



BEING A TRAUMA INFORMED COMMUNITY

SUPPORTING CO-REGULATION

Identifying emotions and learning how to process them together is a great way to support your child learn how to regulate themselves safely. Co-regulation has many long-term benefits, including building the brain structure for self-regulation.

When your child becomes dysregulated, their 'upstairs brain' (responsible for planning, controlling emotions, understanding reason, and empathy) and their 'downstairs brain' (responsible for our big emotions like fear and anger) have trouble communicating.

It is during these moments that they require connection, nurture, and comfort from a trusted adult to become regulated. This may look different for your child depending on their age, stage of development, and experience of trauma.

Infancy

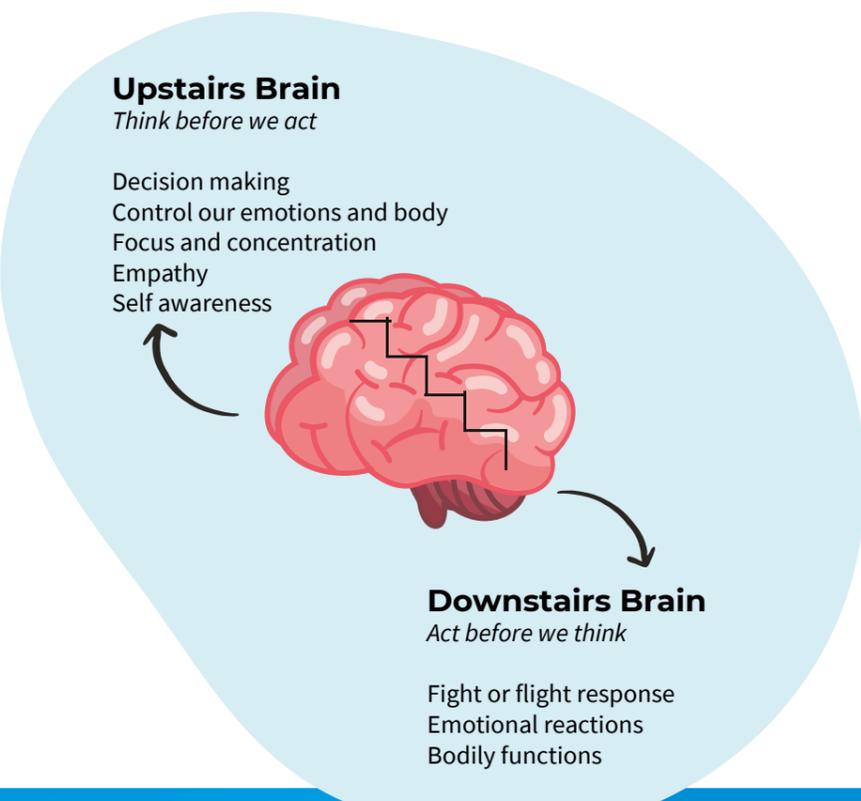
Infants rely heavily on their caregivers to manage most of their regulatory needs. Practice 'baby aerobics' during nappy changes, or when lying on the floor. Hold your baby's ankles and 'march' their legs by gently bending alternate knees up to their tummy. As you do this, sing a nursery rhyme such as 'Row, Row your boat' or 'Hot Cross Buns.' The soothing rhyme and repetition can be calming for both babies and caregivers.

Toddlers

At this stage in your child's development, you will notice that they will 'feel before they act' as opposed to 'think before they act'. This is why toddlers have uncontrollable emotional outbursts, such as tantrums. Using emotional language to describe how they feel and what they need can be very helpful, such as "I know you are upset that I won't let you climb on the chair. It is not safe, and I am worried you will fall".

Some calming activities to include in your toddler's routine may be:

- > Reading a book before bedtime
- > Yoga
- > Blowing bubbles
- > Sharing a hug



School age

At this age, your child is experiencing rapid growth in the areas of the brain associated with self-regulation. This means they can learn and apply their self-regulation skills more easily. Using visual aids in the home, such as emotion charts, will promote your child's emotional literacy. Some calming activities may include:

- > A morning deep breathing session
- > Positive affirmations
- > Guided relaxation before bed
- > Engaging in social activities that allow for your child to learn flexibility through considering other's perspectives and patience, such as by taking turns.

Adolescence

More major brain development happens at this age and stage. The part of the brain responsible for processing emotions and seeking rewards is more developed than the part of the brain responsible for decision making and future planning. This means that their emotions are significantly impacting their decisions. Co-regulation during this stage is vital!

Supporting your adolescent can look like:

- > Active listening during emotionally heightened times.
- > Providing a safe space to calm down during times of conflict
- > Modelling coping skills that can be applied during stressful situations such as asking for help when needed and taking responsibility for the situation.
- > Learning that expressing distressing emotions is okay.
- > Engaging in mindfulness apps such as Calm and Buddhify can provide practical tools for regulation.
- > Drinking a glass of water, holding an ice cube or putting a cool cloth on your head/neck. This will help to bring your adolescent to a place where they can regain control over their body and think more clearly.

Tips For Parents and Caregivers:

- > Introduce the suggested exercises into your routine and practice them with your child or adolescent during calm times. Before bed or a nap is always a good time, or even when you first wake up.
- > Model these strategies for your child. Be mindful of your own emotions, triggers, and beliefs about behaviours of others.
- > Take time to reflect. Was there an underlying need that was not being met during that moment? How did you feel supporting your child to regulate?
- > Remember, if your child feels forced to do an exercise then it will not help them to regulate. If your child does not want to do one but you feel they should, try doing one yourself instead.

Note: The terms 'child' and 'children' also refer to 'young person' and 'young people'.

Here to help! Come and talk to us if you would like more practical ways you can be trauma informed. Contact your case manager to start the conversation.

Sources:

- > Co-Regulation from birth through young adult: A practice brief. OPRE. 2017
- > Bringing up great kids. Australian Childhood Foundation. 2019
- > Finding your calm: A responsive parents guide to self-regulation and co-regulation. J Milburn. 2022
- > Images via Freepik.com



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