

## Trauma-Informed Responses to Shutdown Behaviors

1. Sound familiar?
  - a. •Ignoring you, classmates, aide, parent...
  - b. •Refusing to answer- whether they are looking at you are not...
  - c. •Acting like you aren't even there... "you don't exist"
  - d. •Acting like they cannot hear you. Oh, you're talking?
  - e. •Moving EXTREMEEEEEEMMMMEELY slow
  - f. •Glazed eyes...
  - g. •On a mental vacation... far, far away
  - h. •Confused and confusing
2. Shutdown behaviors are not usually immediately dangerous, but can be baffling/confusing/angering, etc. to those that are trying to be in connection with that person.
3. The Brain & Behaviors
  - a. Behavior is an externalization of your inner experience. Behaviors offer clues.
4. Bruce Perry's Arousal Continuum as shared by Robyn Gobbel

## Bruce Perry's Arousal Continuum

Internal State	Calm	Alert	Alarm	Fear	Terror
Brain System	NeoCortex/ Cortex	Cortex/ Limbic	Limbic/ Midbrain	Midbrain/ Brainstem	Brainstem/ Autonomic
Thinking/ Feeling	Thinking	Thinking/Feeling	Feeling	Feeling/Reacting	Reacting
Flight/Fight Watch Dog	Rest	Vigilance	Resistance (coping/opposition)	Defiance (tantrum)	Aggression
Dissociation Possum	Rest	Avoidance	Compliance (robotic)	Shut down, non- responsive	Non-responsive/ Fainting

5. Two Types of Shutdown
  - a. Watch Dog Internalized
    - i. The Stiff Spaghetti
    - ii. The Simmering Volcano
    - iii. Pay attention to tightness in the body- particularly in the shoulders, eyes, and fist.
  - b. Possum Energy
    - i. The Floppy Noodle
    - ii. Collapsed energy
    - iii. Pay attention to chest, arms, lack of body tone. These can be subtle.
6. Time to get our own mirrors.... Our reactions may be whispers from our pasts.
7. Taking Care of Ourselves
  - a. 4 Steps to Practicing Awareness
    - i. Notice.
    - ii. Acknowledge (as true or real for ourselves)
    - iii. Self-Compassion
    - iv. Breath.
  - b. Practice the pause. With practice this can be done in 1-2 seconds.

8. Connecting with a Simmering Volcano
  - a. OBJECTIVE: Calm arousal state (not focused on stopping the behavior). When the arousal state is calmed the behavior will resolve on its own or we can intentionally teach skills and strategies.
  - b. Some possibilities:
    - i. Guess! I wonder if...
    - ii. Back off. Stop Talking. DO NOTHING!
    - iii. Surprise! Snack, drink, play, silly video, etc.
    - iv. Ask yourself- how does this child know their words matter?
  - c. Internalized behaviors will become externalized (oppositional, defiant, yelling, mean) before they resolve. Match intensity not the dysregulation. Honor their words. Calm arousal.
9. Connecting with a Possum
  - a. Remember that NOTHING is still something. The behavior is showing the more wounded side of the nervous system (the watch dog still believes they can do something to change something, the possum believes fight/flight is futile). Possum behaviors are our bodies last ditch efforts to stay alive.
  - b. Acknowledge that it is much harder to connect, co-regulate, and lean into these behaviors. They can illicit a wide range of reactions within us. WE may find ourselves joining the possum or having our watch dog wake up and start poking at the possum.
  - c. GO SLOW.
10. Decrease Arousal in Order to Bring Felt-Safety
  - a. Think low and slow.
  - b. Make smaller asks. Use "invitations" with no pressure to join.
  - c. Incorporate Movement- Use things flexible seating, fidgets, walking, jumping/small hops, huge steps, teeny tiny steps, etc.
  - d. Sensory Experiences- focus on a mild awakening of the senses in short durations. Visual timers, water beads, a cutie orange for a snack, swinging, lycra/weighted items (with parent approval), etc.
  - e. Rhythm- Music (listening and creating), allow for self before relational rhythm (i.e. play with the balloon/ball themselves and offering to/allow them to invite you into play, etc.)
  - f. Breathe
11. Sometimes all you can do is wait. **And that is still doing something!**
12. Bringing Possums and Watch Dogs together
  - a. TBRI Nurture Groups
    - i. Provide and opportunity for vulnerable children and youth to acquire 4 Skills of Close Relationships (Jude Cassidy):
      1. Be able to give care (e.g. to a pet, a friend, or family members)
      2. Be able to receive care (e.g. from friends, family members or safe adults)
      3. Be able to negotiate your needs (e.g. using choice or compromises)
      4. Be capable of an autonomous self.
    - ii. There are guiding principles that can be taught to leaders.
    - iii. 6 Parts of Nurture Group
      1. Rules (these can be tweaked for each environment/group)
      2. No Hurts
      3. Stick Together
      4. Have Fun
      5. Check-in
      6. Band-aids
      7. Activity
      8. Feeding
      9. Closing