The Co-Regulation Effect:
Strategies Beyond the Session

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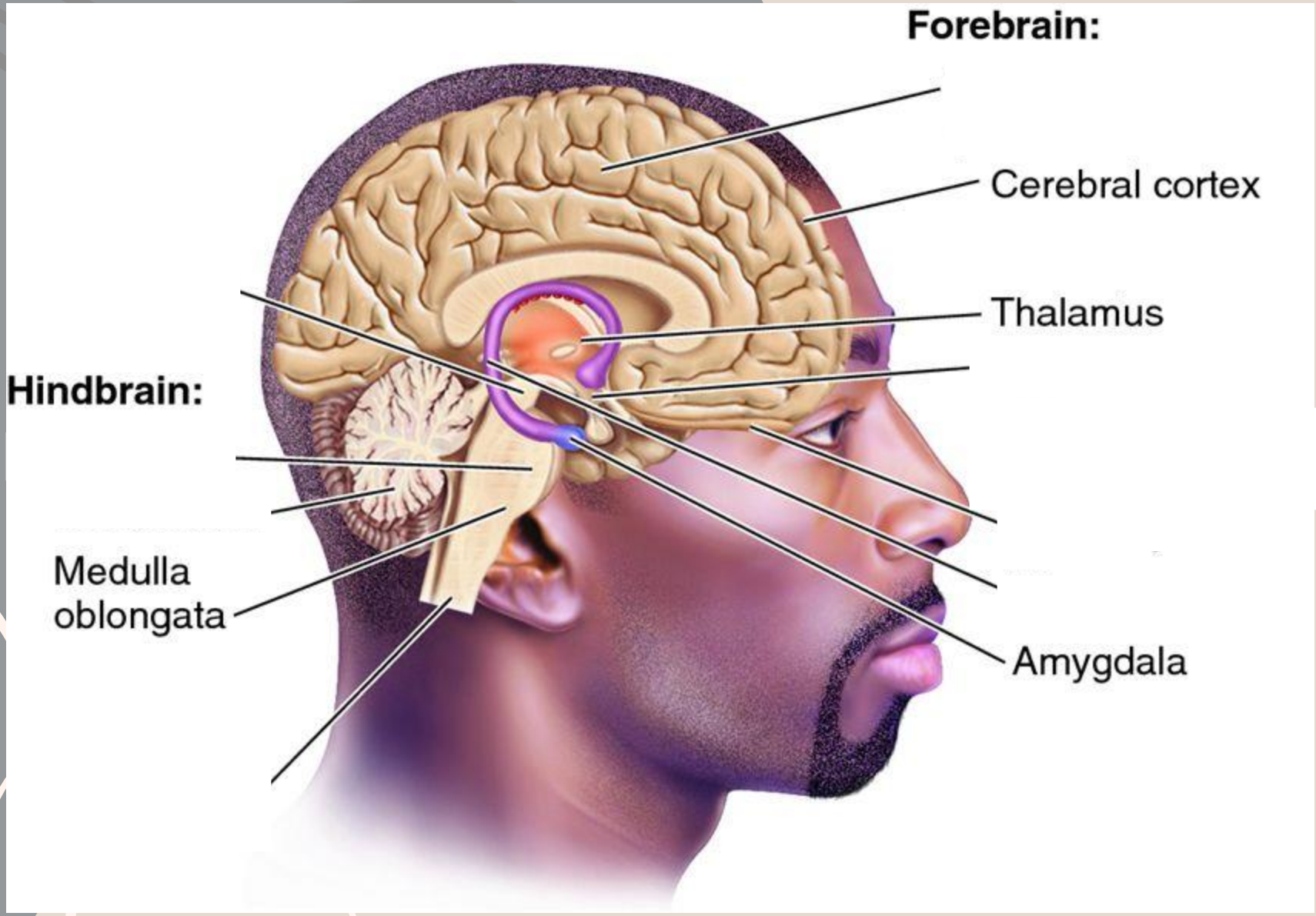
Hannah Tashjian, OTR/L

Hannah Tashjian

- Undergrad - Early Childhood Development
- MSOT Dominican University of California
- Program for Infants and Children (PIC) home visiting early intervention
  - Transdisciplinary Model & Coaching Approach
- Infant Family Specialist (Mental Health Informed)
- Certified Infant Massage Therapist
- Masgutova Neurosensorimotor Integration (MNRI) Core Specialist in Training (expected Nov 2024)

- Special interests:
  - Infant Mental Health; Attachment; Polyvagal Theory; Trust Based Relational Intervention; Mindfulness; Sensory Processing; Reflective Practice

Neuroanatomy Review



Dysregulation is not a choice

Science of impaired cortical function under stress

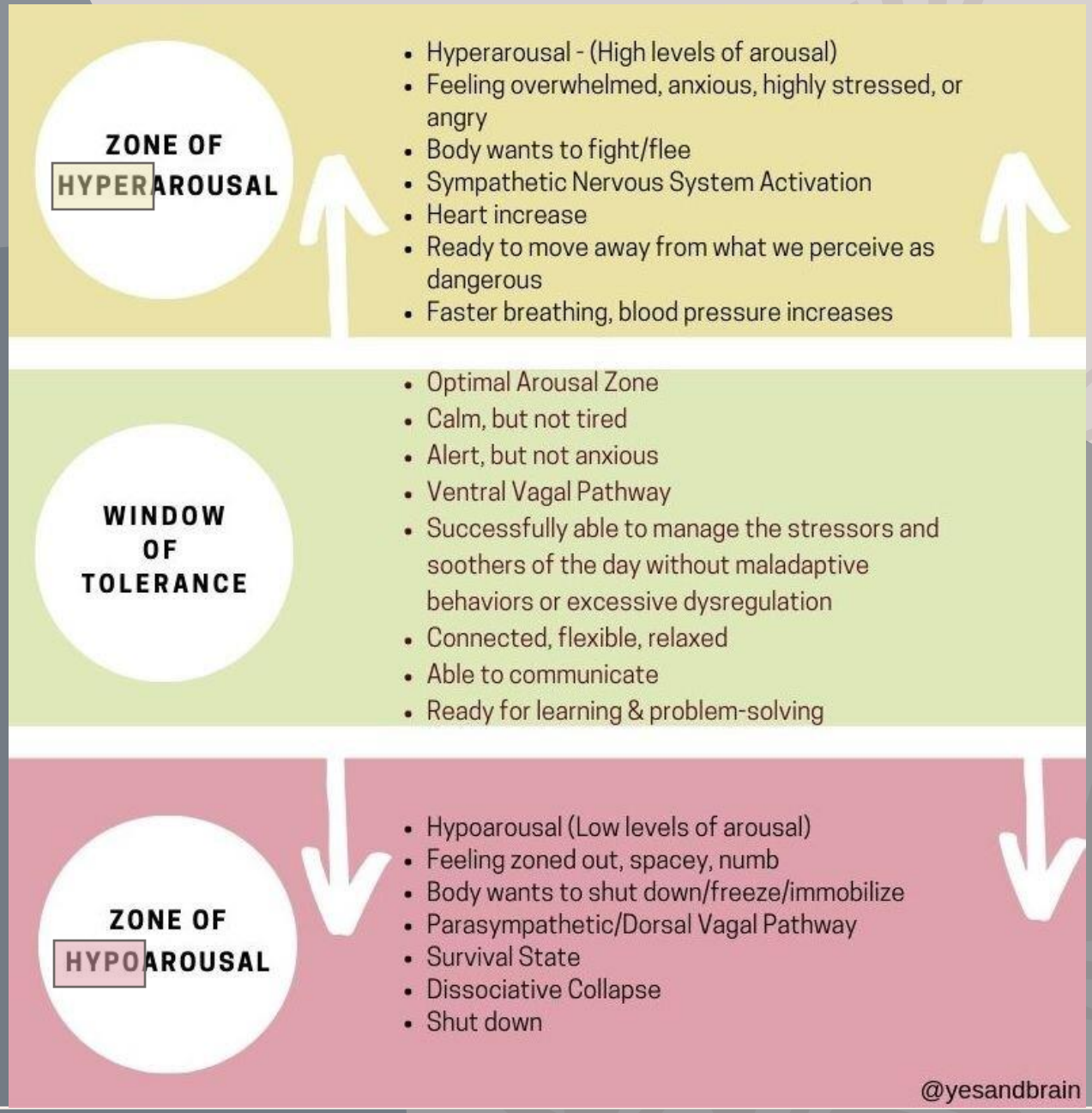
Image Source: The Science Behind Your Child's Tantrums (Published 2020). *The New York Times*. 2020/10/15

Polyvagal Theory

Humans are hardwired to seek cues for social-emotional safety and connection.

The brain's unconscious sense of safety/danger impacts emotions and behaviors.

"According to polyvagal theory, the *neural evaluation of risk* is achieved through **neuroception**, a neural reflexive mechanism, (distinct from perception) and is capable of distinguishing safe, dangerous, or life-threatening environmental and visceral features (in someone) and of instantly shifting the physiological state."
https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/A_Polyvagal_Persepective_on_Anger



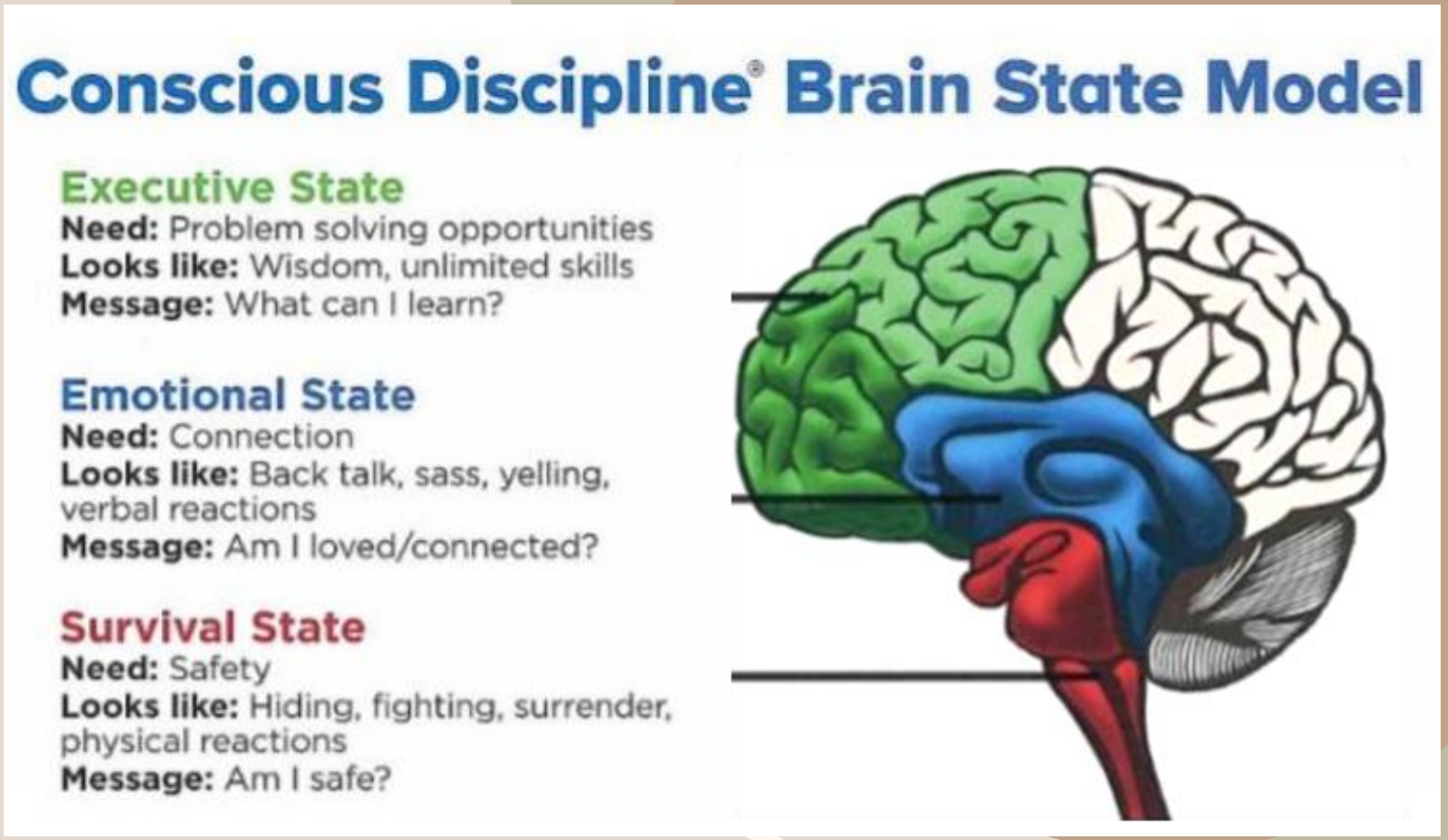
Co-regulating in the moment

-Posture
-Body Language
-Breath
-Non-verbal affirmations
-Drop the agenda
-Validate
-Goal to share calm

-If we honor dysregulation, we become safe, we build trust, we create space for learning and we grow

Identifying States of Dysregulation

- Educate yourself on recognizing what state someone is in
- Recall that this comes from the hardwiring of their brain for connection and safety
- Understand that the only way out is through and it's easier with support
(and harder with pressure)



NeuroRelational Framework: Cues of dysregulation

RED ZONE Pedal

EYES
- ☐ Open, squinted or tightly closed eyes
- ☐ Eyes look quickly around the room or not attending to person or object of focus
- ☐ Pupils are dilated
- ☐ Frequent blinking

BODY POSTURE/GESTURES
- ☐ Increased muscle tension
- ☐ Pushing, shoving, biting, and intruding into others' space
- ☐ Kicking, throwing, jumping, climbing
- ☐ Bumps into things, falls
- ☐ Fidgeting or restless (moving one's mouth, fingers, hands & legs,

EYES
- ☐ Open, squinted or tightly closed eyes
- ☐ May have direct, intense eye contact
- ☐ May avoid eye contact
- ☐ Eye roll
- ☐ Pupils are dilated

FACIAL EXPRESSION

BODY POSTURE/GESTURES
- ☐ Fingers spread out
- ☐ Arching body
- ☐ Increased muscle tension
- ☐ Pushing, shoving, and intruding into others' space
- ☐ Biting, hitting, kicking, throwing, jumping, climbing, spitting,

BLUE ZONE /Brake

EYES
- ☐ Glazed-glassy eyes (looks through rather than at)
- ☐ Looks away for a long time, looks down
- ☐ Does not look around the room
- ☐ Does not look at or towards new events
- ☐ Looks at things more than people

VOICE
- ☐ Flat
- ☐ Makes few to no sounds
- ☐ Sounds cold, soft, sad, too quiet
- ☐ Monotone

RHYTHM/RATE OF MOVEMENT
- ☐ Slow movements
- ☐ Slow to start moving
- ☐ Frozen, no startle response

RHYTHM/RATE OF BREATHING

COMBO ZONE Fast & Jerky/Gas & Brake

EYES
- ☐ Wide open eyes
- ☐ Stares at things
- ☐ Frequent breaks in eye contact
- ☐ Looks around with darting eyes

FACE
- ☐ Raised eyebrows
- ☐ Trembling lips or mouth
- ☐ Mouth wide open
- ☐ Nasal flaring
- ☐ Furrowed brow
- ☐ Lip compression, pursed lips
- ☐ Startled expression

VOICE
- ☐ High-pitched, nasal, sing-song voice
- ☐ Whimpers, weak voice
- ☐ Wobbly/quivering voice
- ☐ Fast changes in tone or pitch
- ☐ Pleading

BODY
- ☐ Tense or rigid posture
- ☐ Winces, cowers, cringes, or hides
- ☐ Trembling hands
- ☐ Clings or grabs others
- ☐ Flails around

RHYTHM/RATE OF MOVEMENT
- ☐ No movement, still body
- ☐ Repetitive movements (rocking, pacing, wrings hands, shakes foot)
- ☐ Fast movements
- ☐ Jerky movements

RHYTHM/RATE OF BREATHING
- ☐ Uneven breathing
- ☐ Breath holding

NRF: Cues of connection and safety

GREEN ZONE
Just Right/Alert

EYES
- ☐ Bright, shiny eyes
- ☐ Looks directly at people, objects with a gleam
- ☐ Looks away for breaks, then returns to eye contact

FACE
- ☐ Smiles, shows joy
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Can express a range of all emotions – appropriate to context

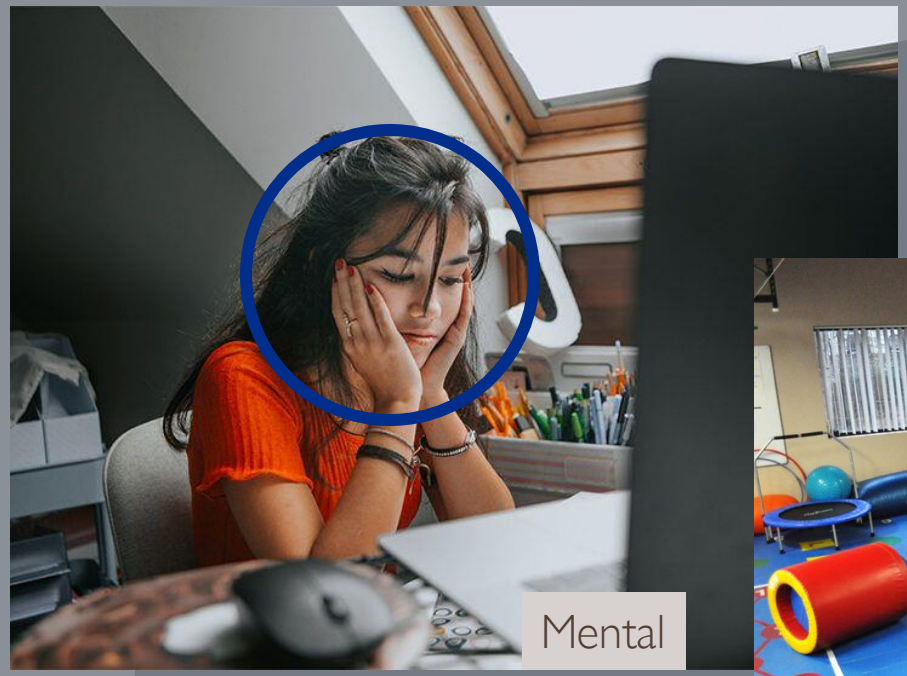
VOICE
- ☐ Laughing
- ☐ Fluctuations in tone – appropriate to context
- ☐ Fluctuations in speed – appropriate to context
- ☐ Melodic

BODY
- ☐ Relaxed with good muscle tone
- ☐ Stable, balanced and coordinated movements
- ☐ Moves arms and legs toward center of the body
- ☐ Molds body into a caring adult when held
- ☐ Gestures are coordinated with body movements

RHYTHM/RATE OF MOVEMENT
- ☐ Changes smoothly to respond to the environment
- ☐ Moves faster or slower – appropriate to context

RHYTHM/RATE OF BREATHING
- ☐ Regular, even breathing

Dysregulation = Dysfunction



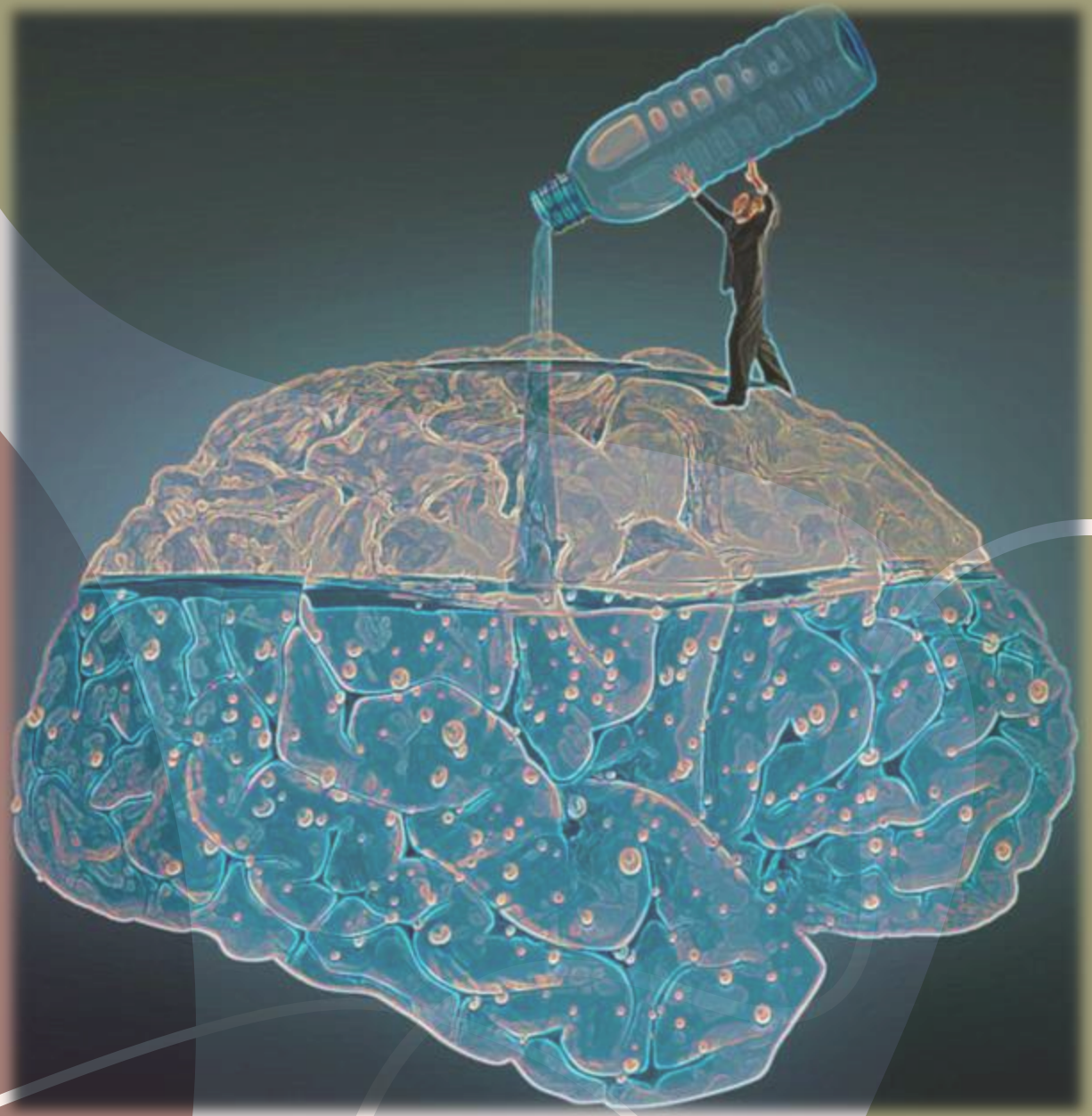
ONE minute

3 Deep breaths

1st Breath: attention to the present

2nd Breath: let your posture settle

3rd Breath: expand your awareness to what's happening around you



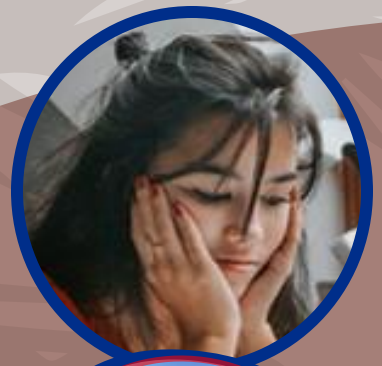
Mirror Neurons

"the key characteristics of mirror neurons are that their activity is modulated both by action *execution* and action *observation*."

Early evidence for the relationship between mirror neurons and empathy.

Research shows that others will typically match the rhythm of the loudest breather

Co-regulate back to Calm



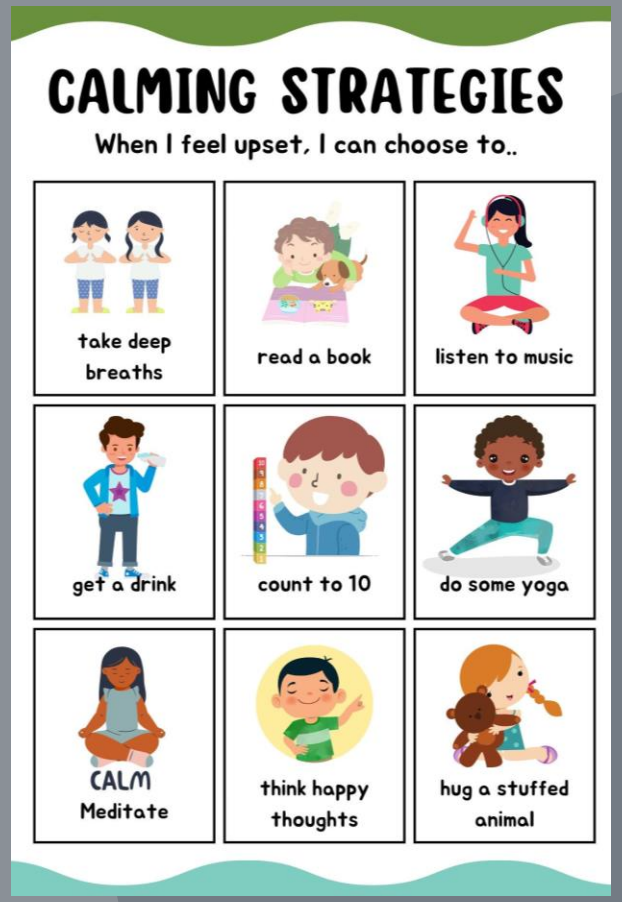
<u>During active dysregulation</u>

- Model regulation
- Give space if needed
- Create a safe place for emotions
- Validate and support their reality

<u>As they start to calm</u>

- Facilitate regulating activities
- Activate calming sensations
- Present visual ideas
- Suggest opportunities to co-regulate (“time-in”)

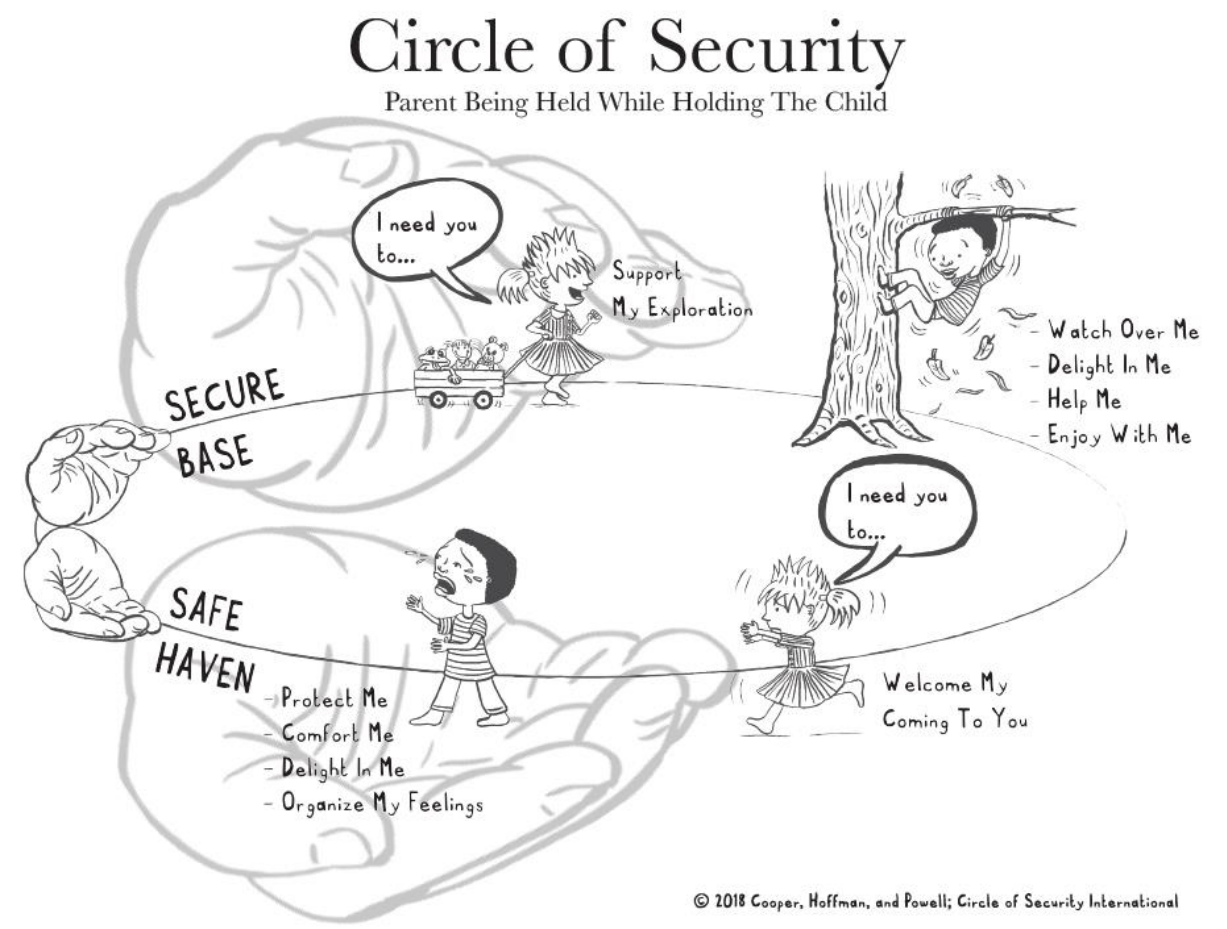
Visually Invite Co-Regulation



Definitely:
Change the activity & Move the body

CO-Regulation = together
Work on a puzzle
Cook/Bake something
Go for a walk
Scavenger hunt
Share favorite funny videos
Read a book
Put on an exercise video
Play catch
Build a structure
Complete a chore
Activate/calm the senses

Coaching Co-regulation



- Facilitate building the attachment
- Get clear with caregivers about their own regulation tools
- Practice personalized ideas and activities – let them try
- Empower confidence in repeating strategies in other contexts
- Identified boundaries and limits are healthy and necessary when managing dysregulated behaviors

RISE to Co-Regulation

Regulate

Establish your own regulation

Identify

Identify what state of dysregulation they might be in

be Safe

Demonstrate that you are safe and open to supporting them

Explore

Explore and model techniques for co-regulating together

thank you

Hannah Tashjian OTR/L
Program for Infants and Children
to.hannah.ot@gmail.com
907-550-3002

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