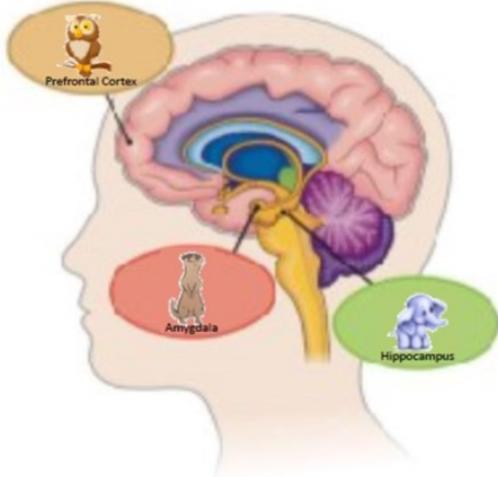




Amygdala - This is the first part of our brain that develops, even before we are born, it is connected to our survival and everything that will keep us alive. This controls our heart rate, breathing and temperature control and is our internal alarm system e.g. fight, flight or freeze.



This can be thought of as our **Meerkat:**

- Always on the lookout, tense and needing to keep us safe.
- It does not understand words but only reacts to facial expressions and tone of voice - sensory.
- We are not meant to use our Meerkat brain a lot as there is not much danger in everyday life. However if we have had an anxious start in life or bad experiences, we use them more than other people.

Hippocampus - This is the next part of our brain that grows, both before and after we are born. It plays a key part in emotional memories e.g. how things, people and experiences make us feel. This is an important part of our brain but not super intelligent (not involved with higher level thinking such as meta-cognition or self-regulation), it is associated with the senses.

This can be thought of as our **Elephant:**

- It never forgets and has a special relationship with the Meerkat reminding it of memories associated with dangers, stress and anxiety.

Prefrontal Cortex - This part of our brain is connected with our logical, reasoning, language and social skills. It does not finish developing in men until their 30s and women in their late 20s.

This can be thought of as our **Monkey:**

- It is clever, calm, has social skills, can work things out and is all seeing.
- Our Monkey regulates us.

Effects of anxiety or stress

When children become anxious or upset their Meerkat is engaged and they disconnect from their monkey. They go into fight, flight or freeze mode - running on cortisol and adrenalin. They do not understand language but respond to tone of voice, facial expressions and actions. The elephant also reminds them of memories connected with these actions/ tone/ expressions.

This results in:

- an inability to listen or function
- a lack of concentration,
- unhappiness,
- desire to run away or self-harm,
- displays of inappropriate behaviour (which is always communicating a message!),
- physical reactions (butterflies, sweating, sickness)





Individuals may seek to numb their inner Meerkat.

- This may be in the form of electronic devices, excessive gaming, alcohol, cigarettes and drugs.



Techniques to Calm our inner Meerkat.

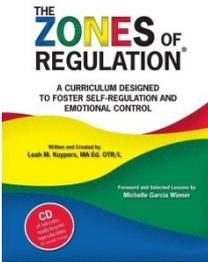
How to calm the panicky Meerkat down

Firstly we need to find out what it likes. Does it like singing, words, cuddles? Being told to “calm down” rarely is effective and can make things worse when the Meerkat is in full swing.

Rhythm is a good tool;

- breathing,
- rocking,
- tapping,
- firm stroking,
- humming sounds,
- singing,
- dancing,
- music.





Sensory Play







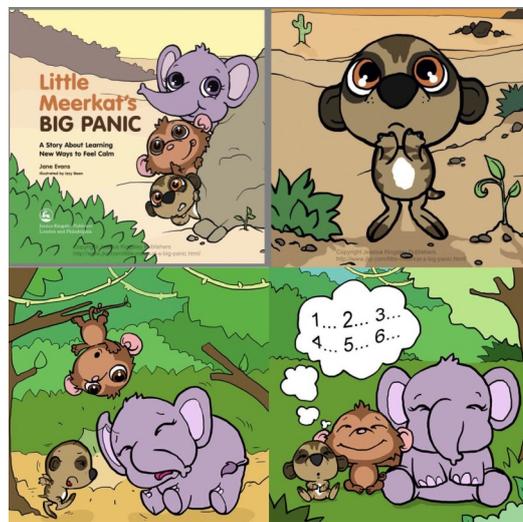

Our Role? Alternatives?

Each person’s Meerkat brain is unique. Consult with the child or young person, what do they find calming? If you start humming, tapping a beat etc. when someone else is in full on fight or flight is happening, it could make things worse, or you might just strike lucky, but find out beforehand if possible.

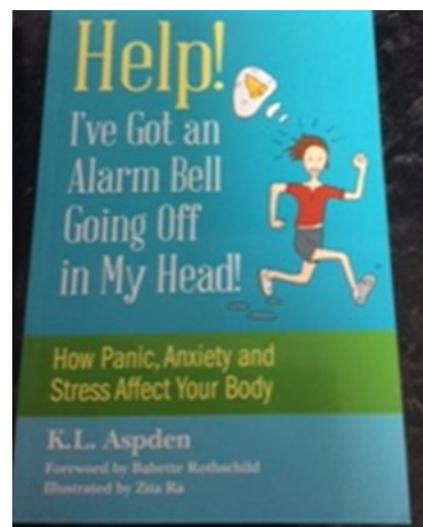
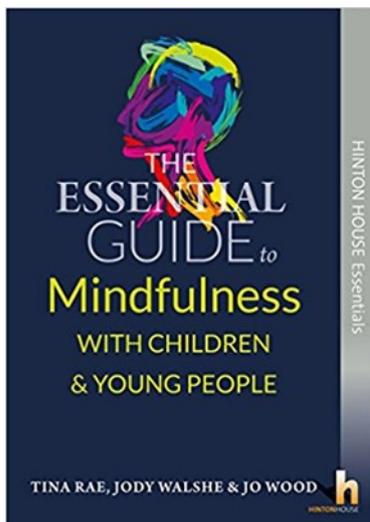


Useful resource for children that uses characters for different parts of the brain.

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Little-Meerkats-Big-Panic-Learning/dp/1785927035>



Other resources:



<https://www.thejaneevans.com/tedx-speaker/>