Understanding Neurodivergents Co-regulation

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- 2004-2008: IUPUI School of Social Work
- 2008: MSW
- 2010: LCSW
- 2008-2018: St. Vincent Stress Center
 - Child outpatient counselor, LIFE counselor, Activity based therapist, parent education counselor, Evening IOP float/dual diagnosis counselor.
- 2016-2017: A Journey Through Coping
 - Private practice owner/therapist
- 2018-2020: Life Enrichment Counseling
 - Private practice therapist
- 2021-2022: Indy Women's Counseling and DBT
- 2023-2025: Co-regulate to Grow
 - Private practice owner/life coach for individuals, parents, and partners
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 - Group practice co-owner/therapist for individuals, families, and parents.

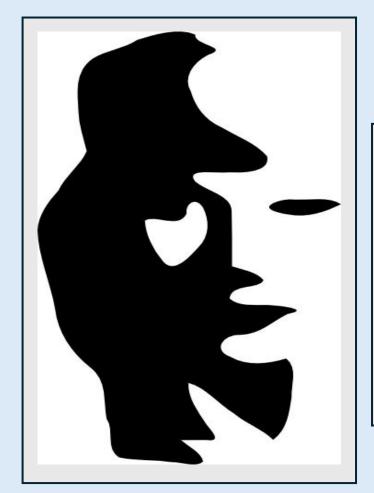
- Where did the information from this presentation come from?
 - Certified continuing education trainings
 - Parent and professional educational trainings
 - Reading books by professionals and those with lived experiences.
 - Following professionals and those with lived experiences on social media.
 - My own professional and lived experiences
 - The insights I have gained learning about neurodivergence from neurodivergents is that many evidence-based practices/treatments are ineffective, harmful, and/or traumatic.

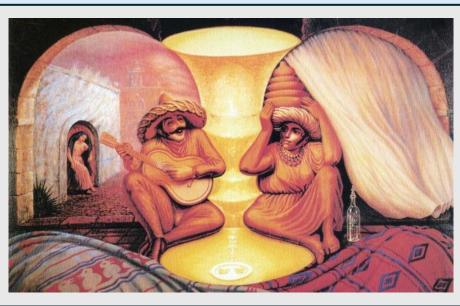
What will be covered in this presentation:

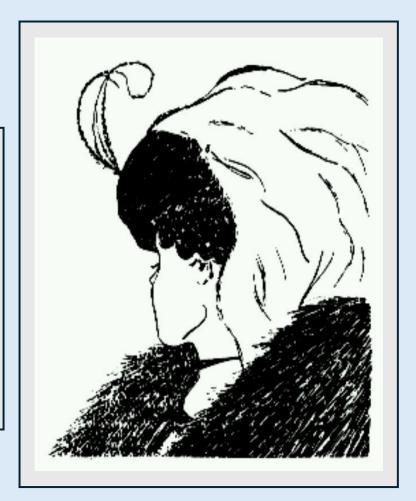
- Neurodiversity
- Discipline based approaches and coregulation
- Dysregulation
- Self-regulation
- Co-regulation
- Accommodations and behavioral management strategies



What do you see?







Neurodiverse World

- We live in a neurodiverse world where everyone's neurotype is unique.
- Even what we tend to call neuronormative brains are unique.
 - These are the brains/behaviors that fall within the normal range on a bell curve for our social construct.
- Neurodiverse neurotypes tend to be viewed as more unique than neuronormative neurotypes.
 - These are the brains/behaviors that fall outside the normal range on the bell curve in either direction for our social construct.
- We all live on a spectrum.
- Lived experiences shape the way we interact with the world.
 - Two people can go through a situation, but the way they are each impacted by the situation can be different.

Neurodiverse World

 Neurodivergence is more of a social construct than a brain development. Understanding neurodiversity is to understand various neurotypes. What is considered neuronormative is decided by the social constructs in which one lives. America is a capitalistic society that needs a certain neurotype to operate and succeed. That neurotype is what America has based it's neuronormative on. Different cultures with different social constructs might have different neurotypes that define their neuronormative.

Neurodivergent Umbrella

- Autism/PDA
 - Pathological Demand Avoidance
- ADHD
 - Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
- PTSD/CPTSD
 - (Complex)Post traumatic stress disorder
- SPD
 - Sensory processing disorder
- OCD
 - Obsessive compulsive disorder
- Anxiety disorders
- Mood disorders
- Personality disorders
- Eating disorders

- Cerebral Palsy
- Down Syndrome
- Epilepsy
- Acquired brain injuries
- Giftedness
- Learning disabilities
- Intellectual disabilities
- Dyslexia
- Dysgraphia
- Dyspraxia
- Dyscalculia
- Synesthesia

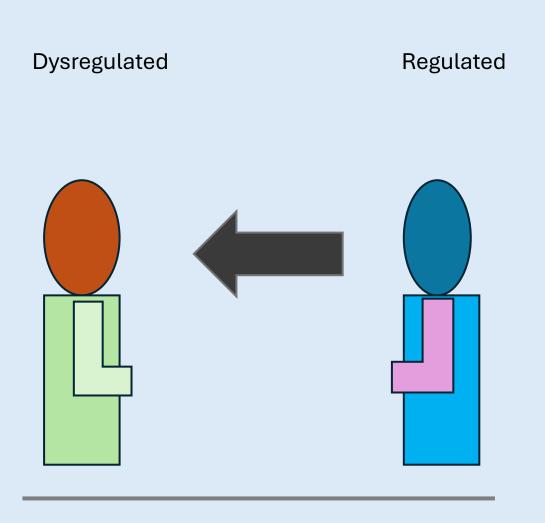
I believe that as each generation gains confidence in co-regulation, it could one day promote healing in the world.

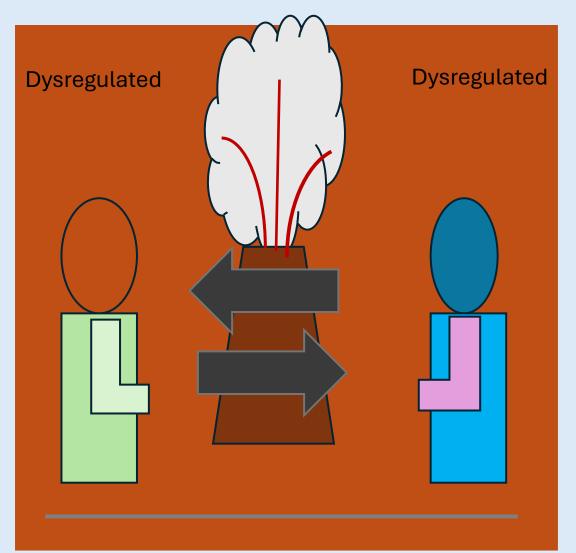
- There is no age restriction for the use of co-regulation.
- Most of the time we think about infants children.
- However, our older children, teens, young adults, middle-aged adults, and senior adults benefit from co-regulation.
- Co-regulation can be used by one regulated person with a dysregulated person or a regulated person with multiple dysregulated people.
- Adults can regulate children, but children can also regulate adults.
- Adults can regulate other adults.
- Parents and caregivers of children benefit from being co-regulated by partners, family members, friends, co-workers, and a supportive community.
- Those who provide co-regulation to these adults benefit from being co-regulated by others, and the cycle continues.

Why Co-regulate over discipline?

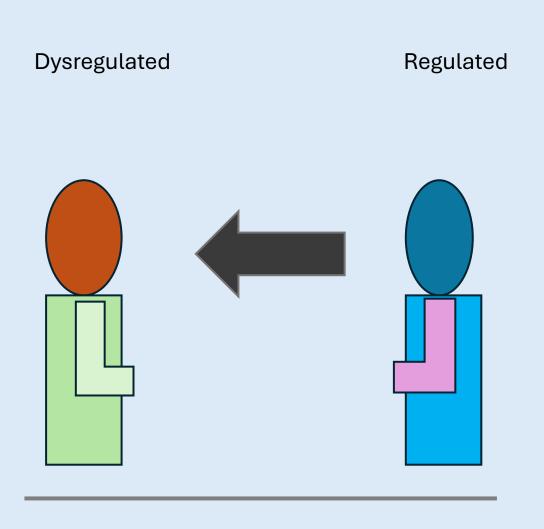
- According to Dr. Steven Porges, and many of those in the neurodivergent community, there is no bad child/person only someone who is struggling with a dysregulated [nervous] system.
- Dysregulation makes it hard to impossible for people to learn or behave in neuronormative ways that are expected.
- Discipline is often associated with limit setting and/or punishment-based teaching instead of connection-based teaching.
- Discipline based teaching often creates power struggles between the person who is supposed to be in control of the environment/situation and the person who is dysregulated.
 - It is believed the dysregulated person has control over their actions.
 - Punishments increase until desired behavior is achieved.
 - This can create exclusive, toxic and abusive environments.
- Using co-regulation over discipline is encouraged.
- Co-regulation encourages connection-based approaches.
- Using accommodations over behavior management strategies are recommended.
- Most behavior management approaches do not assist in the learning of co-regulation to build selfregulation skills.
 - Most behavior management approaches teach masking skills.
 - Masking is where authentic emotions and actions are suppressed or hidden; to appear in the ways others expect to gain approval and acceptance.

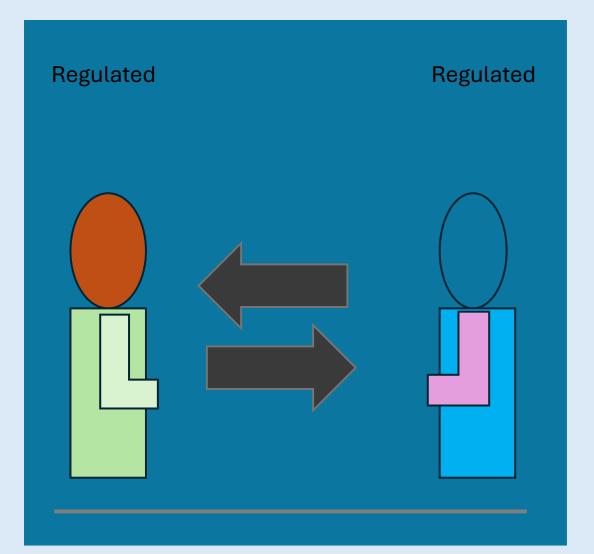
Why Co-regulate over discipline?





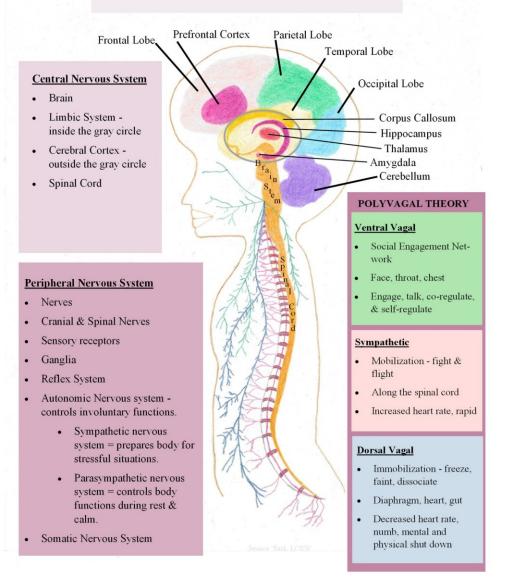
Why Co-regulate over discipline?





- To understand co-regulation there must first be an understanding of dysregulation.
- We are all impacted by dysregulation at some point – if not daily.
 - From infants into old age.
- I am going to define dysregulation by:
 - The human body reacts to stimuli that creates discomfort for the individual and activates their nervous system's need for survival by either under processing or over processing information. The mind and body are not synchronized to escalate and deescalate to the stimuli/situation.
 - The human body reacts to stimuli where the activated individual does not know how to selfregulate through the experience.
 - The human body is reacting to stimuli that is not congruent with neuronormative expectations.
 - Chemical imbalances disrupt the communication between the limbic system and the cerebral cortex.

Brain and Nervous System Diagram



- Tends to show up as:
 - Fight, Flight, Freeze, Flop/Faint, Fawn
- Is not linear.

| | Mild | Moderate | Severe |
|-------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Fight: | Appear annoyed | Appear agitated | Aggressive |
| Flight: | Appear quiet | Appear withdrawn/planning escape | Hiding/Running |
| Freeze: | Appear to be observing | Unable to talk and /or move | Catatonic |
| Flop/Faint: | Disconnecting | Appear withdrawn/daydreaming | fainting/limp body |
| Fawn: | Pleasing others | Being near safe person | Attaching self to safe person |

- I am going to define stimuli by:
 - Any internal or external event that creates felt energy within the body.
- External:
 - Visual
 - Sound
 - Tactile
 - Smells
 - Taste

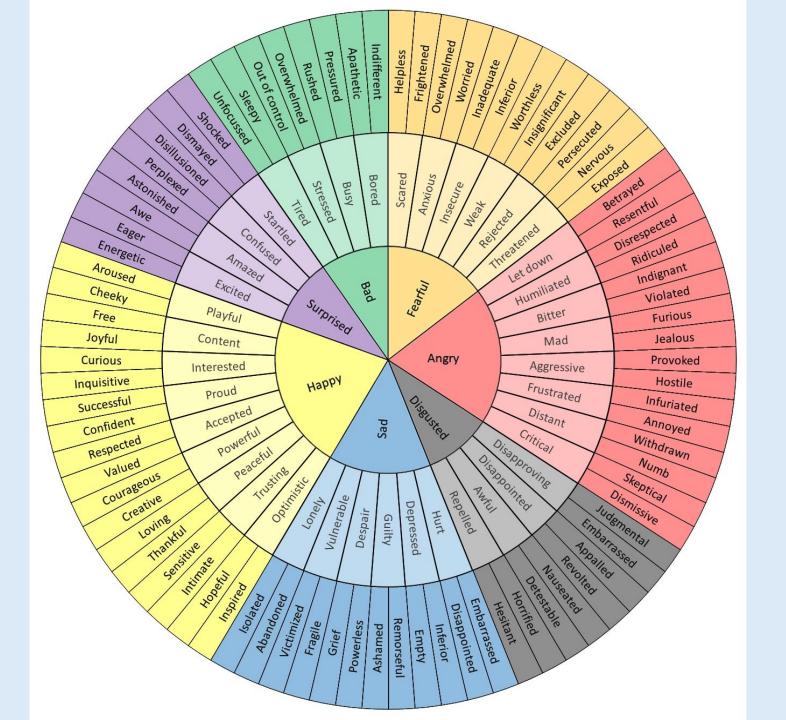
For some the more regulated the nervous, sensory, and/or emotional system is = more tolerance for stimuli that can activate dysregulation.

Internal:

- Neuroception sense of felt safety or danger from the energy of someone and/or the environment.
- Vestibular balance
- Proprioception body awareness in the external environment/pressure on the body.
- Executive Functioning cognitive ability to complete tasks and manage the body's response to stimuli.
- Intrusive and/or Cognitive Distortion Thoughts
- Emotions
- Energy
- Chemical levels
- Physical and/or emotional trauma
- Pain
- Illness
- Hunger
- Taste

- Is often expressed through behaviors.
- Often people over focus on the emotion(s) behind the behavior and miss the stimuli that is causing the emotion(s) and behavior(s).
 - This is why sensory, autoimmune, or other things can be missed or go undiagnosed.
- In dysregulation the emotion(s) activated by the stimuli start to feel uncomfortable and become overhauled by anxiety which then activates the nervous systems survival mode creating the behavior(s) you end up observing.
- The past can cause current dysregulation.
 - Our mind and body remember past events and compare them to our current situations.

Feeling Wheel



Self-regulation

- To understand co-regulation there must also be an understanding of self-regulation.
- It is difficult to self-regulate if co-regulation has not been experienced.
- For one person to co-regulate one or more individuals, they must first be able regulate their self.
 - For instance an adult trying to co-regulate a child must first be able to self-regulate.

Self-regulation

- I am going to define self-regulation by:
 - The ability to recognize dysregulation in the body and use one or more coping skills to regulate the mind, body, and/or nervous system.
- Steps to understanding self-regulation:
 - Take time to understand how and why dysregulation shows up for you.
 - Gain an understanding on the emotions that create discomfort in you.
 - Understand how and why you behave/react the way you do to dysregulation.
 - Discover if and how you mask.
 - Create a list of effective strategies that assist you in regulating.
 - Practice the list of effective strategies you have created even when you're not dysregulated.
 - Give yourself grace while you journey through understanding self-regulation.
 - This is a journey that is different for everyone, so do not compare your journey to others.
 - After you self-regulate take a pause and reconnect to yourself.
 - Once you reconnect then reflect on the current moment that caused dysregulation.
 - After reflecting then repair with yourself.

Self-regulation

Strategies:

Short-term

- Deep breaths = making sure these are belly breaths
- Chewing gum
- · Drink something hot/cold
- warm or cold water put hands in/splash on face
- Weighted blanket
- Sensory input like sand tray, fidget, swing/rocking chair
- Singing
- Listening to classical/relaxing music
- Creative expression = art, music, writing, dancing, etc.
- Grounding techniques to help you focus on staying in the moment you're in (mindful/wise mind)

Long-term

- Self-care= meeting basic needs
- Extended self-care = doing things you enjoy/hobbies
- Mental Health Care/Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Follow dietary recommended for your body (gene testing can be helpful)
- Follow supplement and medication recommended for your body (gene testing can be helpful)
- Regularly practicing mindfulness and using wise mind
- Regular Exercise
- Yoga
- Meditate
- Engaging in creativity regularly

Self-regulate vs Masking

- Masking is displaying socially acceptable behaviors to appear as though you are not stressed or starting to feel dysregulated.
- These behaviors help you blend in and hide the high levels of stress that you feel.
- Ongoing masking builds up stress levels in your body and increases anxiety making it harder to mask.
 - Eventually, a breaking point will occur where dysregulation is heighted to the point of survival.
 - The cat that became the lion feels like it is now attacking.
 - The body can no longer mask, and this can cause burnout and breakdown.
- We all mask at times.
- Some people spend majority of their day masking.
 - You often see this with neurodivergents.
- Neurodivergent masking is how some neurodivergent individuals interact with the neurotypical expectations and interactions in life on a constant basis.
 - This is why you can observe high levels of self-soothing/stemming, dysregulation, breakdowns, and burnout with neurodivergence.
- Our society is designed to function around the top peek of the neuronormative brain.
- When you self-regulate you are genuinely regulating your mind and body. You are not hiding, stuffing, pretending, or masking.

Self-regulation to Co-regulation

- How do you maintain regulation within yourself to co-regulate someone else?
 - Be ready to be open to change within yourself.
 - Changing automatic reactions takes time and repeated use.
 - It can feel weird or wrong when not doing automatic reactions.
 - Be ready to be flexible.
 - What you want and what needs to happen might be different.
 - Be ready to be vulnerable.
 - Admit your struggles so that you can make the needed changes to ensure that the other person feels safe.
 - Be ready to pivot in the moment.
 - Dysregulation can be activated by anything, so what you think might be the reason and what is the reason might be different.
 - This means your plan of action might need to change quickly in the moment.
 - Also, the intensity of dysregulation can increase at any time without any warning.

Co-regulation

- I am going to define co-regulation by:
 - One or more individuals working to maintain a regulated and nurturing environment to assist in soothing one or more individuals' nervous systems.
- Co-regulate someone by:
 - Being a safe person
 - Creating/maintaining neutral energy
 - Empathizing
 - Validating
 - Comforting
 - Supporting
 - Modeling self-care
- To co-regulate you must maintain regulation within yourself.

Co-regulation

- Important to note:
- Co-regulation does not = Calm or consistent regulation.
- To co-regulate you are creating a neutral state that allows you to connect to the dysregulated individual(s), and from there you are either increasing or decreasing energy to create balance within the dysregulated individual(s) nervous system.

- How the steps to co-regulation go when you are the primary person:
 - 1. Safe Environment.
 - 2. Observe.
 - 3. Provide Safety.
 - 4. Co-regulate.
 - 5. Reconnect.
 - 6. Repair.
 - 7. Reason.

- How the steps to co-regulation go when you are the support person:
 - 1. Safe Environment.
 - 2. Observe.
 - **3. Reconnect.** With primary person and/or dysregulated person. Most likely a surface level connection.
 - 4. Observe.
 - 5. Provide Safety.
 - 6. Co-regulate.
 - 7. Reconnect. Most likely a deeper emotional level connection
 - 8. Repair.
 - 9. Reason.

- Step 1 Safe environment
 - Check to make sure everyone is safe and create safety if needed.
 - You might need to quickly pause and regulate yourself.
 - Remember to deep breathe and remind yourself you can problem solve this situation.
 - Regulating yourself will seem like a simultaneous motion with creating a safe environment. While you are assessing the environment, taking note of safety needs and solutions, you are deep breathing and regulating yourself.

Co-regulation

- Step 1 Safety Continued
 - Someone on the severe end of dysregulation:
 - Will most likely be stuck and will need to cycle through or reach their peak point.
 - They may not be able to unfreeze, be aroused, stop being aggressive, stop screaming, come out of hiding, stop hysterically laughing, and/or stop harming themselves or others.
 - You will most likely not be able to connect with them.
 - When in this state it is important to remain regulated yourself and keep them, yourself, and others safe.
 - You are regulating the environment to maintain safety which will help the person begin to reconnect with the environment and their self.
 - Once they have cycled through or reached their peak, then they will begin to come back down.
 - As they come down you will begin to gauge your next move:
 - Is it appropriate to implement a connection at this time approach without words/talk softly from a distance, etc.
 - Once you have established a connection, then you can begin the co-regulation process on a deeper level.

Co-regulation

- Step 2 Observe
- When you are observing the situation remember that dysregulation is not linear.

| | Mild | Moderate | Severe |
|------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Fight: | Appear annoyed | Appear agitated | Aggressive |
| Flight: | Appear quiet | Appear withdrawn/planning escape | Hiding/Running |
| Freeze: | Appear to be observing | Unable to talk and /or move | Catatonic |
| Flop/Faint | Disconnecting | Appear withdrawn/daydreaming | fainting/limp body |
| Fawn: | Pleasing others | Being near safe person | Attaching self to safe person |

- Step 2 Observe Continued:
 - Take note if the person is in survival mode and needs you to wait it out
 with them until they are in a less intense dysregulated state where they
 are more able to connect and pivot with you.
 - If in a survival mode, while you sit with the person at a safe distance or with a barrier and begin the coregulation process, you can make yourself appear less threatening by lowing yourself to eye level or below eye level and take exaggerated deep breaths yourself.
 - Sometimes people watching someone else take slow deep breaths will help them slow their breathing enough to allow engagement in other co-regulating strategies.

- Step 2 Observe continued:
 - Once out of survival mode, continue to remain at an eye level or below eye level position and exaggerated deep breathing. This is the time to create connection.
 - During this time, it is important to begin using soft, gentle, low tone voice and reminding them that they are safe and explaining why they are safe.
 - Use visual cards or other ways to communicate if needed.
 - Begin to allow your exaggerated deep breaths to be heard (if they are sensitive to noise keep space between you and the other person. For some, you don't ever want to make the noise).
 - Explain all your movements before moving.
 - Slowly move closer or express that you are there for them to come to you if they want.
 - If frozen: You might need to ask the question: Would you like me to come to you?
 - If catatonic: You might need to gently state: I am coming to you.
 - Unless you really know and have previously discussed what they like make sure you ask before making any movements or touching.

- Step 3 Provide safety
 - Make sure to provide a safe physical and emotional environment.
 - Let them know that all safe actions are okay and all emotions needing to be expressed are accepted.
 - If struggling to safely express emotions, then provide one or two safe alternative ways for them to express and ask how you can help.

- Step 4 Co-regulate
 - Incorporate other strategies to allow co-regulation to continue to allow the other's nervous system to regulate using your system to help.
 - Holding
 - Hugging
 - Soft touch
 - Brushing
 - Singing a soft song
 - Doing deep breathing exercises
 - Sitting quietly with them
 - Building with blocks
 - Getting them some water or food
 - Running them a bath
 - Throwing a weighted ball
 - Doing frog jumps
 - This list can be unique to fit individual needs

Step 5 - Reconnect

- Reconnect with each other this can be done by continuing the previous steps with intention now being on connecting with the other person more than helping them regulate.
 - Think of the person's love language
 - Making eye contact if they feel comfortable with eye contact
 - Holding in lap, hands, or a shared item
 - Sitting near each other but not touching doing or not doing an activity
 - Soft touching
 - Genuine smiles
 - Special connection things (making heart with hands together, touching nose with finger, a saying, or a gesture)

Step 6 - Repair

- Repair any hurt that has taken place and teach/model selfgrace.
 - Own any part you had in activating the dysregulation.
 - Apologize, including how you will work at doing things different moving forward.
 - Think about their language of apology.
 - If the other person is feeling guilt or expressing shame for the way they reacted, then help them find self-forgiveness and grace, and discuss what was learned by the situation.
 - Discussing what was learned by the situation goes into step 7.
 - If any person is not able to discuss, or signs of dysregulation are still present, stop discussing.
 - Repeat steps 5 and 6, until repair has been made before moving on to step 7.

• Step 7 – Reason

Discuss:

- What the person feels was the problem/reason for dysregulation.
- What you observed being the problem (and if able, discuss responses by all involved).
- What was learned and how to improve in the future.
 - How can you improve helping them co-regulate?
 - What can be done to prevent dysregulation from happening in the first place?
 - Share strategies that the other person can use to help maintain regulation in the future.
- THIS PART MIGHT NEED TO BE SIKIPPED, If the other person and you are not in a mind space to examine the reason for dysregulation. Spend some time discussing once all involved are regulated, reconnected, and repaired: Keep this simple and short. You will come back to it later.
 - Skip if any person involved is not ready to discuss.
 - If dysregulation reoccurs/escalated, then share that it is okay to not discuss at this time and that it can be
 discussed later.
 - Repeat previous steps as needed to repair the relationship.
- It can be helpful to do this part while engaged in an activity.

Co-regulation is something you constantly strive towards.

Co-regulating ideas for parents and caregivers:

- Using a connection-based parenting or caregiving style.
- Using accommodations more than behavioral management strategies.
- Taking exaggerated deep breaths.
- Modeling self-regulation.
- Giving space when needed.
- Maintaining relaxed body language.
- Talking with a calm/neutral tone.
- Using declarative language, silly voice, roleplaying, singing, or visual cards.
- Ask questions, get curious, and listen to what the child needs. Next, try to meet their needs.

- Some people like to be touched (hands held, hugged, sit on your lap), and some prefer to maintain a distance.
- Problem solve together instead of making demands on how you feel it 'should' be done.
- Activities to help can be throwing stones into a stream; tossing a weighted ball; doing frog jumps or animal walks with them.
- Slow down. Nothing is more important than connecting, creating safety, and assisting the child.
- The goal is for everyone to feel like they are on the same team, emotionally and physically safe, accepted, and loved unconditionally.

Self-regulation is something you constantly strive towards.

Self-regulating ideas for parents/caregivers:

- Pause throughout the day and take a few deep breaths.
- Regularly engage in yoga or body movement activities.
- Give yourself time and space throughout the day or week.
 5 minutes to yourself can go a long way.
- Create a "personal space time" at home. This allows everyone to get some space, including you.
- Use earplugs to soften external sounds. Listen to calming music through earbuds or in the background of your environment.
- Be open to change and let go of control. Things might not go as you expect, and that is okay. You can learn to go with the flow.

- Maintain hygiene to the best of your ability. Think outside the box.
- Advocate for yourself and find a network of people who can help you meet your needs and understand your unique family needs.
- Assert yourself to let others know how to meet your needs.
 Do you need space, a hug, a task completed, or support for your parenting strategies?
- There is a balance, and everyone's needs are different. For example, some people may need to increase screen time, sleep, or sensory input, while others need to decrease their time.
- Most importantly, give yourself grace. You live and learn every day.

Provide accommodations over behavioral management strategies.

I will define accommodation strategies by:

- A tool or perspective used to adapt to a person's needs that aids in their ability to function in a way that they desire.
- A tool or perspective used to assist in meeting a person's needs to perform in a neurotypical expecting way.

I will define behavioral management strategies by:

- A tool or tactic used to modify a child's/person's undesired behavior or thought process to a more desired behavior or thought process.
- A tool or tactic used to encourage a child/person to display or use a more neurotypical coping skill.
- Is not effective for all children: PDA, forms of demand avoidance, or trauma.

Examples of accommodation strategies:

- Being open to discussing natural rewards and consequences that occur depending on how we use our energy, and helping the child/person navigate what they feel is best for them.
- Using co-regulation
- Engaging in sensory regulating activities before, during, and after times of high stress.
 - Swimming, swinging, spinning, water play, sand play, sensory bin play, hanging upside down, animal walks, walking outside barefoot or on textured tiles, eating crunchy foods, wearing headphones, being allowed to take breaks, being allowed to sit away from groups of people or under a table.
- Mindfully using declarative language.
- Turning on closed captioning
- Planning extra time to make transitions
- Providing a relaxing space or separate space where someone can go to take a break from engaging in social activity.

Examples of behavioral management strategies:

- Focusing on natural and/or given rewards and consequences to encourage desired behaviors and/or thought processes.
- Using a 3 count
- Using a 5-point scale
- Using a rule/behavior contract
- Using a reward chart

- Specific examples of accommodation and behavioral management strategies:
 - From my book, Creating a caregiving plan for the holidays, (p. 36-37).
- Use accommodations first.
 - It is most important that you know your child and what they need.
 - If you can, visit the space ahead of time, take needed items, and allow kids to explore the place.
 - Arrive early to establish comfort, control, adapt to a less crowded environment, etc.
 - Explain in advance to others how your family will participate in the event and how you accommodate your family.
 - Use calendars.
 - Establish and/or maintain routine.

- Specific examples of accommodations and behavioral management strategies continues:
 - Plan in the way your child feels best and reduces anxiety. This can mean elaborate planning and discussing ahead of time or in the moment planning.
 - Encourage them to focus on one thing at a time.
 - Create a social story you can use PowerPoint with pictures & words, or show pictures from previous events, or events page for current event that explain what & who to expect.
 - Create a schedule for the day in a way your child likes. Let them mark off things complete, maybe add in flex times (where we
 need to use our flexible thinking to flow through an unexpected change).
 - Use picture cards and/or share ahead of time what will come next to help the child transition.
 - Create a transition song and/or activity/game with child and try it ahead of time.
 - Be ready to say or shift to "yes" more than "no."
 - Make sure to focus on giving positive feedback and limiting negative feedback.
 - Keep in mind, for every negative said, 5 positives need to be said to help rebuild self-esteem.
 - Create a safe signal or word that, when said or done, means the child needs a break.

- Specific examples of accommodations and behavioral management strategies continues:
 - Know if you can leave your child alone or need to stay nearby. Don't fear being a "helicopter" parent if that's what your child needs.
 - Make sure the child takes comfort toys/items,
 - Sensory input sand play, water play, hanging upside down, swinging, weighted blanket, headphones, quiet space, chewing items, fidgets, wobble seats, sensory input steps (turtle shells), sensory brushing, crash pad, (bean bag or old couch cushion), hammock chair, etc.
 - Classical music or regulating sounds.
 - Snacks & food your child will eat.
 - Share your child's hobbies and interests with people beforehand.
 - Be ready to gently redirect, gently remind options, and gently referee when needed.
 - Engage with empathy, curiosity, and support to let the child know you are on their side and help them feel connected and not alone.
- Dr. Ross Greene says, Children want to do well, so if they are not, something is most likely wrong.
 - If needed: use behavioral management strategies 3 count, 5-point scale, smiley face chart, etc. Make sure these strategies are positive and focus on assisting the kid more than punishing.

Maintaining and using Co-regulation

- The most important part is to know what works best and/or be open to learn what works best with the child/person you are co-regulating.
- Each child/person is different with different needs and desires.
- Emotion regulation is important, but so is sensory regulation and nervous system regulation.
- Behaviors are often communication. Look deeper until you understand the reason behind the behavior.
- Give yourself grace. We are all human and dysregulation is dysregulating. If you become dysregulated, acknowledge this to learn about yourself and what you need to help you maintain regulation in the future. It is also important for children to see adults dysregulated and for them to watch as you work through your own dysregulation.

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The End

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- If you need a more individual experience or have personal goals that you want to work on sign up for an individual session.
 - Contact:
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