

Calm Minds, Bright Futures:

Reducing Anxiety to Improve
Academic Performance

Who is Nectar?



The Nectar Group is an education company dedicated to helping students overcome learning challenges so that they can reach their full potential. With our assessment-driven process, we use scientific tools to evaluate and pinpoint the root causes of learning difficulties. Then, we create custom solutions utilizing cognitive neuroscience to resolve those root issues.

We optimize learning and take a holistic approach to improving school, work, and life performance by providing:

- Therapeutic interventions that are grounded in neuroscience to treat the causes of learning difficulties for all ages
- K-12 and collegiate level academic tutoring in reading, writing, and math to build solid content and prepare students for college and beyond
- Behavior Coaching in study skills, executive function, emotional regulation, growth mindset, and social thinking to ensure successful student outcomes
- One-to-one educational services via educational consulting, individualized schooling, and homeschool support

Who do we work with?



Clients ages 6 and up



All types of diagnoses:

**ADHD, Dyslexia, Autism Spectrum, “Slow Learners”,
Gifted, Twice Exceptional, TBI**



Students and adults looking for a competitive edge & college prep



Nectar provides all services to clients around the world via our unique eCoaching remote video services

What is Anxiety?

- The mind and body's reaction to stressful, dangerous, or unfamiliar situations.
- It helps us stay alert and aware so that we can be safe! Even though we might not like it, it is the good guy!
- Shows up as somatic symptoms (in the body) frequently
- Everyone feels anxiety to some degree regularly throughout their life.
- The most common but also the most treatable mental health diagnosis.



How does anxiety present?

Inattention and restlessness

- Can look like ADHD
- Fidgets or zones out

School refusal

- Not wanting to participate
- Unwillingness to work independently

Disruptive behavior

- Acting out
- Not following instructions

Social Issues

- Avoids socializing with peers
- Struggles to connect with peers

Trouble answering questions

- Can't demonstrate their knowledge verbally
- Can freeze on tests

Emotional Dysregulation

- Big emotions
- Difficulty self-soothing when stressed

Excessive worry

- Sleeplessness
- Asking a lot of detailed questions regarding upcoming activities or events

Physical Symptoms

- Nausea, upset stomach, headaches, vomiting, picking at or biting fingernails

Common Co-morbidities with Crossover Symptoms

Autism
Spectrum
Disorders
(ASD)

Attention
Deficit
Hyperactivity
Disorder – All
types (ADHD)

Sensory
Processing
Disorder
(SPD)

High
Intellectual
Potential
(HIP)



Most Common Causes for Anxiety in Children

- Moving homes or school
- Parents fighting or arguing/divorce
- Death of a loved one (family/friend)
- Serious illness or injury
- Social issues like bullying
- Abuse/neglect
- Poor school performance and/or learning struggles

#1 Cause:

Poor school performance
and/or learning struggles





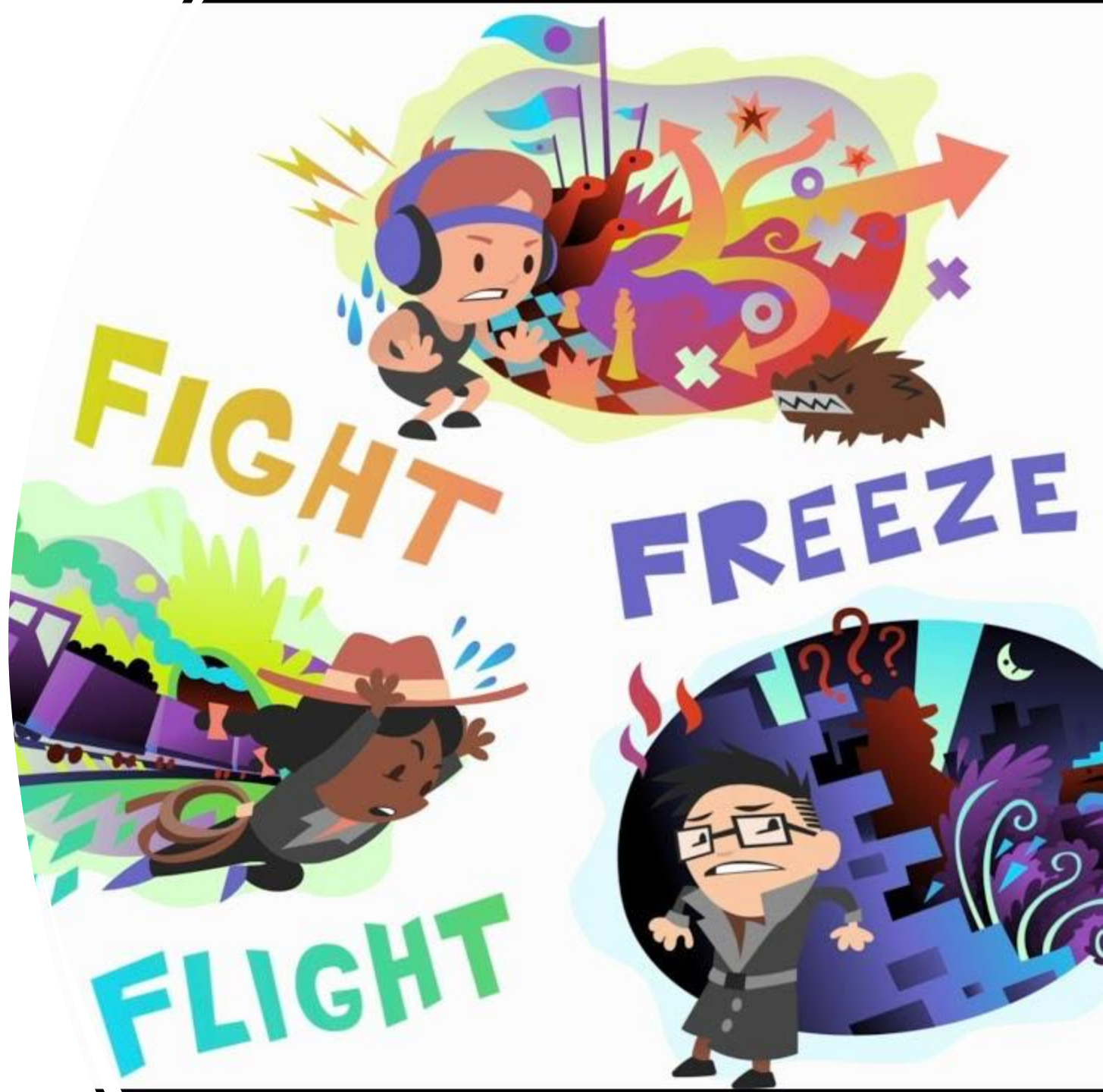
Relationship between Learning Struggles and Anxiety

- What is a child's "job"?
- Poor "job performance" = anxiety
- Rates of mental health issues are 4-5 times higher in adolescents and young adults with learning disabilities
- Studies show that 60% of adolescents and young adults in mental health treatment also have a learning disability or ADHD

What Happens? The Anxiety Response

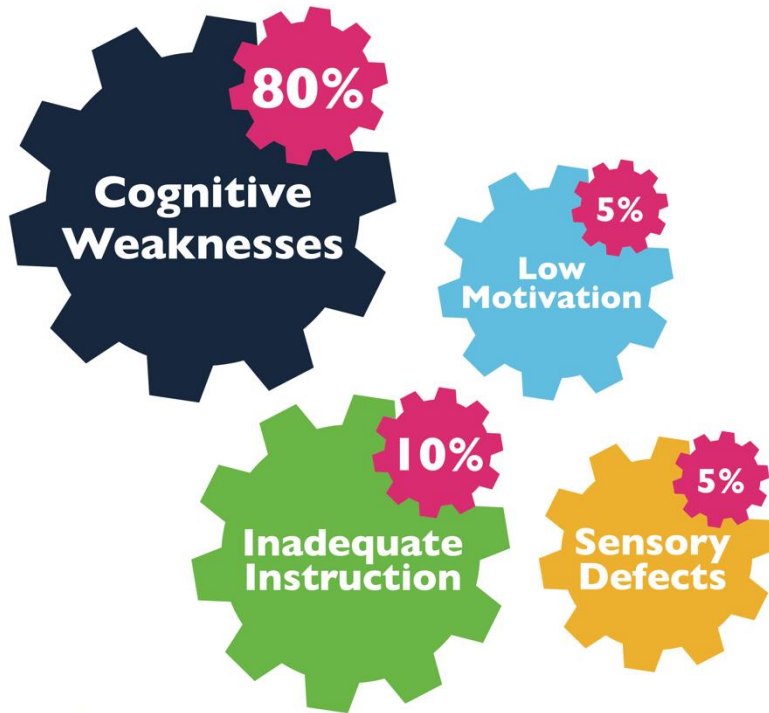
- Stress, frustration, fear of failure, low cognitive function triggers: Fight, Flight, or Freeze
- Flood of Neurochemicals designed to shut down thinking is released
- Elevated stress hormones damage the brain, especially the hippocampus which regulates memory and emotions (shrinks under extended periods of acute stress)

Result: a cycle of poor performance causes anxiety and chronic stress and the anxiety and chronic stress causes poor performance



Learning Difficulties

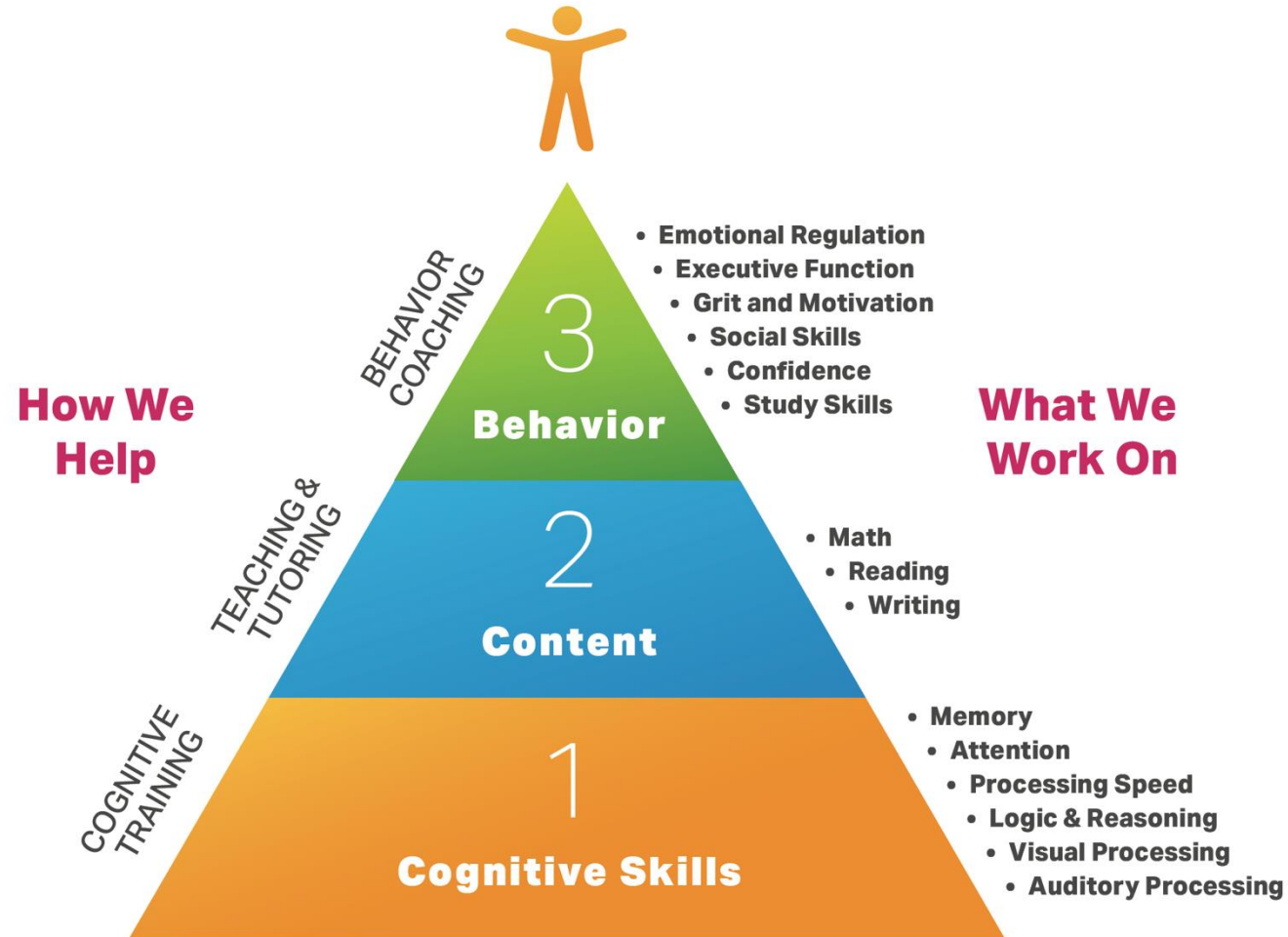
Causes



Effects



Potential Pyramid™

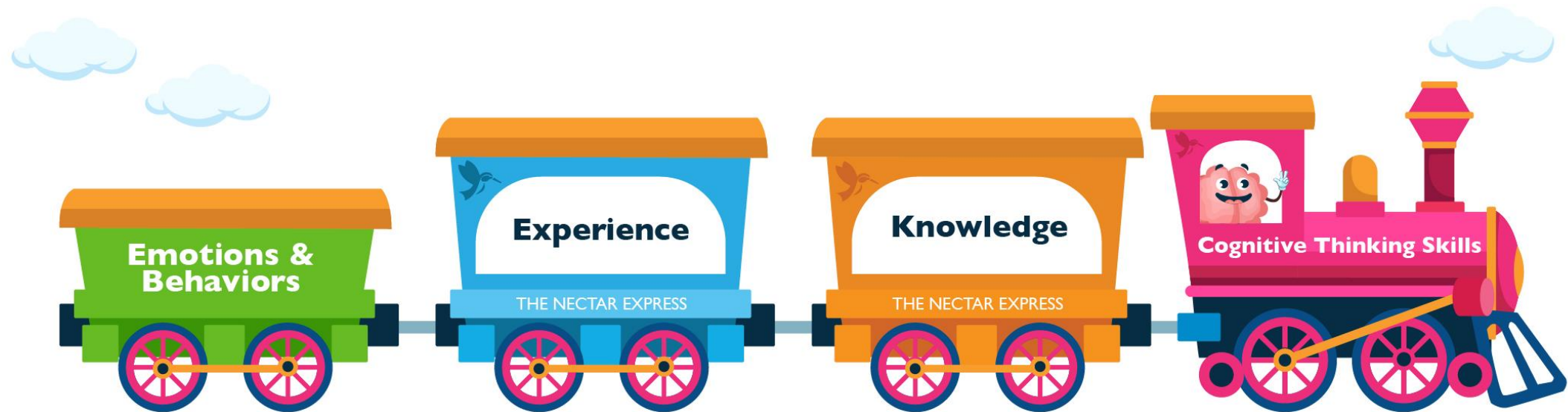




Cognitive Skills and Anxiety

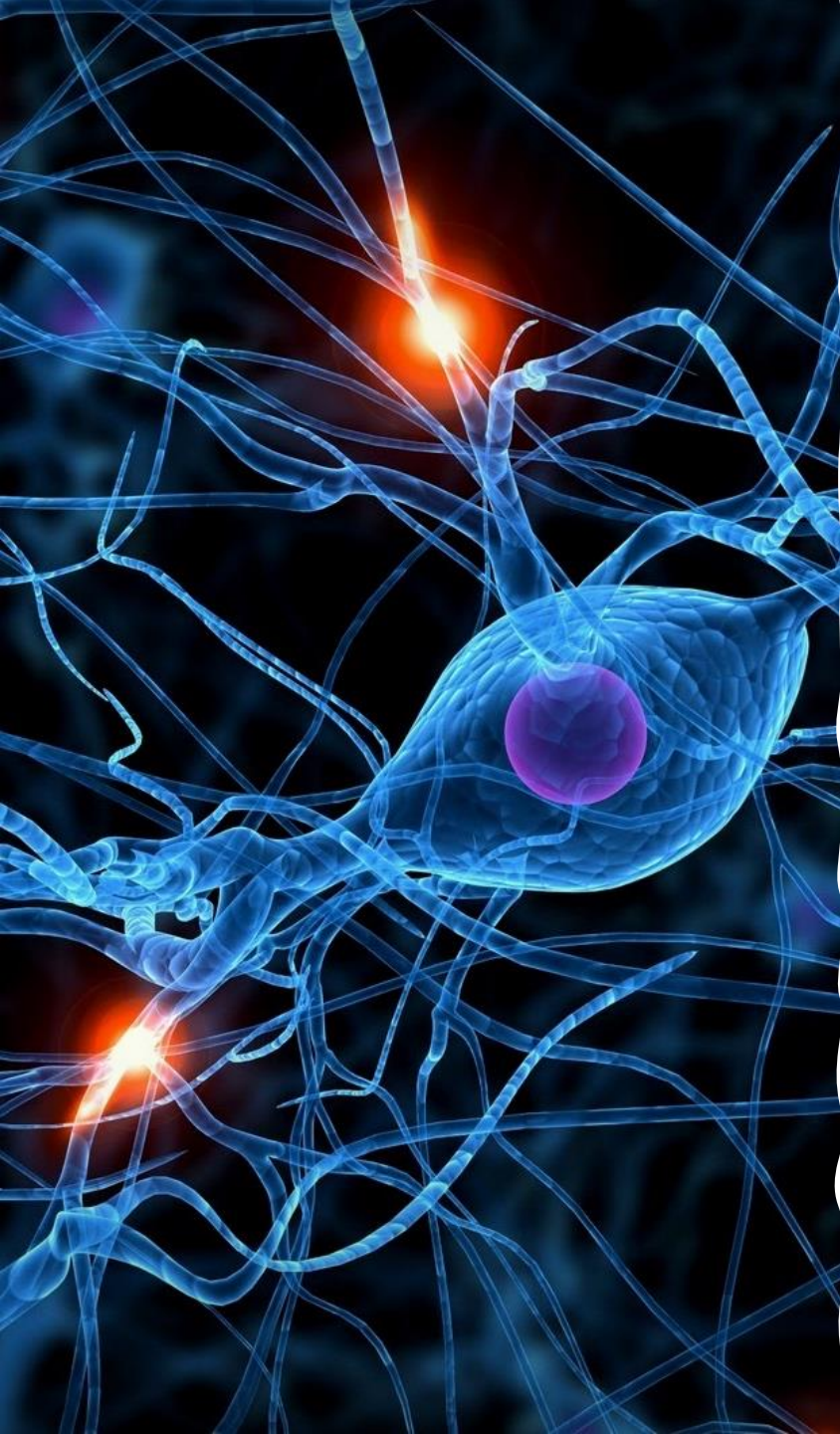
- **Processing Speed:** Overwhelm in real-time situations, struggles with time pressure, fears of slow response in social or classroom settings, frustration, self-doubt, mental fatigue, avoidance and procrastination behaviors, cumulative stress
- **Logic & Reasoning:** Difficulty in problem-solving, uncertainty & indecisiveness, social challenges, poor judgement, inability to connect consequence to behavior
- **Memory:** Fear of forgetting, social anxiety, cognitive overload, frustration, cumulative stress
- Cognitive deficits also contribute to lowered self-esteem and lack of confidence and motivation for learning.
- Cognitive deficits cause learning disabilities which cause academic struggles which lead to anxiety.

In a Healthy Brain: Strong Cognitive Skills Lead, Emotions Follow



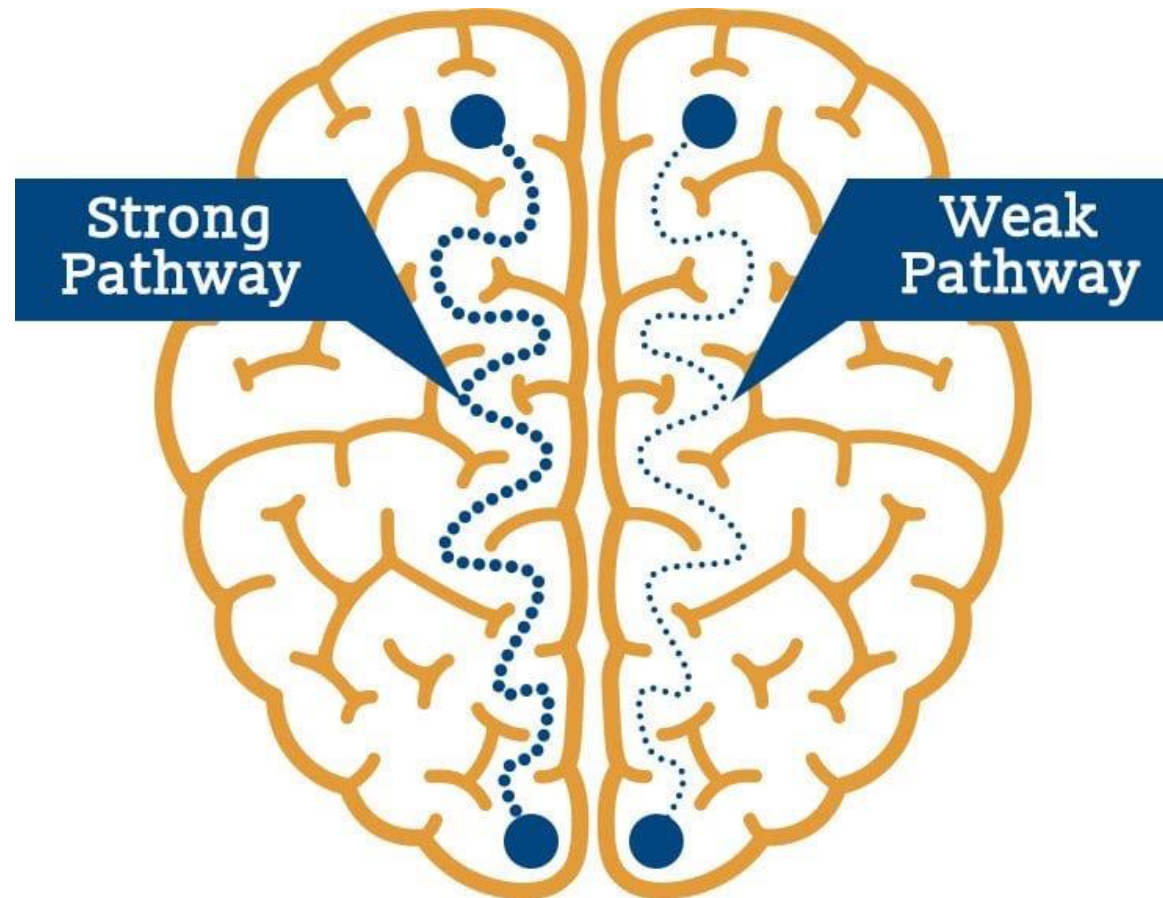


*Can we correct the
underlying issues
and reduce anxiety?*



Great News: Neuroplasticity

Hebb's Law: Neurons that fire together, wire together



It's Never Fixed!

Dr. Deborah Kaufer (UC Berkley Integrative Biology Professor and Researcher) concludes that moderate or "good stress" — such as studying hard for an exam or training to compete in the Olympic Games — can build stronger circuitry and a more resilient brain. But acute, prolonged chronic stress wreaks havoc. "You're creating a brain that's either resilient or very vulnerable to mental disease, based on the patterning of white matter you get early in life," said Kaufer.

"That said, the structure of your brain is constantly undergoing changes through plasticity. Mindset, behavior, and chronic stress are never fixed. The power of neuroplasticity makes it possible to change your brain structure and function throughout your lifespan. You can consciously make daily choices of mindset and behavior that will improve the structure and connectivity of your brain."



How do we
do this?



Action Plan:

1. Identify Symptoms
2. Assess for root causes
3. Treat!

- Utilize coping strategies to build emotional regulation & activate the parasympathetic nervous system.
- Avoid Avoidance like the plague!
- Treat cognitive and academic deficits to remove the source
- Build emotional regulation, growth mindset, social thinking and executive functioning skills for greater resiliency



Test

Psychoeducational
Testing

Comprehensive
Cognitive Testing

Academic (Reading,
Writing, Math) Testing

Coping Strategies



Accommodate During School where Needed

School Accommodations for Learning Issues:

- Additional time for assignments
- Create a distraction free/clutter free zone for working
- Have a cool down area
- Integrate Mindful Minutes in the school day
- Use of assistive technology



Plan Ahead and Set Clear Expectations



- Have a family calendar and help your child use their calendar/planner
- If your child is anxious about an upcoming event:
 - Walk your child through what is going to happen
 - Explain what is expected of them
 - Have them talk through things that could go wrong and what they can do to problem-solve

Utilize Mindfulness Techniques

- Share a 3-breath hug
- Notice and name body sensations, thoughts, and emotions
- Stop and be aware of surroundings
- Move, stretch, and notice body sensations
- Practice belly breathing
- Count your breaths
- Mindful Minutes (see handout on Nectar website)





Practice Reframing Together:

When anxiety is intense your child may get stuck in a cycle of "what ifs" and "I can't's." During these times, they are not able to think logically, so you can use a technique called reframing to help them gain control and become more rational.

Here's how:

- Name the worry floating around in your head right now.
- What is the worry telling you?
- Let's break it down and see if that worry is 100% right.
- How can we take that worry thought and change it into a positive thought? (For example, "I'm nervous about going to the new co-op group" can change to "I'm excited that I have a chance to make new friends today.")

Monitor TV and Internet Usage

- These are easy ways to escape and avoid!
 - Be aware of how much time your child is spending on screens.
 - Have open conversations with what they are doing and why.
- They can also be sources of stress for children.
 - News & shows may include footage of scenes that are not appropriate and can be stressful.
- Be aware and actively involved in the content that your children are consuming!



Take Care of the Basics:

- Quality Sleep (8-10 hours per night for kids)
- Stay Hydrated
- Free play
- Time outdoors
- Exercise (can be an organized sport but for stress reduction think riding bikes, jumping on a trampoline, playing at the park, Hide & Seek, etc.)
- Have a quiet hour at home where everyone can sleep, rest, or read (no screens allowed) daily.



Build a Calm Kit



- **What is it?**
 - A box or basket that is easy to get to filled with tools to calm the parasympathetic nervous system.
 - Make it portable to take when traveling or going somewhere that is anxiety provoking

- Weighted blanket
- Stuffed animals
- Body sock
- Heating pad
- Mini massager
- Stress balls
- Scarves

Calm the Nervous System



- Fidget toys
- Jump rope
- Balls
- Silly putty
- Tissue paper
- Bubble Wrap

Keep the Hands and Body Busy



- Essential oils
- Lotion
- Music
- Mints
- Snow globe
- Scratch and sniff stickers
- Kaleidoscope
- Tea

Connect to the Senses



- Coloring books
- Music
- Books
- Audio books
- Puzzles

Get a Brain Break



- Party blowers
- Eye mask
- Harmonica
- Yoga cards
- Ear plugs

Slow Down and Breathe Deep



- Journal & pens
- Photo album
- Positive notes to self

Challenge and Explore Thoughts



Avoid Avoidance: Why Avoidance Doesn't Work



Treat



Treatments are interventions that target and correct the underlying root causes of the learning difficulty and anxiety.



Effective treatments move one from the severe end of the spectrum to the milder end or off the spectrum altogether.

Treatments for Learning Struggles and Anxiety



**BIOMEDICAL
SUPPORTS**



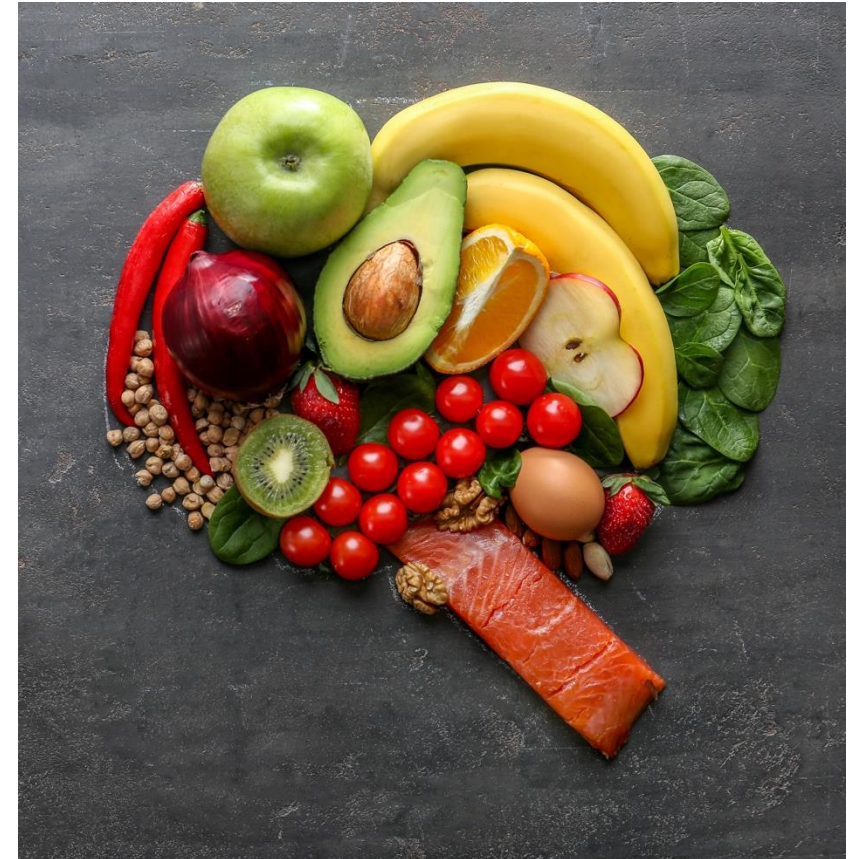
**COGNITIVE
TRAINING**



**RESILIENCY
COACHING**

Biomedical: Diet / Nutrition

- Reduce stimulants: sugar, food additives, and caffeine
- Increase healthy fats : Grass-fed butter, olive oil, wild salmon, coconut oil, chia seeds, flax seeds)
- Consume foods that are rich in: Magnesium (nuts, legumes) Inositol (oats, cantaloupe), B-Vitamins (leafy greens, eggs), and Vitamin C (peppers, strawberries)
- Consider testing for food sensitivities & nutrient deficiencies for targeted supplements or dietary plans



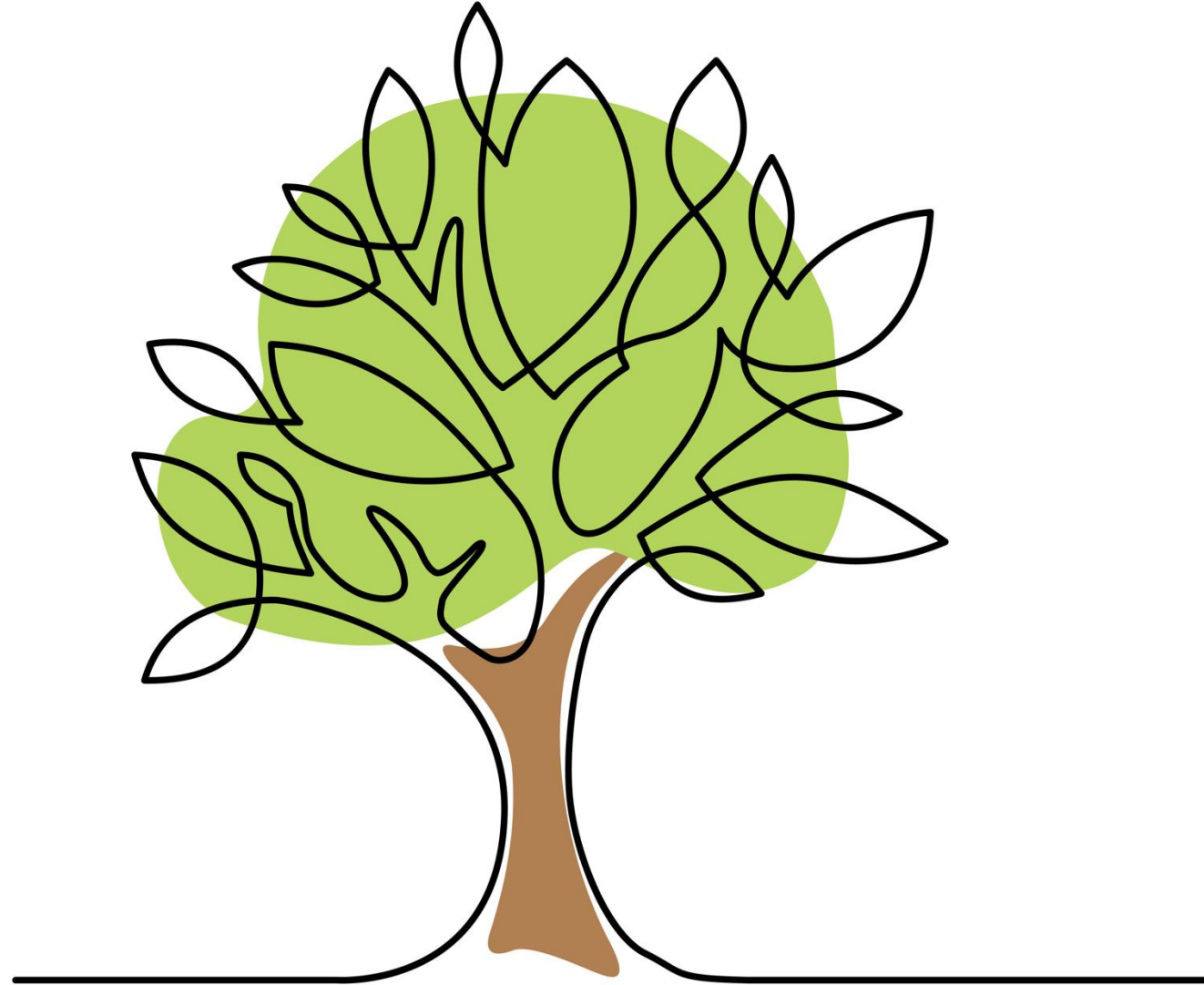
Cognitive Training

One-to-one intensive coaching that targets and resolves cognitive deficits

- Works by stressing a weak area through mental exercise, encouraging the brain to build new neural networks
- Neurons that fire together, wire together! (Hebb's Law)
- Corrective measure that improves the primary underlying causes of learning disabilities: weak cognitive skills



Resiliency Coaching



Study Skills and Executive Function Coaching (SkillsBuild Program)



Time Management and Organization



Study Hacks and Habits



Responsibility and Self-Advocacy



Study Strategies



Critical Thinking Skills



Note-taking



Test-taking Strategies



Behavior Coaching

Wired for Resilience Program

- Emotional Regulation
- Growth Mindset / Grit
- Social Thinking

Resources for Kids and Parents

1. Mindful Minutes handout on Nectar's website:
www.thenectargroup.com/presentations/
2. The DARE app for kids:
<https://www.dareresponse.com/dareapp/>
3. Freeing Your Child from Anxiety by Dr. Tamar E. Chansky, PhD
4. Brain Based Therapy for Anxiety: A Workbook for Clinicians and Clients by Dr. John B. Arden, PhD
5. 100 Days to Brave for Kids: Devotions for Overcoming Fear and Finding Your Courage by Annie F. Downs (Christian perspective)
6. The Client's Guide to Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy by Aldo R. Pucci, MA



How The Nectar Group Can Help:

- Psychoeducational assessments to diagnose
- Cognitive assessments
- Cognitive Skills Training
- Academic Tutoring & Nectar Academy
- Executive Function and Study Skills Coaching
- Behavior Coaching for Emotional Regulation, Growth Mindset & Grit, and Social Thinking
- Biomedical Testing
- Free consultations to determine best next steps



Thank you so much for your time!



Feel free to contact us at:



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