

# SPACE Treatment Approach

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# What is SPACE Treatment?

## Supportive Parenting for Anxious Childhood Emotions



- Evidence based treatment developed by Eli Lebowitz, Ph.D.
- As effective as **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy** (gold standard for child anxiety treatment) (Lebowitz et al., 2019)
- A **PARENT** based treatment meant to treat Anxiety, OCD, ARFID, and Failure to Launch (FTL)
  - Parents are the ones that go to sessions
  - Focuses on changing the way parents respond to their child's anxiety
  - Child does not have to be a willing participant
  - No demands placed on the child to do something (w/ exception of FTL)



**Dr. Eli Lebowitz**  
**Yale Child Study**  
**Center**

# What is the theory behind SPACE?



- SPACE is based on the theory that **child anxiety** is an **interpersonal event** between the child and the parent

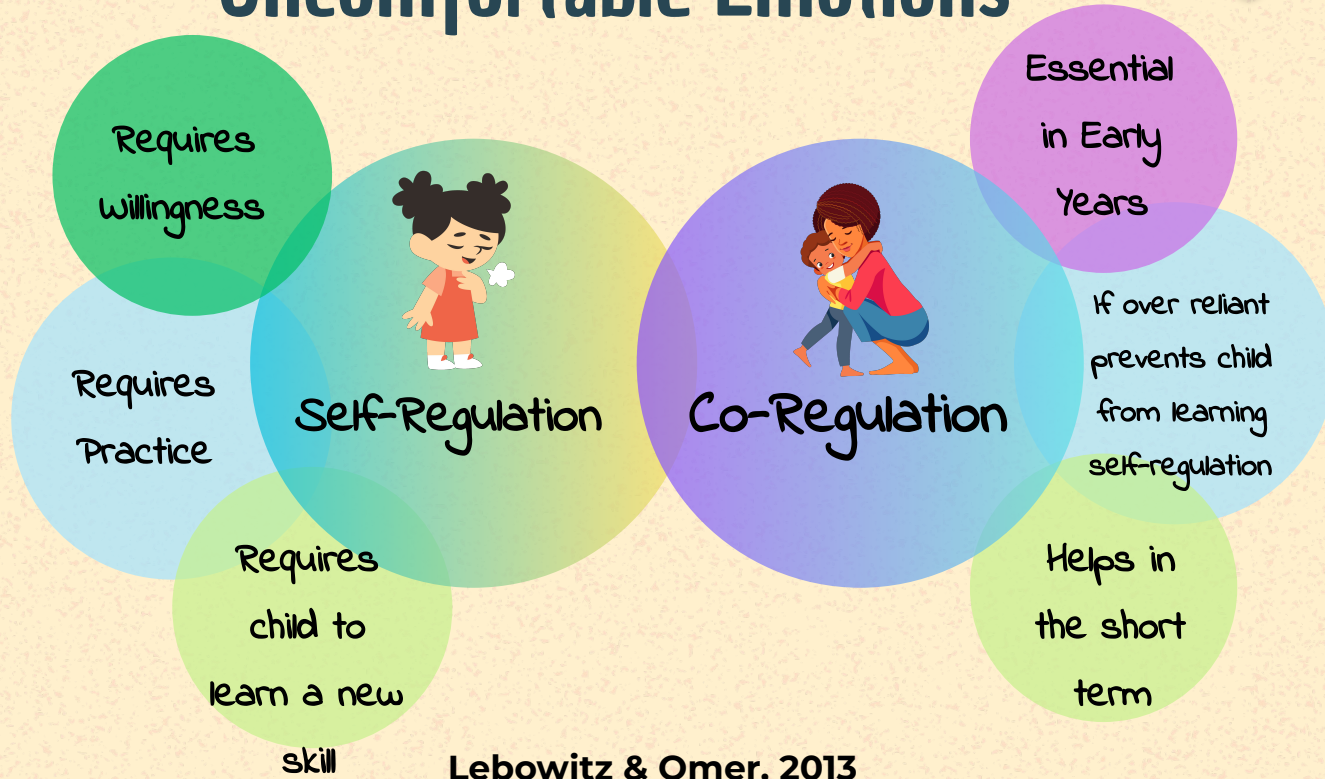
Children are hardwired to signal to caregivers their need for parents to step in when they are distressed



Parents are hardwired to respond and detect fear and distress cues in children, as well as provide regulation and soothing



# Two ways Kids Cope with Uncomfortable Emotions



Lebowitz & Omer, 2013

# What is the Relationship between Anxiety and Self-Regulation?



## Pediatric Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety

Self-Regulation

## 2e and Neurodivergent Children

Anxiety

Self-Regulation

5-10%  
PEDIATRIC POP

40%  
AUTISM POP

29-15%  
LEARNING  
DISABILITY POP

25-50%  
ADHD POP

(Lebowitz, 2021)

(Kerns et al. 2015;  
León-Barriera et al., 2023;  
van Steensel et al. 2011;  
Understood.org, 2024)

Hannesdottir & Ollendick, 2007;  
Keating et. al, 2023; Lebowitz &  
Omer, 2013

## Family Accommodation

Parent orders for child because they can't developmentally or due to stranger anxiety which is normal and protective.



## Self-Regulate

Child may feel nervous but uses strategies to order their own food at a restaurant



Maturing leads to child ordering for self

## Anxious Child

## Family Accommodation

Parent orders or speaks for child



Maturing alone doesn't lead to Self-regulation

## Family Accommodation

Parent orders for child what to eat despite child's ability because child feels too anxious, distressed, or because it is expected. Earlier in childhood it was adaptive but now preventing child from being independent



# Aims of SPACE



= Help children get better at handling ANY anxiety or distress (**FOCUS on FEELING**)

1

We can't get rid of fear nor do we want to

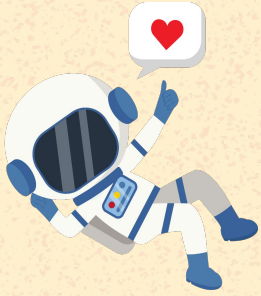


DANGER

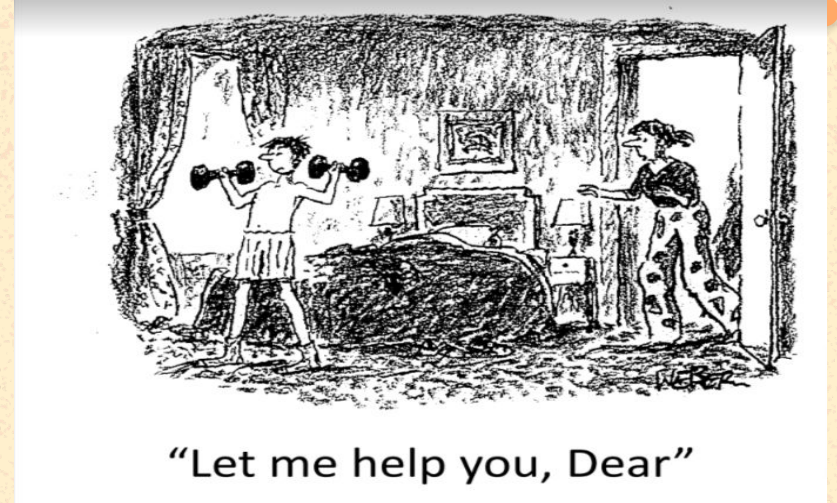
2

We can't control thoughts and feelings, so anxious thoughts and desires to have things a certain way will continue

# Two Main Goals of SPACE



Increase  
Support



“Let me help you, Dear”



Decrease  
Accommodations



# SUPPORTIVE STATEMENTS



ACCEPTANCE AND  
VALIDATION



CONFIDENCE = SUPPORT

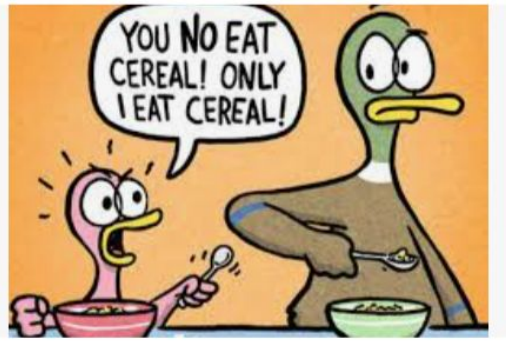
OF THE UNCOMFORTABLE FEELING

THEY CAN HANDLE THE  
FEELING

"I know it's hard when you have to order for yourself, but I believe you can get through it!"

# Family Accommodations

Anything a parent **says or does** or **doesn't say or doesn't do** to prevent or stop uncomfortable feelings in their child associated with anxiety!



Parent might not eat cereal in front of the child

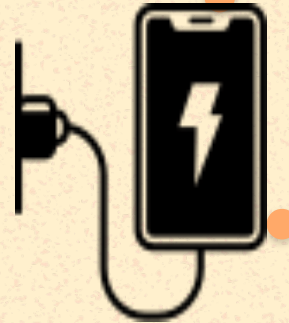


Sarcastic Mommy  
@sarcasticmommy4



I don't care how many degrees you have, nothing prepares you for a teen who finds their phone didn't charge overnight.

Parent might charge the phone for the child



# Parallel Process

2. Get parents to help  
take away feeling

1. Uncomfortable  
feeling or  
thought

!HELP!  
ME!



4. Maintain anxiety

3. Avoid the feeling  
or thought



1. Parent having  
uncomfortable  
feeling or  
thought

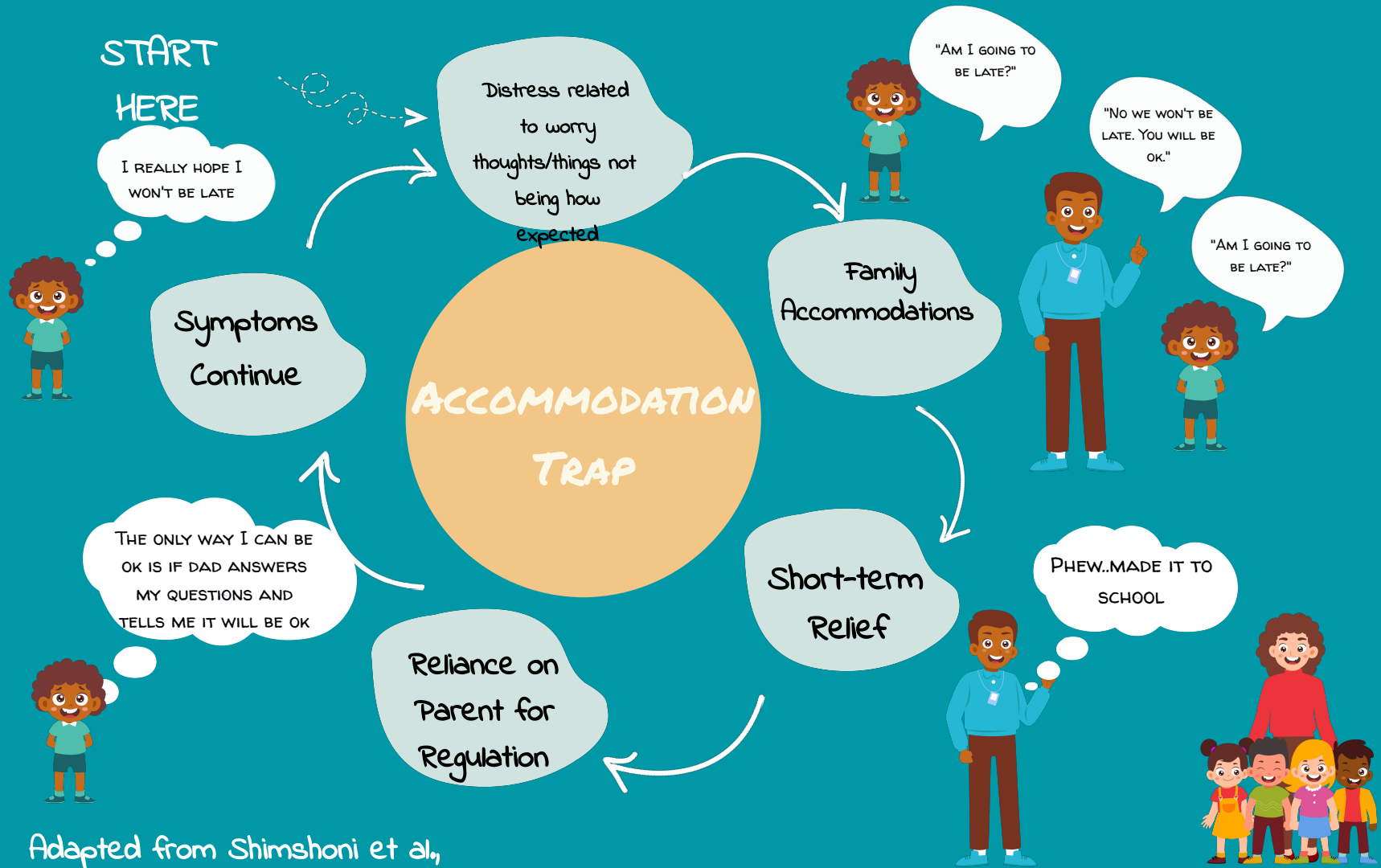
I Am Here!



4. Maintain  
accommodation

3. Avoid the  
dysregulation for  
me and my child

2. I will help take  
away the feeling



# Are all Accommodations Unhelpful?



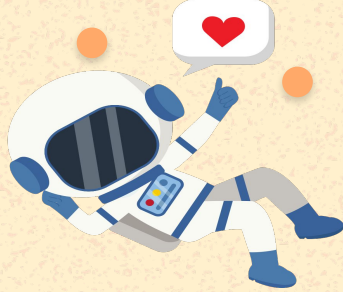
# NOPE

- When it is meant to avoid more and to cope less=**Unhelpful**
- Reinforces your child's belief that they can't cope with anxiety or avoid situations that are likely to trigger it
- No path toward independence

**Your child wants you to reassure them several times a day they won't be late**

**Helpful:** You respond one time each day about the time and provide your child access to a watch.

**Unhelpful:** You respond every time your child asks the question and reassure them they won't be late.



# Who Should Consider SPACE?

- Parents **who are** providing any family accommodations to help their child cope with anxiety
- Children who are unwilling to participate in individual therapy
- Haven't seen individual therapy make much progress?
  - Reducing Family Accommodations
    - Shows to impact success of traditional treatments
    - Gains in non targeted areas

# Other Considerations?



- Working with a provider that is neurodivergent informed and experienced
- SPACE should have adaptations and modifications made to be more neuro-affirming
- Can be used for Insistence on Sameness/Tolerance of Uncertainty
  - Research study at Stanford
  - Autistic, 6-10 year olds  
([spacestudy@stanford.edu](mailto:spacestudy@stanford.edu))





# Things To Do and Not Do



1. **EDUCATE YOURSELF:** Learn More about SPACE and see if it is something your family wants to pursue.
2. **TRY OUT SUPPORTIVE STATEMENTS:** Using statements that have both validation and confidence in the face of distress are helpful even if you still accommodate according to Dr. Lebowitz.
3. **DO NOT START REMOVING ACCOMMODATIONS:** One of the biggest errors is removing accommodations without having the proper supports and pieces in place.
4. **MODEL:** Model using supportive statements on yourself to your child. State when you feel anxious and how you manage that feeling.
5. **GET TRAINING:** Find a provider to help you learn the SPACE techniques. You can do it in about 12 weeks.

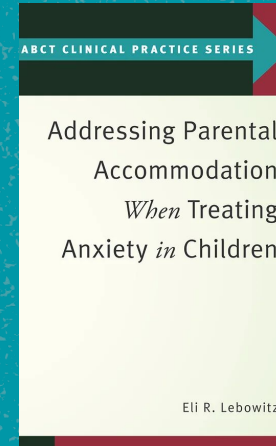
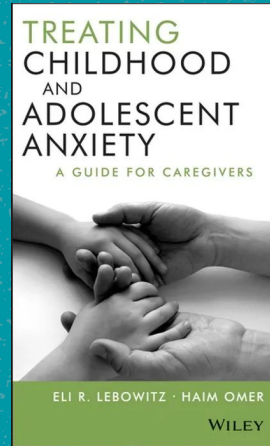
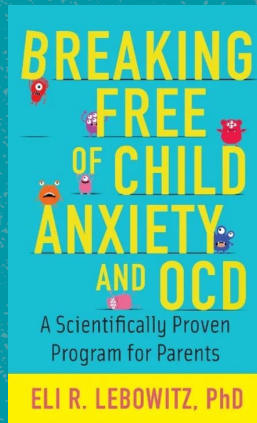


# Resources for SPACE

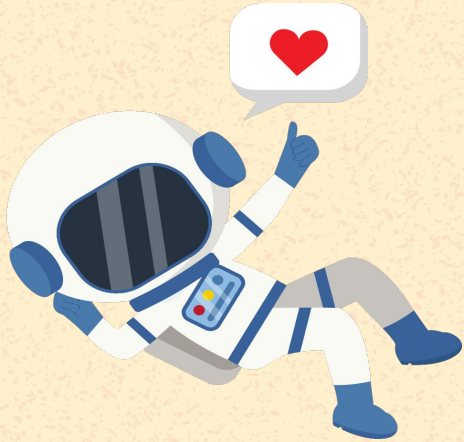
Website: <https://www.spacetreatment.net/>

TED Talk: <https://youtu.be/ExVvAn9hcjY>

Books:



# THANKS!



CONTACT INFO:

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