

Staying the Course: The Importance of Emotional Regulation for Families

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Concerned Persons for Adoption

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Our Family And How We Got Here

- ▶ Seven girls - ranging in age from 15-32 now
- ▶ All preteens when we met them
- ▶ All with significant histories of trauma, neglect, and abuse
- ▶ Family formed by foster care, guardianship, adoption and kinship for over 15 years
- ▶ We learned over time (sometimes the hard way) how important it is for us to regulate the emotional thermostat in our family



What is Dysregulation?

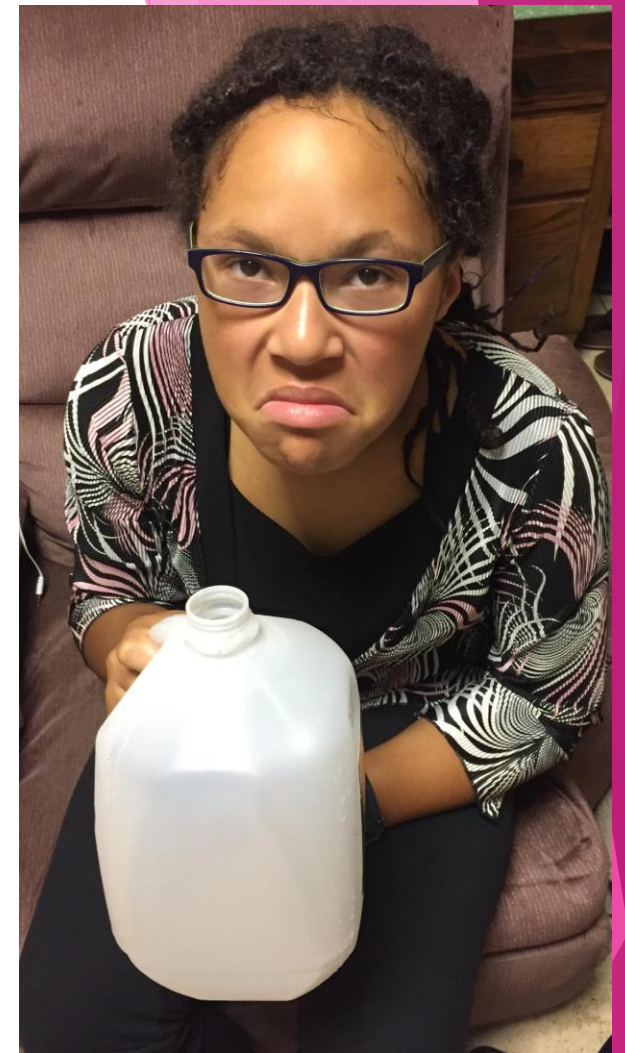
What Does it Look Like?

- ▶ Difficulty controlling emotions
- ▶ Disorganized behavior
- ▶ Oppositional or defiant behavior; arguing
- ▶ Spacing out; daydreaming
- ▶ Loud and very active
- ▶ Tired
- ▶ Pupils dilated, sweating, agitated, pale
- ▶ “Wild Child”
- ▶ Think fight, flight or freeze



What Causes Emotional Dysregulation?

- ▶ Trauma
- ▶ Dysregulated and inconsistent environments
- ▶ Hunger
- ▶ Thirst - dehydration (*this is very important)
- ▶ Fatigue or tiredness - lack of sleep or of good quality sleep
- ▶ Stress - this can be positive or negative
- ▶ Transitions - changes in routine - separations
- ▶ Child is not usually aware - but this awareness can be developed over time

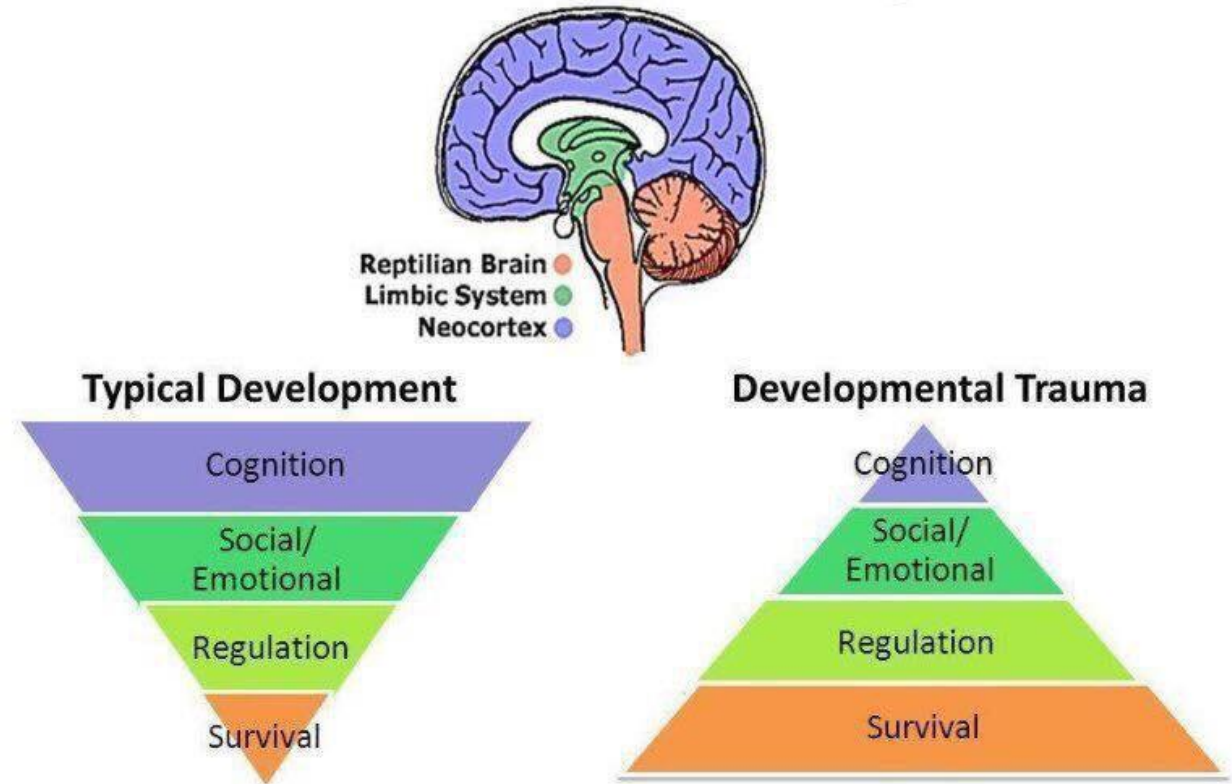


Complex Developmental Trauma

Effects on the Brain

- ▶ Effects of trauma on the developing brain
- ▶ Overdevelopment of the part of the brain that responds to danger
- ▶ Underdevelopment of the higher, executive functioning areas of the brain

Trauma & Brain Development



Adapted from Holt & Jordan, Ohio Dept. of Education

Complex Developmental Trauma Effects on the Brain

- ▶ How this leads to emotional dysregulation
 - ▶ Brain architecture for regulation is not there
 - ▶ Child has not had the repetitive experience of getting needs met that leads to the development of frustration tolerance and regulation
 - ▶ Brain is always responding to danger or threat
- ▶ Full explanation of this is another workshop

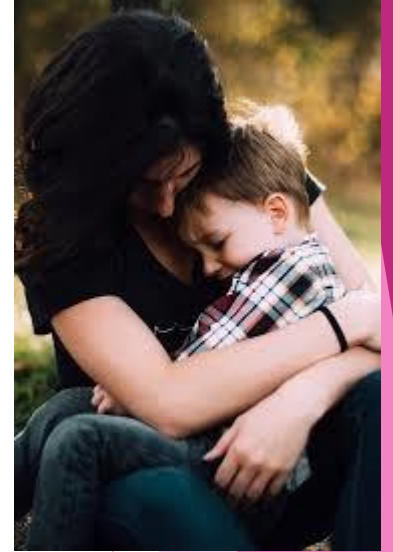


We Must Be Regulated Ourselves

- ▶ We must be the emotional thermostat for our families
- ▶ Our being regulated is the first step in helping our kids stay regulated and learn skills for self-regulation
- ▶ This absolutely can develop over time!
- ▶ It does so in the context of a healing and regulating relationship
- ▶ Taking care of ourselves is how we can stay regulated
 - ▶ This is the usual stuff - sleep, eat healthy, exercise, get support, make time to do things you enjoy, mindfulness
 - ▶ Focus on your relationships
 - ▶ So much easier said than done....



“
Trauma happens in the context of relationship. It must heal in the context of relationship.”



Emotional self-regulation develops in relationship with a regulated parent.



Regulated Family and Home Environment

- ▶ Structure - be structured, but flexible
- ▶ Routine - predictability = safety
- ▶ Schedules - can loosen up over time
- ▶ Focus on keeping home a peaceful place
- ▶ Plenty of time for transitions
- ▶ Pay attention to times that lead to dysregulation (bath time, hygiene/tooth brushing, bedtime, getting ready for school)
- ▶ Importance of playfulness (setting timers, making things into a game)




Regulation Outside the Home

- ▶ School - there is structure but still can be very dysregulating - the school bus - the lunchroom
- ▶ Large gatherings/Parties - plan ahead for frequent breaks - maybe shorter periods of time
- ▶ Public places/Shopping - prepare ahead of time whenever possible - keep kids close
- ▶ Look out for places where there is a lot of activity (arcades, theme parks) - be aware of lighting
- ▶ Consider when it might be helpful to let other adults know how they can help
- ▶ Consider not doing certain things if you can avoid them until better skills for regulation are developed



The Importance of Diet

- ▶ Hydration (water, alternate water with other drinks - limit soda, substitute seltzer and juice, lemonade and water)
- ▶ Regular meals and snacks
- ▶ Foods that regulate (crunchy, sweet)
- ▶ Right balance of carbs and proteins - proteins early in the day, carbs later
- ▶ Omega 3's and phosphatidylserine (Accentrate)
- ▶ Eating together as a family is super important 
- ▶ And yet mealtimes can be very stressful - may have been the time that conflicts took place - focusing on emotional regulation at mealtime can help this shift over time



Tools for Regulation and Self-Regulation

- ▶ Fidget toys (NOT spinners)
- ▶ Calm down bottles or timers
- ▶ Chewables/chewlry
- ▶ Puzzles that engage the brain (executive functioning)
- ▶ Sensory things - weighted toys and blankets
- ▶ Aromatherapy (diffusers and balms)
- ▶ Inflatable seat - kick bands
- ▶ Yoga ball
- ▶ Rhythmic motion (drumming, rocking, pogo sticks, trampoline)
- ▶ Physical activity (balance board, jumping jacks, running)



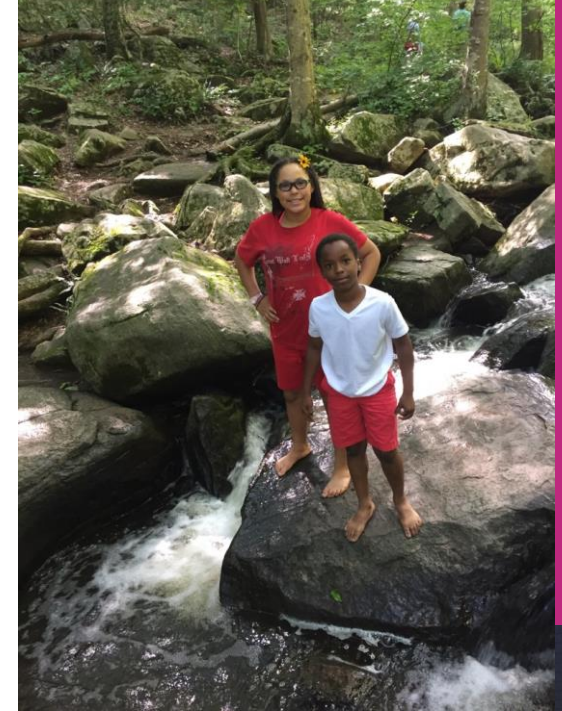
WEIGHTED discovery
bottles
for Active Kids



Things That Help with Regulation

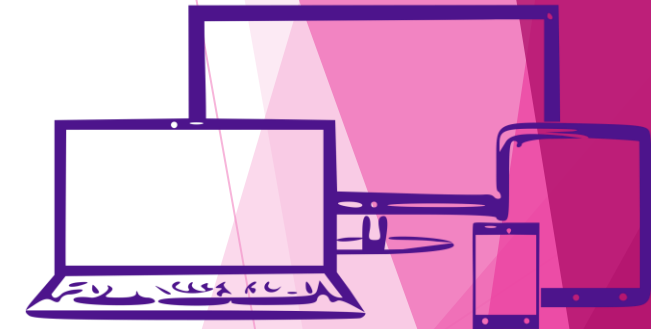
- ▶ Music
- ▶ Yoga
- ▶ Breathing
- ▶ Exercise/sports
- ▶ Pets
- ▶ Drawing/painting/coloring
- ▶ Clay
- ▶ Writing/journaling
- ▶ Being outside in nature
- ▶ Arts and crafts
- ▶ Puzzles
- ▶ Lego

Basically anything that engages the parts of the brain that are responsible for executive functioning and helps these areas develop



Things That DO NOT Help with Regulation

- ▶ Electronics
- ▶ Television
- ▶ Video games
- ▶ Certain types of animation
- ▶ Anything with a screen
- ▶ Parties/large gatherings
- ▶ Unstructured or unsupervised social activities
- ▶ Theme parks
- ▶ Fairs
- ▶ Water parks and rides
- ▶ Action movies
- ▶ Poor diet
- ▶ Not enough rest or sleep
- ▶ Dehydration



What We Can Do

- ▶ Limit screen time
- ▶ Increase family time - cook together, game night, quiet activities
- ▶ Alternate activities that are good for the brain with those that are not
- ▶ Prepare ahead of time for hydration and regulation breaks
- ▶ Spend time outside - walks, explore, build things, play
- ▶ Go “Old School” - as far as games, media, activities
- ▶ Insure kids get adequate sleep
- ▶ Be patient
- ▶ Be proactive
- ▶ Respond to the need and not the behavior - connect before you correct
- ▶ Remember - Hungry? Thirsty? Tired? Afraid? Stressed?



Back to This Little Guy....



Questions?
Thoughts?
Ideas?
Share?



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