Brain Buddies
Parent Workshop



Ask about the #ELFTPromise

We care
We respect
We are inclusive

NHS
East London
NHS Foundation Trust

About Me

I work for City & Hackney's WAMHS (Wellbeing and Mental Health Support Team).

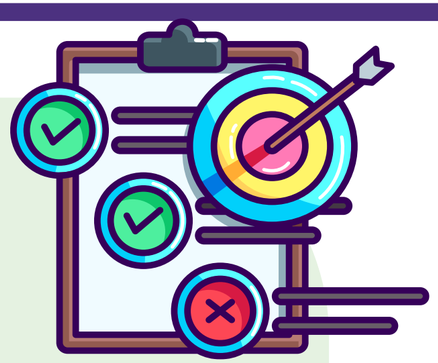
My role is Education Mental Health Practitioner

I provide evidence-based interventions that promote and sustain emotional wellbeing in children and young people*.

I am based in different schools across Hackney but work at Grasmere on Friday mornings.

* Common behaviour/ anxiety parent-led interventions, Groups e.g. Brain Buddies/ Tree of Life and workshops

Aims



- Explore the link between children's brains, emotions and behaviour.
- Understand why emotional regulation is important for wellbeing and learning.
- Understand how the Brain Buddies programme helps children develop emotional awareness and regulation skills.
- Learn practical ways to support emotional development at home

What is Emotion Regulation?

- Noticing emotions
- Understanding what they mean
- Managing them in a helpful, appropriate way
- Happens **with** adults first (modelling, co-regulation, routines)
- A skill that develops slowly



A child's ability to understand, manage and respond in a way that is helpful for themselves and others.

Emotion Regulation in children

- Calming down after getting upset
- Expressing feelings in words
- Coping with disappointment
- Taking turns
- Managing frustration
- Flexible thinking



It’s not about never getting upset. It’s developing skills over time so they can recover from difficult emotions and use helpful strategies.

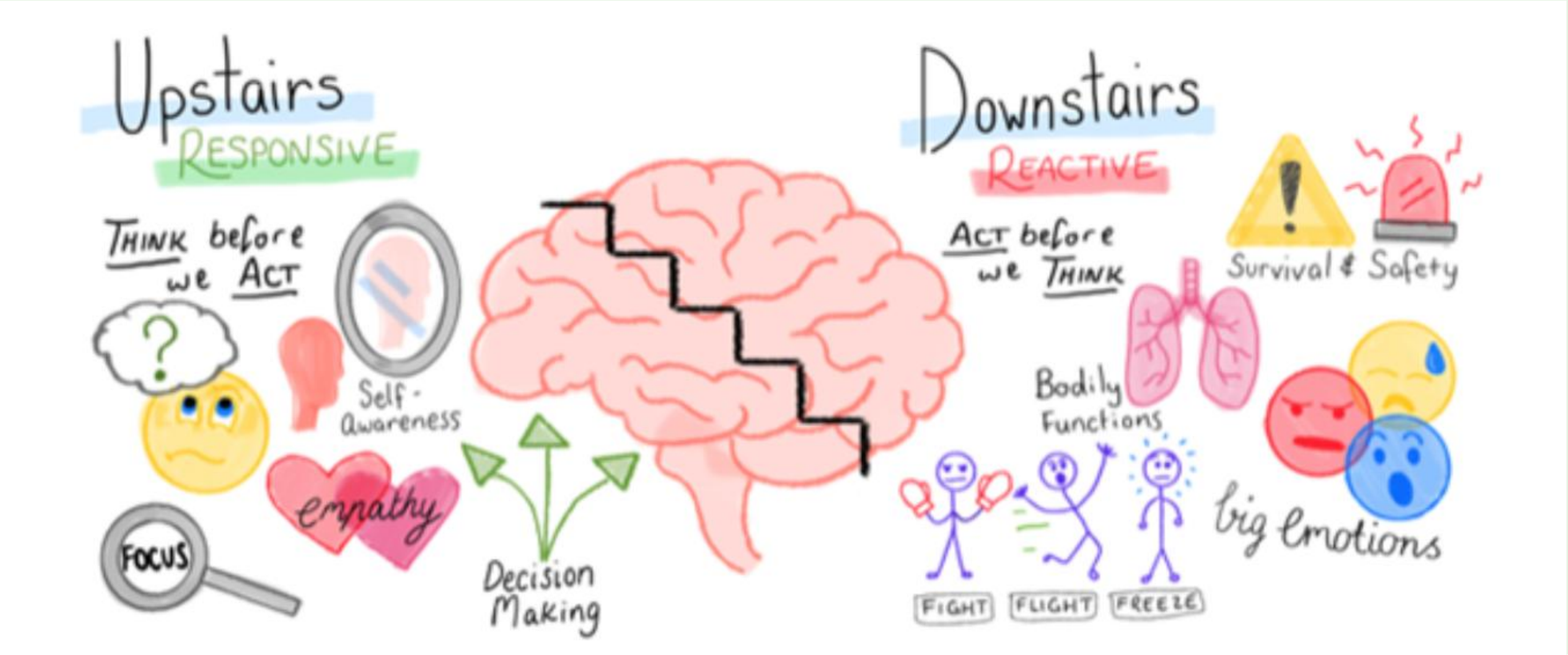
Link between ER and Learning



- Studies suggest that children who have difficulty regulating their emotions have trouble learning and are less productive and accurate when completing their schoolwork (Graziano, Reavis, Keane, & Calkins, 2007).

- "The emotional brain, the limbic system, has the power to open or close access to learning, memory, and the ability to make new connections“ (Vail, 2017)

A Developing Brain



Developing.
Matures in 20s

Struggle to think clear, follow instructions / talk calmly

During big emotions...

- Thinking brain shuts down
- Logic disappears
- Children go into survival mode
- Reacting, not choosing behaviour calmly
- Struggle to learn, listen or reason
- Need **connection before correction**



Connection is calm tone, safe presence and co-regulation

What is Brain Buddies?



1. 6-8 x 45 min- 1 hour sessions



2. Target cohort: KS2
3. Evidence based, whole class intervention
4. Supports children to develop further understanding of their emotions
5. Provides children with the skills to identify, understand and develop strategies to manage strong emotions and to become more emotionally resilient

Evidence-Based Intervention



- Programme based on principles of Cognitive Behavioural approaches
- Written by registered clinician Dr Helen Aspland, Clinical Psychologist in Islington CAMHS.
- It was written with colleagues from UCL and the Anna Freud centre for children, an internationally recognised centre of excellence for child development and child wellbeing.

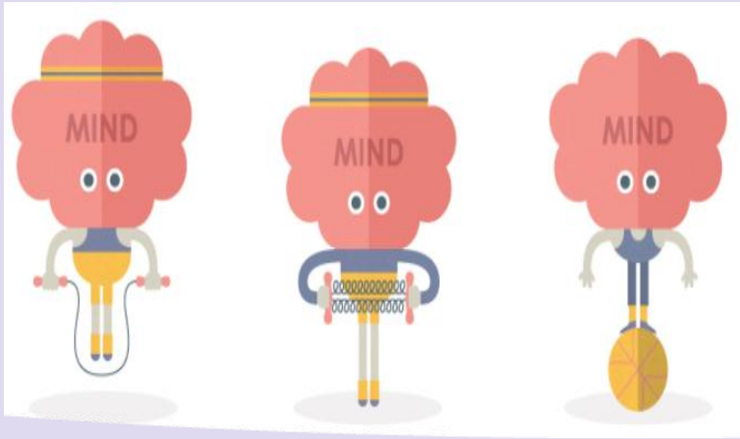
Anna Freud

How can Brain Buddies support your child?



Children who are able to identify and manage their emotions are supported to:

- Perform well at school
- Make friends and strong attachments
- Ask for help when necessary
- Have increased self-esteem



What is taught during the sessions?



UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONS AND HOW THEY WORK IN OUR BRAINS AND BODIES

BODY BASED BBER SKILLS

COGNITIVE BBER SKILS LEARNING AND ENDINGS

REVIEW AND MAINTENANCE PLANNING



1-3: Understanding emotions and how they work in our brain and bodies

- Introduction to Brain Buddies
- What are emotions?
- Why do we have emotions?
- Emotions in our body
- Thinking and Survival brain
- Hand model of the brain
- Zones of Regulation
- Strategies: Body scan, I statements, belly breathing, chair push-up, rollercoaster/ finger breathing



4: Body Based BBER skills

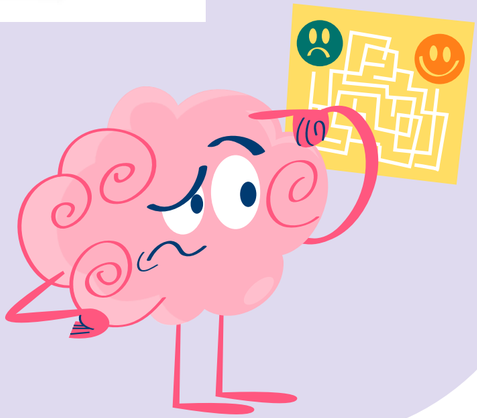
- Signs to look out for in different zones
- Body skills: Palm push, arm/hand massage, deep breathing, yoga stretch, distraction techniques, PMR,
- Building a calm kit



5-6: Cognitive BBER skills learning and endings

- Thoughts linked to body clues and flipping lids
- Positive self-talk
- Identifying thoughts, feelings and behaviours
- Helpful vs unhelpful thoughts
- Illusions/ Perception
- Problem solving and acceptance (what can I/can't control)





What can you do as parents?

Remember that behaviour is communication.

All behaviours have meaning and serve a purpose about a child's need.

When we see behaviour, we need to pause and ask:

'What is the emotion underneath this?

'Bad' Behaviour Iceberg



Co-Regulation comes first

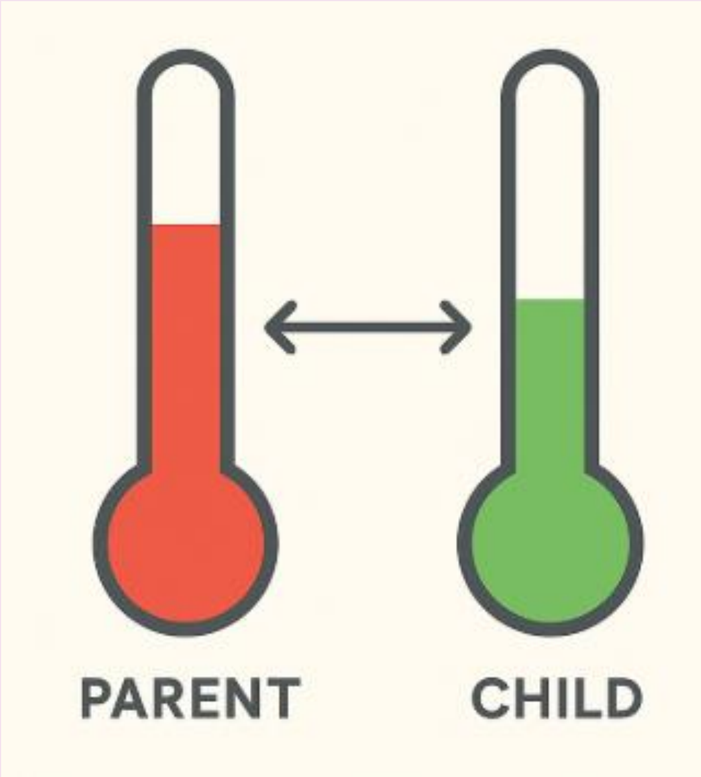
Before self-regulation, children need co-regulation:

- Lending children your calm
- Helping them soothe before they can self-soothe
- Building emotional safety
- Teaching them skills through modelling



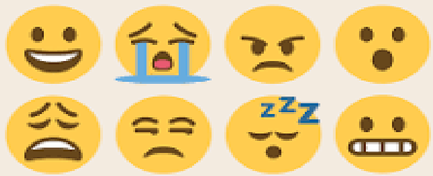
Self-regulation is learnt through repeated co-regulation experiences with trusted adults.

Why your calm matters



- Children ‘borrow’ the adult’s nervous system
- We can’t co-regulate if we are dysregulated
- Regulation is contagious (calm or stress)
- Self-care is not selfish – it’s part of co-regulation
- It’s okay to need a pause

Naming and Labelling Emotions



- Helps children understand what they are feeling
- Gives them words instead of behaviours
- Builds their emotional literacy
- Reduces overwhelm
- (You won't always get it right but that's okay)

It looks like you're feeling frustrated

Your body seems tense, are you worried?

I wonder if you're feeling disappointed

Ask open questions

Encourages children to explore and identify their feelings. Only when the child is calm, NOT at peak of dysregulation. Avoid why.

What do you think might help next time?

What were you hoping would happen?

What happened just before you were upset?

Are you feeling more sad, angry, worried, or something else?



How is your body feeling right now?

Normalising and Validating

Tells children that all emotions are allowed and that emotions are safe. Also helps them feel understood and move *through* the feeling.

Thank you for being honest/ I'm glad you've shared that with me

It's okay to feel angry – everyone feels angry sometimes

I get why you felt upset – I would be too

I can see/hear how disappointed you are



That sounds really frustrating

Validation is NOT agreeing with the behaviour – it's acknowledging the feeling underneath

Modelling Regulation

- Children learn more from what you do than what you say
- Show how you manage emotions. Use BB strategies.
- Narrate your process
- Keep your tone calm



“I’m feeling stressed, so I’m going to take some deep breaths”

“I need a moment, then we can talk”

“I’m going to go for a walk to calm down”

Zones of Regulation

Provides children with a simple visual way to express how they feel



Common Pitfalls (We all do them!)

- **Labelling emotions as “good” or “bad”.** All emotions have a purpose and are appropriate at different times.
- **Encouraging emotional suppression / being dismissive** – ‘It’s not a big deal’ ‘Stop getting upset’.
- **Modelling** – shouting frequently = appropriate way to express frustration/anger
- **Asking why**
- **Expecting self-regulation before developmentally ready**
- **Jumping into fixing rather than listening**

What can you do as parents?

- Check-in on Fridays about what strategies they have learnt: practice these together at home
- Encourage open conversations about emotions
- Model emotion regulation strategies
- Listen, validate, empathise, name and normalise feelings
- Give them time to connect to their thinking brain
- Create a sense of collaboration

Feedback

Please complete survey 😊





Workshop name: Brain Buddies Parent

Any Questions?



Signposting - Parent Support

NHS East London NHS Foundation Trust

Family Action

Charity that provides practical, emotional and financial support to those who are experiencing poverty, disadvantage and social isolation across the country:
www.family-action.org.uk

Hackney SENDiags

Provides impartial and confidential information, advice and support to parents and carers of children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) and children and young people (up to 25 years old) with SEND:
020 7275 6036 https://hackneysendiags.co.uk/

St. Joseph's Hospice

Offers support to children, young people and families who have lost a family member, care giver or other significant person due to a bereavement of any kind):
https://www.stjh.org.uk/our-care/counselling-and-advice/bereavement-service/

Family Coach Service

Works with families that have SEND children (no formal diagnosis or EHCP required) 1:1, empowerment groups and drop-in coaching sessions:
familycoach@hackney.gov.uk 0208 356 7344

Hackney

African and Carribean Services

ACMHS

Father to Father offers a programme for parents whose children (12-15) experience emotional wellbeing or behavioural challenges : 07930 699 970

Mental Health Support Team

MHST is an NHS school based early intervention and prevention service that focuses on delivering direct input to children, YP, parents and caregivers to help improve young people's emotional wellbeing
https://www.elft.nhs.uk/camhs/where-we-work/city-hackney-camhs/city-hackney-mhst-schools

Young Minds: Parent helpline

Free helpline that can support with practical advice on how to support your children's mental health:
www.youngminds.org.uk/parents-helpline
0800 802 5544

YOUNGMiNDS

Early Help Support

Family assessment and development of a support plan: MASH@hackney.gov.uk
020 8356 5500

CHSCP

Crisis Service

NHS East London NHS Foundation Trust

East London CAMHS Extended Crisis Service is a service for children and young people in mental health crisis and their families across City & Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham:
Tel. 111 Option 2