

# Ask the Expert



## Helping Kids with ADHD/LD Overcome Chronic Stress: Part 1



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# Helping Kids with ADHD/LD Overcome Chronic Stress

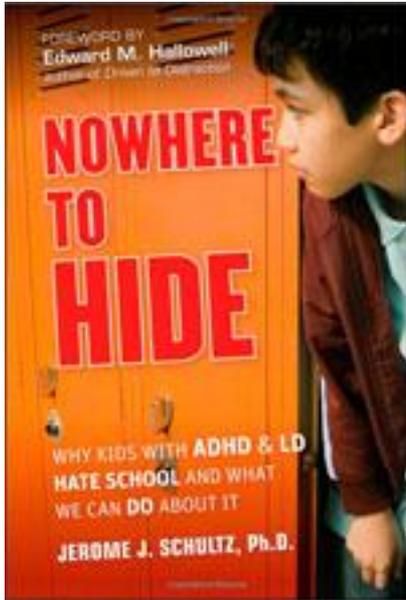
**Part 1: In-depth Presentation by Dr. Schultz**

**\*Wed. January 16, 2013, 3-4 PM Eastern**

**Part 2: Extended Question & Answers**

**\*Mon. January 28, 2013, 4-5 PM Eastern**

Register online at [www.help4adhd.org](http://www.help4adhd.org)



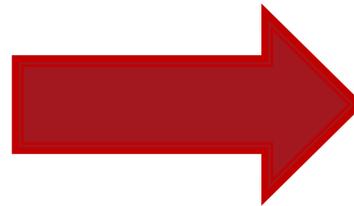
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it's a dog's life...



# Webinar Overview:

- Why students with ADHD/LD are particularly vulnerable to stress.
- The neurobiology of stress.
- Understanding the “Saving FASE” cycle
- Using the De-Stress Model to help kids find greater success and happiness in school and in life.
- What *is* stress?
- The impact of stress on life and learning.

# What is Stress?

Any physiological and emotional reaction to a danger or threat, either perceived or real.

A protective mechanism to keep us safe.

An event that triggers a “fight or flight” response.

Can be short term (acute) or ongoing (chronic).

And why do we care? Unrelieved, the cumulative physical strain generated by psychological stress can harm the body and the brain.

Do you know the feeling?



How one little boy dealt  
with stress...

Alex

Read + draw  
carefully.

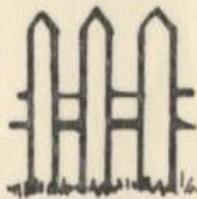


Name \_\_\_\_\_

1. A big owl is in a



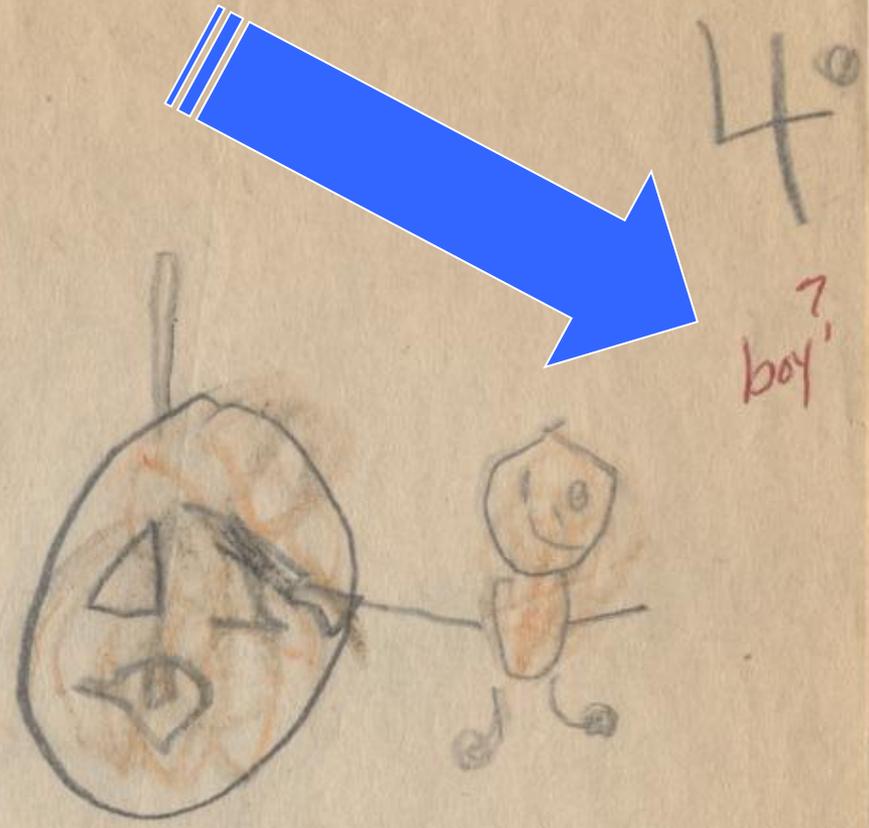
2. Make 3 bats on a



3. Make a witch with a green



4. A boy makes  on a pumpkin.



**(A boy making a face on a pumpkin...)**

# AND NOW, IT'S THANKSGIVING

(Or pay back time...)



Reinforcing vocabulary

Name

A

Alex



2

Excellent

1. Make a big fish on a .

2. Make a turkey in the .

3. A big deer runs in the .

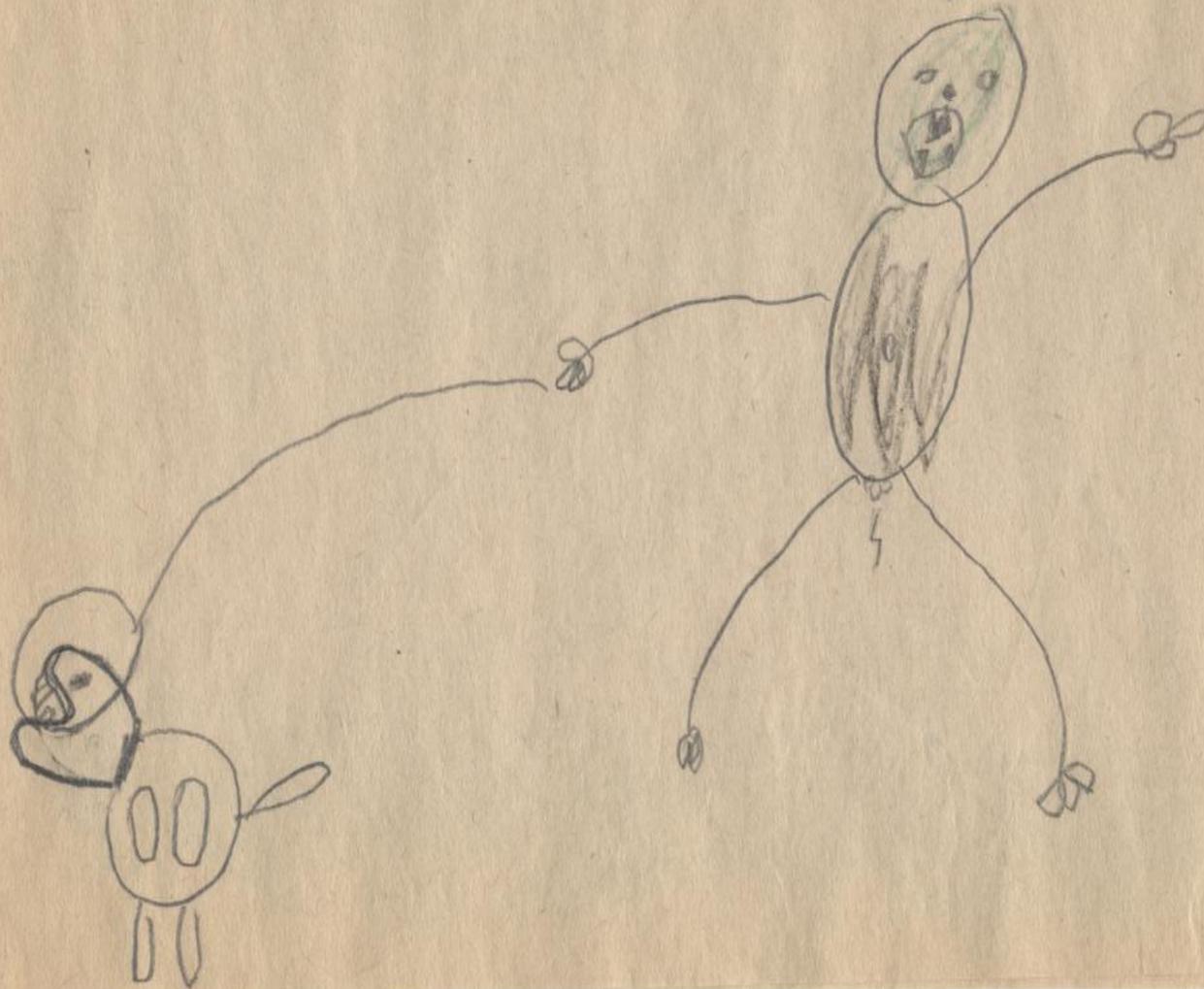
4. A boy walks a dog.

...and now Alex is thinking to himself:

"Hmmm. I really wanna show you that I was paying attention to the feedback you gave me at Halloween, teacher..."

This is *most definitely*--  
a **BOY**, walking his dog.

4



Alex will survive---But what about all  
the other kids who are not as resilient  
or who don't have any  
“money in their self-esteem bank”  
???

Think of a child  
*you worry*  
about...



# Not all stress is *BAD*

“GOOD” STRESS ADVISES US TO:

Get ready, get set..

“BAD” STRESS YELLS AT US TO:

Get outta here!

# (BAD) Stress Happens...

When we don't have any  
control over threatening  
events.

# Symptoms of Stress in Children

- Bed wetting
- Frequent bathroom trips
- Thumb sucking
- Nail biting
- Sleep disorders
- Eating disorders
- Changes in behavior
- Emotional lability
- Low self-esteem
- Depression
- High risk behaviors (drugs/drinking)
- Somatic symptoms
  - Back pain, tense muscles
  - Stomach aches, headaches
  - Ulcers, tics
  - Increase in allergies (rashes/breathing difficulties)

# Why Are Kids Under More Stress?

- Faster paced lives (families, teachers and kids)



**“Your mother and I are feeling overwhelmed, so you’ll have to bring yourselves up”**

And enter a child with special needs--  
more conflict...more worries.



Are we surprised?

## More reasons:

- More environmental stressors  
war, violence, news coverage,  
the stock market, politics,  
worries about the World Series?
- Influences of media (screen cultures, music)
- Competitive environments
- High stakes tests
- Hard to find an “Oasis of Tranquility” (Schultz, 2008)

# Kids' lives are too full



# Why it's hard to help kids with LD/ADHD deal with stress:

- They can't recognize or label this feeling
- They don't see a relationship between their behaviors or feelings and stressful events or thoughts

So...teachers and parents often fail to see behaviors as maladaptive reactions to stress

And...they react to the **event**, not the **cause**

The result?      *Increased Stress!*

# How does stress **impact** learning?

- Worrying, being overwhelmed, and the unpleasant physical sensations of anxiety make it difficult to learn.
- Stress can put the “survivalist” brain into high gear while simultaneously shutting down the EF brain—the “thinking” brain.
- Early and repeated stress can cause the brain to build abnormal brain-cell networks that make it less efficient.

# Why kids with ADHD/LD are especially vulnerable to stress

\*\*The cumulative consequence of poor academic performance reduces tolerance for difficulty and frustration.

# DENNIS THE MENACE



"BY THE TIME I THINK ABOUT WHAT I'M  
GONNA DO...I ALREADY DID IT!"

**AND...** There is too much attention on a student's weakness, both in and out of school.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** how many services are available for kids with ADHD and LD that focus on improving weaknesses?

Students have not learned that ADHD/LD is not an excuse for poor performance, but a way to explain difficulties.

In other words, they are not like this boy...



(cartoonist unknown)

*"Can we hurry up and get to the test? My short-term memory is better than my long-term memory."*

# Stress may cause a negative re-framing of identity.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Do you know a child who has become known as the “class clown” to compensate for weaknesses due to ADHD or LD?

Isn't it better to be the kid who gets laughed at for doing funny stuff than the one who gets laughed at for making errors?

To many kids don't understand the nature of their LD or ADHD, or more important, what they can do about it.

Errors made because of inattention or poor processing are too often considered "dumb" mistakes.

When teachers, other adults and classmates don't know about the ADHD or LD, they might be surprised when kids have difficulty or make errors. This leads to embarrassment.

Imagine a classmate saying to another:

“Boy *that* was stupid!” or a teacher saying “You’re so smart Jake, I’m surprised you got that wrong”

Students may **shut down or shut up** because they fear negative responses from teachers and other kids.

Overdependence on specialists may lead to a lack of confidence...

**Who's "A" is this, anyway?**

A word about **Attribution Theory**...

## DISCONTINUOUS LEARNING: When the cure is the cause.

Taking students out of class for tutoring and various therapies can cause gaps in learning.

This can lead to insecurity or increased anxiety ---which leads to decreased performance.

The student feels trapped. There's no way to get out of a stressful situation.

And school goes on for a long time...



**“If these are the happiest years of our lives, you can *imagine* what’s in store for us!”**

There may be way too much  
emphasis on *Product*...and not enough on  
*Process*.

Lack of respect for alternative ways to demonstrate competence.

*i.e., too much emphasis on “high stakes” testing.*



**“He looks very promising—  
but let’s see how he does on  
the written test.”**

# Myths about the value of cooperative learning for kids with LD or ADHD

## *THINK ABOUT IT:*

Poorly chosen after school activities may exacerbate stress by accentuating a student's weaknesses.

# The Relationship Between Stress and LD

Stress may **magnify** ADHD and LD  
(especially in students with NVLD or Asperger Syndrome)

Unrecognized and untreated LD & ADHD can leave the child  
without a sense of control.

Instead of “I can and I will,”

... it's, **“I Can't and I won't!”**

# Kids with LD and ADHD

often find themselves at this intersection:



Being forced or even encouraged can  
create a need to “Save FASE”

# How Negative Behaviors Help Kids “Save FASE”



# So, when teachers and specialists see kids with special needs...

- Pulling away from a task
- Making jokes; getting silly
- Destroying a paper
- Saying the work isn't important

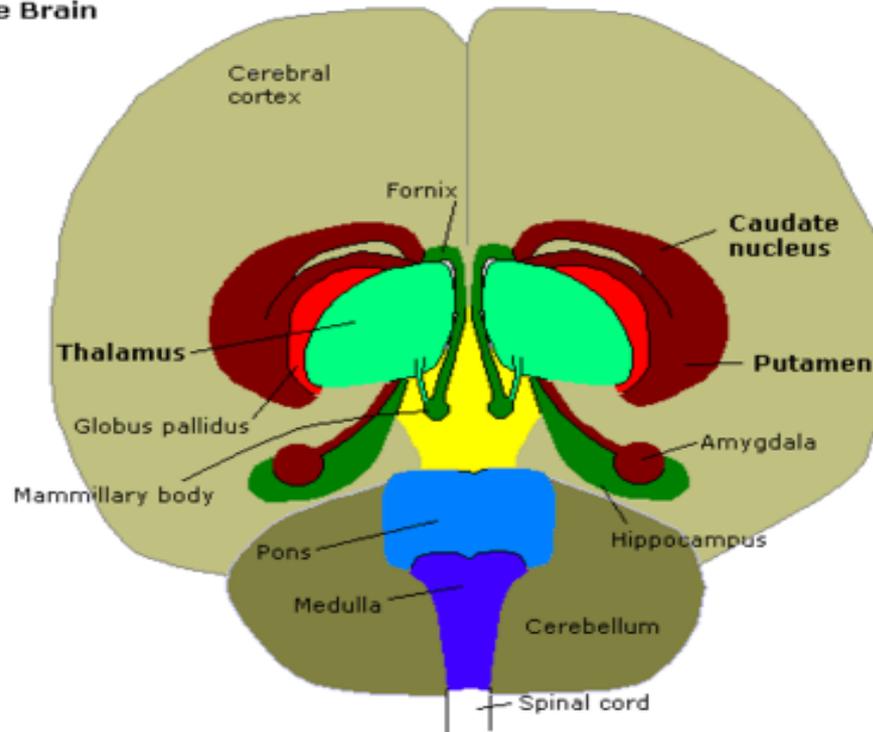
They may misread these behaviors as  
*OPPOSITIONAL... INATTENTIVE*  
*UNMOTIVATED...LAZY*

*And NOT the (Predictable) Reaction to STRESS*

# The Neurobiology of Stress

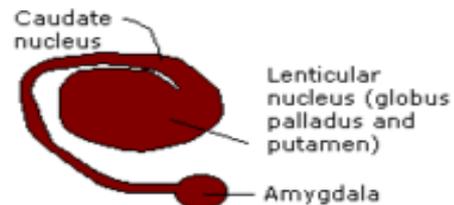
- Stress triggers the production of cortisol (a hormone--glucocorticoid [GC]), etc.
- This inhibits the production of memory enhancing proteins in the amygdala
- Irregular cortisol fluctuations can cause extreme behavioral and learning problems
- Prolonged exposure to cortisol via repeated exposure to stressful events is believed to damage brain cells in the hippocampus, with a corresponding decrease in cognitive skills.

## The Brain



The brain as viewed from the underside and front. The thalamus and Corpus Striatum (Putamen, caudate and amygdala) have been splayed out to show detail.

## Corpus Striatum



## How is cortisol produced?

The **pituitary gland** is a small pea size gland situated just behind the nose.

Controls the **endocrine system** and the functions of endocrine-related glands.

**Pituitary gland** releases a hormone called ACTH which enters the blood circulation and passes to the **adrenal glands** (just above each of the kidneys)

...making these glands release **cortisol**.

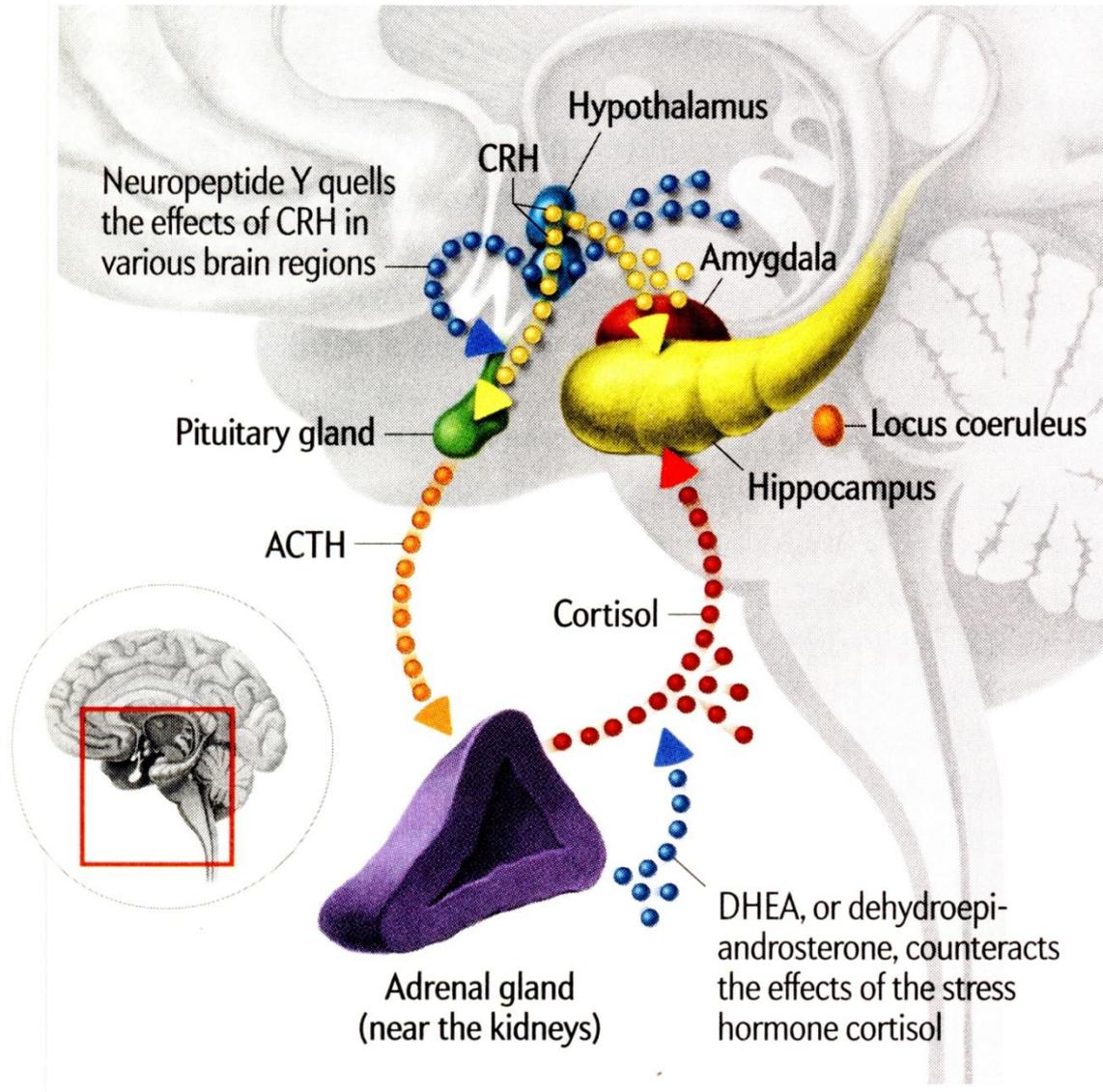


Illustration by Jen Christiansen

# Why is Cortisol Important?

Too much cortisol in blood gives signal for the brain and adrenal glands to decrease the production of cortisol, and keep things in balance.

Under continuous stress, this **feedback system** breaks down.

The result: **too much cortisol!!**

How does this relate to students with LD  
under chronic stress?

# Academic **FIGHT** or *Flight*

“Students with ADHD/LD etc., confronted with the unabated stress created by exposure to tasks that are in reality or in their perception too difficult (e.g., threatening), exhibit the protective behavior of *any* organism under extreme stress...”

# They...

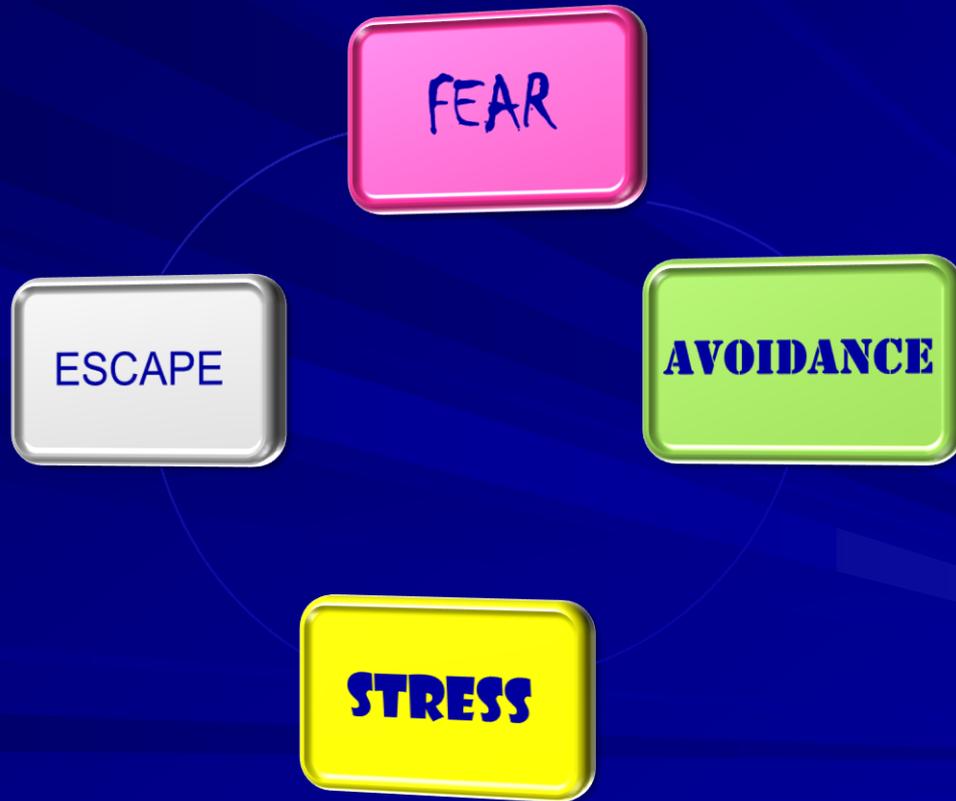
## **1. RESIST OR AVOID**

“aggressive passivity” or physical escape

## **2. CHALLENGE OR ARGUE**

oppositional, defiant behavior

# *Re-emergence of Saving FASE*



## The Good News:

Effectively managed stress can enhance the performance of students with LD.

You mean there's HOPE?



# To paraphrase Dr. Eric Kandel\* “The Rock Star of Neuroscience:”

Just as fear, stress and anxiety can change the brain...

behaviors and thoughts that relate to hope, love and happiness can also change it. It's completely symmetrical.

\* Nobel Laureate and Professor of Neuroscience, Columbia University

# Taking Kids from **STRESS** to DE-STRESS

## A MODEL FOR CHANGE

*Source: Nowhere To Hide: Why Kids with ADHD and  
LD Hate School and What We Can DO About it.*

# Steps in the DE-STRESS MODEL

**D**efine: understanding the condition

**E**ducate: teach the child about the impact

**S**peculate: looking ahead for + and –

**T**each: strategies that maximize success

**R**educe the Threat: neutralize the risk

**E**xercise: physical activity reduces stress

**S**uccess: Replace Doubt with Confidence

**S**trategize: Use what you learn to plan ahead.

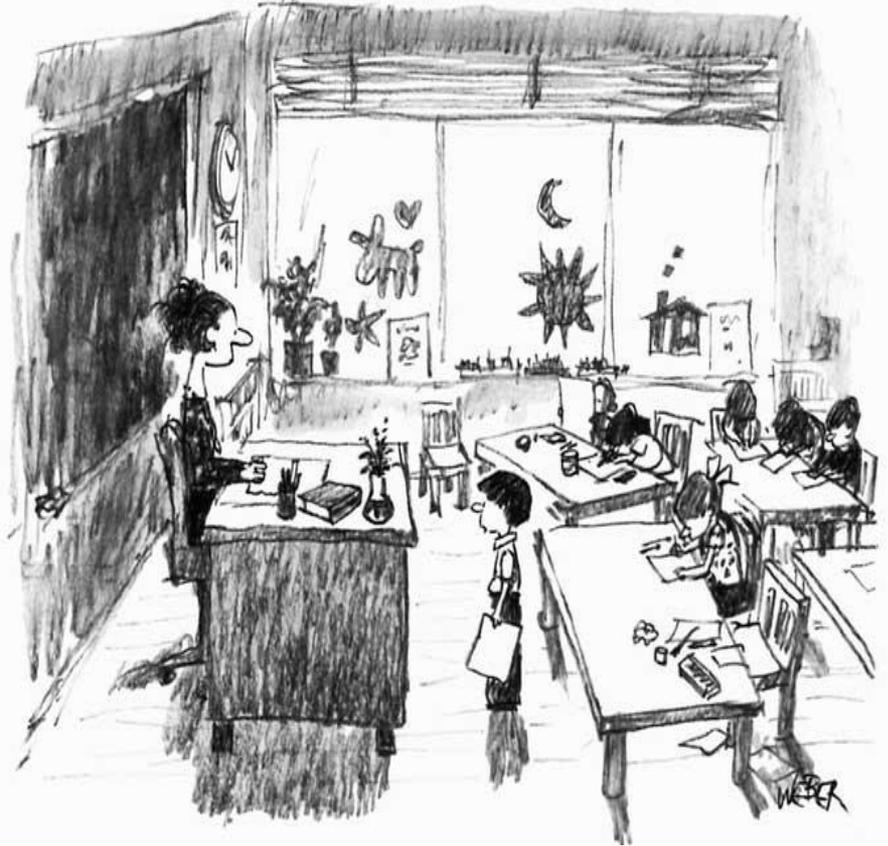
# Our task is clear:

- Understand the relationship between stress and learning
- Understand why students with LD and ADHD are particularly vulnerable to stress
- Correctly interpret stress-induced behaviors
- Remember this MANTRA:  
**Control through Competence**

# And we must...

- Help students develop a sense of confidence and competence that comes from success
- Teach students how to recognize and cope with stress

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**“With all due respect, Mrs. Davis-- you talk faster than I listen.”**

We want kids who can accurately identify the factors that lead both to failure and to success.

They can and must be actively *taught* how to do this.



Remember: These kids need the right kind of emotional support.

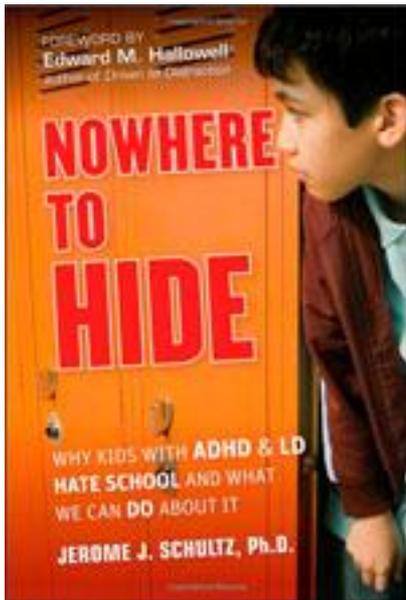
**And they need a learning environment in which they experience can experience success and the joy that comes from it.**

We need to teach kids to understand the impact of stress on their learning:





**But, we don't want them to be *too* expressive...**



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