

# Trauma Informed Parenting

A support group for parents



# Regulatory System

-- Our stress response system--



- Its purpose is to help us **manage, interpret and respond** to stress
- It can help us to function in a stressful situation

*i.e. be stressed but still be able to communicate effectively*

But it can become **overwhelmed**, resulting in an inability to function

# Regulatory System

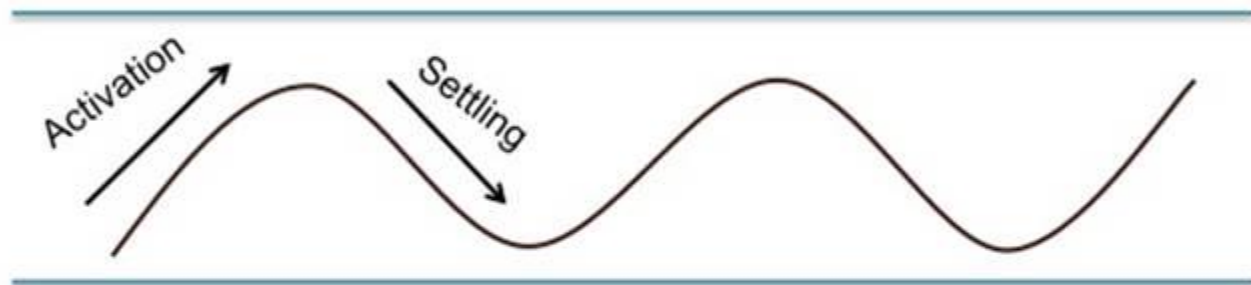
**Each individual has their own unique ability to tolerate stress.**

- This is referred to as one's **window of tolerance**
  - *As long as the amount of stress allows the system to stay in this window – the person can function*
- If stress takes the system outside of this window, then it is **overwhelming and we cannot function**



# Optimal Functioning

## Window of Tolerance



### **Somatic Signs**

Regulation  
Repair and clean up  
Ease  
Grounded/settled  
Pain symptoms lower

### **Mental-Emotional Signs**

Calm  
Curious  
Playful  
Relaxed  
Relational

### **Behavioral Signs**

Cooperation  
Completion of tasks  
Spontaneity  
Empathy is available  
Creativity emerges

Bandwidth can be very narrow – our goal is to expand it, but first *we have to be in it!*

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# Window Size

- The size of the window is variable for each person.
- Some people have a **large window** and thus can **tolerate a great deal of stress**
- Other people have a **very small window** and it **doesn't take much** at all to put them outside of this optimal zone.



# Window Size

- The size of our window is directly related to our early **caregivers' ability to assist us in regulating our stress.**
- Through regular experiences **where caregivers soothe infants who are distressed, this window becomes larger and larger.**



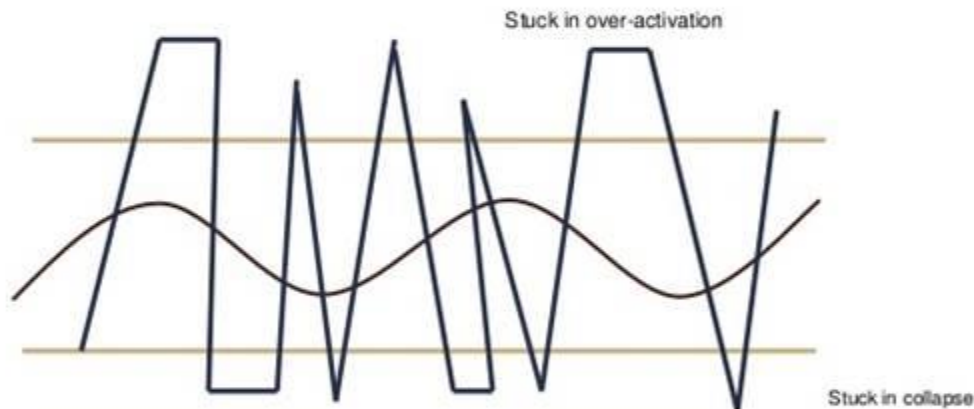


# Window Size

- Without these experiences, our regulatory system is impaired, our window is small, and we quickly go into **panic or shutdown mode** in the face of small amounts of stress
- If we are left to our own devices when stressed as infants and young children, this **impairs our ability to regulate stress without direct caregiver assistance**

# Sub-Optimal Functioning

## Outside Window of Tolerance



### Over-activation Signs

- Anger
- Anxiety
- Lack of cooperation
- Explosions
- Low patience/tolerance
- Outwardly sensitive

### Collapse Signs

- Sullen/depressed
- Compliant
- Procrastination
- Shut down
- Nonverbal
- Withdrawn



# Sub-Optimal Functioning

## **Over-activation Signs**

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# A New Paradigm

- Going outside our window of tolerance results in behaviors that seemingly make no sense
- But when interpreted in light of the child being **deathly afraid at that moment** of not being cared for or soothed – then the behaviors might make perfect sense



# A New Paradigm

- Thus we need to look at behavior through a new lens:

**Regulation:** the ability to experience and maintain stress within one's window of tolerance  
(i.e. "Good behavior")

**Dysregulation:** the experience of stress outside of your window of tolerance  
(i.e. "Bad behavior")



# Summary – Kids with Trauma:



- Get dysregulated VERY easily
- Can't easily shift out of dysregulation
- **If they were hurt by the person who was originally supposed to help regulate them as infants then they will resist letting others regulate them.**

# Our work is to stay regulated ourselves

Scientific research shows that within an interaction between two people, **the person with the calmer amygdala has the ability to soothe the one that is activated**



The adult must be regulated in order to calm the child.

# Our work is to stay regulated ourselves

As long as the adult is regulated, there are many ways to interact with a child that avoid contributing to the dysregulation and encourage a return to a regulated system.



# This is the focus of our group

The focus in a trauma-informed interaction/intervention is on:

***1. regulate yourself first***

***2. attend to your relationship with the child***

*next*

***3. help regulate their nervous system next***

***4. responding to behavior last***

# Goals of the Group



# Goal 1: Increase parents' knowledge about the impact of trauma on the brains and behaviors of children

- **A foundation in trauma education** increases a parent's ability to effectively parent and respond to children's dysregulated behaviors
- Knowing **WHY** your child is responding in a panicked or shut down way makes it much easier to attune and connect

# Goal 1 (cont.)

Learn to view **children's misbehaviors** as **responses to stress**

- “Good behavior” = a *regulated* nervous system
- “Misbehavior” = a *dysregulated* nervous system



Dysregulated behaviors communicate that **something is off** in the child's nervous system



# Goal 1 (cont.)

Discipline based on behavioral approaches tends to be **fear-based**

- Fear = dysregulation
- Dysregulation = more behaviors

Parents work to accept the trauma education and process through any resistance that arises



## Goal 2: Increase parents' awareness of their own issues related to trauma, guilt, expectations, or family of origin

Help parents to identify how these issues interfere in their ability to **effectively respond** to their child's dysregulated behaviors



## Goal 2 (cont):

Help parents develop and implement a plan for themselves that may include :

- **therapy**
- **mindfulness and meditation**
- **spirituality**
- **twelve step programs, etc.**



## **Goal 3: Develop and increase parents' ability to notice, observe and label their own responses to their children's dysregulated behaviors**

How is my body reacting, what am I thinking, and what emotions am I experiencing in response to my child's dysregulated behaviors?

Am I reacting from fear or responding from love?



## Goal 3 (cont).:



Reinforce trauma education to increase understanding of the **importance of regulating oneself before responding**

Notice the obstacles that get in the way of being able to self-regulate

**Goal 4: Increase parents' ability to effectively ground themselves in the context of their children's dysregulated emotions and behaviors**

Teach skills to pause and regulate:

- Mindfulness
- Grounding
- Breathing
- Somatic exercises



## Goal 5: Develop parents' skills to connect with their children in the context of dysregulated behaviors

Understanding of and ability to implement **connecting principles with children:**

- eye contact
- voice quality
- playful engagement
- nurturing touch
- attunement
- agreement (with their feelings)
- making shifts in the moment and slowing down



## Goal 5 (cont.)

Ability to co-regulate with the child:  
Deep breathing, grounding, mindfulness,  
time-in vs. time-out



Teaches children over and over and over that  
**their needs will be met**

**Goal 6: Increase parents' awareness and knowledge of how to "make their children's worlds small" in order to prevent dysregulation**

A child with a history of trauma must be met where he is at

– *May be developmentally younger than his age*

Implement necessary accommodations for the child such as decreasing activities outside of daily routine

## Goal 6 (cont.):

Sensory diet, weighted blankets, meeting child's basic needs (diet, hydration, sleep), calm/relaxation

Resources available in the community that may help address the child's specific needs

- Play therapy, neurofeedback, chiropractic care, etc.

# We CAN affect a child's regulation system

## Build your regulation bank account



- Child led play 10-15 min each day, both parents when possible (no electronics).
- Snuggle time every night.
- Create rituals around separation and reconnection.
- Reconnect every day when they/you return home.