell me kindly who I am & what I'm doing
- Tell me what you want me to do 1:1 without showing frustration
Flight
What I look like in Flight ...

- Run away
- Keeping SUPER busy
- Not coping in free time
- Need to be first or at the front
- Bumping into people
- Avoiding tasks and activities
- Baby talk or silly voices
- Hyperactive, giddy & silly
- Hiding under tables
What I am aware of ...

- Unable to focus
- Lonely
- Panic
- Feeling bad, movement is distracting
- Shame
- Overwhelmed
- Worried about what happening next
- Anxious, apprehensive
How my body feels

- Escape, run & hide
- Painful joints
- Numb
- Vibrating
- Ready for action
- Jumpy & tense
- Sick
Whats happening in my Inner World

✗ I want to escape from this scary moment but I can't
✗ I don't want you to see my real feelings, you can't handle them
✗ I am really worried I can't do what's going to happen next
You can help me feel safe with the following ...

- Keep me close by
- Deep breathing
- Give me a easy & familiar task
- Make things predictable
- Tell me I'm safe, show me a safe place or person I can go to
- Kindly talk though what might be tricky
Fight
What I look like in Fight ...

× Hot & bothered
× Angry & aggressive
× Controlling
× Lie or blaming
× Shouty & argumentative
× Pushing away friends
× Demanding
× Inflexible
What I am aware of ...

× I'm in danger
× Really scared
× I am all alone
× I feel bad
× Frightened
× Unimportant
× Invisible
What's happening in my Inner World ...

✗ I can't be cross at the people
   I really want to be cross at
✗ I'm going to push you away
   before you get rid of me
✗ Unsafe
✗ I hate myself, I am
   unloveable, I want to die
✗ Why wasn't I good enough?
✗ I need to be in control &
   make things predictable
You can help me feel safe with the following ...

- Give me a role
- Support me socially
- Match my energy
- Make things predictable
- Deep breathing
- Connect & show empathy before exploring the consequences of my behaviour
Submit
What I look like in Submit ...

- Socially withdrawn
- Compliant
- Quiet
- Unable to think, just yes or no answers
- Passive
- Resigned
- Neutral expression
- Low mood
What I am aware of ...

- I can't think
- Tummy aches
- Tired
- Sad
- Lonely
How my body feels ...

- Worn out, no energy
- Guilty
- It's given up
- Slow
- Tearful
- Poorly
What's happening in my Inner World...

- Why couldn't I be better, I'm completely useless
- I hate myself, I am unloveable
- It's all my fault
- Nothing will ever feel ok
- I can't keep myself safe
- I want to die
You can help me feel safe with the following ...

- Repetitive simple tasks
- Weighted blanket
- Building with lego or play-dough
- Tell me I'm safe
- Deep breathing
- Spending time with a trusted adult
- Do the task with me
- Tell me what to do without showing frustration
Spending just a small amount of time making me feel safe, activates the calm part of my brain and I am ready for you to teach me again.

I might need you to do this a few times throughout the task but the more my brain knows how to stay in the calm zone, the less likely I am to go into survival mode.

Thank you for helping me every day to make safe and life changing differences to my brain.

It's an amazing thing you're doing for me.