



# Anxiety at Camp: Staff and Camper Issues

Robbie Berg, MD  
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# Outline

- Anxiety 101
- Preparing for the summer
- Tips for staff working with campers
- Dealing with anxiety at camp (campers and staff)
- Questions

# Anxiety 101



# Anxiety 101

## **Normal anxiety**

- Serves a purpose
- Person can function
- Specific to certain situations
- Typically doesn't radically change behavior

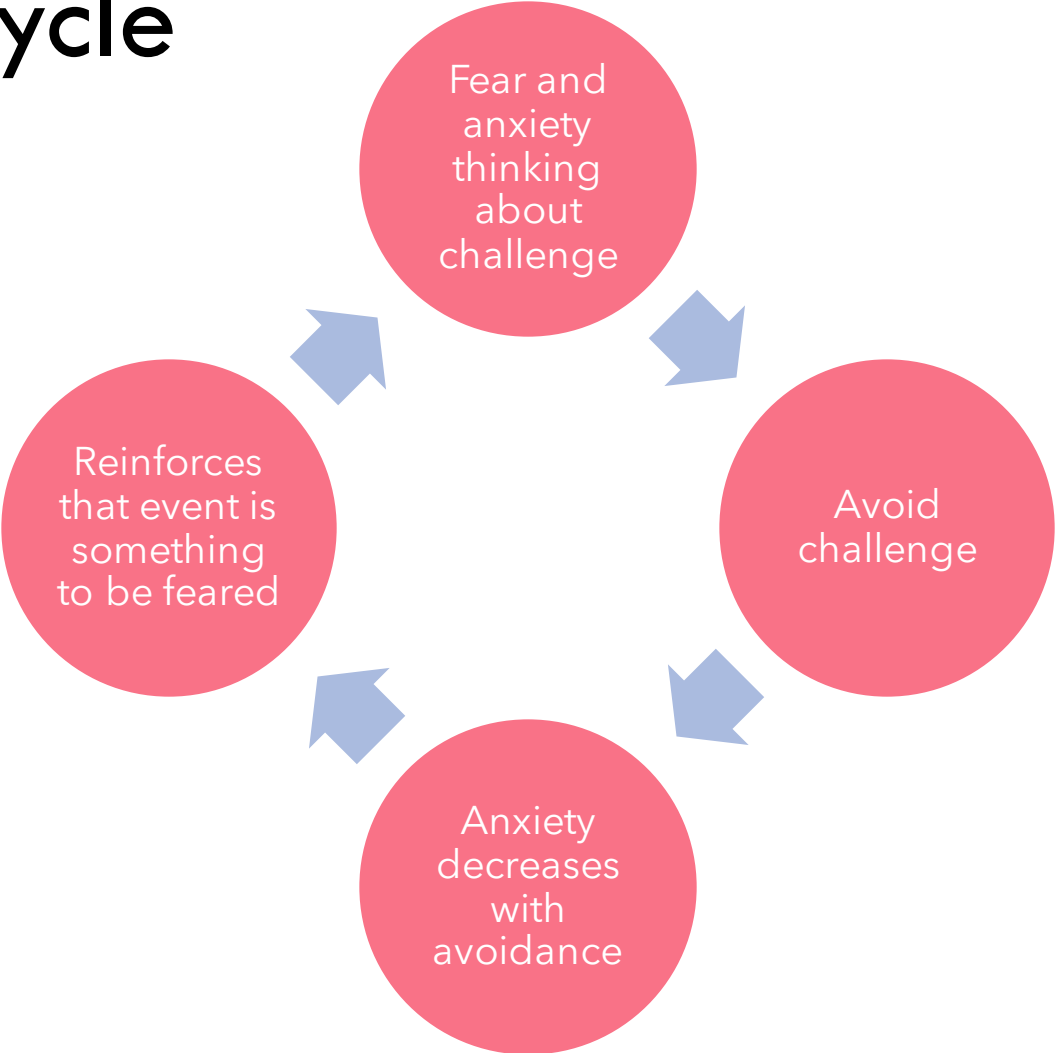
## **Anxiety disorder**

- More than expected
- Unable to function
- May be generalized
- Reinforced avoidant behaviors

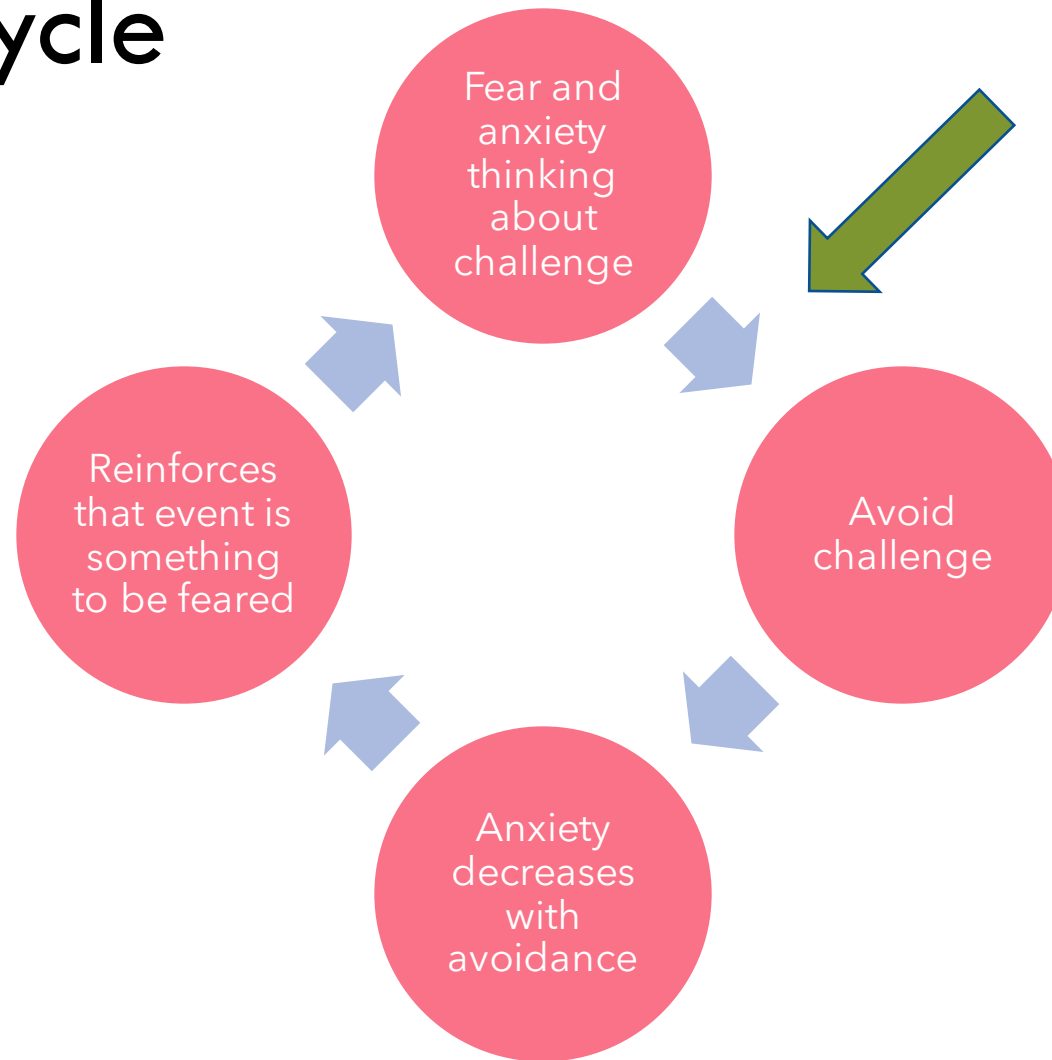
# Anxiety Disorders

- Generalized anxiety disorder - excessive worries / "what if" in multiple domains
- Obsessive compulsive disorder - intrusive thoughts with specific rituals
- Panic disorder - panic attacks (heart racing, difficulty breathing, disabling sense of doom) with fear of future attacks
- Social phobia / social anxiety disorder - significant, disabling anxiety specifically in the realm of social interactions
- Selective mutism - child only speaks in certain settings (usually related to social anxiety)
- Trichitillomania - pulling of hair (usually as a result of anxiety)

# Anxiety Cycle

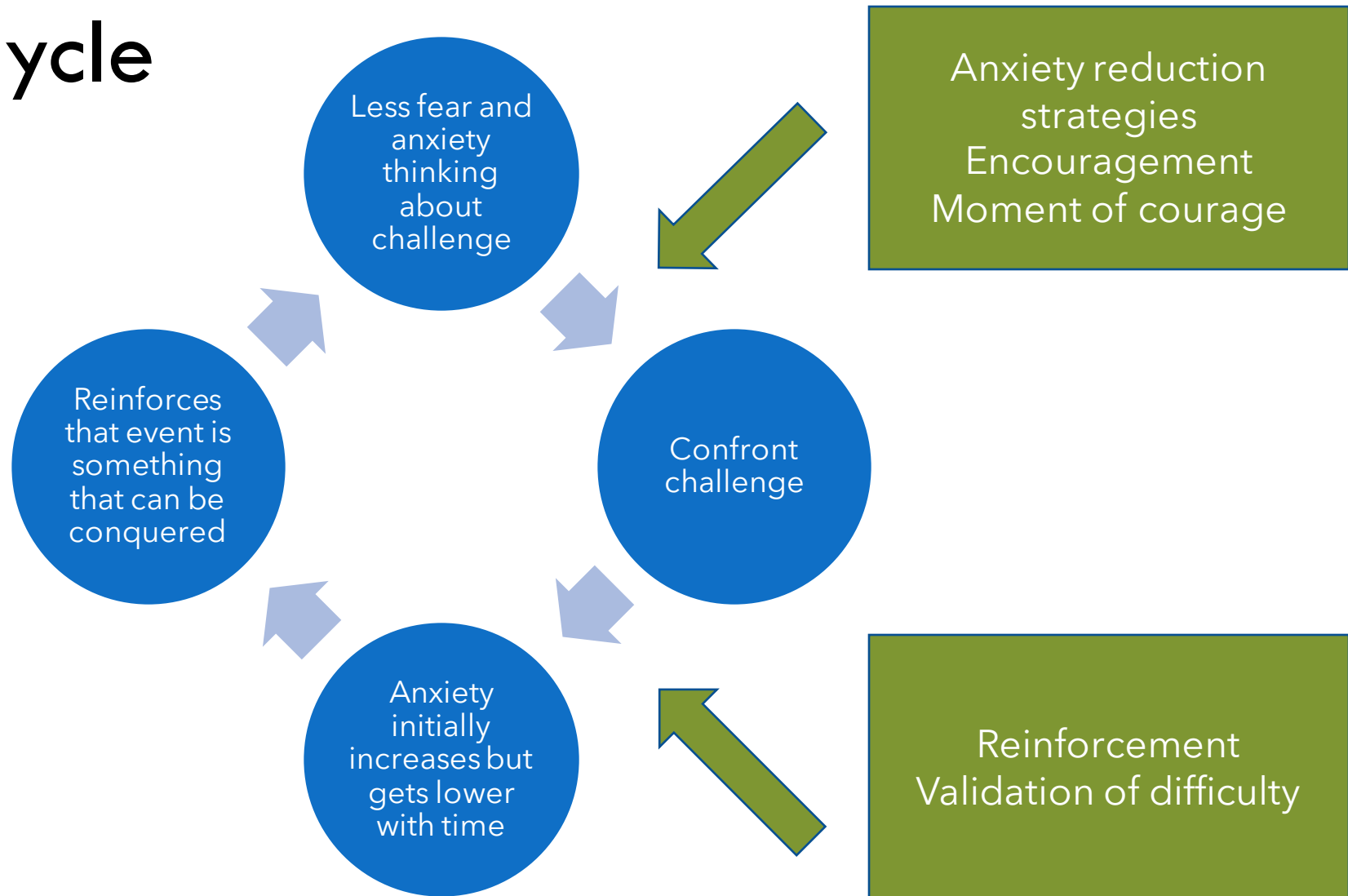


# Anxiety Cycle



Anxiety reduction strategies  
Encouragement  
Moment of courage

# Anxiety Cycle







# Planning for the Summer

# General Planning for All Campers

- FJC resources for MESSH on camper forms!
- <https://jewishcamp.org/foundation-for-jewish-camp-messh-question-bank/>
- Identify strengths, challenge points
- Focus on goals for the summer

# Anxiety Disorder Planning



If a camper has a diagnosed Anxiety disorder, work with the family / therapist / psych provider



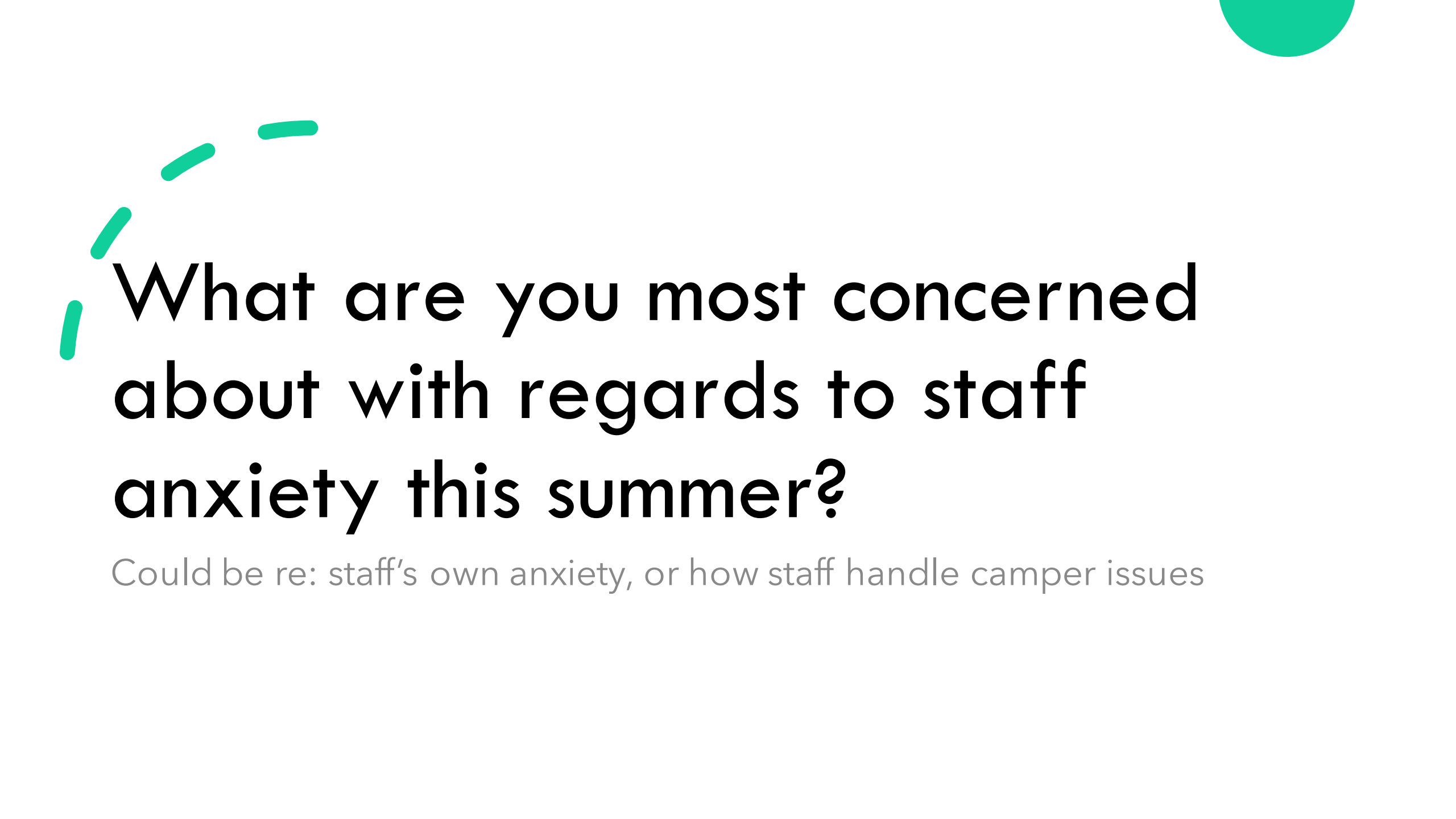
Identify strategies that work at home



Identify triggering situations



Recognize that home vs. camp may look very different (sometimes worse at camp but often much better!)



What are you most concerned about with regards to staff anxiety this summer?

Could be re: staff's own anxiety, or how staff handle camper issues

# Staff Anxiety

- Can modify FJC resource forms
- Cannot ask directly about diagnoses etc.
- Examples of questions you could ask:
  - What strengths do you have for your role?
  - What do think the hardest part of your role will be this summer?
  - What does it look like when you're frustrated?
  - Would you like to speak to a supervisor / medical team member about a space for telehealth visits with a doctor/therapist during the summer?

# General Guidelines for Staff

- Important goals:
  - Keep campers safe
  - Promote belonging
  - Role model camp values
  - Have fun!
- Impossible goals:
  - Curing children of disorders
  - Changing ingrained patterns of behavior
  - Altering personality traits

# Helping Staff Help Campers

## **Staff feels unprepared**

- Comes to leadership / camper care with every small problem
- Reinforces that the counselors don't have skills to help
- Overtaxes the camper care team

## **Staff feels overconfident**

- Young staff may overshare/overstep boundaries
- More serious issues go unreported
- Staff are exhausted by dealing with too many issues

# What Can/Can't Staff Handle?

## **You Got This!**

- Nervousness about activities
- Concerns about social interactions
- Occasionally missing a meal
- Concerns of teasing / bullying

## **Get Some Help!**

- Persistent refusal of activities
- Inability to engage in any social situation
- Consistently missing meals
- Disclosure of abuse



# Staff Training

- Interesting vs. Interested exercise
  - Pair up; one partner is “interested” and one is “interesting”
  - The interested partner can only ask questions about the interesting one and cannot talk about themselves.
  - After 3 minutes, try switching.
  - Debrief: what was difficult about this? Was it hard to not talk about yourself? Was it hard to not
- Generally – staff is interested, campers are interesting
  - Goal: 80%-20% in conversations



# Anxiety Management

Tips for the moments of stress!

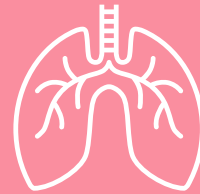
# Anxiety Management – Cool Off



Temperature  
Down



Intense  
Exercise



Paced  
Breathing



Paired  
Muscle  
Relaxation

# Anxiety Management – Grounding

5

Things you can see

4

Things you can hear

3

Things you can feel

2

Things you can smell

1

Thing you can taste

# Anxiety Management – Environment

- Often beneficial for campers to cool down in a quieter space
- Consider physical symptoms:
  - Hungry?
  - Tired?
  - Dehydrated?
  - Camp crud?

# Anxiety Management – Panic Attacks

- Maintain safe environment
- Distance other people
- Reinforce that this will pass
- Deep breaths
- Grounding exercise
- Cold water

# Wellness for Camp Staff



Joyous activity



Eat enough



Move your body



Prioritize sleep

# Tips for Talking About Anxiety

- Try NOT to minimize the fear (“It’s not so bad! This isn’t a big deal!” etc.)
- Validate the challenge (“You’re right – this is scary! We can get through this together.”)
- Set time limits for anxiety (“Let’s feel our feelings for five minutes and then rejoin the group!”)
  - Each successive event the time limit can decrease
- Reward hard work (“Wow, that was really tough, and you made it through!”)



# Final Thoughts

- Anxiety is normal and common!
- Camp is a perfect place to conquer fears
- Camp is not a place to cure Anxiety disorders
- Staff and Campers with Anxiety disorders **can have a wonderful time at camp**