

MISSION: CONTROL!

A BIG FEELINGS ADVENTURE!



Parent Power Pack

"From the Inside Out"

By

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Background information on Fight or Flight or Freeze Responses

Your prefrontal cortex, your thinking brain, controls behaviors such as doing what is expected and paying attention. Your amygdala, your surviving brain, manages fear and big feelings and keeps you alive. When something is "too much", your thinking brain gets overwhelmed and the more primitive part of your brain goes into fight or flight or freeze.

This is what happened to Joseph in the story and he was able to "unlock" the surviving brain by breathing, thanks to Gretchen reminding him to choose a coping strategy. Then, he could access his thinking brain and use his will power to win the battle against The Green HypnoZoids, who wanted to keep him hypnotized with the TV, using their HypnoRay.

Once Joseph did some breathing, His Big Feelings calmed down, he felt better inside, he was able to be comforted by his mom's bedside messages and he could begin to think about his future self being in charge of his Big Feelings.

Joseph's mom set the stage for him to be able to come up with the idea of being in charge of his feelings by helping him inspect his feelings, not push them away. By bringing awareness in this situation to what was going on inside of him, she prepared him for recognizing the state he was in when something felt like it was "too much"; this will help him be more prepared to handle a similar situation in the future and provide an anchor of competency. This message is reflected in the poster on his

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will: Tomorrow, I will be a day older. Tomorrow, I will be more practiced. Tomorrow, doing hard things will be a little easier.

Application to the story

In *Mission: CONTROL! A Big Feelings Adventure!*, Joseph struggled to control his Big Feelings when it was time to stop watching TV. Something was just “too much” for him in that moment and he reacted with Big Feelings. In that moment, he was in another universe! With his mom's acknowledgement and acceptance of his Big Feelings, she was able to bring him back to Earth, after working hard to reconcile his Big Feelings (represented by Robojo) and the voice of reason (represented by Gretchen) so that ultimately he could defeat the something that was just “too much” (represented by The Green HypnoZoids). With Gretchen reminding him to choose a strategy to help him gain control over his Big Feelings (by breathing) he could then access his will power to “break free” of the uncomfortable feelings, manage his emotions, and solve the problem.

In processing this fight or flight or freeze experience with his mom, Joseph learns from the inside out that he can be in charge of his Big Feelings. With the thrill of a newly discovered ability, Joseph contentedly winds down his day, imagining possibilities that tomorrow will bring.

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Application to your child's life

Practicing these brain skills will make it just a little easier to do hard things:

- Mindfulness, Meditation, Yoga, Prayer
- Self-talk
- Flexible thinking
- Mindset (see Parent Power Pack on Mindset)
- Self-monitoring (noticing what you are feeling inside, telling someone about those feelings, choosing a calming strategy and solving it)

Try these messages to remind your child that it's possible to do hard things, just like Joseph did.

- Charge Up! (Both Joseph and Robojo get charged up overnight)
- Shield Down!
- Laser Up!

Some strategies that can help your child unlock the thinking brain: (see the buttons on Joseph's gauntlet.)

- Breathe.
- Try again.
- Take a break.
- Use words.
- Count to 10.
- Play music.
- Close your eyes and think of something calming.
- Ask for a hug.
- Change something.
- Move on.
- Move your body.
- Do self-talk e.g. "I got this."
- Ask for help.

Ideas for what to say:

- Ask, "What's next?" if your child says, "I'm done."
- "What is going on inside you?"
- "Are your big feelings feeling quieter now?"
- "I'm wondering about something. Are you feeling like there is something that is just "too much"?"
- "What does this feeling inside remind you of?"
- Name a time when you felt like this. Can you remember what coping strategy you used to unlock your brain so you could solve the problem?
- Do you have a question you want to ask about your big feelings?

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Research-based strategies that help children learn to take charge of their big feelings:

How these strategies are incorporated into Mission:CONTROL! A Big Feelings Adventure!

Jerome Schultz - Article

<https://sharpbrains.com/blog/2009/02/10/from-distress-to-de-stress-helping-anxious-worried-kids-part-1-of-2/>

Recalling and connecting to a time when one learned something well and had positive feelings about it helps make learning less stressful and thus easier.

<https://dyslexiaida.org/the-dyslexia-stress-anxiety-connection/>

"Competence instills confidence and competence leads to success. When children, adolescents, and adults are able to develop a sense of mastery over their environments (school, work, and social interactions), they develop a feeling of being in control of their own destiny. Control through competence is the best way to eradicate stress and anxiety."

<https://www.mightier.com>

When kids understand their physiological cues and their bodies' responses to triggers that result in big feelings, it helps them calm down more quickly and to feel more confident.

These strategies are embedded in the messages at the end of the story. When Joseph's mom helps him process his feelings, she is helping him capture this internal state and competence he felt to be in charge of his big feelings so that she can help him recall this moment next time he encounters a challenge.

<https://www.themeditationblog.com/new-study-reveals-the-core-meditation-areas-in-the-brain/>

"There are three main meditation-related areas in the brain, according to a new meta-analysis study: Insula, the prefrontal cortex, and the anterior cingulate cortex. All of these are located in the front half of the brain, and they seem to be involved irrespective of the type of meditation used.

What do they do? Insula is the part of the brain we use for awareness of our own

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body, and for linking bodily sensations to emotions. We use the prefrontal cortex, among other things, for directing attention to the immediate task at hand, here and now. The anterior cingulate cortex combines some of the functions of the other two: attention, and regulation of emotion."

Joseph's mom asks questions and guides Joseph to connect awareness of his body sensations to his Big Feelings. For example, "I'm wondering what was going on inside you when you were kicking and yelling. Was something just "too much"?"

Tips

According to Jerome Schultz, Ph.D., anxiety and stress are fueled by uncertainty. Try these tips to create more predictability in your child's life:

- Create and follow a schedule.
- Preview expectations for situations your child will be experiencing.
- Be consistent with routines, bedtimes, mealtimes, nap times, homework times, and boundaries.
- Observe non-verbal language and open up a discussion about what your child is feeling inside.

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Challenges

1. Create a family challenge to notice every time someone handles a challenging situation.
2. Create a chart with coping strategies for each person in the family. Mark which strategy the person used in handling a challenging situation. See ideas above.
3. Journal about the changes happening in your family as a result of noticing what is going on inside.
4. Explore yoga, mindfulness, or meditation options that your family could do together.

Quotes

Quote from *Taming Your Gremlin* by Rick Carson

"I free myself not by trying to be free, but by simply noticing how I am imprisoning myself in the very moment I am imprisoning myself." (Remember this part in the story when Robojo and Joseph were captured by the Hypnotron?)

Zen Theory of Change

"Stand up to your fears and shoot for the stars!"

Ruth Soukup from *How Big is Your Brave?*

Recommended Reading

Trauma and the Body by Pat Ogden, Kekuni Minton, Clare Pain

The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel van der Kolk, M.D.

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Resources

https://www.ted.com/talks/ruth_soukup_one_simple_trick_to_overcome_your_biggest_fear

Ruth Soukup on 7 fear archetypes

https://www.understood.org/en/community-events/blogs/expert-corner/2016/11/08/competence-anchors-my-advice-for-kids-who-are-stressed-about-school?_ul=1*bolqat*domain_userid*YW1wLVk2NnB3emQycVpxRHdobVBrUGdHQXc

Jerome Schultz on Competence Anchors

<https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/child-learning-disabilities/dyslexia/video-dyslexia-and-the-fear-factor-in-the-brain>

Jerome Schultz on Dyslexia and Fear of Reading

<https://www.understood.org/en/friends-feelings/managing-feelings/fear/8-self-soothing-techniques-for-your-young-child>

Coping strategies

<https://www.livingwellspendingless.com/how-to-raise-confident-kids/>

Ruth Soukup's on raising confident children

https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/understanding-childrens-challenges/talking-with-your-child/9-ways-to-show-empathy-when-your-child-is-struggling?_ul=1*1tvo4hg*domain_userid*YW1wLVk2NnB3emQycVpxRHdobVBrUGdHQXc

Showing empathy for your child's struggles

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20Gh48azhHY>

Jerome Schultz interview on stress

https://www.understood.org/en/friends-feelings/managing-feelings/fear/help-child-overcome-fear?_ul=1*266y1a*domain_userid*YW1wLVk2NnB3emQycVpxRHdobVBrUGdHQXc

What to say to help your child manage fear

www.Mightier.com

A program that helps kids build confidence and thrive pairs video games with clinically validated strategies to help kids build confidence and thrive.

Taming Your Gremlin by Rick Carson

<https://learn.hes-extraordinary.com/dashboard> (Your Brain: Explaining Fight or Flight to Kids) Poster on how the brain works (Nicole Day)

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