

# MARC'S SENSORY OASIS

*Sensory-based Occupational Therapy*

[www.otmarclandry.com](http://www.otmarclandry.com)



Anxiety is becoming a major issue with children! It is often manifested as challenges with behaviour and attention.

ANXIETY IN KIDS OFTEN LOOKS LIKE ANGER

CHILDREN ARE PRECIOUS!

Support My Work  
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Workshops that Focus on:

- Brain Differences, Behaviour, & Learning
- Sensory Processing & Self Regulation
- Resilience & Stress Management
- Kindergarten Readiness

And More...

Are you helping to overcome this or embedding it as a life issue?

You can learn more about my valuable workshops at

## [My Workshops](#)

I also welcome your e-mails! Tell me what you like and what you do not like.

Do I need to expand on this newsletter? Did I miss something?

All feedback is welcome!

[marclandryot@gmail.com](mailto:marclandryot@gmail.com)

More and more children are being identified as having anxiety issues, while most anxiety issues continue to be mislabeled and misdiagnosed. In my opinion, most labels of behaviour problems are the result of anxiety and stress (emotional and sensory) that are not recognized or are suppressed. Anxiety can lead to not only interpersonal and educational problems, but lifelong problems with food, drugs, and trauma.

The natural reactions to children's anxiety is to minimize or to shield and protect the child. Minimizing anxiety and telling kids to 'stop worrying' send messages that the worry is wrong, and this often causes the anxiety to go underground and to not be addressed. Shielding children from things that cause anxiety or stress feeds the subconscious notion that avoidance is the way to deal with stress and anxiety.

Please see the **LAST PAGE** for **How is it Going at Your School?** if your end of year experience has been less than nurturing.

## Safe House!

You can help your child to handle anxiety and worry. Your example is very important, so you should model what you want to teach.

Avoiding things that create stress and anxiety may seem like a great way to get through today, especially if you are stressed and stretched too thin. But these are not good strategies for supporting mental health, which clearly requires support right through childhood to adulthood. The best way to deal with anxiety and worry are to defeat them. Yes, they can be DEFEATED. Escaping your fears is not the answer, WALKING right THROUGH your fears IS the answer! This is the part we are not so good at! It's called EXPOSURE, and we need exposure to become brave warriors in life rather than hiding, fearful victims. If your mission is to escape and avoid sources of worry and stress, then you will create a pattern that follows through life. When the main objective is to avoid stress, anxiety, or worry, you will be severely limited, and you will NOT be free! You will learn detailed strategies for avoiding things that are not comfortable, and you will learn to generate ideas, plans, and situations that help you to achieve this goal. Often, these priorities lead to serious avoidance strategies that include alcohol, drugs, manipulation, dissociation, and other anti-social behaviours and mental health challenges. None of us want this for our children, nor for ourselves. So, we must learn that worry is actually a trigger to thinking about strategies and supports that we should muster to overcome or get through something challenging. Worry and anxiety are reminders that we need to mobilize our brains and our social networks in order to remain competent and in control. This should trigger us to think and

strategize, not to avoid. In order to mobilize and conquer the situation, we need to muster the wherewithal to face the negative thing. Once we can look the enemy in the eye, we can walk past it and get right through it. Often, the initial EXPOSURE can involve stories, pictures, and YouTube videos. Dr. Philip C. Kendall of Temple University says that in dealing with anxiety, his exposure therapy most often starts with YouTube videos, citing the example of a child having blood drawn. When I checked this, I found at least 5 videos of kids getting blood drawn, and I could see how watching these would be helpful, followed by visiting a lab, watching someone else, and finally, going through it. Dr. Kendall talks about how he goes about this in his Coping Cat workbook, available on Amazon or Odin Books. Starting with the video exposure, or even the story, follow up by discussing the child's bodily reactions, praising the fact that you "got through it" courageously, in fact. When a child feels some degree of mastery, the positive neurotransmitters can be mustered on subsequent exposures, making the child feel more strong and competent. Sometimes, adults can fabricate the scenario, sometimes not. There will also be times when there is an exposure, and it does not go well. This causes most adults to back down and give up, strengthening avoidance, anxiety, worry, OCD, and more. When it goes bad, you need to (not rescue) let it run its course and help the child see that this was not the end of the world, and the child survived just fine.

In ACTION, worry out loud; state your worry, sort through a couple alternatives, and choose one to try. Discuss (later) how it went and feel proud, or announce that next time you will try something different.

Help kids to give life to their worries. Ask them to draw a picture of what they are worried about. In separate boxes, include what they think might happen, what they would like to happen.

Start a worry bank for worries that are not immediate. Write down what you are worried about, and put it in a box, basket or can that you decorate for this purpose. After dinner, pull out the worry box and pick a couple to talk about. Decide if it is still a concern, if it is worth worrying about, then worry, along with ideas and action plans, then put it aside. This makes it concrete that worrying is OK, but can be limited in terms of when and how much. When something is resolved or not worth worrying about, throw it away. And celebrate when a strategy was tried and worked!

Make a list or chart of worry options. When I am worried, I can... run, jump, climb, read a book, find quiet time, talk to my mom/dad/friend, draw a picture of it, write about it, put it in the worry bank, make a plan, list possible solutions, breathe deeply, do HeartMath, have a chocolate, engage in my favourite activity, have a fidget, dig a hole, play in sand, use positive self talk, make a list of things I am good at, play with a pet, throw rocks into a pond, break sticks, take a quiet walk in the woods, etc. etc.



I've used this technique with fear of dogs, bees, bugs. I've used this myself with social fears and anxieties. Whenever one is exposed to something and holds it together, one feels stronger and more competent. This makes it easier to do the next exposure, and maybe get a little closer to the stimulus or a little deeper into the situation.

You don't get over your fear of people by avoiding them! You can't get over your fear of test taking by never taking a test!

I'm not saying you need to get over every issue that comes along. I don't need to get over all my sensory issues. I can now sit in the same room as someone eating calamari, but that's as much desensitization as I need, it'll never cross my lips and that's OK. But if you say "that's OK" to every avoidance you have, you will become a paralyzed recluse.

So, we need to pick and choose our battles. I am a big believer in the notion that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Pick something that you suspect the child might enjoy once s/he gets used to it, and then follow the principles of exposure and gradual desensitization.

For example, a child might not like touching goopy slimy things, either in hands or in mouth. But rather than avoiding it, let the child see others having fun with it. Then let them touch the goop with a stick, and gradually move forward, praising the courage and strength that you want to see.

Then, let the child hear you brag to others about how brave s/he is, and praise the child for this bravery. Help the child see himself/herself as a brave warrior that overcomes obstacles, starting small and building up.

You can create a sense of empowerment and a willingness to

tackle new things with courage and true grit.

Caring people will tackle this with GREAT patience and love, and build resilience.

From time to time, review the child's accomplishments, even in a basic way. "You used to be afraid to sit on the toilet, and now you are fine." "you used to be afraid to see the dentist and now it is easy for you." "You are so brave." Support confidence, it supports competence. Raise a superhero instead of a worrier!

We need to talk more about our own struggles, rather than hiding them and always showing total confidence. Tell your child that something makes you nervous. Then let him/her see you go through it anyways, and let them see your face as you succeed with something that caused anxiety or stress. You are a powerful model.

## How Stress Affects the Body

**HEAD** – issues with mood, anger, depression, irritability, lack of energy, concentration problems, anxiety and panic attacks

**HEART** – increased blood pressure, fast heart beat, increased risk of heart attack and stroke, and higher cholesterol

**SKIN** – skin problems like acne, psoriasis, eczema, dermatitis, random breakouts, and skin rashes

**STOMACH** – can cause peptic ulcer disease, IBD, IBS, food allergies, stomach cramps, reflux, nausea and weight fluctuations

**PANCREAS** – results in elevated secretions of insulin, which if chronic could lead to diabetes, damaged arteries and obesity

**INTESTINES** – decreased nutrient absorption, reduced metabolism, decreased enzymatic output, increased risk for inflammatory bowel diseases, diabetes, and more

**REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM** – decreased testosterone and estradiol production leading to reduced fertility. Dampening of sexual behavior and loss of sexual drive

**JOINTS & MUSCLES** – aches and pains, inflammation, tension, lowered bone density (propensity for osteoporosis), tightness in the shoulders and back

**IMMUNE SYSTEM** – suppressed effectiveness of the immune system to battle and recover from illness. Leads to high levels of inflammation in the body, which causes a variety of chronic health conditions



# How is it going at YOUR school?

I am a big believer in public education, and I think we need to strive for a system that meets the needs of all learners, and where the needs of ALL learners are paramount. Unfortunately, I do not see this as possible in large districts where funds are allocated and decisions are made by people who provide the funding and people who allocate limited funding. I see more and more districts pushing back because of limited funding. Children are denied support, technology, and special services and I do not see this getting better with the new BC curriculum. I believe it will be several generations before the federal government steps in and puts laws and regulations in place that support first world education, which is not currently available for most learners. Staying in a broken system will not bring change, only strong advocacy and lawsuits will. Staying in a broken educational system has damaged families, created trauma for children, their parents, their siblings, and all who love them. It also seems to have turned some school districts into monsters, fighting for their own salaries and departments by taking educational dollars from the learners who need them. Even best practice districts are now trying to do everything they can to protect their systems and resist change. Yes, I am skeptical, but I believe there is hope for the future. Change will be more likely as more people abandon the public system and it becomes common knowledge that the system is broken.

The KLEOS distributed learning program has openings for September, especially for learners between grades 4 & 12. With this program, a teacher is assigned to you and helps you to develop an educational plan. They also provide educational assistants, and support services such as speech and language therapy and occupational therapy.

This type of program is great for parents who feel the need to withdraw from the public system, but do not want the full responsibility of planning and implementing a curriculum and developing program materials. They are, however, flexible, and will allow you to be as active and engaged in the educational process as you can, in a way that supports you and your family.

You might also choose to develop some social development and physical development goals that get your child out into the community to participate in activities such as riding, gymnastics, etc. When these support IEP goals, they can often be funded with educational funding, within restrictions imposed by the Province, which still feels the need to protect parents from making poor choices.

Kleos office number is  
778-484-5554.

Website is <http://www.kleos.ca/>

Email inquiries can be sent to  
[admissions@kleos.ca](mailto:admissions@kleos.ca)



I have also discovered that many private religious schools embrace all learners as perfect beings with a lot to offer their communities. The private school that has most impressed and inspired me is Cloverdale Catholic School.

(<http://www.ccsunited.ca/>) While it goes against my grain to make this type of recommendation, this school has done an amazing job with some children that would be greatly challenged in a large public system. Sometimes, the needs of the individual are very important, even to the religion skeptic. This nurturing community is inspiring.

**NEXT Newsletter!!**

**How to Support  
Resilience through  
Sensory Play!**