



# ANXIETY ON THE RISE

*Parenting Teens in the Age of Anxiety*



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# "Are teens today **really** more anxious than they were in the past?"

Recognizing the signs of an anxiety disorder vs. "normal" (typical) experiences of stress

Overview of why teens are experiencing more anxiety today than in the past

How parents can best support their teens with anxiety

How therapy can help



# WHAT IS ANXIETY, AND IS IT ALL BAD?

We all have anxiety and stress at times.  
Stress is a normal part of being human.  
It is necessary to keep us safe.

*A healthy dose of anxiety can help us complete important tasks; make good decisions; and can motivate us to overcome challenges.*





1 IN 3

*adolescents 13-18 will experience an anxiety disorder*

According to the National Institute of Health, since 2007, anxiety disorders have increased by 20% .

The rate of hospital admissions for suicidal teens has doubled over the past decade.





# APPROPRIATE ANXIETY

- Teen is anxious the night before a test...but the anxiety dissipates once the test is over.
- Teen is self-conscious about public speaking or social interactions ...but still spends time with friends and completes school assignments.
- Teen worries about health of loved ones after a family member is ill ...but is able to get their mind off of it and focus on other things.

# RED FLAGS

- ...and continues to obsess about grades, compulsively checks Schoology, and loses sleep over academics.
- ...and ends up missing school on presentation days & avoids gatherings with friends.
- ...and can't stop worrying about health, frequently Googles symptoms, and has many physical health complaints despite a clean bill of health.



# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

HOW PERSISTENT ARE THE SYMPTOMS  
(HOW LONG HAVE THEY BEEN AROUND?)

HOW MUCH TIME DO THEY TAKE UP?

WHAT IS THE LEVEL OF DISTRESS?

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE SYMPTOMS  
IMPACTING DAILY FUNCTIONING?



# CLINICAL ANXIETY DISORDERS

GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER

PANIC DISORDER

SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER

\*OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE DISORDER

ADJUSTMENT DISORDER WITH ANXIETY

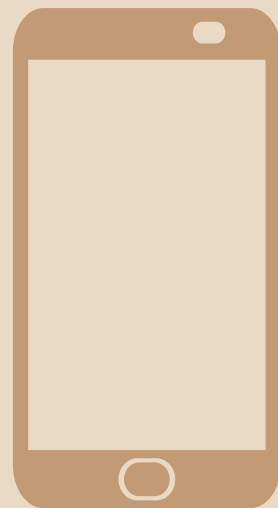


# WHY DO TODAY'S TEENS HAVE MORE ANXIETY?

World Events



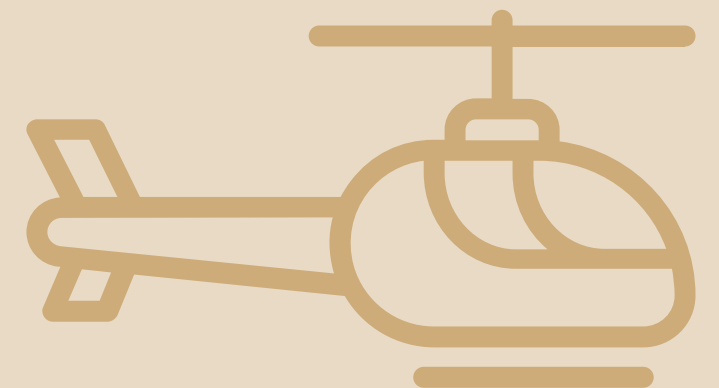
Social Media &  
Smartphones



High pressure to  
succeed



Parenting  
trends





# WORLD EVENTS



- COVID-19 pandemic
- Racial injustice
- Political unrest
- Shootings & violence on news

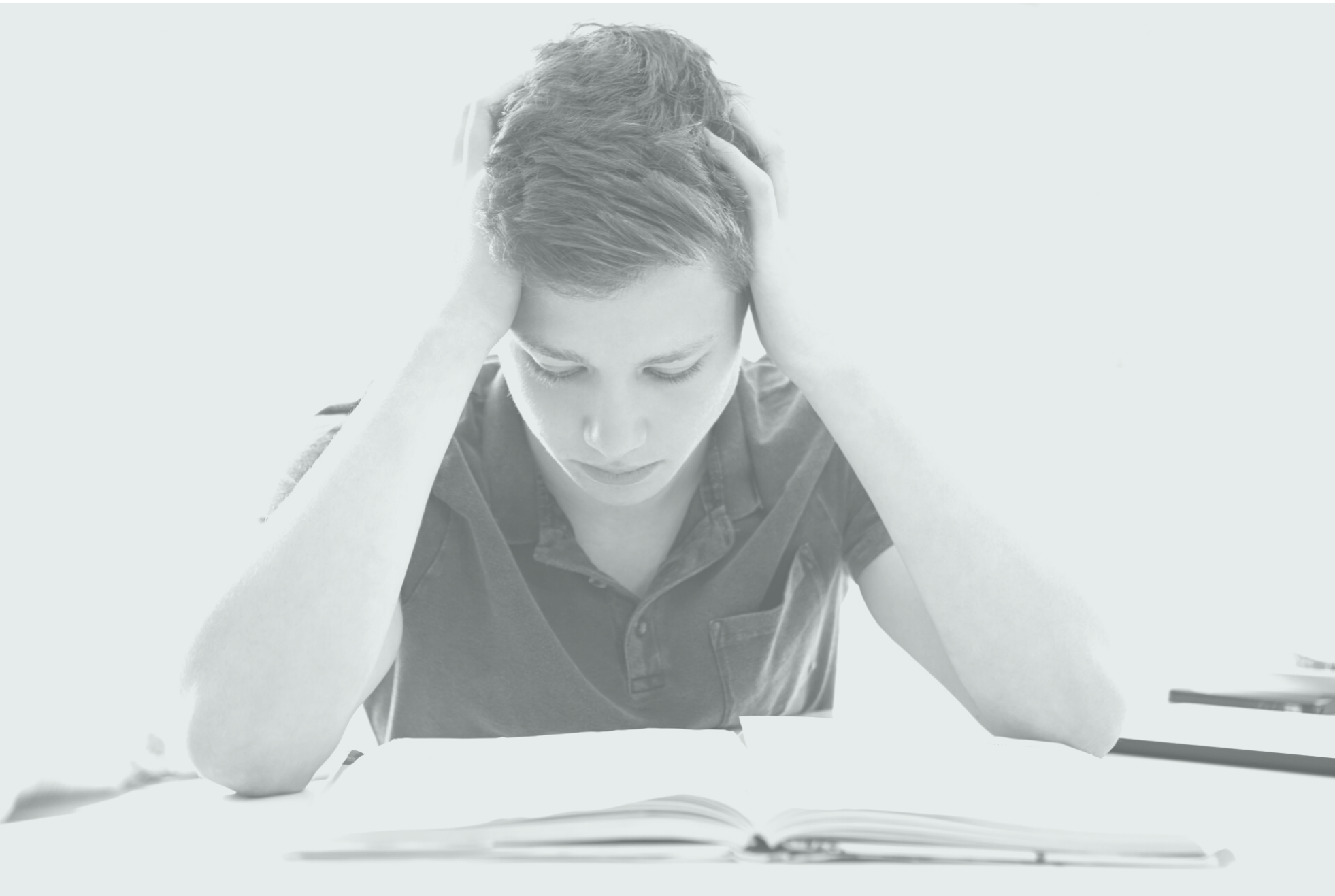
# SOCIAL MEDIA



- Multiple worlds to navigate (in-person & online)
- Cyber-bullying
- Increased comparison
- Less sleep



# HIGH PRESSURE TO SUCCEED



- Rigorous standardized testing
- Culture of achievement
- Comparison on social media (i.e. college acceptance posts, etc.)



# PARENTING TRENDS

A black and white photograph of a roller coaster track against a cloudy sky. A large, white, rounded rectangular sign is superimposed over the track, containing the text 'Helicopter Parenting' in a bold, sans-serif font. The sign is positioned in the center of the frame, with the roller coaster track visible behind it and the sky in the background.

## Helicopter Parenting

### **Good Intentions:**

- We want our kids to succeed.
- We want to support our kids so that they can be successful humans and students.
- We love our kids and our efforts to be involved are well-meaning.

### **Unintended consequences:**

- Our kids struggle to problem-solve on their own.
- Kids miss out on developmentally appropriate challenges that could help build resiliency.
- Kids are less independent & the adolescent phase extends into 20's.
- Kids experience more social anxiety.

# HOW PARENTS CAN SUPPORT THEIR TEENS WITH ANXIETY

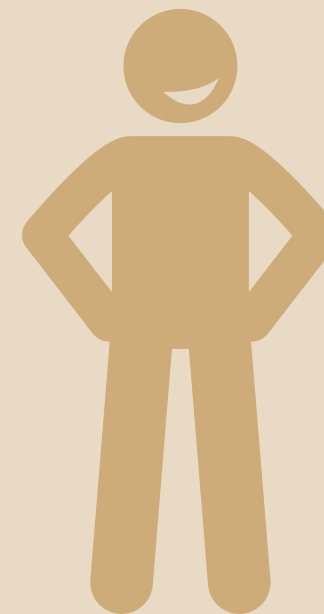
Locus of  
control activity



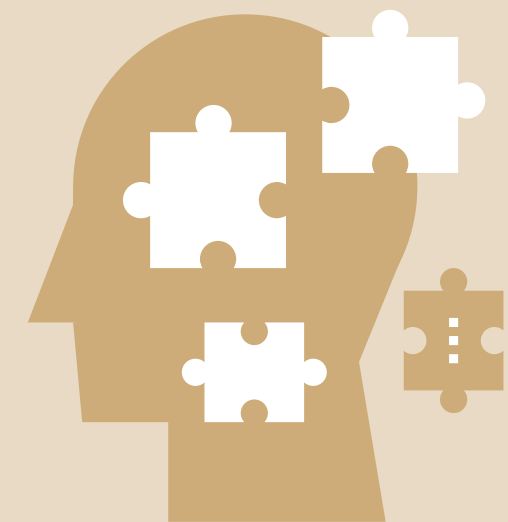
Increase  
tolerance of  
uncertainty



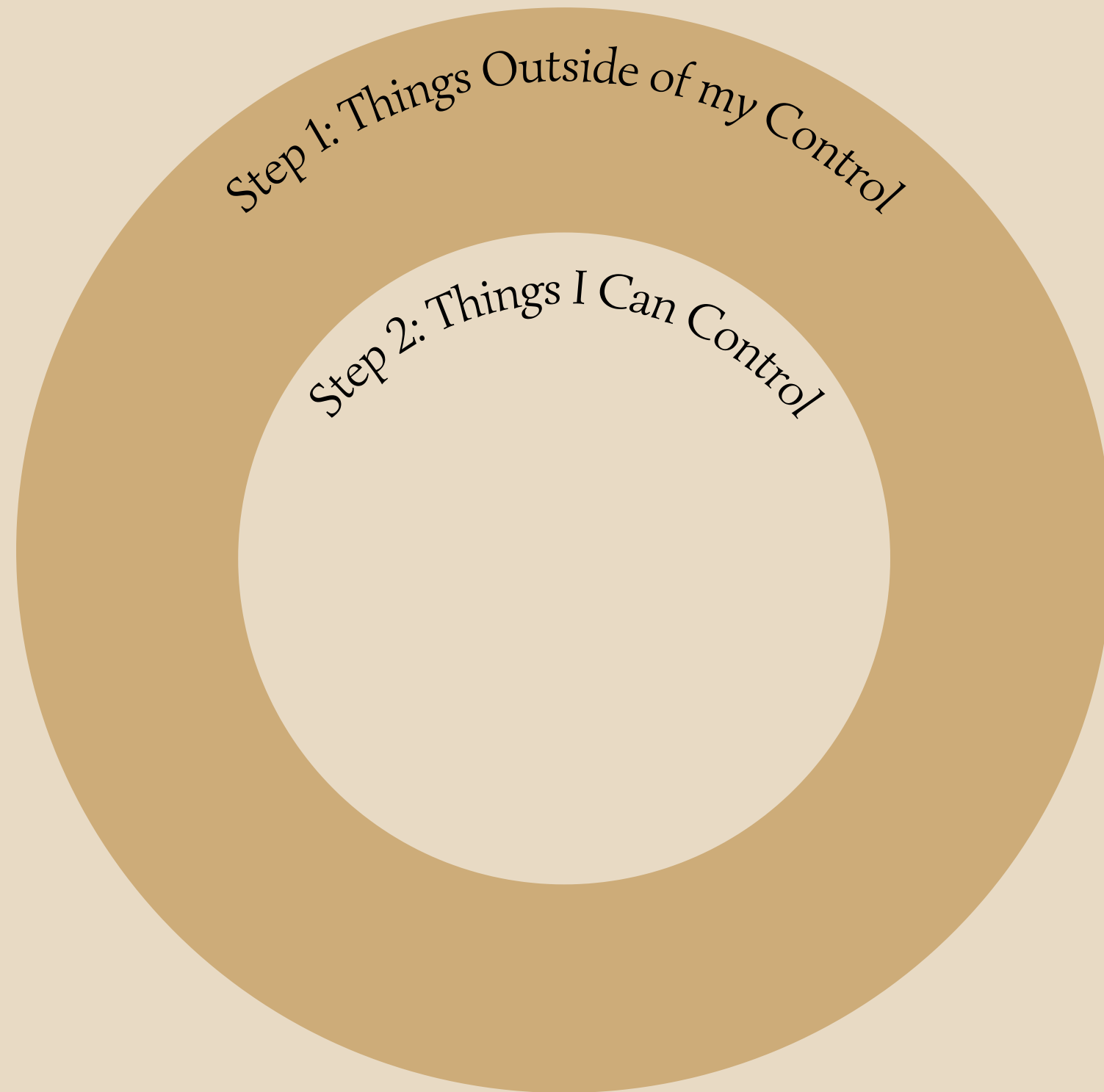
Approach vs.  
Avoidance



Foster  
independence &  
problem-solving



# LOCUS OF CONTROL



Step 3: Coping Strategies for Things I Can't Control





# THREE DOMAINS OF COPING STRATEGIES

## 1. Calming the Body

- Physical activity/exercise
- Breathing exercises
- Grounding through the senses

## 2. Calming the Mind

- Listening to music
- Spending time with friends/family  
(virtually or in person)
- Doing an enjoyable activity

## 3. Meaning, Purpose, & Sense of Future\*

- Countdown apps on phone for fun events
- Vision board with plans for the future (vacation, etc.)
- Linking current activities to future goals

# TOLERANCE OF UNCERTAINTY

There is a misconception that we have to convince ourselves that nothing bad will happen in order to reduce anxiety.

The opposite is true: the more that we can tolerate uncertainty and accept the reality that life always involves risks,  
**the less anxious we start to feel.**

The key is teaching our kids (and ourselves!) that  
**we can handle whatever challenges come our way.**



# TOLERANCE OF UNCERTAINTY

## AFFIRMATIONS FOR ANXIETY & UNCERTAINTY

I can take things  
one day, hour,  
& minute  
at a time.

I can focus on  
what is going right  
today & cope with  
tomorrow when  
it arrives.

Uncertainty can  
bring positive  
outcomes, too.

I trust in my ability  
to take the next  
right step when  
facing challenges.

I have done hard  
things before & I  
can do them again.

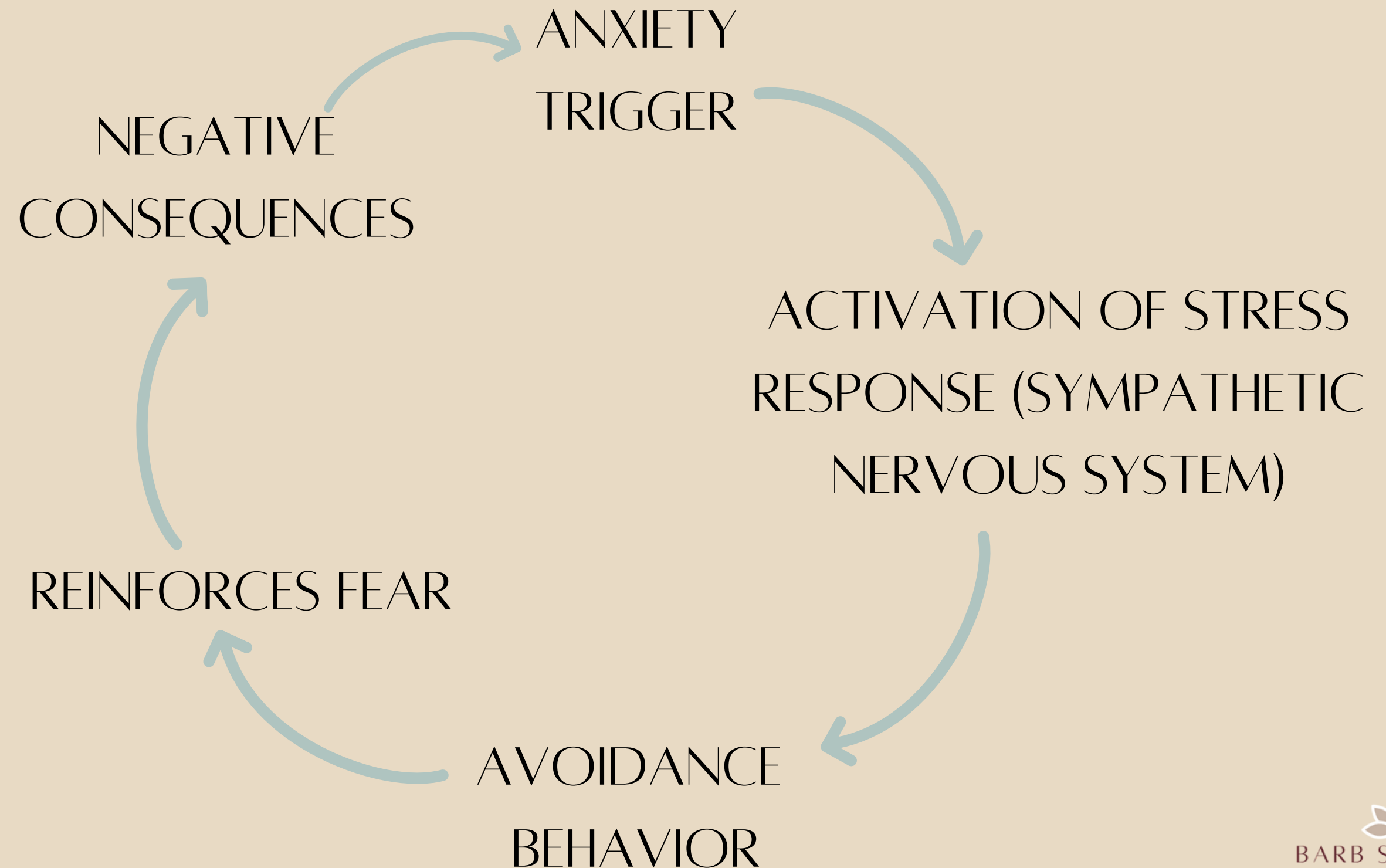
I have supportive  
people in my life to  
help me with  
challenges.





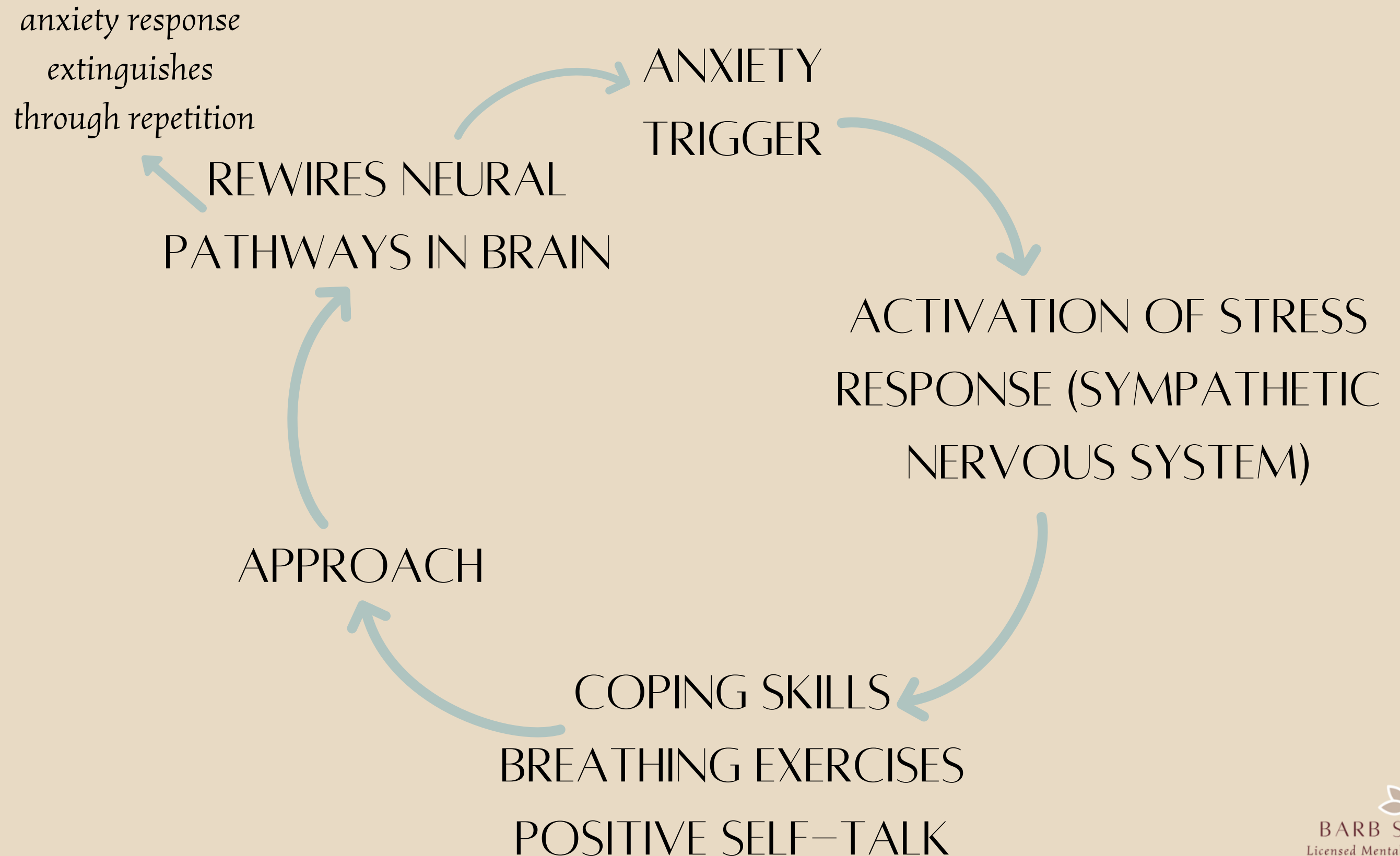
# APPROACH VS. AVOIDANCE

Avoidance of fears strengthens the **anxiety feedback loop**.



# APPROACH VS. AVOIDANCE

Progressively facing fears within working zone/window of tolerance leads to **increased confidence and decreased anxiety.**



# INDEPENDENCE & PROBLEM-SOLVING

There is emerging research about the extension of the adolescent years; Columbia University psychiatry has referred to "25 as the new 18."

Kids become confident and self-sufficient adults when they have ample opportunities to problem-solve and work through challenges.

We can support our teens with this learning curve by providing guidance, a listening ear, and ideas about how to navigate problems - while also putting them in the driver's seat to take action.

Failure breeds learning. It is okay (and encouraged) for our kids to struggle when working toward their goals!



# HOW CAN THERAPY HELP TEENS WITH ANXIETY?





# Therapy for Anxiety

## Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

- Identify anxiety triggers
- Dispute unhelpful thoughts patterns & irrational thoughts
- Gain control over thoughts & emotions

## Mindfulness Training & Coping Skill Education

- Relaxation strategies
- Breathing exercises
- Progressive muscle-relaxation
- Emotional-regulation skill training

## Exposure therapy

- Create exposure hierarchy for feared situations & progressively work toward approaching these situations (paired with coping skill development)

## Holistic Approaches to Overall Health

- Boundaries around screen time
- Mind-body connection
- Time spent in nature
- Self-care



# FINAL THOUGHTS FOR PARENTS

Parenting is the hardest job.

We are going to make mistakes as parents. A lot of them.

You're under a lot of pressure (it's been a REALLY hard year).

We aren't meant to be everything for our kids (it takes a village).

Ask yourself, who else can help support my kids? Teachers, therapist, family friends, neighbors, grandparents.

Give yourself permission to tag out and **take care of yourself** when you need to.

Therapy is for parents too!



# RESOURCES

## **Connecting with a therapist:**

Psychologytoday.com

Referral from school counselor or pediatrician

## **Books:**

*The Anxiety & Phobia Workbook (7th Ed.)* by Edmund Bourne, PhD

*Don't Panic: Taking Control of Anxiety Attacks (3rd Ed.)* by Reid Wilson, PhD

*Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Made Simple: 10 Strategies for Managing Anxiety, Depression, Anger, Panic, & Worry*, by Seth Gillihan, PhD

## **Questions? Reach out!**

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# REFERENCES

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