

# Fight, flight and freeze

The fight/flight response is how our brains and bodies respond to threat. It's our inbuilt 'survival mechanism' that is important for keeping us safe.

## What happens in our body?

There is a part of our brain called the amygdala. One of the jobs of the amygdala is to look out for danger. When it perceives danger, it triggers the fight/flight/freeze response. This response is what prepares your body to fight, run away (flight) or freeze on the spot.

When this response is triggered, we can feel it in our bodies. Our muscles may feel tense and tight. Our heart may beat faster and our breathing may quicken. We may sweat, get a funny feeling in our tummy and we might notice that we find it hard to think. These feelings are all happening because our body is preparing for fight or flight.

**Fight**



**Flight**



**Freeze**

This response would have been really helpful for our ancestors, who may have needed to escape from dangerous animals. Although nowadays we're not likely to be faced with a sabre-tooth tiger, our brain sees threats in other situations and still reacts in the same way. This means we can experience these physical feelings even in situations where fighting or running away wouldn't be very helpful!

## Why does this happen?

## Making sense of body feelings

Bodily feelings and emotions are very much connected. When we feel anxious, we might notice our heart beats faster, our legs feel wobbly and we need to go to the toilet. When we feel angry, we might notice that we feel hot, our fists start to clench and our body feels tense.

The bodily feelings we get when we feel anxious might be frightening or confusing to some children if they do not know why they are happening. Teaching children about the bodily feelings connected with emotions can help them to understand that they are normal and temporary, and hopefully will help them feel less worried.

Understanding the different bodily feelings linked with different emotions can also help children understand their emotions better. Paying attention to what is happening in their body can help them to recognise what emotion they are feeling.

**1**

One way of introducing the idea of bodily feelings is to use the outline of a body to support discussion. You might want to draw or print a body, or have your child lie down on some large paper and draw around them.

Encourage your child to think about what happens in their body when they feel different emotions by asking them questions about what they noticed in different parts of their bodies. Write these things down on the body outline next to the right body part.

**2****3**

To normalise bodily feelings, it can be useful for you to talk about what you feel in your body in different situations in everyday life.

