# Raising Resilient Children: Tools to Develop Emotional Regulation

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DANIEL EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

1

## Introduction



Sara Daniel, LCW, MSW
Executive Director of Daniel Educational Services

- School based mental health clinician
- School Administrator
- Trauma Sensitive Schools lead in state of Wisconsin
- Author of Trauma Sensitive School Initiative and the co-author of the Trauma Sensitive Schools Learning Module Series https://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/mental-health/trauma/modules.
- Certified clinician and trainer in Dr. Bruce Perry's Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT) and the Neurosequential Model of Education (NME).
- Statewide leader of the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Interface Master Trainer Project for the state of Wisconsin, which promotes public education about ACEs and the development of self-healing communities in partnership with Laura Porter and Dr. Robert Anda.

2

## Objectives

- Participants will understand the science of stress and big feelings in children
- Participants will be able to apply evidence-based strategies to support emotional regulation and resilience in children.
- Participants will create a plan to utilize self-regulation strategies to stay calm and responsive to children.

3

Regulate




4

## Relate

What is one thing that you have done to protect your personal peace and wellbeing in the last few weeks?

5

What is Well-being?

Turn and talk: What is well-being to you?

Share a time that you believe you achieved a state of well-being

Focus on describing what it is…not what it is not.



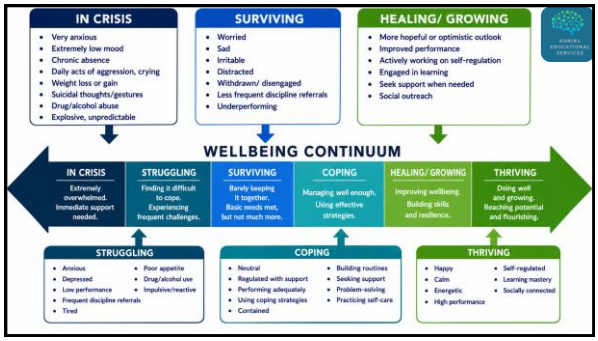
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## Well-being Defined

- Not simply the absence of illness or problems
- Includes the presence of positive emotions and moods (contentment, happiness), the absence of negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety) satisfaction with life, fulfillment and positive functioning.
- Judging life positively and feeling good.
- Can include:
  - Physical well-being.
  - Economic well-being.
  - Social well-being.
  - Emotional well-being.
  - Psychological well-being.
  - Life satisfaction.
  - Domain specific satisfaction.
  - Engaging activities and work.

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2018, October 31). Well-being Concepts. Retrieved January 29, 2021, from https://www.cdc.gov/hrqol/wellbeing.htm#three*

7




8

## Well-being Disruptors

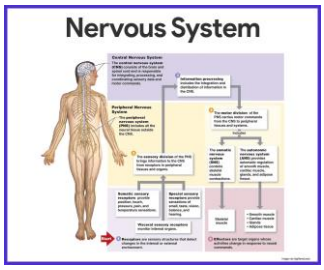
What gets in the way?

- Chronic stress & overwhelm
- Health challenges
- Mental health challenges
- Trauma & traumatic experiences
- Loss, grief & major life changes
- Difficult relationships & social isolation
- Financial stress & poverty
- Racism, discrimination & oppression
- Unsafe or unstable environments
- Workplace stress & burnout
- Identity struggles & loss of belonging
- Spiritual or existential challenges
- Caregiving demands
- Lack of sleep, rest or recovery
- Limited access to resources & support
- Uncertainty & lack of control

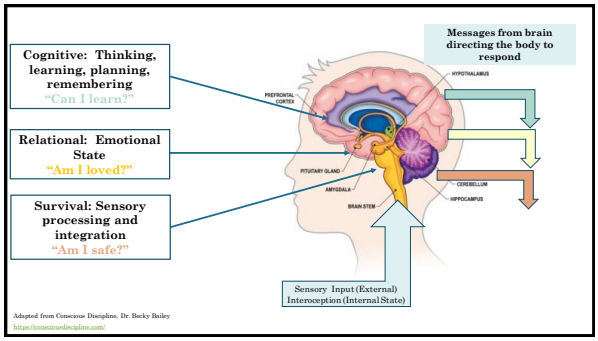
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## The brain and body

- Central nervous system- brain and spinal cord
- Peripheral nervous system
  - Autonomic nervous system – nerves that go to organs; involuntary functions
  - Somatic nervous system – nerves that go to skin and muscles
- Messages flow between brain and body




10




11

## Types of Stress

**Positive:**
Brief increases in heart rate, mild elevation in stress hormone levels

**Tolerable:**
Serious, temporary stress responses buffered by supportive relationships.

**Toxic:**
Prolonged activation of the stress response system in the absence of protective relationships.

12

How does stress show up for you? Fight, flight or freeze?





13

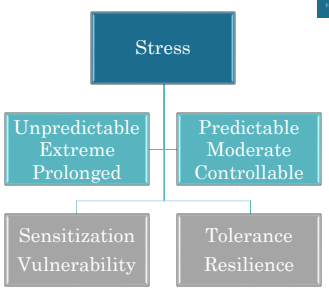
Flock and Fawn





14

Patterns of stress




Perry, B. 2010-2025

15

What can we do to make the stressors that children experience more predictable, moderate and controllable?

Reflection

16

## How Can We Make Stressors More Manageable for Children?

Help children experience stress as more predictable, moderate, and controllable.

### 1 Make stress more predictable

Help children know what to expect.



- Establish consistent routines and clear expectations.
- Give advance notice before transitions or changes.
- Explain what will happen, who will be there, and what comes next.
- Prepare children for unfamiliar experiences.
- Follow through on promises and be consistent in our responses.

### 2 Keep stress moderate

Match challenges to children's capacity and provide support.



- Break overwhelming tasks into smaller steps.
- Reduce unnecessary noise, demands, and stimulation.
- Offer co-regulation and connection before expecting problem-solving.
- Adjust expectations based on developmental needs and current stress levels.
- Provide opportunities for recovery, play, rest, and movement.

### 3 Increase children's sense of control

Help children feel they have a voice and options.



- Offer meaningful choices within appropriate boundaries.
- Involve children in decisions that affect them.
- Teach and practice coping and emotional regulation skills.
- Help children identify what they can control and where they can get help.
- Respond to mistakes with teaching and repair rather than shame.

17

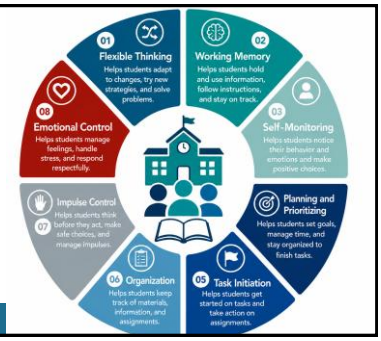
**Executive Function**

Cortex- Top of the brain

How do these help you in problem solving and overcoming challenges?

How do children use them?

What happens when we don't have access to these skills due to stress?




18

## Neuroplasticity

- The brain's ability to form new connections and change
- Remains true throughout our lifetime
- Sensitive periods in early childhood and adolescence
- Change through patterned, repetitive, sensory input (Regulate, Relate, Reason)



19

## Resilience can be…

Something that you are born with

Something that you learn

Something that happens due to your environment

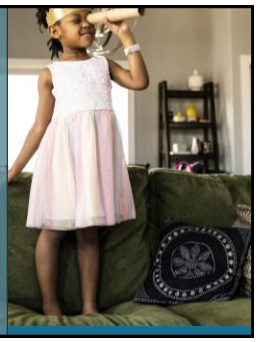
Something that you can get through relationship and connection with others



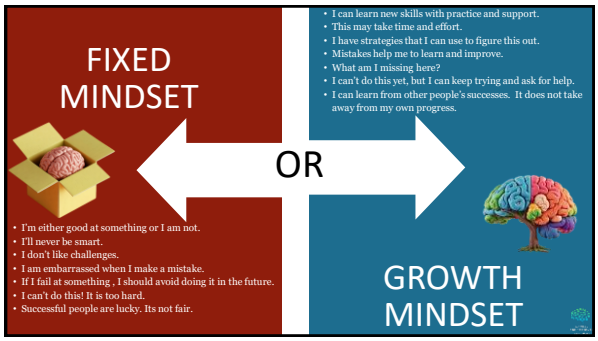
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## Mindset

- Confirmation bias:
  - We see what we are looking for
  - We more easily take in information that we already believe to be true
- Whatever we give our energy to, we strengthen. (Nurtured Heart Approach)
- Self-fulfilling prophecy
- Growth / Fixed mindset



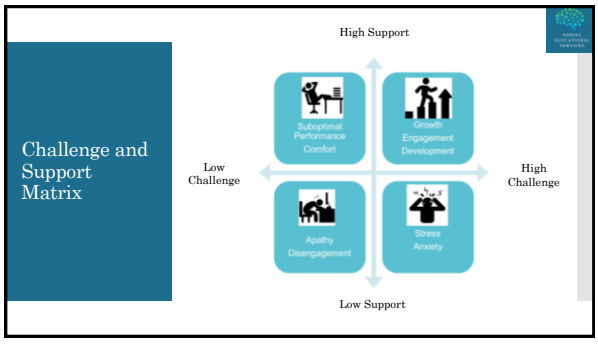
21




22

| Instead of this... | Try this |
|---|---|
| You are so smart! | You worked hard on this! |
| This is too hard. Let's do something else. | What other strategy could we try? |
| You are great at baseball. | You really work hard and pay attention on the field. |
| You did this wrong. | Mistakes can help you to learn. |
| Why is this so hard for you? | Wow, this is challenging right now. What do you think you need? |
| You are out of control. | Big feelings are difficult to manage. Let's work on it together. |
| Labels or diagnosis | Learning or practicing skills to.... (describe developing skills) cope with big feelings, regulate emotions, control attention and focus, reduce stress, manage disappointment, tolerate sensory triggers. |

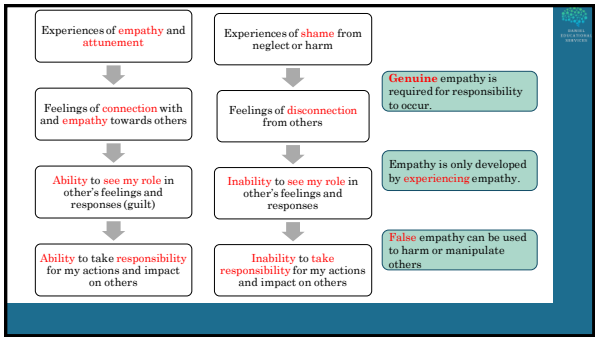
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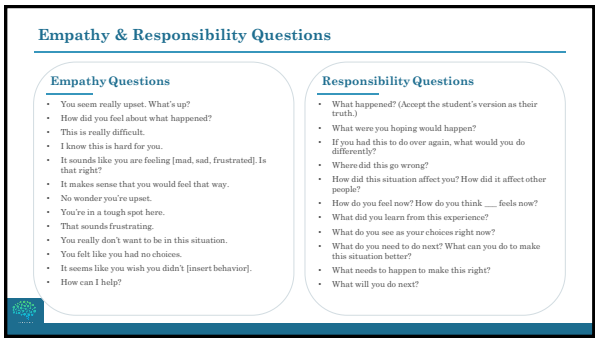

24


60
MINUTES
Identity / Sense of self: Shame vs Guilt

25


Experiences of empathy and attunement
Feelings of connection with and empathy towards others
Ability to see my role in other's feelings and responses (guilt)
Ability to take responsibility for my actions and impact on others
Experiences of shame from neglect or harm
Feelings of disconnection from others
Inability to see my role in other's feelings and responses
Inability to take responsibility for my actions and impact on others
Genuine empathy is required for responsibility to occur.
Empathy is only developed by experiencing empathy.
False empathy can be used to harm or manipulate others

26


Empathy & Responsibility Questions
Empathy Questions
You seem really upset. What's up?
How did you feel about what happened?
This is really difficult.
I know this is hard for you.
It sounds like you are feeling [mad, sad, frustrated]. Is that right?
It makes sense that you would feel that way.
No wonder you're upset.
You're in a tough spot here.
That sounds frustrating.
You really don't want to be in this situation.
You felt like you had no choices.
It seems like you wish you didn't [insert behavior].
How can I help?
Responsibility Questions
What happened? (Accept the student's version as their truth.)
What were you hoping would happen?
If you had this to do over again, what would you do differently?
Where did this go wrong?
How did this situation affect you? How did it affect other people?
How do you feel now? How do you think ___ feels now?
What did you learn from this experience?
What do you see as your choices right now?
What do you need to do next? What can you do to make this situation better?
What needs to happen to make this right?
What will you do next?

27

## Consequences with Empathy

| Punishment | Responsibility and Repair |
|---|---|
| • Used to assert power and control | • Designed to teach |
| • Person feels powerless | • Choice is offered |
| • Person feels shame "I am bad" | • Person may feel guilt – "I did something bad" |
| • For the benefit of the punisher | • For the benefit of the offender |
| • Punishment may be unconnected to the offence | • Consequences are logical, connected to the behavior and designed to repair. |
| • Focus is on rule | • Focus is on the relationship |
| • Involves exclusion or isolation | • Involves inclusion |
| • Imposed with blame | • Imposed with empathy |
| • Adult version of the problem is the only story | • Student version of problem is accepted as their truth |

28

## C

## Co-Regulation

(Brainstem/ Diencephalon/ Autonomic Nervous System)

29

***Self-regulation*** *is defined as the act of managing cognition and emotion to enable goal-directed actions such as organizing behavior, controlling impulses, and solving problems constructively.*

- Foundation of lifelong functioning
- Developed through ***co-regulation***
- Can be defined as warm and responsive interactions which help child to understand, express, and modulate thoughts, feelings and behavior through prolonged or pronounced stress and adversity
- Can be taught with focused attention, support and practice
- Key developmental periods early childhood and adolescence

Murray, D. et al (2015), Self regulation and Toxic Stress Report 1: Foundations for Understanding Self-Regulation from and Applied Developmental Perspective, Center for Child and Family Policy, Duke University

30

Am I Safe?

Brain stem seeks patterned, repetitive, rhythmic, sensory input.



31

Co-regulation always starts with a regulated carer.

Adult Sensory List:

What are your sensory preferences? Seeking/ Avoiding

How do you get those needs met ?



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32


Touch / Temperature


Vision


Sound


Smell


Taste


Movement


Balance


Internal sense


Just right



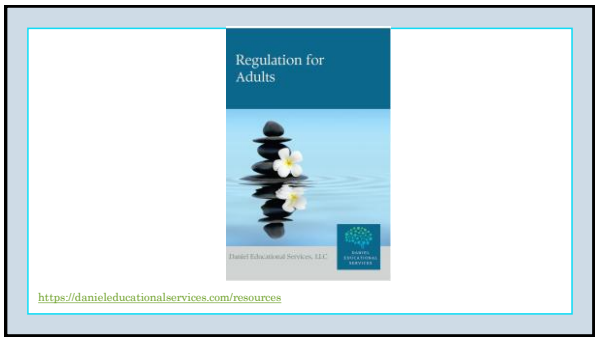
Too little



Too much

Sensory Self-Assessment

33




34

## Examples: Tactile

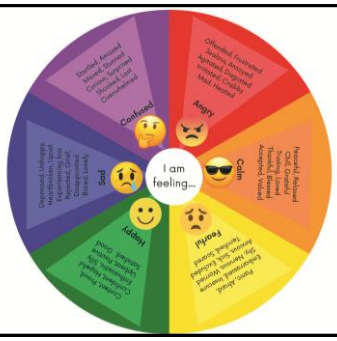
| Seeking | | | Avoiding | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Typical* | *Problematic* | *What educators can do?* | *Typical* | *Problematic* | *What educators can do?* |
| Touches surfaces, runs hands along walls<br><br>May lean into others or against surfaces<br><br>Prefers tight clothes<br><br>Consistently dirty<br><br>Craves vibration | Lacks personal space boundaries<br><br>Under responsive to pain<br><br>Aggressive to other children - may push or hit | Use tight squeeze (e.g., bear hug), hand massage, heavy work<br><br>Have student wear snug, athletic top<br><br>Teach personal bubble using hula hoop/other visual cue<br><br>Provide fidget toys, spinners, dough, clay, finger paints<br><br>Teach body scan to identify pain | Avoids touch (i.e., not a "hugger")<br><br>Avoids certain clothing or textures<br><br>Avoids messy activities (e.g., finger painting)<br><br>Does not like to be barefoot, toe walks | Flinches at touch<br><br>Overly responsive to pain<br><br>Overly distressed by seams, tags and other textures<br><br>Refuses hair brushing and bathing<br><br>Anxiety with light touch or in crowds<br><br>Refuses to stand in line | Give advance warning of touch<br><br>Approach student from the front<br><br>Give language to set personal boundaries (I'm not a big hugger)<br><br>Have student dress in layers<br><br>Provide safe area in class or extra space |

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35

Talk about feelings every day.

No good or bad feelings




36

Activity Book For Family Well-being



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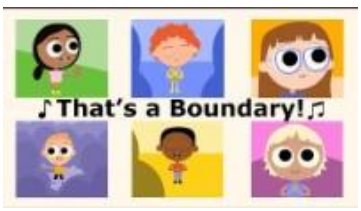
37

## When it might be necessary to set boundaries

- You feel completely responsible for another person's happiness or well being.
- You are constantly afraid of letting someone down.
- You say "yes" even when you don't want to.
- You avoid speaking up because you don't want to hurt someone's feelings.
- You feel taken advantage of.
- You don't say/do anything when someone hurts your feelings.
- You are asked to keep secrets that make you uncomfortable.
- You are always the one apologizing or "fixing" things.
- Your time is not as important as the other person's time.

38

## Boundaries Video




39

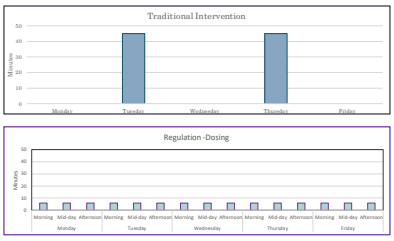
## Boundary Statement

Teach and post on wall

- I can help but I cannot do this for you.
- I respect your thoughts on the matter, but it is my decision
- I need some time right now, but we can discuss this later.
- I hear what you are saying but I need to end this conversation now.
- I am sorry, I can't make it.
- This is not okay with me.
- Please don't do that.
- That is not something I can do right now.

40

## Regulation: Dosing







41

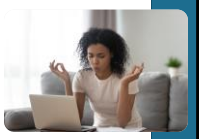
## Self-Compassion



Kindness

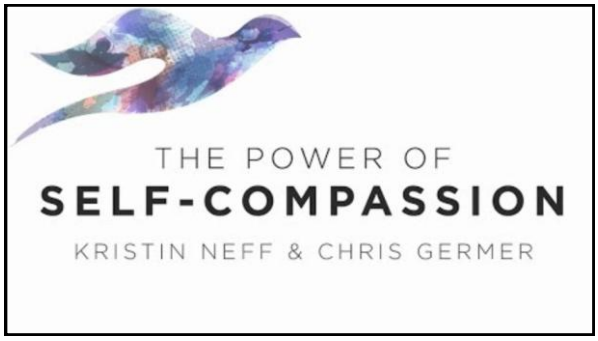


Shared Humanity



Mindfulness

42




43

## Family Self-Compassion Plan

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44

## Stress and Anxiety Resource Packet

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45


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46