



# **A GUIDE TO HELPING CHILDREN MANAGE ANGER (AGES 3-12)**

**Presented by Military & Family Life Counselors**

# OBJECTIVES

- Overview of Topic
- Defining Anger
- The Fight or Flight Response
- Stopping the Cycle of Anger
- Recognizing Physical Queues
- Belly Breathing – A Skill Builder
- Describing Emotions
- Teaching “Breathe Down to Cool”
- Practicing “Breathe Down to Cool”
- Helping Children Teach Others



# BACKGROUND

## After school and summer program class management is complicated:

- Lots of personalities, family dynamics, cultures and temperaments in one room
- Culturally, people may express emotions differently than you do
- Plenty of action and activity
- Demands of needy or disruptive children
- It's stressful making sure everyone is safe, ratios are maintained, and keeping activities organized and progressing



# WHAT'S THE STORY ON ANGER?

- Anger is a normal emotion, a response to stressors in our environment
- Angry children are communicating:
  - Lack of skill in managing strong emotions
  - Overwhelming life stressors at home or school
  - They want something and have used anger successfully in the past e.g. want someone to stop bugging me, want that toy, want help but nobody notices...



# ANGER

- Anger is our oldest emotion and helped human beings survive the ages
- Feeling angry is inevitable for children as they develop skills to communicate their thoughts & feelings



# FIGHT OR FLIGHT

The Fight or Flight Response is dependent on continuous messages from the **BRAIN**

The strongest muscle for managing anger. Change or interrupt negative messages and the response will change.



# FIGHT OR FLIGHT

CONTINUED

Hormone receptor sites in the brain and body receive danger signals from brain and flood the body with “RUN!” and “fight the threat!” hormones

- Nutrients rush to major muscle groups to power them up
- The digestive system shuts down
- Heart and lungs work harder and faster
- Pupils dilate
- Brain stops thinking things through



# WHAT CAN I DO?

## Teach even the youngest children anger management skills:

- Children thrive when they live with structure and rules;
- Acting out anger by breaking things, endangering or hurting others breaks the rules.





# THE KEY TO UNLOCKING ANGER...

**Belly Breaths help us...  
Breathe Down to Cool**



# CAN WE STOP ANGER EXPLOSIONS?

When hormones are in full flood there is a point at which it is almost impossible to stop angry explosions...

It is much easier to stop the cycle of anger *before* someone gets out of control!



# WHAT CAN I DO?

- Observe your own anger responses. What happens when you get angry?
- Unless you **first** manage *your* anger or frustration, you will not be able to teach children to manage theirs
- Model good anger management skills and children will take their cues from you.



# WHAT ARE YOUR PHYSICAL CUES?

## Learn to recognize your own and other's physical cues by observing:

- Breathing, is it faster and more shallow than usual?
- Hands and fingers, are they moving rapidly or making fists?
- Eyes, are they darting around?
- Shoulders, are they raising up near the ears?
- Eyes and face, are they scrunching up tight?
- Teeth, are they clenching together?



# BEING SO ANGRY...

- ...that the fight or flight response kicks in can make your brain take a walk...
- ...and not much thinking goes on when the brain is walking out of town...
- BUT! When the hormone flood stops, the brain can begin to work again.
- Thinking and reason will complete breaking the cycle of anger.



# ACTIVITY: BELLY BREATH

- Take in a huge amount of air, your belly button needs to move *away* from your spine and your belly should fill up round and your shoulders should rise up with all that air you are breathing in...
- Hold that breath for 3 – 2 – 1
- Release breath slowly to a 5 count-down while pulling your belly button toward your spine until all the air is gone... and then push out a little more
- This is a Belly Breath, use it to **Breathe Down to Cool!**



# DESCRIBING EMOTIONS

Emotions have been described by talking about color and temperature:

- “I’m feeling blue”
- “She’s so cold to me”
- “I was seeing red”
- “Don’t get hot under the collar”
- “Chill”
- “Cool off, man”



# TEACHING BREATH DOWN TO COOL

- Ask children to draw a picture that looks like they do when they are angry. Are they hot or cold?
- If anger had a color, what color would each person's anger be?
- Have children draw their own faces using their anger colors
- Teach Belly Breaths
- Demonstrate with colleague giving you instructions in front of children (if possible)
- Practice technique two times a day with children





# TEACHING BREATH TO COOL DOWN

When teaching Breathe Down to Cool use language such as...

“We’re \_\_\_\_\_”

- Breathing Down to Blue in 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – cool

or

- Counting Down to Cool 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – cool



# PRACTICE

- Practice when children are not angry
- Single out children by asking them to Breathe Down to Cool, be sure you ask cool headed children and more hot tempered children equally
- Work to help them recognize their own physical cues to anger and Breathe Down on their own, recognize the child when you see her use a Belly Breath to Breathe Down



# USING BREATHE DOWN TO COOL

- Get the angry person's attention – eye to eye
  - Use gentle touch or a slow steady friendly voice
- Take a big breath in while saying  
“Lets Breathe Down now” then “Are you cool?”
- When your lungs are full, hold up one hand and count down 3 – 2 – 1, saying “Hold It”
- Begin to breathe out slowly while you count down from 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – cool...
- Hold eye contact as you move other children away and manage any conflict or source of frustration.
- Model Belly Breath body positions (yes, even though you're talking).



# THE END

...don't forget to help the ones who learn how to **Breathe  
Down to Cool** teach others...

If we listen, see and do we learn, if we teach we remember  
forever.



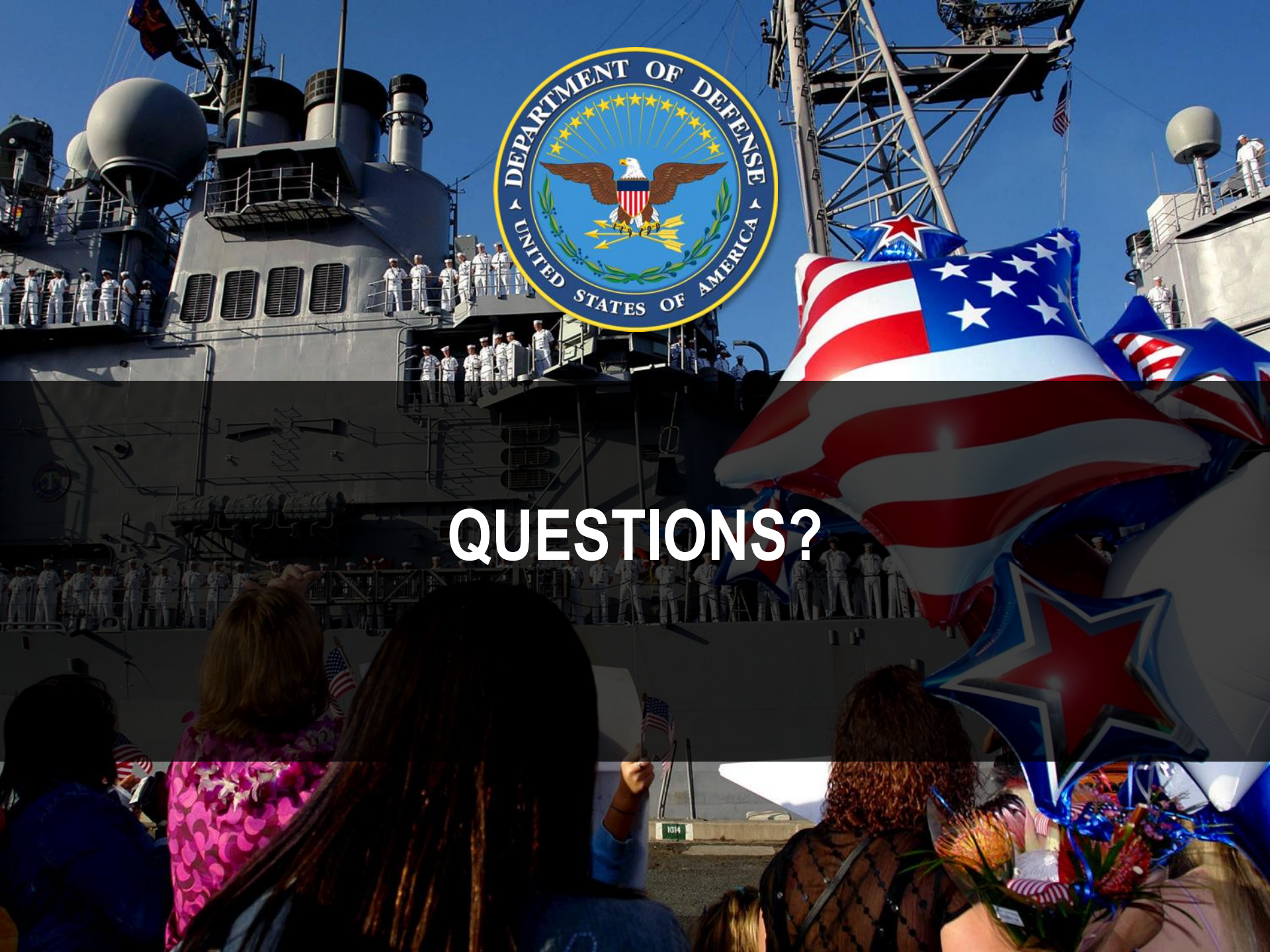
# SUMMARY

- Anger is a normal emotion and a response to stress
- The fight or flight response is dependent on continuous messages from the brain
- Interrupting negative messages to the brain stops the response
- Recognizing our physical queues can help stop the anger cycle
- Belly breathing can calm us down and interrupt the fight or flight response
- Help children practice “breath down to cool” when they are not angry
- Encourage them to teach others





QUESTIONS?





# RESOURCES

- Military Community Services
- Chaplain and Local Clergy
- Military OneSource (800) 342-9647
- TRICARE [www.Tricare.mil](http://www.Tricare.mil)
- Behavioral Health Services





**THANK YOU**

