



## **THE DRAGON PHENOMENON**

Daily life can bring challenges that make "playing school" or getting along with others difficult. Regulation, or being able to function when things aren't perfect, is required to manage emotions and behavior. Self-monitoring is required for regulation and that is what this dragon program was designed to help with. Knowing how to stop, reflect on how things feel like inside, and then problem-solve or adjust will help anyone find success.

The DRAGON PHENOMENON is a framework for teaching self-monitoring and regulation strategies so kids can feel more in control. It offers a toolbox of movement-based strategies to aid in self-regulation and supports children in developing these vital skills by giving them words to describe their internal experiences and practical strategies to change how they feel.



Sometimes, it is the way a child is wired that makes these skills hard to develop; other times, these skills emerge more slowly than for others. When our kids struggle, they may simply need us to view them through a different lens. It's heartbreaking to watch a child repeatedly miss the cues that help them navigate their world. When success feels out of reach and friends are scarce, children may start to give up, believing nothing ever works for them. How can we support children in managing school or at least begin teaching them how to "play school"? Will these skills translate to their home life and beyond?

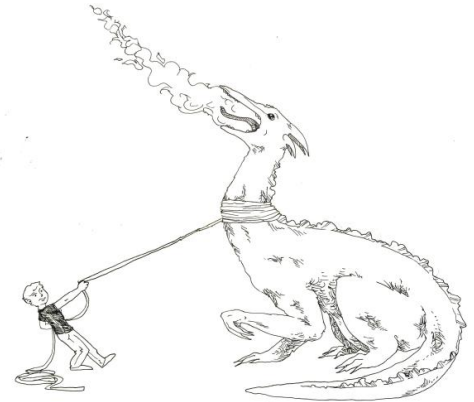
Here's how the Dragon Process works:

Imagine there is a dragon who lives in our brain, right in the middle where all our emotions are processed. This dragon is important to behavior because it communicates to us through signals. We need these signals or our brain doesn't know how to guide our responses. These signals, like butterflies in our stomach or imagined fire, and smoke, help keep us safe and on track. The dragon's job is to get our attention, and this feeling of heat and uneasiness is a means of communication. Dragon warnings remind us to start homework or a work project before it's too late; they also alert us that we have gone high enough or fast enough. These signals are critical for safety *and* success.

When children learn to recognize and manage these signals, they become "MASTER DRAGON TAMERS," which means they can handle dragon problems to stay safe, logical, successful, and regulated.

## **WHAT IF WE HAVE TOO MUCH FIRE DRAGON?**

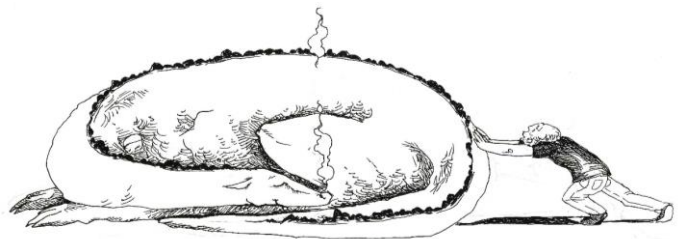
Unexpected things can be really scary- even if they really aren't. Warnings can fly all over the place all the time, and that results in anxiety and worries. This can prevent us from trying new things or keep us from having fun with something or someone new. When our dragon is constantly shooting flames and stomping feet, we DO NOT feel good! The fire dragon can make a child respond with aggression while another might hide. The end result of too much fire dragon is exhausting.



- Sometimes when a child's behavior is aggressive or loud (much like the picture of a fire dragon), it is because they have gotten so much fire, so many signals and so much stomping that they begin to take on those characteristics.
- Many behavior issues stem from anxiety or a lack of control. That class bully might be a child who is insecure and afraid so they act to counteract how they are feeling inside.
- When the brain switches into "protection mode," more stress hormones are released, which make it hard to weed out incoming signals, so behavior is distraction with lots of "squirrel moments."
- If they are not sure of how something is going to feel at any moment, behavior can appear obsessive-compulsive as a way to control as much as they can.

## **WHAT IF WE HAVE TOO MUCH SLEEPY DRAGON?**

No signals affect behavior because now this child is a little too laid back about things that need attention like homework, chores, or hygiene. Sleepy dragons are tricky because you will think all is well until suddenly it ISN'T!



- Procrastination is common because there is so much other fun stuff to do, and there are no alarms prompting otherwise or encouraging different choices.
- Sometimes the lack of signals only affects them in specific areas of life and may not be quite as obvious as with others. They aren't always daredevils, but school can be really tough with sleepy dragons in charge because there are no alarms or signals to listen, or work, or focus on something they don't love.
- Behavior is tough to control when the signals aren't working because there are no cues to read the room or observe a peer's body language.
- It doesn't matter how smart a child is if they can't "play school."

## WHY EVEN TALK ABOUT DRAGONS ????

- #1 REASON IS SELF-ESTEEM!!

- Kids who struggle with attention, school, or behavior are often asked:

- “Why didn’t YOU get that done”
- “Why do YOU play so rough”
- “Why didn’t YOU hand in your homework”

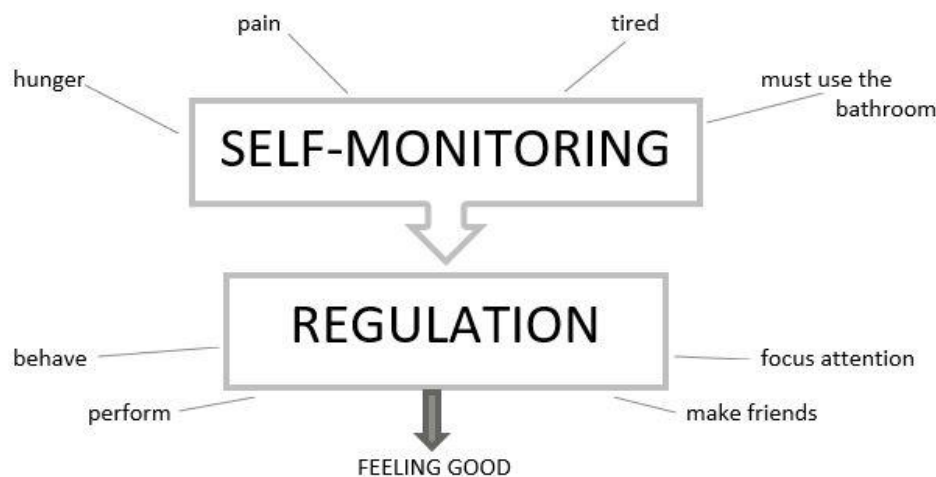


- The dragon allows for a judgment-free way to discuss how a child is behaving, how their wiring may not have worked for them in this situation, and then HOW to begin coming up with strategies.
- It’s no longer a flaw; there’s nothing wrong with this child. They just have a dragon problem to solve.
- Remember, the dragon is only a vehicle; some kids don’t like dragons, so you could just as easily compare their nervous system to a princess theme, favorite video game character or even a computer systems that lags and prevents them from getting the information they need, just like the sleeping dragon. Computers also glitch or over-heat when there is too much going on or they have been on too long, just like the fire dragon.

- The goal is to give a child some way to self-monitor and find tools for regulation. We can also use characters that fit their developmental and cognitive level, like Tigger, Pooh and Eeyore. It just needs to be fun and relevant so they come up with ideas.
- Recovery is a critical skill to learn, and failure provides an opportunity to recover. Things will not change overnight and just because something didn’t work (again) doesn’t mean it NEVER will. Help them problem-solve what went wrong with this pesky character and how they could have recovered to prevent getting stuck or repeating the same mistake over and over. Shift the focus from past behaviors to looking forward, planning how to respond differently, or making a new choice next time.
- Laugh with this child and remember that this is a process. Have them show you what they know works and let them be the expert of their dragon. If they can describe what dragon they are dealing with, you can coach them when things change and there is a new dragon visiting. We have to know what we are dealing with so we can find the right tools.
- Have fun with the characters and be tough on that dragon- he needs taming, and this amazing child can do it!

## How Do We Self-Monitor To Figure out which Dragon to Manage?

We need to identify which "dragon" is present in the moment, as this determines which tools to use. Depending on the child's age, there are various ways to figure this out. It's essential to pause, assess, and adjust for self-monitoring to be effective. Visual aids are particularly helpful in encouraging this process. The "Self-Monitoring Page" is an excellent resource for teaching children how to recognize and manage their emotions when their brains are calm and functioning well. In moments of stress, this visual then becomes a vital tool, helping them access their coping strategies through this familiar visual tool. Using visuals reduces the need for verbal communication, which is crucial during high-stress times when a child's brain may struggle to process or problem-solve but still needs support.



**Magic Wand Method:** This technique involves imagining a magic wand moving down your body, helping you tune into each area as it passes. Start at the top of your head and slowly move the wand down, paying attention to each part of your body.

- **Head:** Do you feel any headaches, or are your eyes dry or blurry?
- **Mouth and Throat:** Are you thirsty, hungry, or feeling something else?
- **Chest:** How does your chest feel? Is your heart racing? How is your breathing—fast or slow?
- **Stomach:** This is a crucial area. Do you have butterflies, feel hungry, too full, or need to use the bathroom?

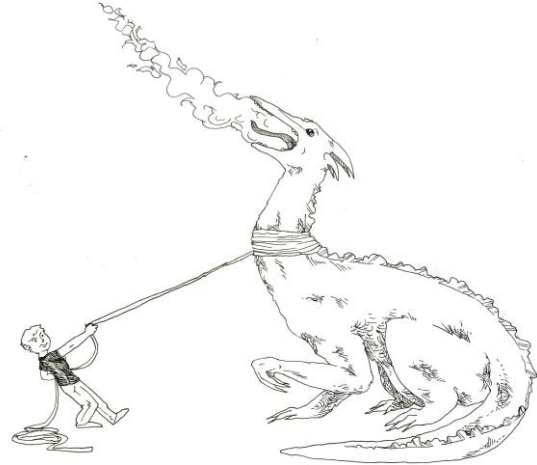


**Flex and Relax:** For older kids, encourage them to flex and relax each part of their body to identify areas of stress or discomfort. Discuss any pain or obvious feelings they notice. Additionally, help them assess if they feel too low (like the "blue zone" or the "sleeping dragon") or too high (like the "red zone" or the "fire dragon").

This awareness guides the selection of tools, which can be listed on their support page. This way, when they feel off-balance, they don't need to think too hard—they can simply refer to a few visual options that typically help them feel better.

# Self-Monitoring Page

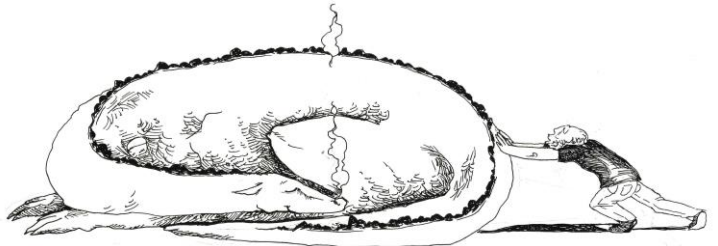
Red Zone



Green Zone



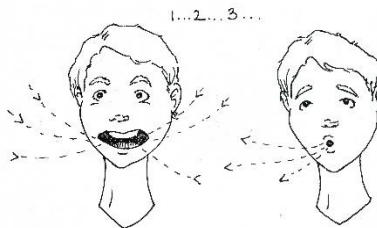
Blue Zone



## **DRAGON TAMING STRATEGIES (for both kinds of dragons)**



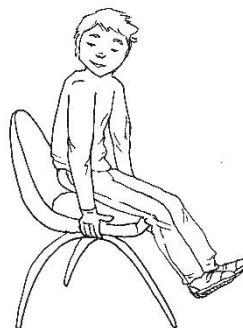
**Carry heavy  
Objects**



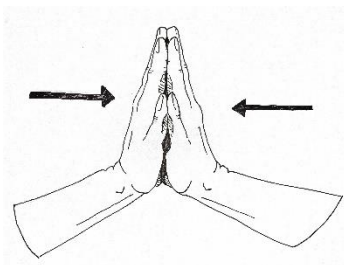
**Deep Breaths**



**Give a hug**



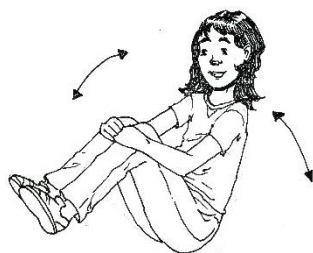
**Chair pushup**



**Push hands  
Together hard**



**Helper  
Squishes**



**Rocking**

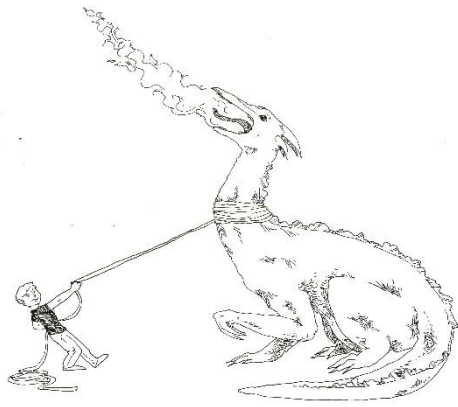


**Drink of water**



**Find a quiet space**

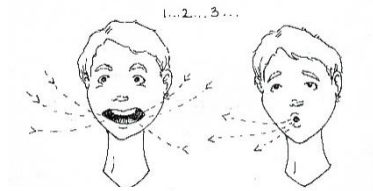




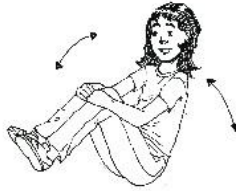
# WHAT TO DO WITH FIRE DRAGONS

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1. Deep Breathing



2. Slow Rocking



3. Chair Push-up



4. Heavy job



5. Helper Squishes



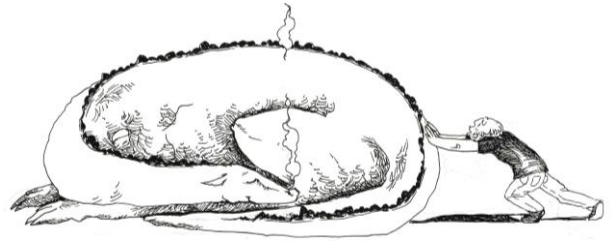
6. Quiet Work Place



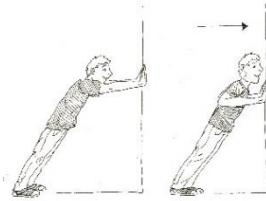
7. Stand up or Move



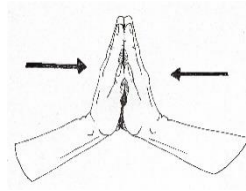
# WHAT TO DO WITH SLEEPING DRAGONS



1. Wall Pushups



2. Push Hands Together



3. Chair Pushup



8. Heavy job



9. Big Hug



10. Drink of Water



11. Sit on a Cushion



Dear Parents and Caregivers,

We are currently learning about ways to self-monitor so we can better regulate behavior. These skills are important for school, friends and will be important for life even as an adult. The goal is for kids to have a way to describe what's going on inside their bodies when things aren't working- but this isn't always easy. I use the analogy of a dragon to help kids come up with ways to talk about their behavior; there is a fire dragon and a sleeping dragon. The words tend to come a little easier when kids can talk about these creatures, rather than themselves.

There are two kinds of dragon problems, and uncontrolled or unhelpful dragons cause lots of problems. Your child is learning to identify WHEN one might be a problem for them, but then WHAT to do to solve that problem. This packet reviews some information about strategies that can be used in class, and if dragons visit your child at home, you will now know how to "talk Dragon" with them. They can make a Dragon Book that will help them remember the tools.

This is meant to be fun, never scary, and your child is the expert of their dragon, so their ideas are critical in this process. Have fun, let them try out strategies they invent, and then help them determine if they worked! You might even find that a "Dragon Book" helps you feel better, and this is a great adventure to share with your child!

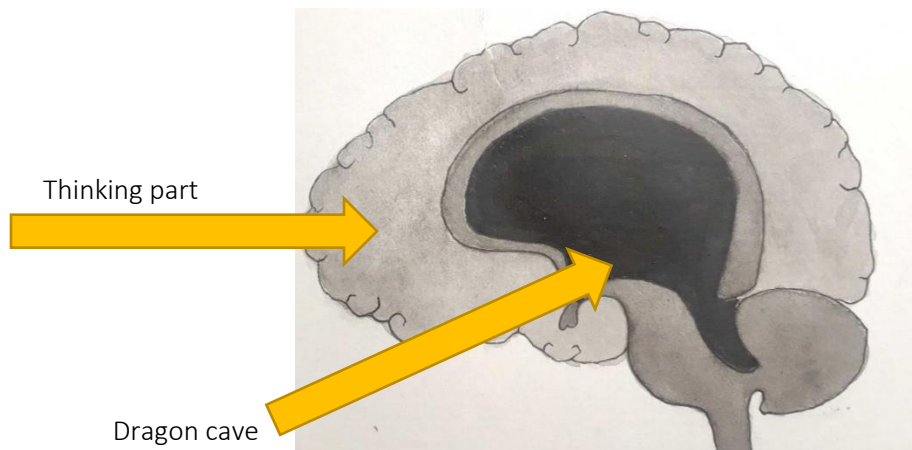
Good Luck and Have Fun!

# MY DRAGON BOOK



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## MY BRAIN



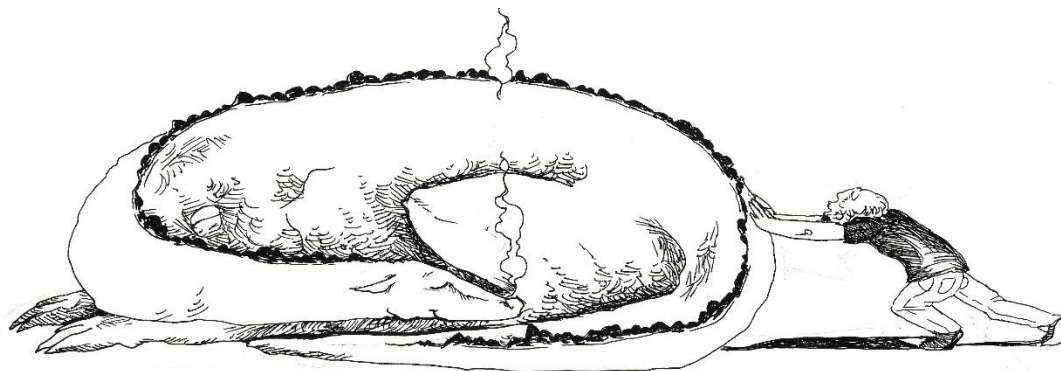
This is my brain. The front part is for thinking. I need signals from the dragon cave so I can think.

The inside is where my dragon lives in his cave. My dragon is here to help me, but sometimes he doesn't...sometimes, he makes things worse. When this happens, I need to train my dragon. This book shows all the things that help manage MY dragon. Sometimes I need a little break to help my dragons, so this book will help remind me how to train my dragon when he is sending too much fire or completely asleep and not sending any signals to my thinking brain.

THANK YOU FOR HELPING ME TRAIN MY DRAGON!

©Kristin Robison, MOT, OTR/L

(cut)------(cut)



### **SLEEPING DRAGON TOOLS**

------(cut)



### **FIRE DRAGON TOOLS**

------(cut)

#### **INSTRUCTIONS FOR MAKING YOUR BOOK:**

- Cut out and put the “My Dragon Book” with the picture of the trained dragon on the front cover.
- The “My Brain” part goes on the back.
- Cut out the dragons because they go inside, one on each side to hold the tools that manage that dragon.

Try out the dragon training tools and figure out which ones work for each of YOUR dragons. Remember, everyone has a different dragon, so your tools might be different than what your friend has or what the sheet says should work. If you come up with some of your own, draw a picture with a label and put it in on the side that trains that dragon. Fire dragons need special tools. Sleeping dragons do too. Sometimes you will find a tool that works no matter what kind of dragon is visiting today, so put that one on both sides. Good luck! Training dragons can be hard, but when you figure it out, you will be a MASTER DRAGON TAMER!

# AWARD OF EXCELLENCE

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## *DRAGON TAMING*

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AWARDED TO: \_\_\_\_\_

FOR MASTERY IN THE ART OF DRAGON TAMING



BY: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_