

Recognition, Resilience, and Healing in ECE



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Introduction



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Regulation



*What are the
three words
that describe
how you feel
today?*

[menti.com](https://www.menti.com)

4423 8423



Learning Objectives

- Identify and interpret signs of stress and trauma in children, and apply trauma-informed and prevention-focused responses that prioritize emotional and physical safety.
- Apply and strengthen foundational social-emotional skills, including emotional awareness, self-regulation, healthy communication, and boundary setting, to promote resilience, connection, and recovery within supportive environments.
- Recognize and manage one's own trauma responses by analyzing the impact of lived experiences, identifying triggers, and practicing self-regulation and self-compassion strategies that foster calm, clarity, and sustainable care

Let's start by talking
about mental health



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.



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
- Neuroception: The continual subconscious process of determining whether a situation are safe, dangerous, or life threatening

Nervous System

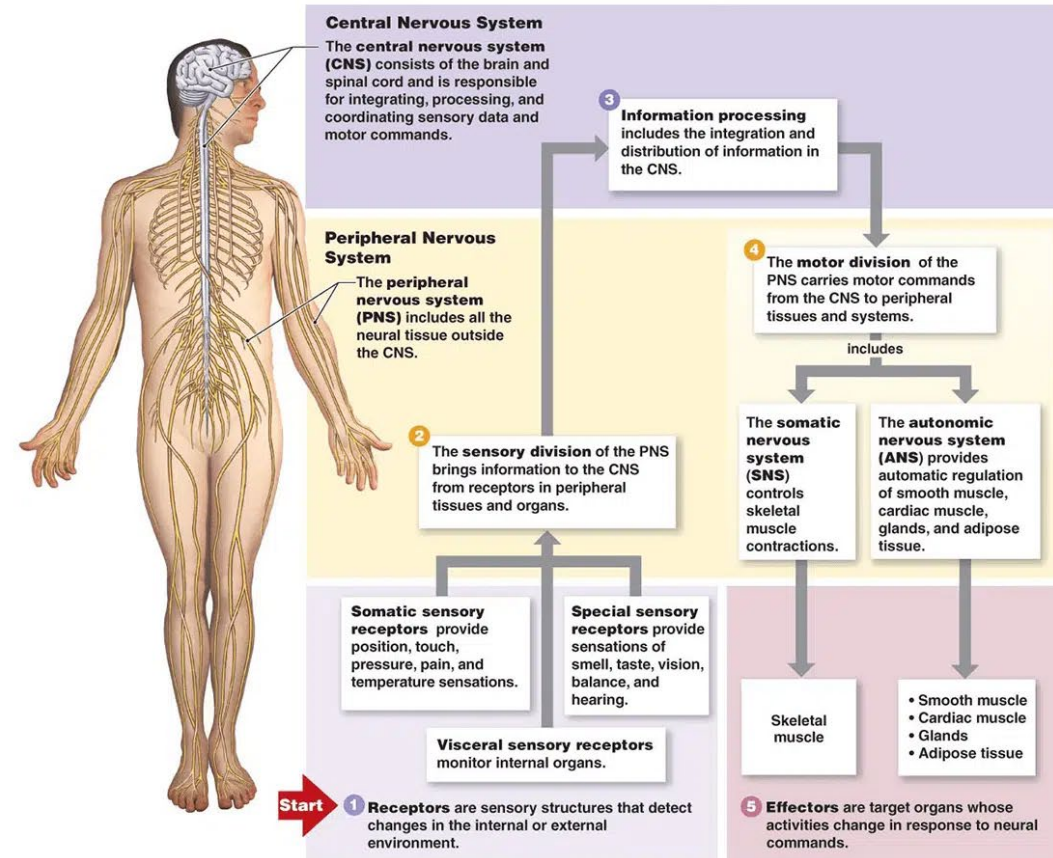


image via: highlands.edu

**Cognitive: Thinking,
learning, planning,
remembering**
“Can I learn?”

**Relational: Emotional
State**
“Am I loved?”

**Survival: Sensory
processing and
integration**
“Am I safe?”

PREFRONTAL
CORTEX

**Messages Directing
Body to Respond**

HYPOTHALAMUS

PITUITARY GLAND

AMYGDALA

BRAIN STEM

CEREBELLUM

HIPPOCAMPUS

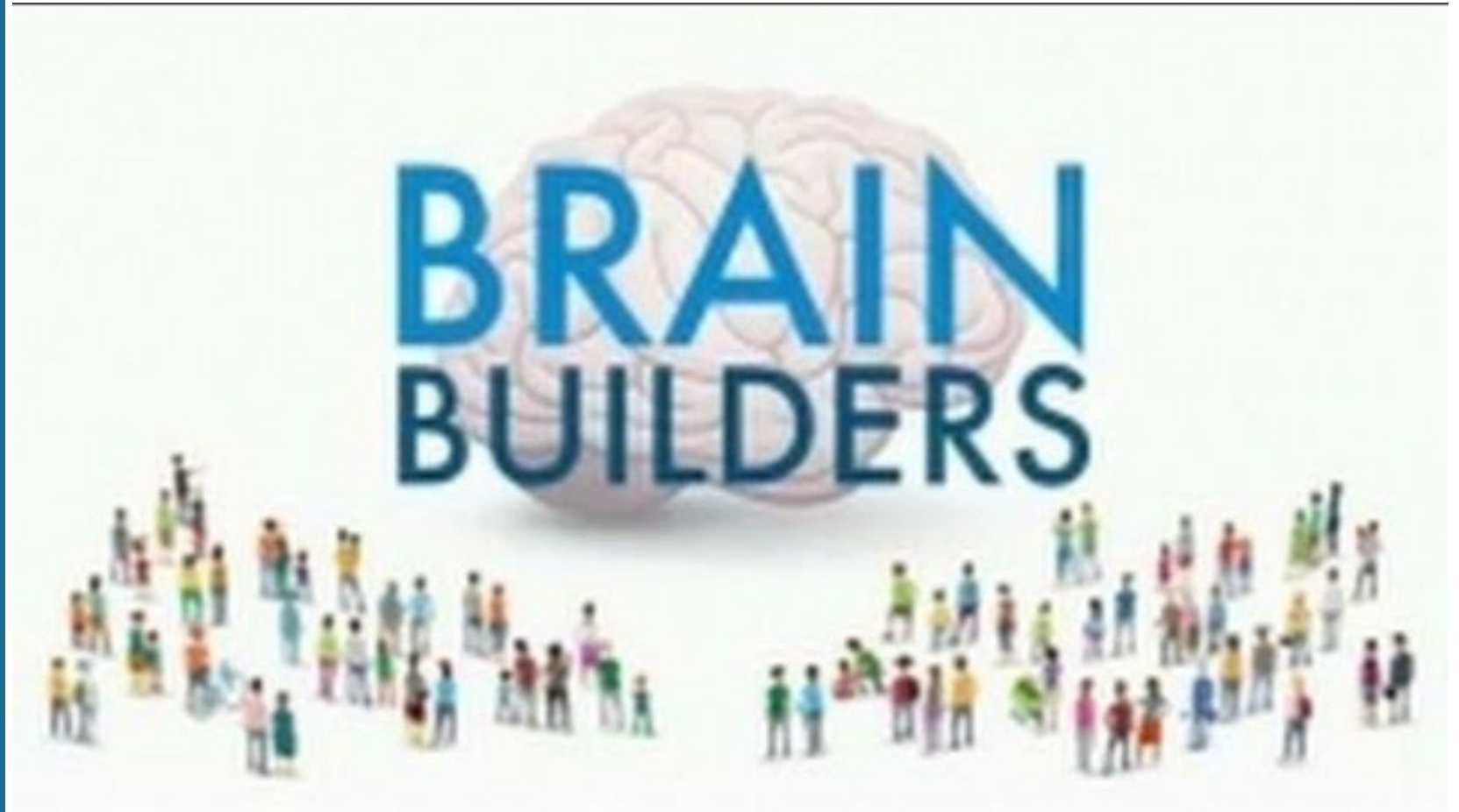
Sensory Input (External)
Interoception (Internal State)



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How Brains are Built

Alberta
Family
Wellness



What is trauma?

- Traumatic events threaten the safety of a child or their loved ones.
- Young children are especially affected because they depend on caregivers for their safety.
- Trauma can cause lasting emotional and physical reactions.
- Feeling unprotected can intensify these reactions.
- Trauma can stem from external events (disasters, violence) or within the family (abuse, sudden death)

Recognizing Child Abuse

Awareness helps protect children. Trust your observations and report concerns.

Types of Abuse



Physical abuse



Sexual abuse



Emotional abuse



Medical abuse



Neglect



Signs and Symptoms of Physical Abuse

- Unexplained injuries, such as bruises, broken bones (fractures), or burns.
- Injuries that do not match the explanation given.
- Injuries that are not compatible with the child's capacity for development.



Signs and Symptoms of Sexual Abuse

- Sexual behavior or knowledge inappropriate for the child's age.
- Pregnancy or a sexually transmitted infection.
- Pain, bleeding, or injury in the genital or anal area.
- Statements by the child saying that he or she was sexually abused.
- Inappropriate sexual behavior with other children.



Signs and Symptoms of Emotional Abuse

- Delayed or inappropriate emotional development.
- Loss of confidence or self-esteem.
- Social isolation or loss of interest or enthusiasm.
- Depression.
- Avoiding certain situations (for example, refusing to go to school or taking the bus).
- Desperately seeking affection.
- Decreased school performance or loss of interest in school.
- Loss of previously acquired developmental skills.



Signs and Symptoms of Neglect

- Poor growth.
- Excessive weight with medical complications that are not being properly treated.
- Poor personal hygiene.
- Lack of clothing or supplies needed to meet physical needs.
- Hoarding or stealing food.
- Poor school attendance record.
- Lack of adequate attention to medical, dental, or psychological problems or lack of necessary follow-up.



Red Flags in Parental Behavior

- Not recognizing physical or emotional suffering
- Blames the child for problems
- Constantly criticizes or belittles
- Expects the child to care for the parent or give him or her sole attention
- Apply severe physical discipline
- Demands inadequate physical or academic performance
- Limit contact with other people
- Confusing, contradictory, or inconsistent explanations for injuries
- Repeatedly takes the child for unnecessary medical evaluations





Recognizing Stress in Young Children



Fight, Flight or Freeze



Flock and Fawn



Signs of Stress

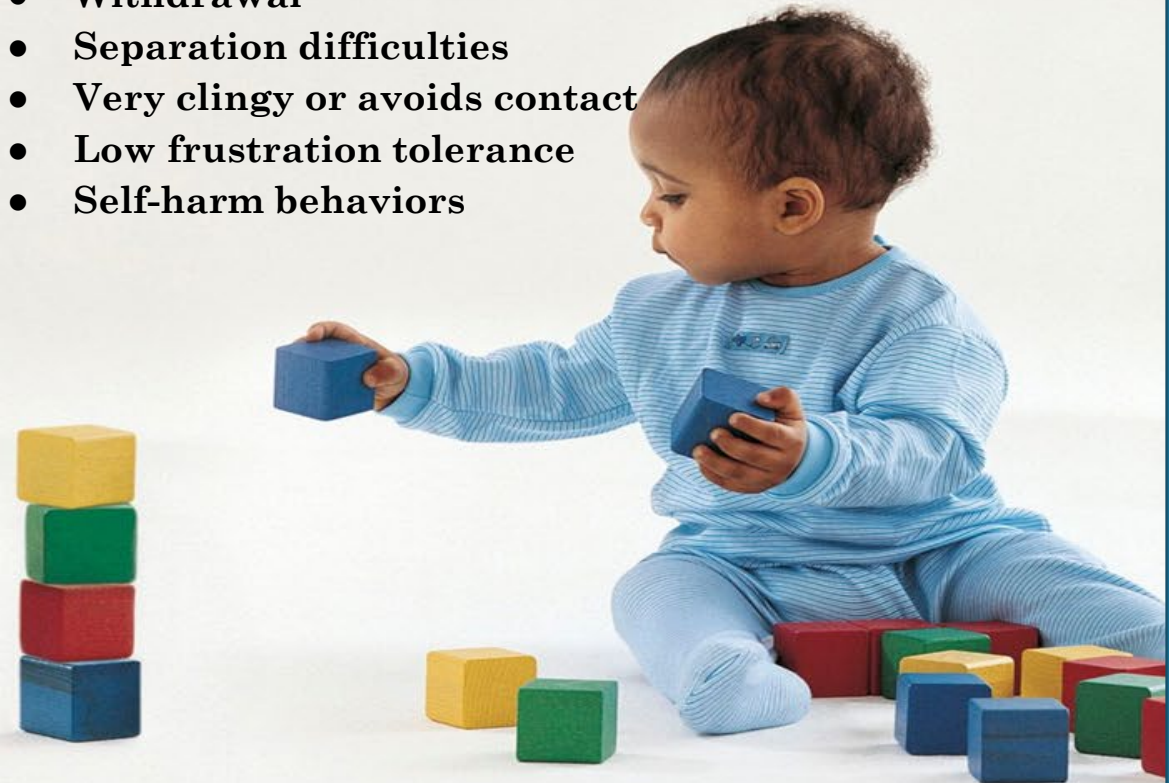
Infants

- Difficulty calming down (crying constantly or for long periods)
- Withdrawal / not interacting (crying very rarely)
- Appearing frozen or hypervigilant
- Difficulty gaining weight
- Resisting or startling at touch
- Unresponsive to adults' attempts to interact
- Extreme fear of strangers



Toddlers

- Language delay
- Aggressive behavior
- Fearfulness
- Sleep problems
- Tantrums
- Withdrawal
- Separation difficulties
- Very clingy or avoids contact
- Low frustration tolerance
- Self-harm behaviors



Signs of Stress

Pre-school

- Hypervigilant or constantly on guard
- Indiscriminate attachment to strangers
- Misinterpreting the meaning or intentions of others
- Feelings of shame
- Difficulty managing strong/difficult emotions
- Tantrums
- Withdrawal
- Regression
- Attempts to control the environment

School Age

- Hypervigilant and on guard
- Easily upset or dysregulated
- Impulsive
- Difficulty with self-regulation
- Poor impulse control
- Difficulty thinking about consequences
- Withdrawn
- Overwhelmed
- Aggressive or defensive
- Rigid and inflexible



How to
respond to
possible
abuse?



Milwaukee Center
For Children & Youth
Restoring Hope, Healing, and Support

A Staff Guide: Next Steps When a Student Discloses Abuse

5 Helpful Steps



1. Stay calm and help your student feel safe.

- Stay calm, even if their emotions feel overwhelming.
- Let them know they did the right thing by sharing, and that you are there to support and protect them.

How to respond to possible abuse?

2. Believe and Validate Your Student.



- Validate their feelings and acknowledge their courage in speaking up.
- Listen carefully to your student's disclosure without interrupting or judging.

3. Ensure Safety and Protection.



- Restrict the alleged abuser's access to the student and take any necessary precautions to prevent further harm.
- Contact Child Protective Services (CPS):
(414) 220-SAFE

How to respond to possible abuse?



4. Communicate with Parents (if They Are Not the Abuser)

- Encourage parents to stay calm, reassure, and validate their child.
- Provide resources for parents.



5. Seek Professional Help: Remember You Are Not Alone

- Consult with a qualified agency that specializes in working with abuse victims.
- Milwaukee Center for Children and Youth: (414) 248-3996



6. Practice Self Care

- Take time to breathe.
- Practice self-care.
- Process your feelings with someone you trust.

Neuroplasticity and Resilience

Our brains can change
and grow throughout
our lives.



Neuroplasticity



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

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



Our brains have an amazing capacity to adapt, heal, and grow—
especially when we have supportive relationships and safe environments.



Resilience



Strategies for children



Strategies to prevent abuse

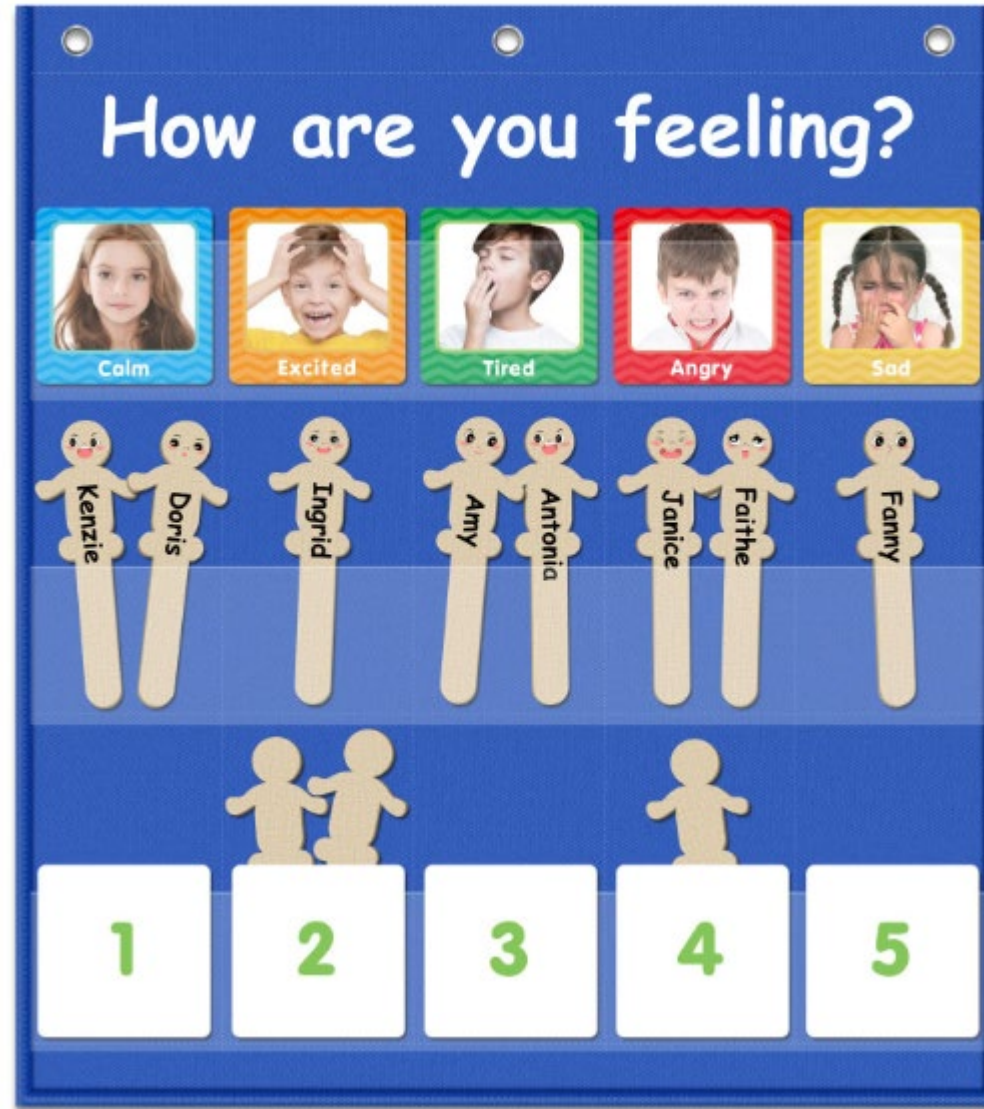
- Social-emotional development
- Self-regulation skills
- Healthy Boundaries



Areas of Social- Emotional Learning



Talking
about
feelings
every day.
No good or
bad feelings



Sensory Tools

👉 Touch

- Sensory trays
- Play dough or kinetic sand
- Toys with different textures and manipulative objects for motor restlessness

👤 Movement (Body and Balance)

- Small trampoline
- Balance Tools
- Push and pull activities

🎧 Sound

- Noise-cancelling headphones
- Relaxing music
- Rhythmic instruments (such as drums, maracas, tambourines, etc.)



👁️ Visual Supports

- Visual Timer
- Glitter jar
- Visual Schedule

🧸 Calm and comfort

- Cozy corner or calm corner
- Weighted objects to place on your lap (weighted blankets, pillows, or cushions)
- Soft textured toys and materials

💨 Oral regulation and self-regulation

- Bubbles, straws and windmills
- Crunchy snacks
- Safe tools for biting or chewing

Breathing

Co-regulate: Sit close to the child, even out their breathing, and then slowly slow down to help them regulate.

Through play:

- Bubbles: Make the bubble bigger with slow breaths.
- Instruments: Blow a long note.
- Windmill: Inhale 1–2–3, exhale 4–5–6.
- Cotton ball: Blow a cotton ball to the finish line with deep breaths.

Guided breathing:

- Rainbow: Inhale by raising your arms; exhale lowering them in the shape of a rainbow.
- Abdominal: Lie down with a stuffed animal on your abdomen and watch how it rises and falls as you breathe.
- Birthday: Inhale "smelling the cake" and exhale "blowing out the candles."



Rhythm and Movement

- Call-and-response drum patterns (the adult can play a pattern on the drum and children can repeat it by clapping or tapping their feet).
- Sing songs.
- To dribble a ball following a rhythm.
- Toss and catch a bean bag with a partner following a rhythm or song.
- Reach out toward the ceiling with your hands up and then touch your toes.
- Take a walk; follow the leader.
- Learning stations.
- The Hokey Pokey.
- Place your hands on your hips, twist and twist your body.
- Yoga poses (mountain, tree, lunge, warrior, forward bend, and downward facing dog)



Teaching Healthy Boundaries to Young Children

Healthy boundaries help children feel safe, respected, and empowered.



Boundaries help children learn how to:

- Respect their own body, feelings, and personal space.
- Respect the bodies, feelings, and space of others.
- Build safe, healthy relationships.



Teach it

- Bodily Autonomy
- Personal Space
- Mutual Consent
- Name Feelings
- Use Visual Aids
- Act Out Scenarios



Model it: Children learn boundaries by watching adults

- Ask permission before helping or touching.
- Respect children's choices when appropriate.
- Use calm, respectful language.
- Reinforce boundaries with consistency and kindness.



When children understand boundaries, they feel safe, confident, and valued.



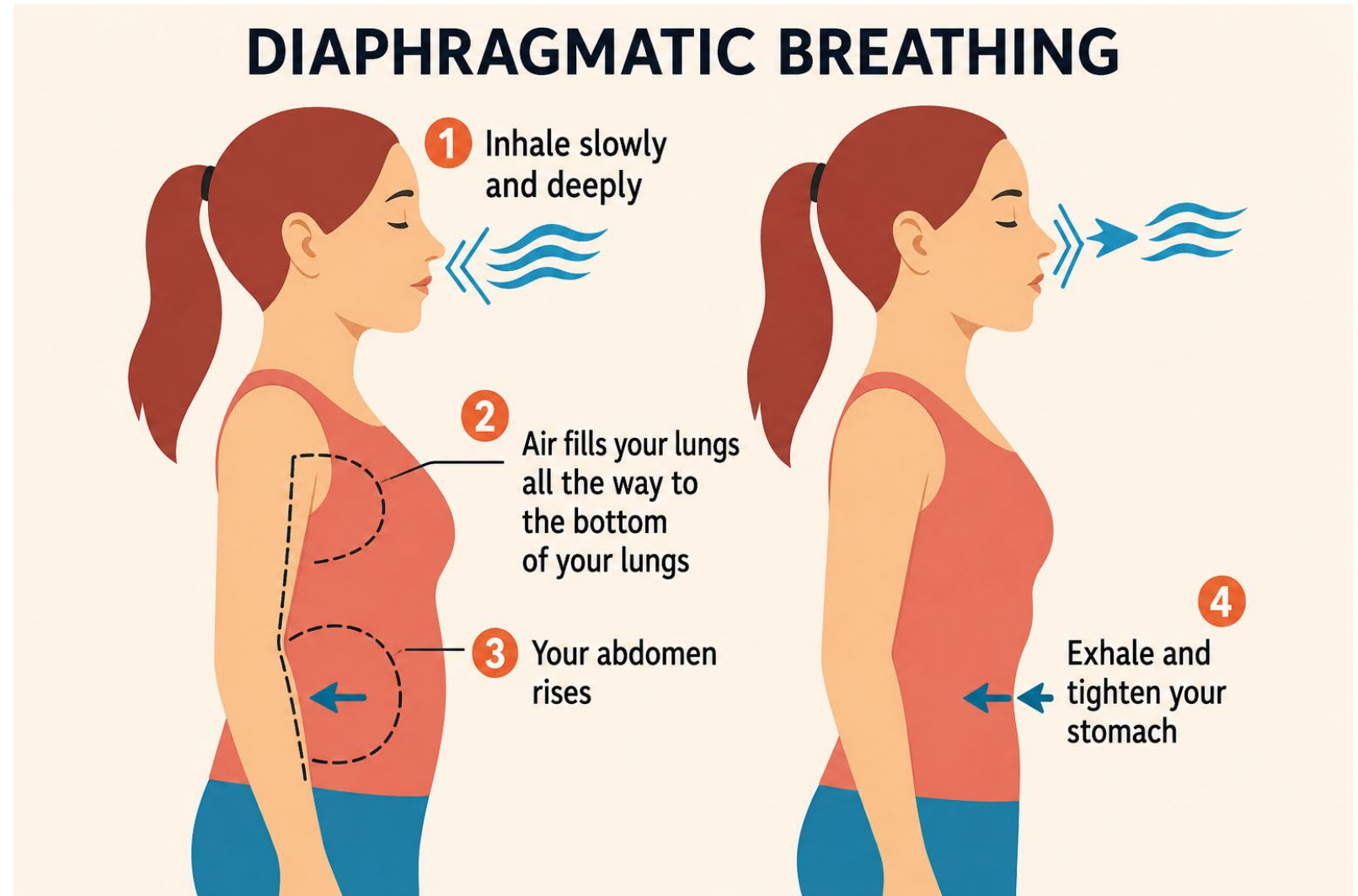
♪ **That's a Boundary!** ♪



Co-regulation strategies for adults



Deep Breathing



Mindfulness

- Awareness of the present
- Observation without judgment
- Acceptance
- Cultivating calm
- Reduction of automatic reactions



Body Scan: Recognizing Stress in Your Body



BODY SCAN MINDFUL MOMENT 3 Minutes

 THE POCKET MENTOR

SIMPLE MOVEMENT BREAKS

≡ *for Adults* ≡

REDUCE STRESS. BOOST ENERGY. FEEL BETTER.

1 SHOULDER ROLLS



Roll your shoulders up, back, down and forward. Repeat 5 times.

Release tension.

2 NECK STRETCH



Gently tilt your head to one side. Hold for 15 seconds. Switch sides.

Relieve neck tightness.

3 STANDING SIDE STRETCH



Reach one arm overhead and lean to the side. Hold for 15 seconds. Switch sides.

Open and lengthen.

4 SEATED SPINAL TWIST



Sit tall and gently twist to one side. Hold for 15 seconds. Switch sides.

Improve mobility and release tension.

5 WALL PUSH-UP



Place hands on the wall at shoulder height. Step back and do a gentle push-up. Repeat 8–10 times.

Boost energy and strength.

6 STAND & REACH



Stand tall and reach your arms overhead. Take a deep breath. Repeat 3 times.

Stretch and recharge.



MOVE. BREATHE. RESET.

Even 1–2 minutes of movement can help reduce stress and improve your focus. Take breaks. You deserve it!

QUICK TIPS

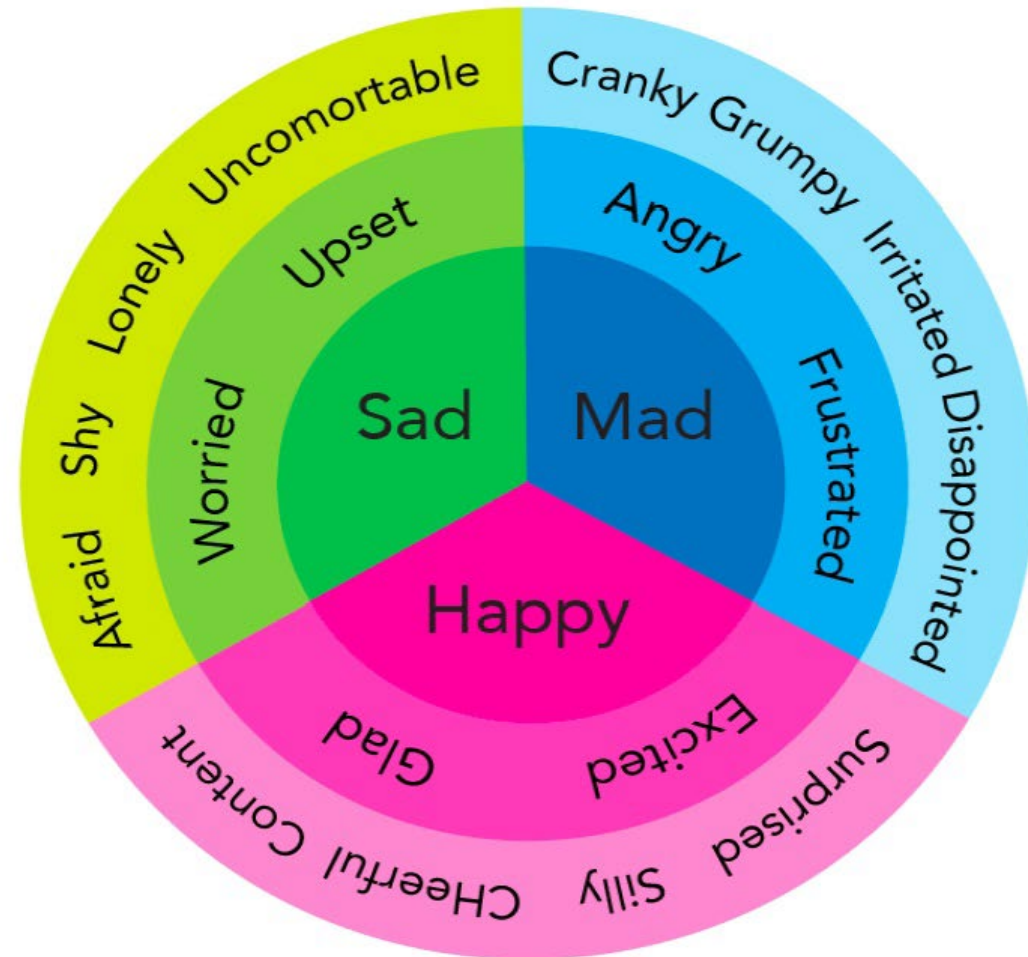
- ♥ Move at your own pace.
- ♥ Breathe deeply.

- ♥ Listen to your body.
- ♥ Take breaks often!



SMALL MOVES. BIG IMPACT. ♥

Recognize and name emotions



Other Regulatory Strategies

- Quiet Time / Noise Cancelling Headphones
- Enjoy a hot drink
- Take a walk
- Massage your hands, arms, and shoulders
- Knitting
- Music
- Dancing
- Gardening
- Get outdoors
- Read

Healing Strategies

- Recognize automatic negative thoughts
- Focus on the things you're grateful for
- Identify and name what you're feeling and the emotions behind it
- Name what is in your control and what is not and focus on what you can control
- Focus on the present and be aware of your surroundings
- Repeat a mantra: I am safe, I control my own body, I have what I need to protect myself.
- Using the strategies in your self-regulation plan
- Connect with others
- Set limits

Supporting others



Empathy blockers

Advise/Repair

- Maybe you should get up earlier.
- Maybe you should think about another job."
- Maybe you should..."

Educate

- There's a good book that I think will help you.

Data Analysis/Collection

- You know, this seems to be a pattern of yours.

Minimizing

- It's not that bad
- You think you had a rough day.
Let me tell you mine.

Sympathy

- I'm sure you did the best you could.

Discounting / Shutting Down

- Well, you know you should be glad to have a job.

Compassionate Witnessing

- You don't need to fix it.
- You just need to be present, without judgment, and witness their pain and their experiences.
- Create a safe space.
- Ask what they need: just listen or give them advice?



Building empathy

- I'm listening to you, I'm here with you, you're not alone.
- That sounds very difficult.
- I can't imagine how stressful it must be for you.
- I don't know what to say, but I'm glad you shared this with me.
- Wow, that must have been very frustrating.
- Your feelings are valid; I can understand why you feel that way.
- Is there anything I can do to help you?

The 3 Components of Self-Compassion



**KINDNESS TO
ONESELF**



SHARED HUMANITY



MINDFULNESS

Self
Compassion



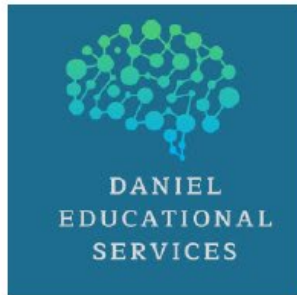
THE POWER OF
SELF-COMPASSION

KRISTIN NEFF & CHRIS GERMER



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Activity Book For Family Well-being



<https://danieleducationalservices.com/resources>

Thank you!

Ways to Stay connected

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