

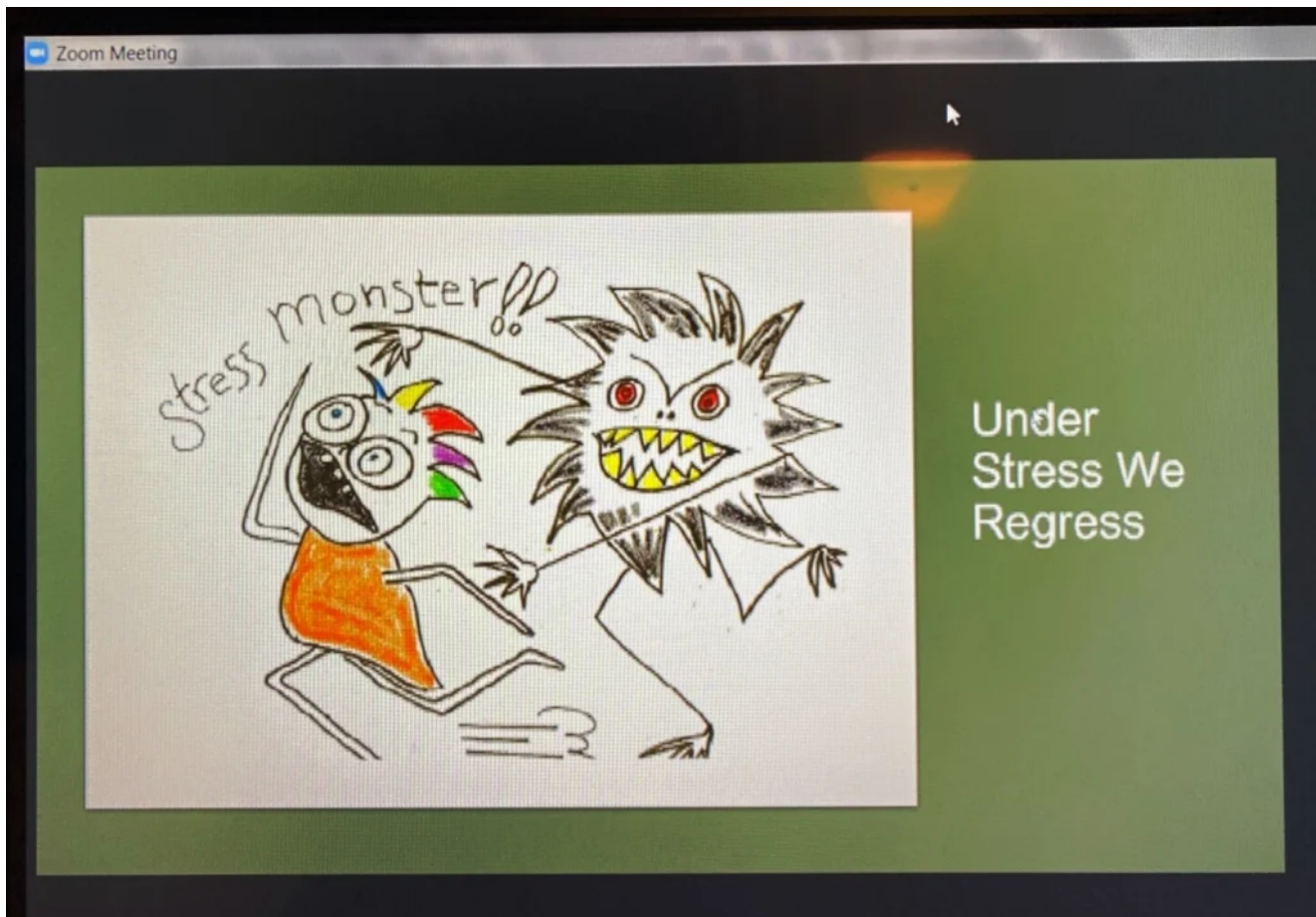
SAD 17 brings in guidance for childhood anxieties

SJ [sunjournal.com/2020/11/12/sad-17-brings-in-guidance-for-understanding-childhood-anxieties/](https://www.sunjournal.com/2020/11/12/sad-17-brings-in-guidance-for-understanding-childhood-anxieties/)

By Nicole Carter

November 12, 2020

PARIS — Eight months into a pandemic with a recent surge that has now closed two schools in Oxford Hills, SAD 17 administrators are bringing in assistance for parents to help children cope with difficult challenges. The district has scheduled four free webinars, presented by Alison Roy, Psy.D, of the New Hampshire based non-profit Center for Trauma-Responsive Practice Change.



Economic struggles, pandemics and isolation from peers bring out the monsters that can drag children down. *Supplied photo*

Roy has provided district-wide training for trauma-informed practices for educators, staff and administrators in SAD 17 since 2019.

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The first webinar, Understanding Fear, Anxiety, and Upset: The Neurobiology of Stress, took place Tuesday night. The focus was to look beyond typical childhood responses to stress and consider what brings on their behaviors.

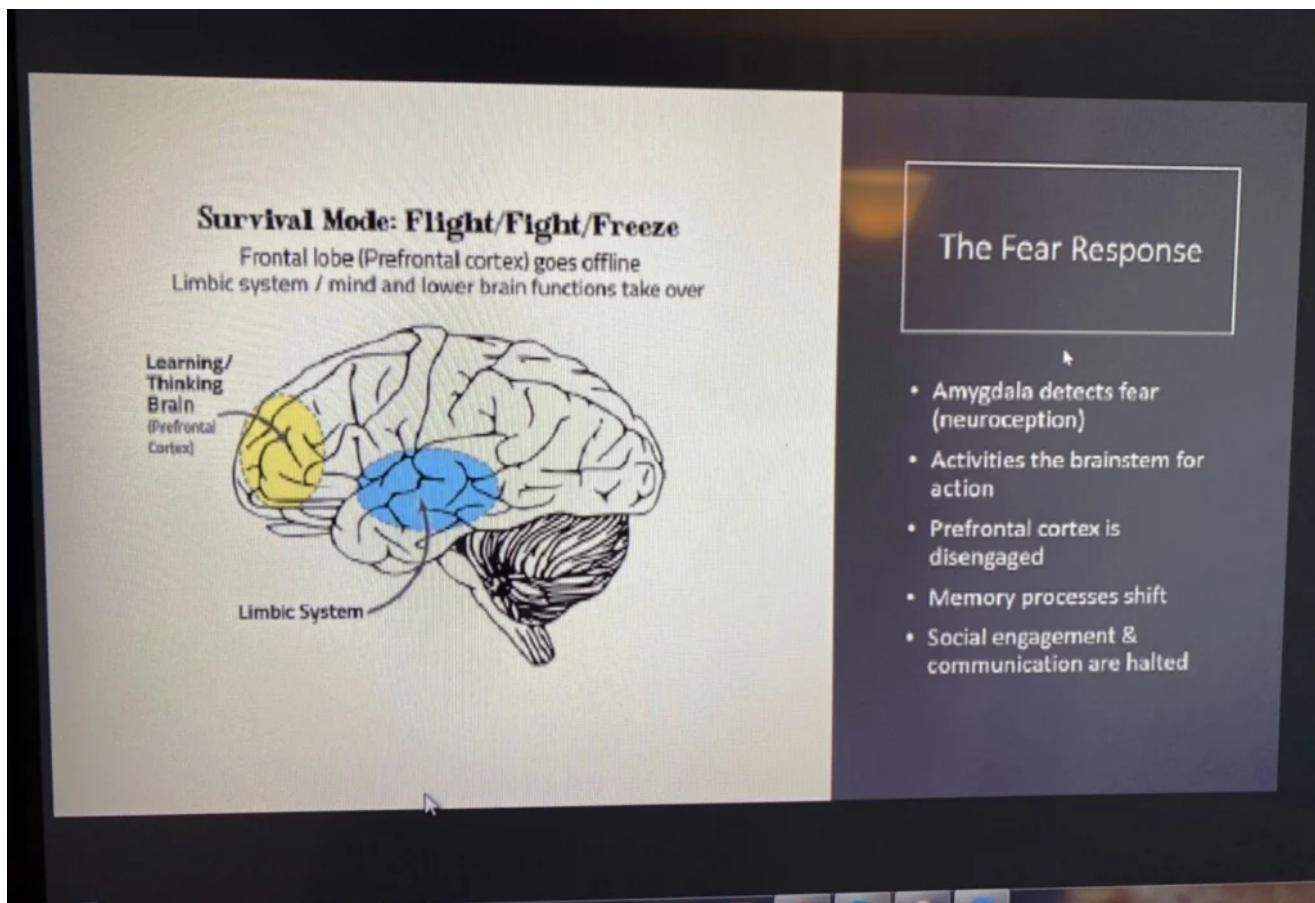
As Roy explained it, the human brain develops in three layers and it takes about 25 years for it to be completed. “Reptilian” is basic survival instinct – something we are all born with. As children grow the “mammalian” function does too, which brings about subconscious emotions such as fear, joy, love and anxiety as well as memory. “Human” brain – the ability to plan, emit empathy, practice self-control and continue learning – does not occur until adulthood.

Through periods of prolonged stress, like economic stress on parents and the isolation and fear brought on by the pandemic, a child’s mammalian development can be interrupted as they and those around them are forced into survival mode. When a child is always watching for danger and experiences accompanying anxieties, reptilian instincts can overtake his or her developing instincts for the emotions that would normally help them to cope with that danger.

According to Roy, conditions like those that 2020 has brought, children (and adults) can be affected by what she called “surge capacity,” where thoughts become stuck in high gear until a person feels emotionally depleted, which affects memory, the ability to carry out learning functions like school work and the ability to use language to explain their feelings.

“It is fear response and it disengages the use of our [developing] higher brain powers,” Roy told the Zoom audience of about 30 attendees.

Unable to process or explain the consequences of brain surge, children’s fight (hyper-arousal) or flight (hypo-arousal) instincts dominate their thoughts and determines how they behave.



A child's brain stuck in fight or flight mode can result in behaviors that he or she is unable to explain.
Supplied photo

With hyper-arousal, the child operates with heightened adrenaline, senses and instinct – responses that are appropriate for an emergency situation but compound when under chronic stress. Resulting behaviors may be physical or verbal aggression or temper tantrums.

A child prone to hypo-arousal experiences the opposite, a slowing down of their biologic systems, which are appropriate responses to a situation like an acute physical wound. Their senses may slow down; they may stop language communication and withdraw.

Understanding how the stresses and fears that most people have been operating under recently and how they culminate in children is the best way for parents and caregivers to help them cope with the difficulties and find a way past them.

December 8: YOU Are Enough! The Key Role of the Parental Relationship in Developing A Resilient Child

January 12: Helping Your Child Grow: It' s all about Safety and Regulation

February 8: Your Family Can Survive Anything: How the Use of Story & Holding Hope Help Us Overcome

Parents and others concerned with managing their children's challenges during COVID-19 can register for the remaining webinars by calling or emailing Marjorie Scribner at (207)743-8972, [(#)]

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