


Cultivating Emotional Resilience in Young Children: Practical Strategies for Educators and Families to Foster Regulation in Everyday Moments

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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.

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Objectives

- Participants will be able to explain how stress impacts brain development in young children and analyze the implications for learning and behavior
- Participants will be able to identify and demonstrate at least three evidence-based, classroom-ready strategies to support young children in developing resilience and managing strong emotions.
- Participants will design a personal emotional regulation plan to implement in the classroom while supporting young children through emotional challenges.



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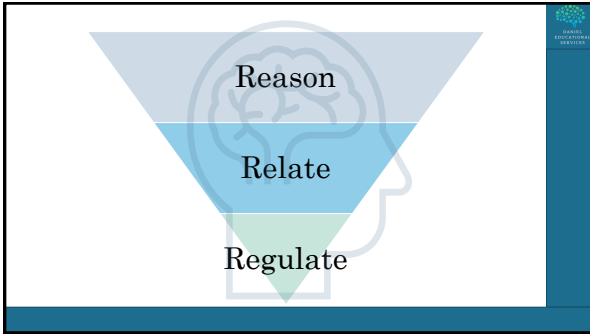
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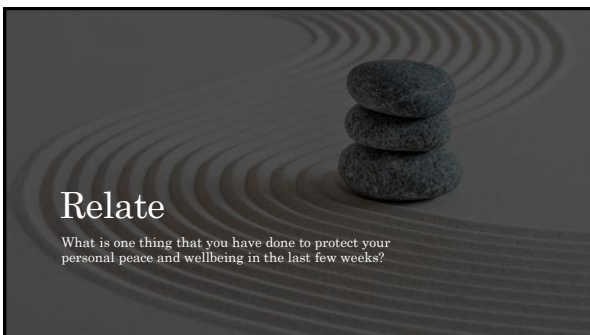
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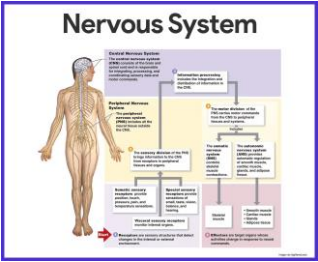
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**The brain and body**

- 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



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**Neuroception**

- The continual subconscious process of determining whether a situation are safe, dangerous, or life threatening
- It is different from "perception" which implies cortical awareness
- A neuroception of safety is needed before social engagement can occur
- A neuroception of lack of safety might be a common thread running through many mental health challenges, including autism, schizophrenia, anxiety, depression, and reactive attachment disorder. *Porges, Stephen W. Zero to Three (J), v24 n5 p 19-24 May 2004*

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**Types of Stress**

*Stress is our body preparing to respond to challenges*

**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.

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



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Flock and Fawn



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How Brains are Built  
Alberta Family Wellness



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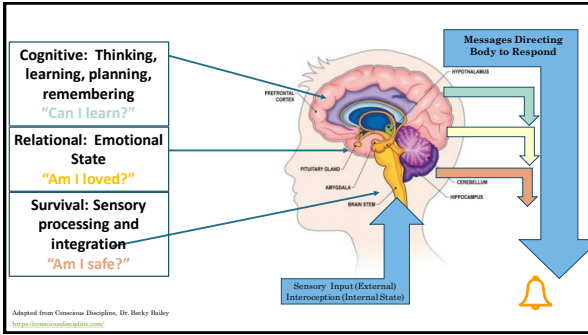
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Mental State	Cognition	Primary / Secondary Brain Areas	Hyperarousal Continuum	Dissociative Continuum	Functional IQ
Calm	Abstract	Cortex	Rest/ Reflect	Rest/ Reflect	120-100
Alert	Concrete	Cortex Limbic	Vigilance/ Flock	Avoid	110-90
Alarm	Emotional	Limbic Diencephalon	Resistance/ Freeze	Comply	100-80
Fear	Reactive	Diencephalon Brainstem	Defiance/ Flight	Dissociate	90-70
Terror	Reflexive	Brainstem Autonomic Nervous System	Aggression/ Fight	Shut down/ Collapse	80-60

Perry, B. & Winfrey, O. (2021). What Happened to You?: Conversations on Trauma, Resilience, and Healing. Park Macmillan.

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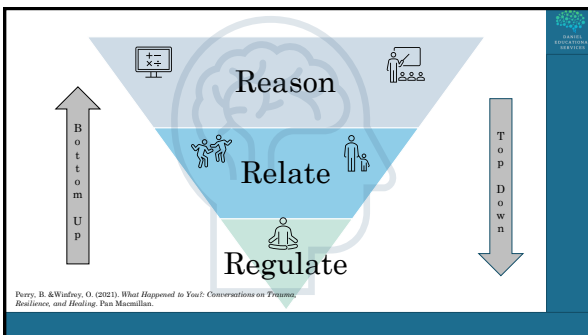
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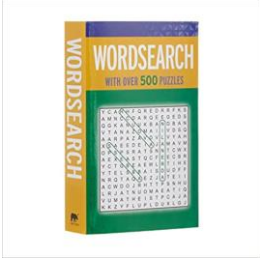
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## Activity



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## What is the impact in the classroom?

<p><b>Learning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization</li> <li>• Cause and effect</li> <li>• Memory</li> <li>• Executive functioning</li> <li>• Attention issues</li> <li>• Academic engagement</li> <li>• Intrusive thoughts</li> <li>• Receptive and expressive language</li> <li>• Fine motor skills</li> <li>• Academic risk taking / fear of failure</li> </ul>	<p><b>Behavior</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frustration tolerance</li> <li>• Reactivity</li> <li>• Impulsivity</li> <li>• Vigilance/ dissociation</li> <li>• Relational engagement</li> <li>• Emotional regulation</li> <li>• Social and emotional development</li> <li>• Aggression</li> <li>• Withdrawal</li> <li>• Perfectionism</li> </ul>
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Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative, 2012

LEVEL  
 TRAUMA  
 AWARENESS

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## Neuroplasticity

- The brain's ability to change and form new connections
- Remains true throughout our lifetime
- Sensitive periods in early childhood and adolescence



LEVEL  
 TRAUMA  
 AWARENESS



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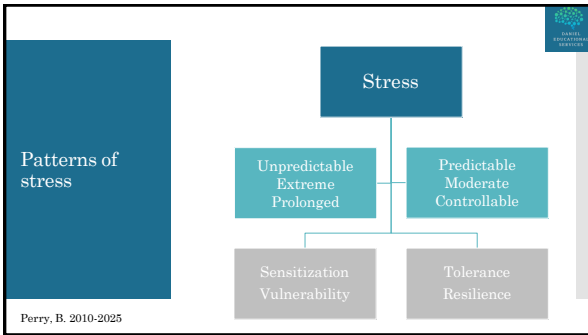
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Resilience can be...

- 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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What can we do to make the stressors when in our care more predictable moderate and controllable?

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Daily Schedule Chart

- Circle Time
- Centers
- Snack
- Group Time
- Lunch
- Outside
- Nap Time
- Art
- Centers
- Story Time

Predictability and routine

Advanced notice of change.

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SESAME WORKSHOP

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SKILLS

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Talking about feelings every day. No good or bad feelings



How are you feeling?

1 2 3 4 5

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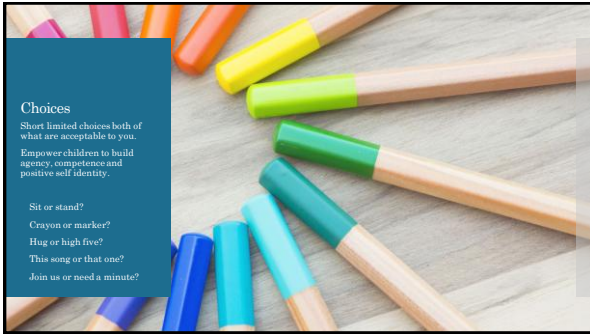
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**Choices**  
 Short limited choices both of what are acceptable to you. Empower children to build agency, competence and positive self identity.

- Sit or stand?
- Crayon or marker?
- Hug or high five?
- This song or that one?
- Join us or need a minute?

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*The CARER Framework*

- C o-regulation
- A uthentic connection
- R esilience through intentionality
- E ducation and empowerment
- R esponsibility and repair

*Carer: Someone who cares for the well-being of another person.*

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**C**  
**Co-Regulation**  
 (Brainstem/ Diencephalon/ Autonomic Nervous System)

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**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 Trauma Stress Report 1: Foundations for Understanding Self-Regulation, Brain and Cognitive Development Perspective, Center for Child and Family Policy, Duke University

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**Am I Safe?**  
Sensory input from body to lower parts of the brain  
Brain stem seeks patterned, repetitive, rhythmic, somatosensory input.  
Safety triggers ventral vagal state  
Allows access to relational and cortical parts of the brain  
Supports feelings of emotional well-being



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**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 during the workday?



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Sensory Areas

### Seeking or Avoiding

- Touch
- Movement (Proprioception)
- Balance (Vestibular)
- Hearing
- Sight
- Taste
- Smell
- Internal state (Interoception)



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Regulation for Adults

Daniele Educational Services, LLC

<https://danieleducationalservices.com/resources>

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Examples: Tactile

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

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Sensory Diverse Classroom  
 Movement:  
 Must have rhythm and repetition

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Movement and Balance

Seeking  
Balavisx  
 Balance board  
 Movement in learning  
 Brain breaks  
Body Percussion:

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Movement and Balance

Avoiding/Calming  
 Deep Breathing

[Breathing Visualization Slides](#)

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Sensory Diverse Classroom

Auditory

Seeking  
Music  
Call and response  
60 Beats per Minute Metronome

Avoiding  
Quiet place  
Noise cancelling headphones

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Sensory Diverse Classroom

Visual

Which do you prefer?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UchPSeIXN0>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FhBSR9r\\_jSE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FhBSR9r_jSE)

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CLASSROOM SCHEDULES

VISUAL

Sensory Diverse Classroom

Visual

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Activity Book For Family Well-being



<https://danieleducationalservices.com/resources>

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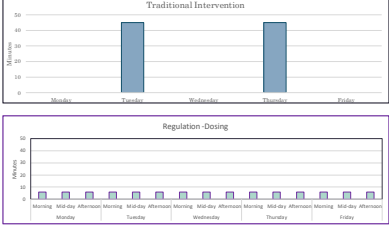
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Regulation:  
Dosing



Day	Minutes
Monday	0
Tuesday	100
Wednesday	0
Thursday	100
Friday	0

Day	Time	Minutes
Monday	Morning	10
	Mid-day Afternoon	10
Tuesday	Morning	10
	Mid-day Afternoon	10
Wednesday	Morning	10
	Mid-day Afternoon	10
Thursday	Morning	10
	Mid-day Afternoon	10
Friday	Morning	10
	Mid-day Afternoon	10

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Your  
Emotional  
Regulation



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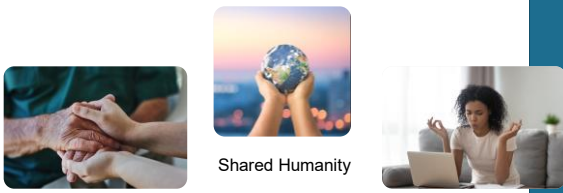
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Self-Compassion



Kindness      Shared Humanity      Mindfulness

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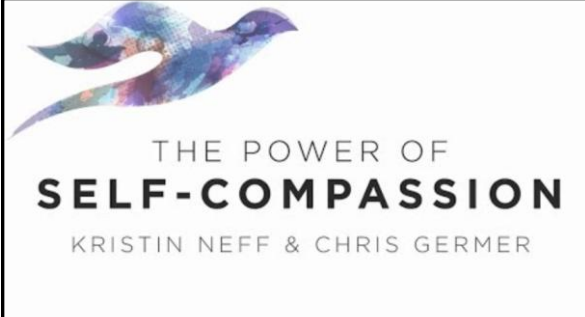
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THE POWER OF  
**SELF-COMPASSION**  
KRISTIN NEFF & CHRIS GERMER

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Instead of..	Try this..
What is wrong with me?	I tried my best
How could I let this happen?	I am human, like everyone else
I can't do anything right	I never agreed to be perfect
I failed again	I learned something
Anyone could do this better	I'll do it differently next time

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Family Self-Compassion Plan

<https://danieleducationalservices.com/resources>

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Thank you!

**Ways to Stay connected**

- Facebook Discussion Group/ Linked In: #SDanielEd
- Community of Practice / Mailing list [www.danieleducationalservices.com](http://www.danieleducationalservices.com)
- [danielledservices@gmail.com](mailto:danielledservices@gmail.com)
- (262) 305-0711

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