

A close-up photograph of several green leaves, likely from a fern or similar plant, showing intricate vein patterns. Numerous small, clear water droplets are scattered across the leaf surfaces, reflecting light. The leaves are arranged in a fan-like pattern, with some veins running parallel and others branching out. The overall color is a vibrant, natural green.

# **Self-Regulation: Nurturing the Mind-Body Connection in Our Children**

**Nicola Doughty, RCC**  
for Lord Tennyson School  
January 2022



**I'm speaking to you from the  
unceded and occupied land  
of the Coast Salish peoples –  
Sk̓w̓w̓ú7mesh (Squamish),  
Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh  
(Tsleil-Waututh) and  
x̣ẉməθḳẉəỵəm (Musqueam)  
Nations.**



# Our goals this evening:

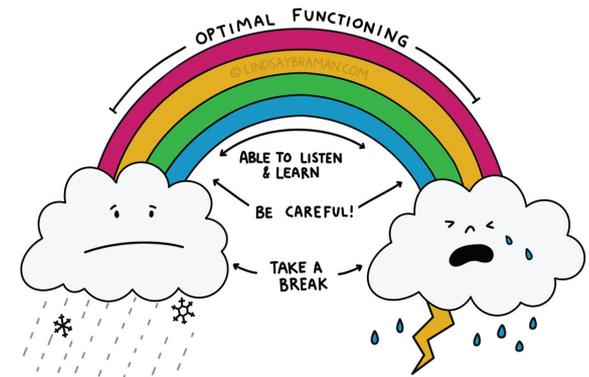
- Setting the stage for understanding
- Behaviour as communication
- Self-regulation & the brain
- Responding to self-regulation difficulties in children
- Covid and the impact on children and self-regulation
- Supporting increased self-regulation in children



As children grow up and their brains develop, they become more able to manage their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

They become better at:

- staying calm when they feel upset
- stopping to think before they act
- doing what is expected of them, even when they don't want to
- paying attention and avoiding distraction
- staying focused on their goals
- waiting to get what they want
- adapting to changes in their environment
- cooperating with others



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## Examples of self-regulation

**Babies** might suck their fingers for comfort or look away from their caregivers if they need a break from attention or are getting tired.

**Toddlers** can wait short times for food and toys. But toddlers might still snatch toys from other children if it's something they really want. And tantrums happen when toddlers are overwhelmed by strong emotions.

**Preschoolers** are starting to know how to play with other children and understand what's expected of them. For example, a preschooler might try to speak in a soft voice if you're at the movies.



## Examples of self-regulation

**School-age children** are getting better at controlling their own wants and needs, imagining other people's perspectives and seeing both sides of a situation. This means, for example, that they might be able to disagree with other children without having an argument.

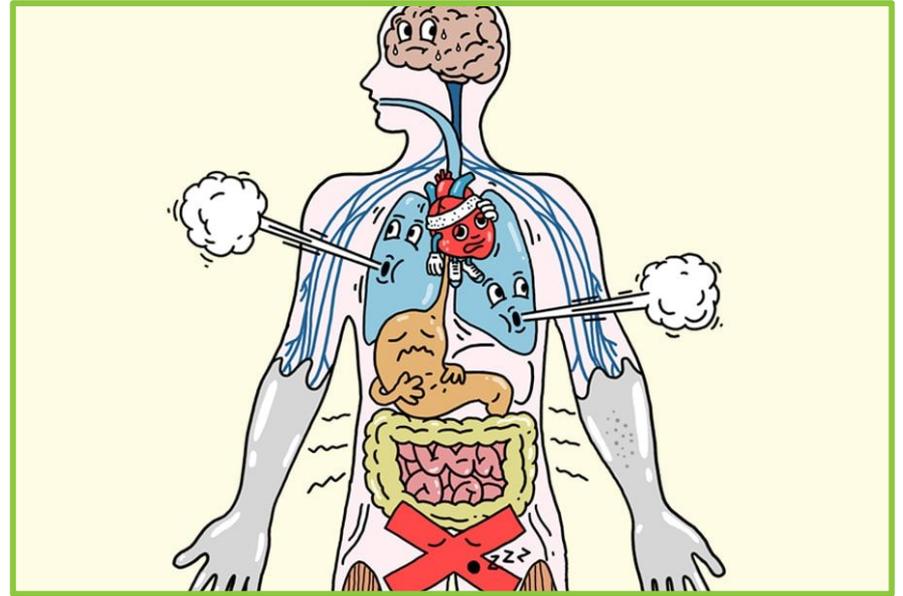
**Preteens and teenagers** are better at planning, sticking with difficult tasks, behaving in socially appropriate ways, and considering how their behaviour affects other people. For example, your teenage child might think about your perspective when they're negotiating with you about their curfew.



# What causes dysregulation?

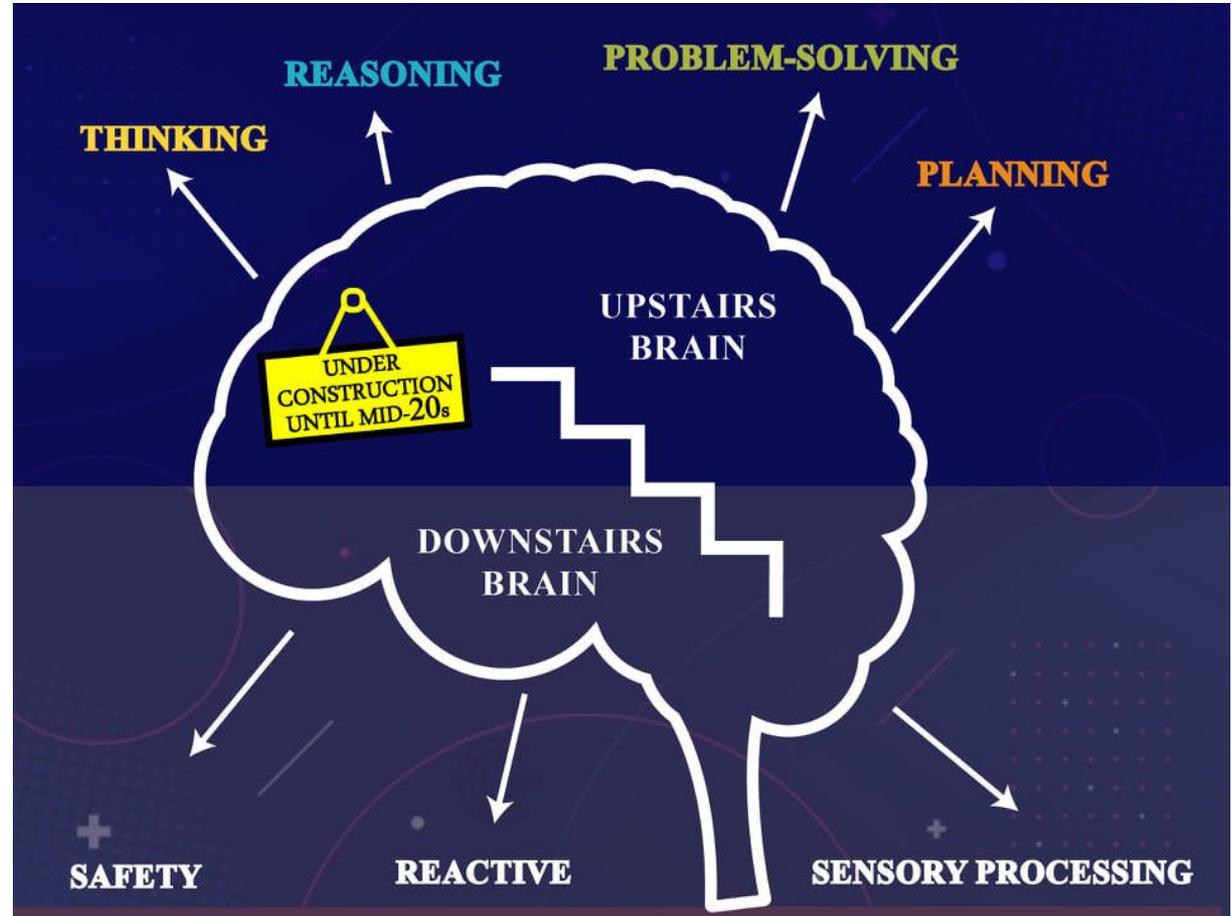
## Stress

Anything that requires our internal systems to burn energy to maintain internal balance





## Self-Regulation & the Brain



# Four Provocations of Stress (internal conflict)

- Physical and emotional safety
- The unknown
- Incongruence in the environment
- “Shoulds” & unmet expectations

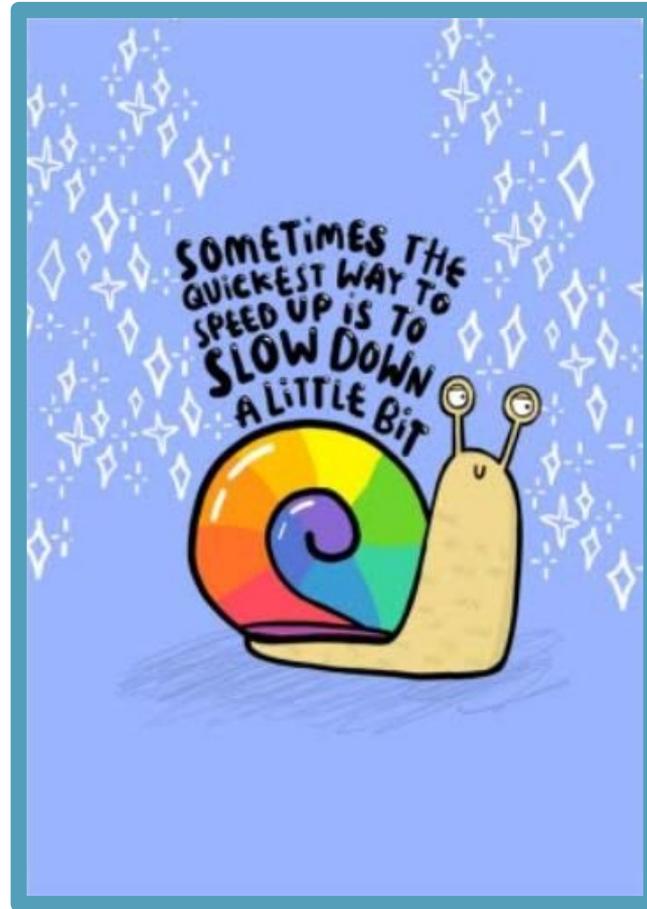




# Covid and the impact on Children and Self-Regulation

Restrictions have reduced the opportunities for children to build natural skills in such areas as:

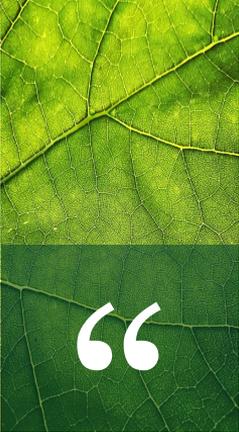
- socializing
- independence
- cooperative play
- focused concentration
- decision-making and following instructions
- flexibility
- routines for long periods of time (ie. school day)
- relationships with other authority figures





We want to ensure that the demands we place on children are never greater than their internal resources to cope.





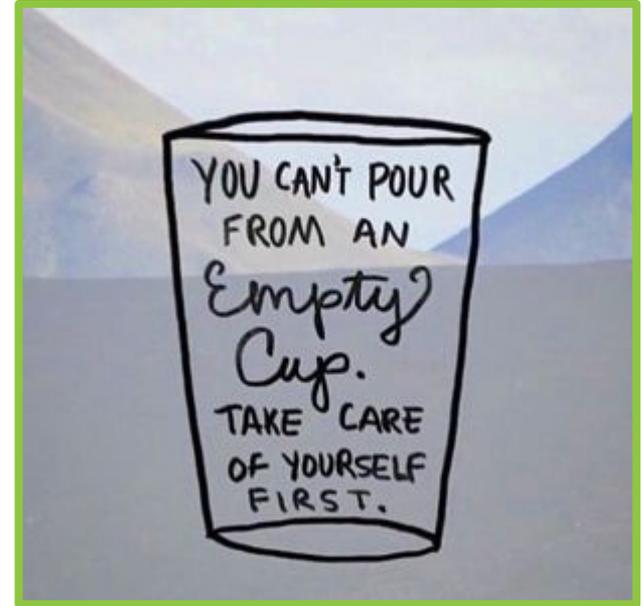
***Safety is not the absence of threat...  
it is the presence of connection.***

*- Gabor Maté -*



## Responding to self-regulation difficulties in children

- Co-regulation is the first step to self-regulation
- Challenge yourself to regulate
- Practice, practice, practice





## Your child's best resource...

- You!
- Know their world - learn about them, from them
- Spend time together
- Play
- Listen
- Attend to their feelings - show them the importance of being aware of their inner world
- Reduce screen time as much as possible



## Strategies for supporting increased self-regulation:

Self-regulation involves a set of skills that allow us to manage our big emotions and think before we act.

- **Manage your own stress.**
  - This doesn't mean being perfect or being perfectly happy.
  - Demonstrate the ways that you self-regulate.
  - Show appropriate emotions for the situation at hand
    - Don't avoid 'negative' feelings



 Stop Breathe Think



**Acceptance is Key**





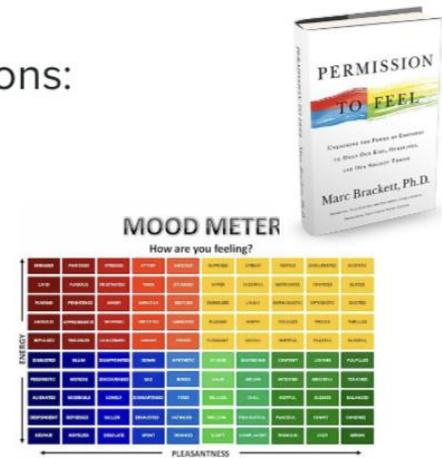
*stay calm*

- **Stay calm and model self-regulation.** When children are reacting in the moment, they are in **survival mode**. Their downstairs brains are in full swing. Do not try to talk to them because **they cannot respond** to logic or reason. Instead, **stay calm**, show **empathy**, guide them through sensory experiences and calming strategies - all of these will help them become more **present** in the moment and **self-aware**.
- **Be supportive and encouraging.** Help children feel cared about, valued, and understood as they learn to regulate. Show genuine interest and engage with them in the moment. Connect, even in the toughest moments.



## Feeling the Emotions:

- Sad
- Angry
- Frightened
- Apathetic
- Frustrated
- Hopeless
- Confused
- ..... help your child find their emotion



- **Teach children about their brains.** Help them understand the role of the downstairs brain in their stress response, as well as the upstairs brain in their regulation.
- **Expand their vocabulary.** Talk to children about their feelings. Teach them about their resource pool (their village of people).



# Creating a toolbox!

- The idea is to help children stop in the moment - stay calm and think - and not act on their big emotions. Introduce these things **slowly**, one at a time, **NOT** during a “activated phase”. Do these things together (parent-child) to show co-regulation!!
  - **Mental** break (book, music, colouring, creativity, hobbies, games, movies)
  - **Physical** break (dance, sports, walk, stretch)
  - **Spiritual** break (yoga, meditation, mantra, singing, prayer)
  - **Sensory** experience (sound, taste, touch, movement)
  - **Grounding** activity (deep breathing, slow counting, visualization)
  - **Positive self-talk** (affirmations)
  - **Social support** (ask for help, connect with a friend/ parent)





- **Keep the end goal in mind.** It is not to simply decrease children's challenging behaviour. **We want to teach skills and increase their own awareness.** They can handle changes in their environment better and respond to stress more calmly.
- **Develop realistic expectations.** Demand from children only as much as they are able to handle, keeping in mind that success leads to more success. Expect setbacks to learning and growth.





- **Ensure that children's resource pool for regulation is regularly replenished.** Sleep, a balanced diet, and regular exercise are essential. Help your child plan for activities they enjoy and in which they do well.



- **Reduce unnecessary demands.** Review your child's routines to make sure they are not overloaded. Too many responsibilities will increase stress and decrease children's energy levels to regulate.
- **Provide structure and consistency.** Let your child know what to expect and what is expected of them (routines, clear rules, proactive planning). Predictability helps to decrease stress.



- **Collaborate and make learning about regulation fun.** Be creative when helping your child develop, practice, and adapt coping strategies toward regulation. Listen to their ideas. Talk about 'learning to regulate' in ways they can understand. For example, if your child likes science, present this task to them as an experiment. If they like spy games, present it as a mission.
- **Help your child identify opportunities to practice their skills.** Start by practising in moments of calm. Then, they will be more able to apply these skills during increasingly challenging situations.



## DON'T PRAISE

INTELLIGENCE  
OR  
ABILITIES

## DO PRAISE

THE PROCESS  
AND  
EFFORT

- **Use positive reinforcement, and constructive praise.** Notice and acknowledge moments when you witness your child use the strategies you are working on. Recognize effort and attitude, be positive about attempts, no matter the result.
- **Hold back from punishing dysregulated behaviour.** Instead, use it as a starting point to understand where children need support. Remember that punishment will not teach children the skills they need to regulate.

I CAN'T  
STOP  
WORRYING!



KIDS & TEENS

WATCH VIDEOS TO

TRANSFORM

WORRY, ANGER,  
PERFECTIONISM & NEGATIVE THINKING  
INTO RESILIENCE!

See Videos! ▶▶

# Q & A

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**"Listen. Are you breathing just a little  
and calling it a life?"**

**- Mary Oliver -**