

A serene landscape with misty mountains and a calm lake reflecting the scene. The mountains are layered, creating a sense of depth and tranquility. The water is still, acting as a perfect mirror for the sky and the surrounding greenery.

# Trauma and Big Feelings

Supporting and Responding to Children with a Brain-Based,  
Trauma-Focused Approach

## Lauren Alvarez, MA

- School Counselor, Jenks East Elementary
- Certified Parent Educator: Parents as Teachers, Active Parenting, Practical Parent Education
- Improving Lives Counseling Services: LPC Candidate, Parenting groups, Anger Management groups
- Family and Children's Services: Parenting Classes and Helping Children Cope with Divorce Workshops

Hello.

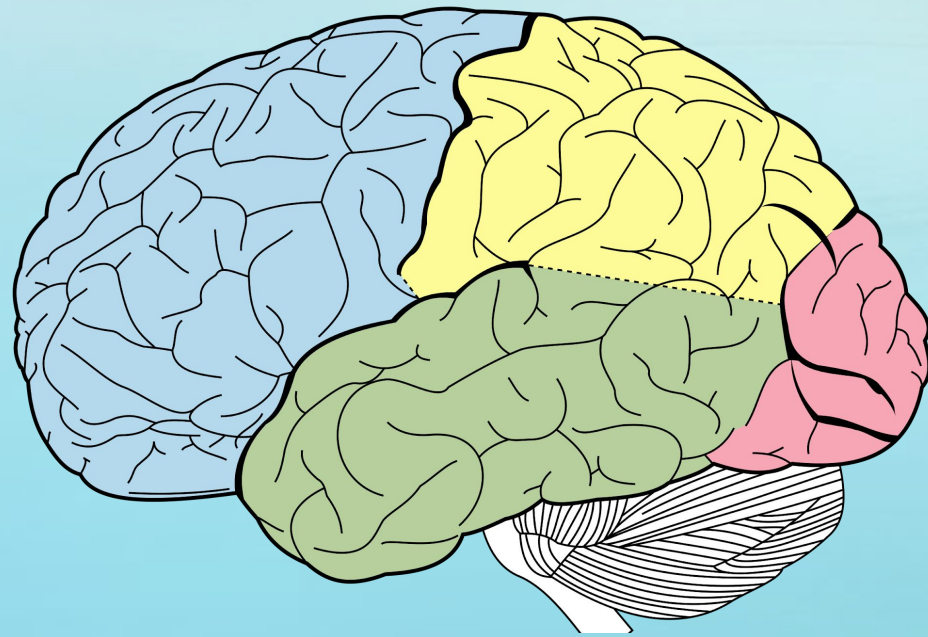
# Presentation Overview

- A look at the brain and the impact of trauma
- Brain-based interventions: Integration, Developing New Brain Patterns, Coping Skills
  - Integration: Dr. Dan Siegel techniques from the Whole-Brain Child book
  - New Patterns- Brain awareness and strategies for understanding anger and creating new brain responses
  - Coping Skills- Ideas for prevention and response to anger

Give it Time.....



# Understanding Trauma and the Brain



# Some of My Favorites

Dr. Barbara Sorrels:

<https://www.connectedkids.org/our-founder>

Dr. Bruce Perry: <https://www.bdperry.com/>

Dr. Dan Siegel: <https://drdansiegel.com/>



# Parasympathetic vs Sympathetic Nervous Systems

## SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM



### Stress Response

*Revs you up, preparing you to fight, take flight or freeze*

- Heart beats fast
- Breath is fast and shallow
- Pupils of eyes expand (can make you sensitive to light)
- Gut becomes inactive (difficult to digest)
- Blood rushes to your skeletal muscles and away from your brain, making it hard to think clearly
- Hormones rush through your body, making you feel anxious
- Expend your energy

## PARASYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM



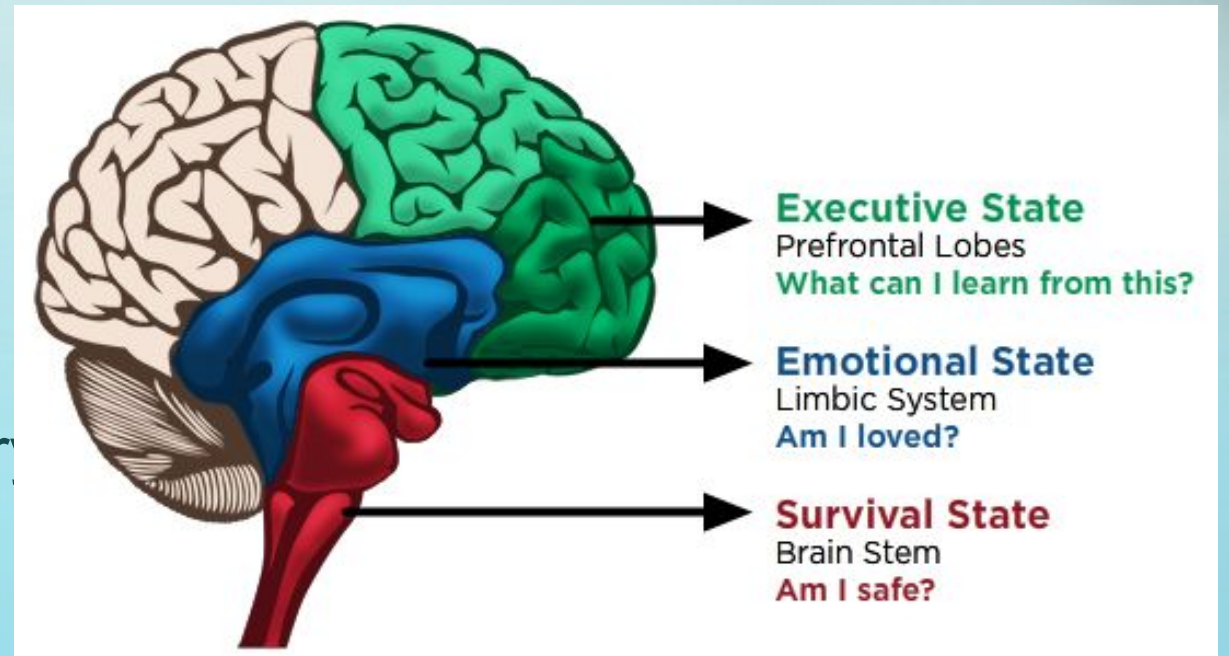
### Relaxation Response

*Calms you down, preparing you to rest, think and restore*

- Heart beats in slow, rhythmic pattern
- Breath is full and slow
- Pupils of the eyes shrink
- Gut is active (helps you digest and absorb the nutrients from your food)
- Increased blood flow to gut, lungs and brain
- Hormones rush in, lifting your mood and helping you to relax
- Conserves your energy

# Neuroscience

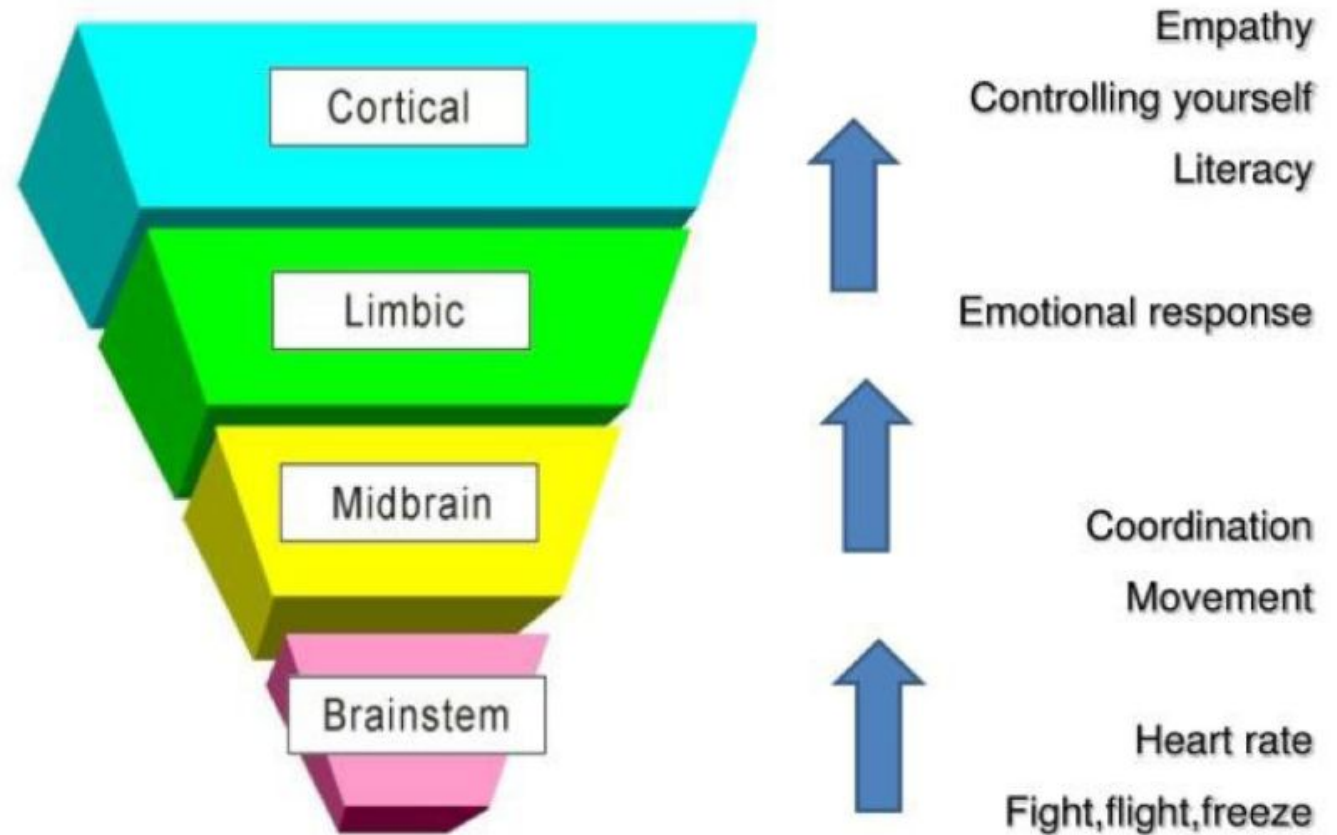
- **Brainstem:** ancient brain. Regulates basic processes, states of arousal, fight-flight-freeze.
- **Limbic System:** emotions, evaluation of good vs bad, forming relationships and emotional attachment, memory
- **Cerebral cortex:** think, imagine, combine facts and experiences, create





- Brain development is based on pattern, repetition and rhythm.
- Trauma/poverty in early childhood creates a chaotic environment and can develop a disorganized brain stem.
- Everything starts at the brain stem (internal and external stimuli)

## Perry's Neurosequential Model



Perry, B.D. (2002). *Brain Structure and Function I: Basics of Organisation*. Adapted in part from *"Maltreated Children: Experience, Brain Development and the Next Generation"* (W.W. Norton & Company).

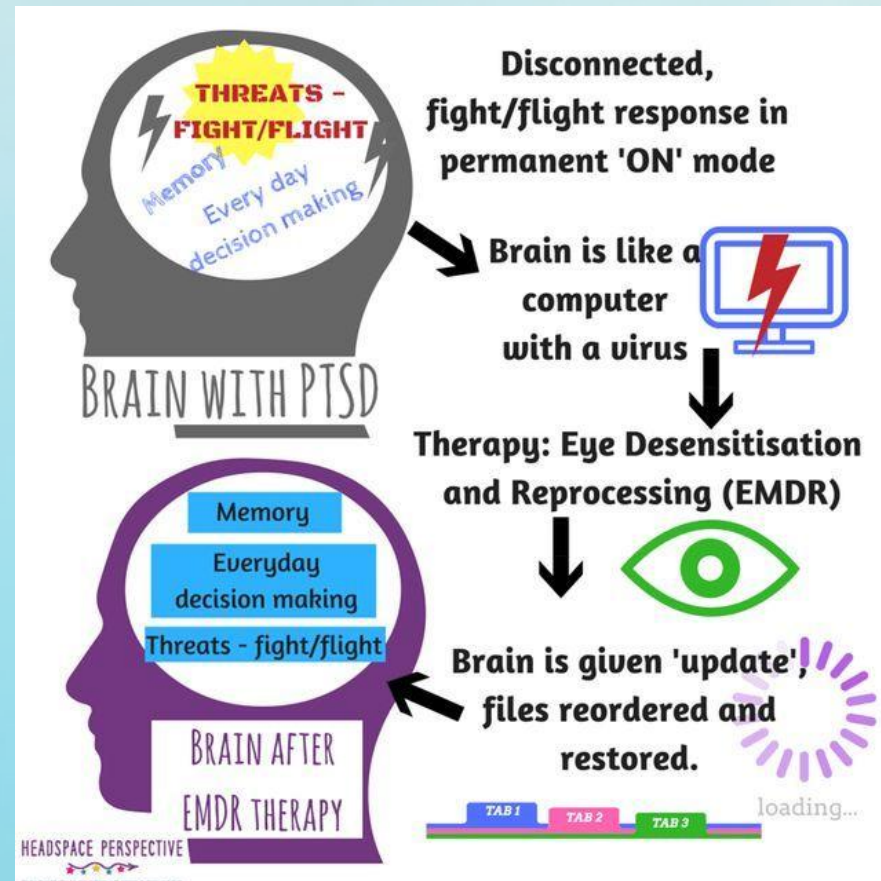
# How does this impact emotional regulation?

- Trauma is defined as any event that undermines a child's sense of physical or emotional safety or poses a threat to the safety of a child's parents or caregivers (Groves, 2002)
- Children instinctively know they can't take care of themselves. They need the adults around them to be safe so they can feel safe.
- Every emotion that we feel has a correlating neurochemical cocktail (dopamine, norepinephrine, serotonin, etc). A disorganized brain releases disorganized neurotransmitters. (Dr. Barbara Sorrels)
- A child from poverty/trauma can develop a sensitized stress response- any new thing or transition can be viewed as a threat even when it isn't. Even something fun like a special guest or a birthday party at school.

# What a child's brain needs

- The immature brain requires the full presence of a more organized brain (Dr. Bruce Perry).  
**THAT'S YOU!!!**
- Children learn to regulate by being regulated
  - Emotional regulation in young children starts off with **co-regulation** where they require an adult to help them regulate. By the age of 3 they have better capacity to self-regulate. FYI-Time out does not teach children how to self-regulate.
  - “It’s like a bluetooth connection between my brain and that child’s brain.” (Dr. Barbara Sorrels)
  - Strategies for co-regulation in young children:
    - [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/tip\\_sheet\\_toddlers\\_accessible\\_5082.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/tip_sheet_toddlers_accessible_5082.pdf)
    - Silence as a strategy:  
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/silence-co-regulation-strategy-pre-k-classroom/>
- Learning Self-regulation- Need **repeated exposure** to small, manageable challenges (Dr. Perry)
- Requires consistent, organized and rhythmic environments.

# EMDR and Neurofeedback: a different kind of therapy



# What can be done?

- Add rhythm to daily activities
- Create soothing environments
- Build relationships and use brain-based responses
- Directly teach mindfulness and emotional regulation skills



# Adding Rhythm to Soothing Environments



# Ways to add rhythm to the classroom or home

- Rhythm helps organize the brain. From conception, every cell is bathed in rhythm. (Dr. Barbara Sorrels)
- Stories of a tantrum (Dr. Sorrels)
- Soft, Low and Slow
- Music less than 60 beats per minute is deescalating:  
<https://insidetheorchestra.org/2019/04/17/comforting-music-for-kids/>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZ1DiLT-MkA&t=11s>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yugCIEfgspk>
- Have songs for transitions (example from camp) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEO6gYCFbr0>
- Rhythmic handshake when entering the room or coming home from school
- Alternate seating that allows movement  
<https://www.prodigygame.com/main-en/blog/flexible-seating-classroom-ideas/>
- Create a calm down playlist

# Create Soothing Environments

- Pay attention to the organization of space, time and materials (Dr. Barbara Sorrels)
  - Space- uncluttered, don't fill the walls
  - Time- Predictable schedules, visual schedules, help with transitions
    - Give a specific task for those who struggle with transitions
    - Ask- what do you want to finish in the next three minutes before we move to the next thing?
    - Try to minimize transitions as much as possible
  - 60 beats per minute music, lowering lights, natural light



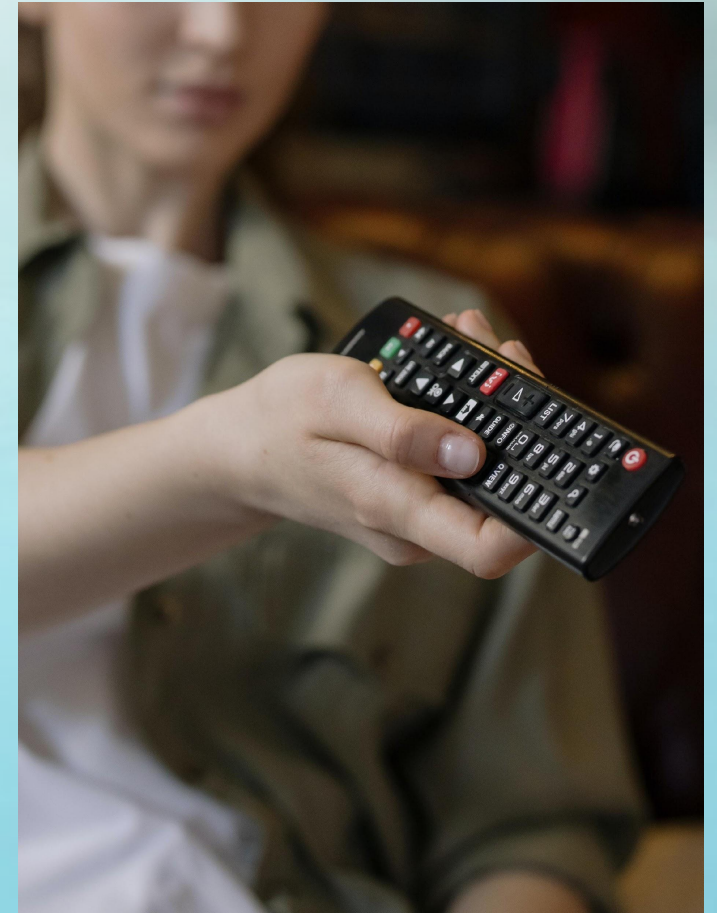
# Calm Spaces

- Consider building calm spaces in classrooms or at home. This is a place you can go to change your mood.
- What are spaces you have at home or could make at home that could be a Calm Space?



# Not Just Play... Changing the Brain!

- Many adults minimize sensory toys as just play.
- Frontload the knowledge that **Doing Things On Purpose** to calm down (like sensory toys, the calm down box, mindfulness) changes what is going on in the brain.
- It is like a remote control for our brain. I can “change the channel” or change my mood by doing things on purpose to change that mood.
- Remember- Anger is a state of the brain!



# Idea: Family Calm Down Bucket

- Family Calm Down Bucket



# Teach Coping Skills- Prevention and Response



# How do children learn a new behavior?

- Modeling
- Guided Practice
- Independent Practice
- Repetition



# Directly Teach Emotional Regulations Skills

- Under the age of 3 require co-regulation
- Movies about feelings. (Inside Out, [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=social+emotional+videos+about+feelings](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=social+emotional+videos+about+feelings))
- To teach emotional regulation, children need these things (Dr. Sorrels)
  - I can name my feelings (zones of regulation, feelings charts, mood meters)
  - Feelings can change (stories/songs about changing feelings, what do we do to change our feelings, etc.)
  - I can have more than one feeling about something at the same time
  - My feelings may be different than someone else's
  - I can manage my strong emotions (teaching them deep breathing techniques)
  - I can manage frustration (provide small manageable challenging tasks)
  - There are people who can help me manage my emotions (help them co-regulate)

# NAME THAT FEELING

- From the movie Inside Out- guess the feeling <https://youtu.be/dOkyKyVFnsS>
- Bibliotherapy- Social Emotional books for literacy and emotional literacy (Scholastic Books)  
<https://shop.scholastic.com/teachers-ecommerce/teacher/search-results.html?text=social%20emotional%20book%20collection&p=1&n=20&f.grade=prek>
- Use mood meters to ask how characters are feeling
- Have mirrors in the classroom or at home or real pictures of kid faces
- A Little Spot series: <https://www.dianealber.com/collections/spot-series>
- Consider a grade/age level library to share or a parent group library
- Puppets can teach feelings
- Sesame Street
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxfJicfyCdq>
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gdw19ZFGy-A>
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Myz87a-0HM>
- Daniel Tiger songs:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smeSiFroaYw&list=PLnfOzyQiyQYNRKjW1-0mbKC2xfg8WhV\\_1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smeSiFroaYw&list=PLnfOzyQiyQYNRKjW1-0mbKC2xfg8WhV_1)

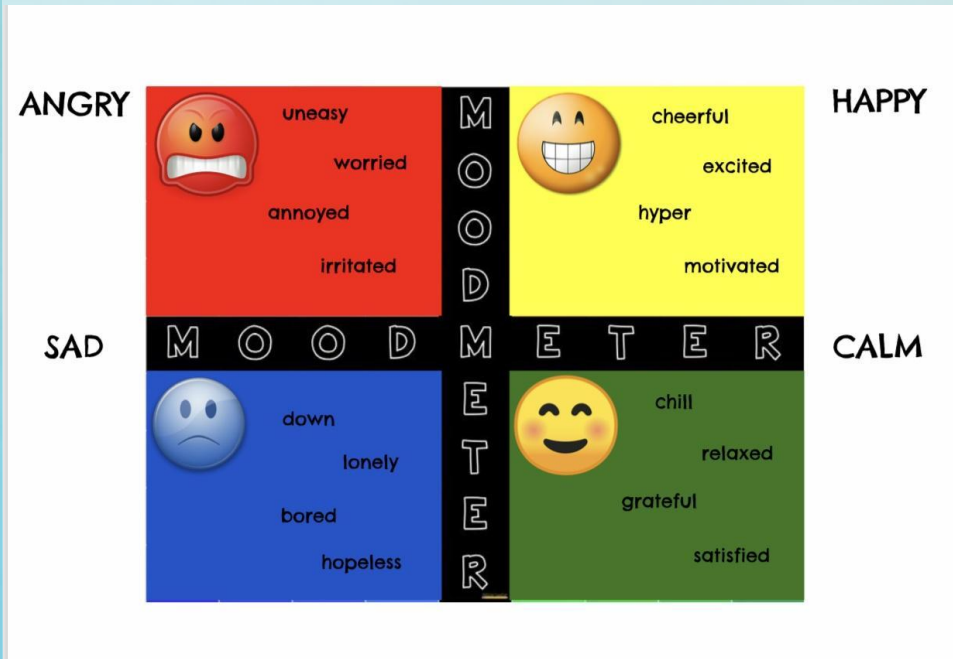
# Tell me a story.....

## Use social stories to name and understand emotions

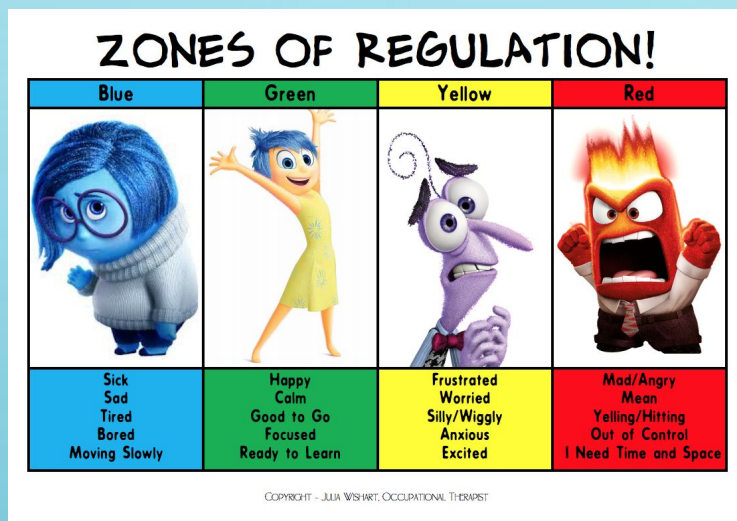
- Google social stories about anger or anxiety or big feelings
- Make a story book with your child about things they are afraid about or things they are struggling with and read it together
- <https://happylearners.info/social-stories/feeling-anxious.html> (For Anxiety)
- <https://happylearners.info/resources/anger-management.html> (For Anger)
- Detailed social stories about different anger scenarios:  
<https://www.thewatsoninstitute.org/resource/anger/>
- Ruby Finds a Worry: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCyiiHI2SJU>
- Cartoon Video explaining anger and the brain:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clwt7iXF1Mg>
- Good book resources: Julia Cook social emotional books:  
[https://www.youtube.com/results?sp=mAEB&search\\_query=julia+cook+books+about+anxiety](https://www.youtube.com/results?sp=mAEB&search_query=julia+cook+books+about+anxiety)
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# Mood Meters/Zones of Regulation

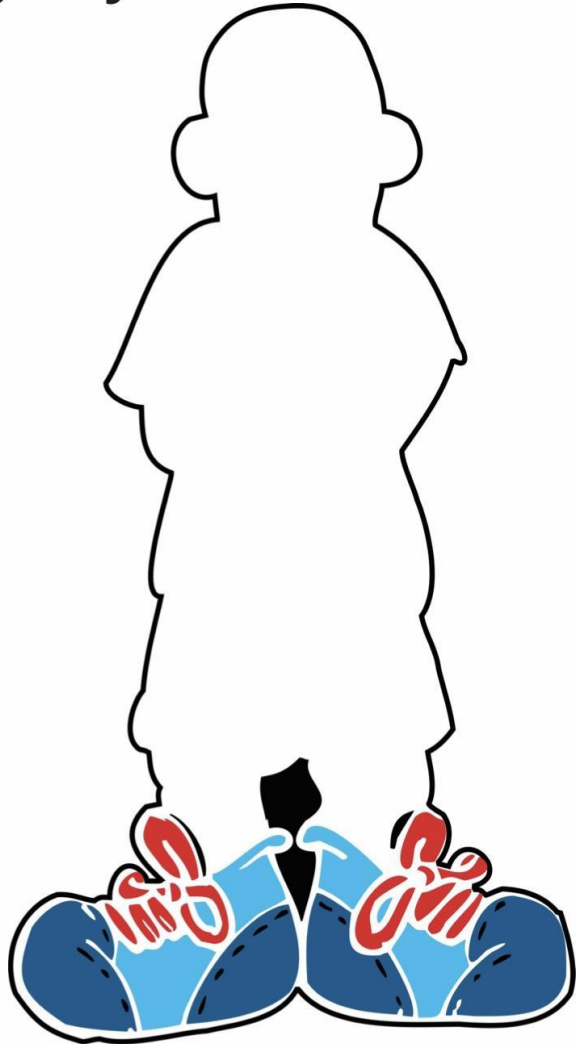


- Use this to check in with your children, even in a nonverbal way.
- Use phrases like- When I know how you feel, I can be bettering at helping you
- Feelings are ok! There isn't a "bad" feeling, it just is. What we do with that feeling makes a difference.
- What can you do for yourself to move you from Angry to Calm?
- What can I do to help you move from Sad to Happy?
- What do you need from \_\_\_\_\_ to help you move from Angry to Calm?
- Help me help you.....
- Links to google drive files: [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Q7j\\_3XPPvh5dUWgGL95dxCk8xYaARXXC?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Q7j_3XPPvh5dUWgGL95dxCk8xYaARXXC?usp=sharing)
- Zones of Regulation Information: <https://www.theottoolbox.com/zones-of-regulation-activities/>



# YOUR BODY CAN GIVE YOU CLUES

## My Body Tells Me What I'm Feeling











## Teach kids to tune into their bodies

- How does their body feel (physical cues)
- What are they doing (behavioral cues)
- What are they feeling (emotional cues)
- What are they thinking (cognitive cues)

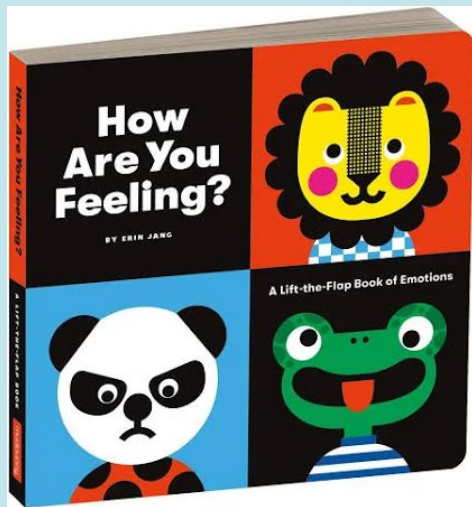
- Transitions can activate the Sympathetic Nervous System (reactive)
- Give a specific task for those who struggle with transitions
- Ask- what do you want to finish in the next three minutes before we move to the next thing?
- Do purposeful things to activate the parasympathetic nervous system instead (calming)
- Embed 60 Beats Per Music during transitions or times of day that are difficult.
- Have a breathing specialist as a class or family job
- Watch for patterns and do a Progressive Muscle Relaxation in your challenging transitions

## PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

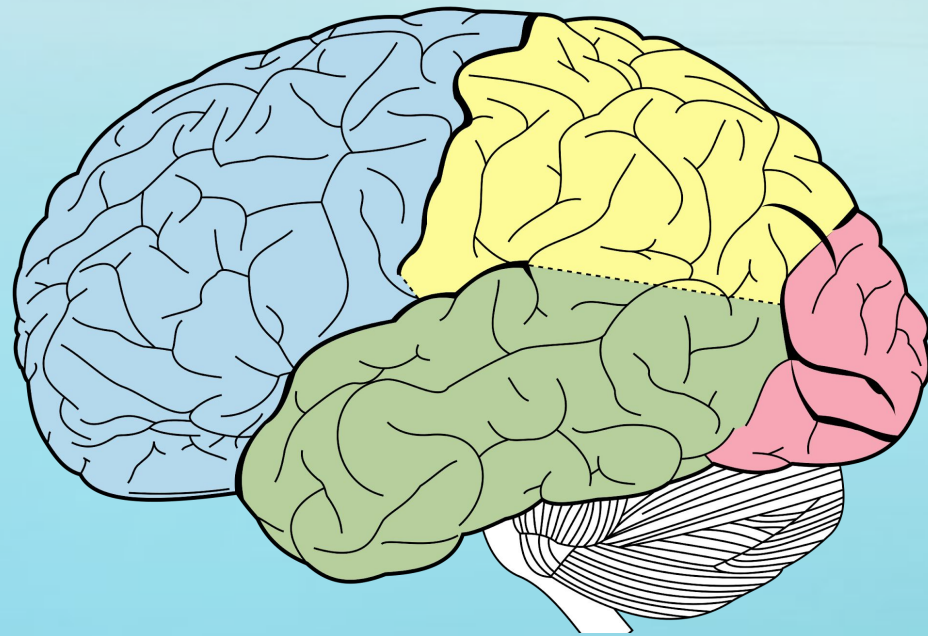
|   |  |
|---|--|
|    | Take 3 Deep Breaths                          |
|    | Squeeze your foot for 5 seconds, Relax       |
|    | Squeeze your leg for 5 seconds, Relax        |
|    | Squeeze your stomach for 5 seconds, Relax    |
|    | Shrug your shoulders for 5 seconds, Relax    |
|   | Squeeze your arm & hand for 5 seconds, Relax |
|  | Squeeze your whole body for 5 seconds, Relax |
|  | Take 3 Deep Breaths                          |

# Book Ideas....

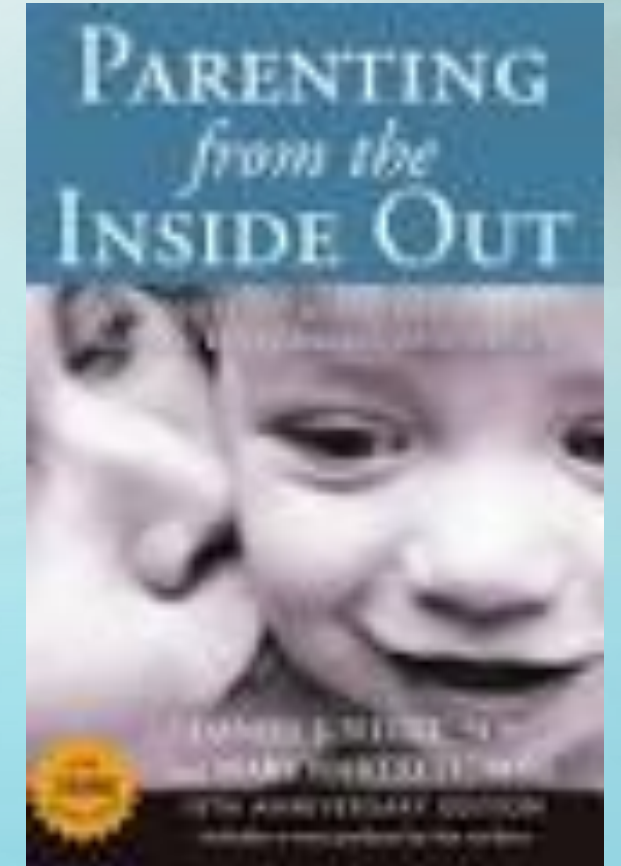
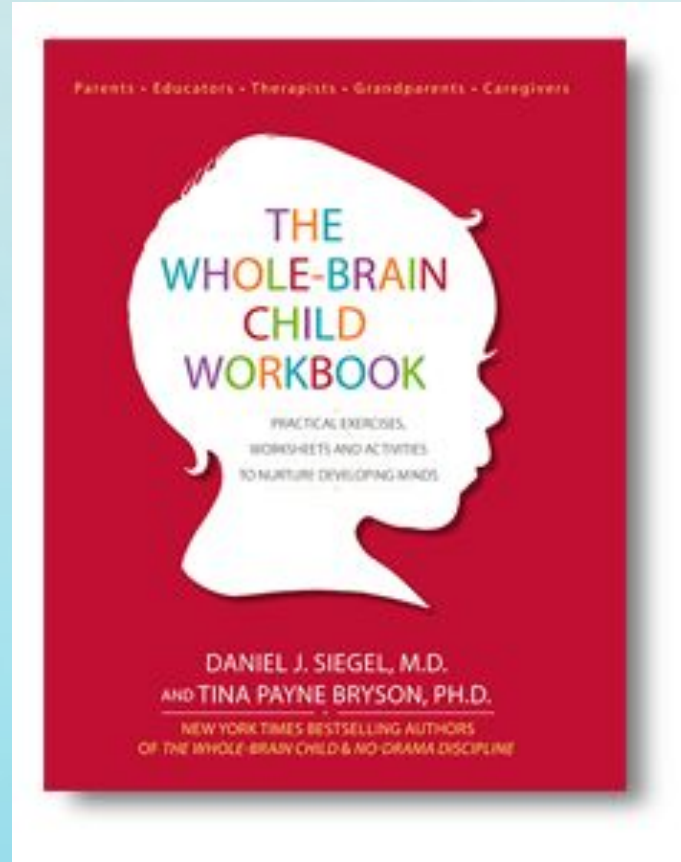
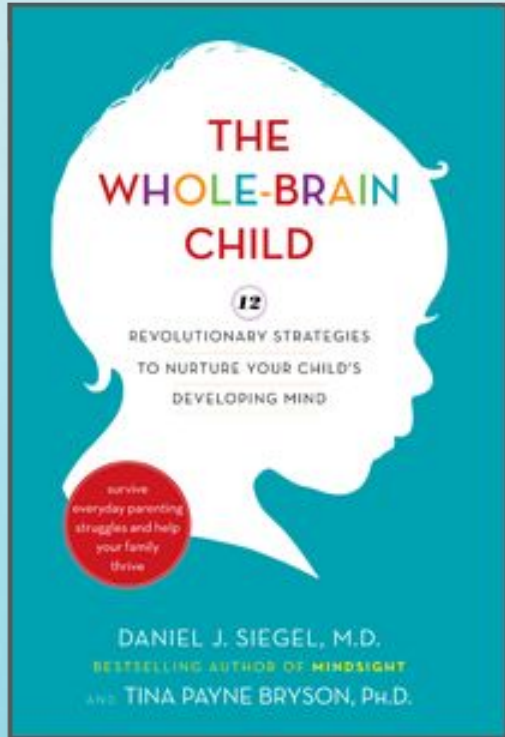
- <https://childmind.org/article/best-childrens-books-about-mental-health/>
- <https://clearlakechildrenscenter.com/helpful-articles/bibliotherapy/>
- <https://isliplibrary.org/bibliotherapy-for-teens-recommended-books/>



# Brain-Based Interventions



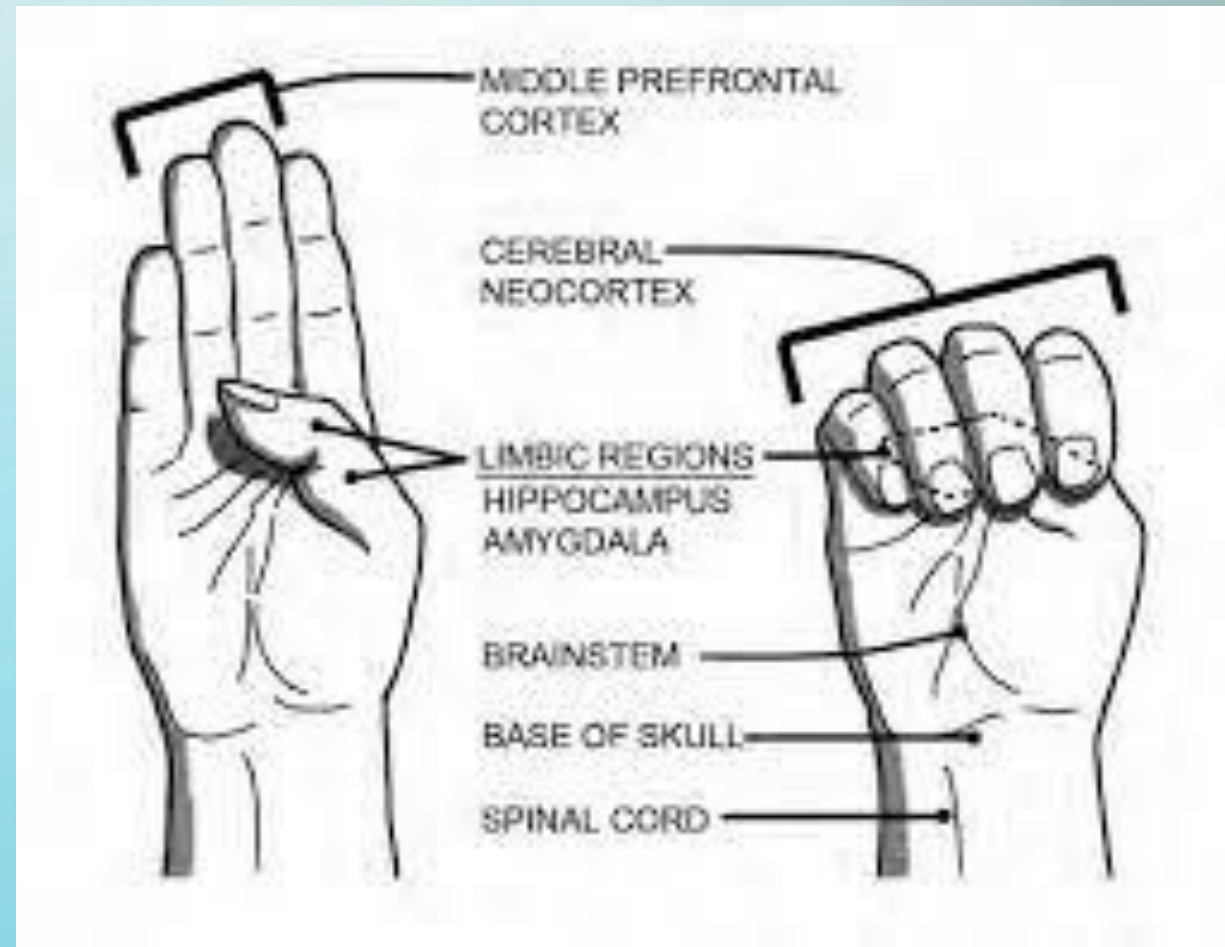
# The Whole-Brain Child: Dr. Dan Siegel



Remember- Anger isn't a BEHAVIOR, it is a state of the brain.

# Neuroscience

- Parts of the Brain Hand Model
- (Video):  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm9CIJ74Oxw> 2:31)



# Integrated responses: Serve the left and right brain

## Left Brain versus right brain

- Left Brain is logical, linear, about words, very literal
- Right side of the brain senses emotions and information from the body, non-linear, nonverbal, can see the whole picture.

## Logic Based Responses

### Typical responses:

- Don't worry, there's nothing to be afraid of
- It's not a big deal that it broke. Just fix it.
- There's no reason to cry. Losing is part of the game.
- Homework is your job. Just get it done. If you focus, you'll be finished sooner.
- Where teachers and parents tend to live



# Are you left or right brained?

- Think about yourself now, and how you respond in high-stress situations with your kids.
  - When you see the signs you described above, what's your response?
  - Do you generally respond with logic, explaining the reasons behind why your child shouldn't feel like she does?
  - Do you typically match emotion with emotion, elevating the chaos in the situation?
  - Are you usually more integrated, combining left- and right-brain approaches?
  - If you're like most parents, it depends on the day!

# Whole-Brain Strategy #1: Connect then Redirect

## Connect with the Right

- Connect to feelings
- Get down on eye level while talking
- Facial expressions that are soft, relaxed
- Timing- Let child finish before responding
- Positive Touch
- Watch Tone of Voice
- Show Empathy
- Pausing

## Redirect with the Left

- After child is settled, redirect with logic
- Solutions
- Planning
- Logical explanations
- Setting Boundaries

Feel the feelings, think the thinking

# Integration is the Key

Right Brain responses like connecting to feelings, watching nonverbal language, being present

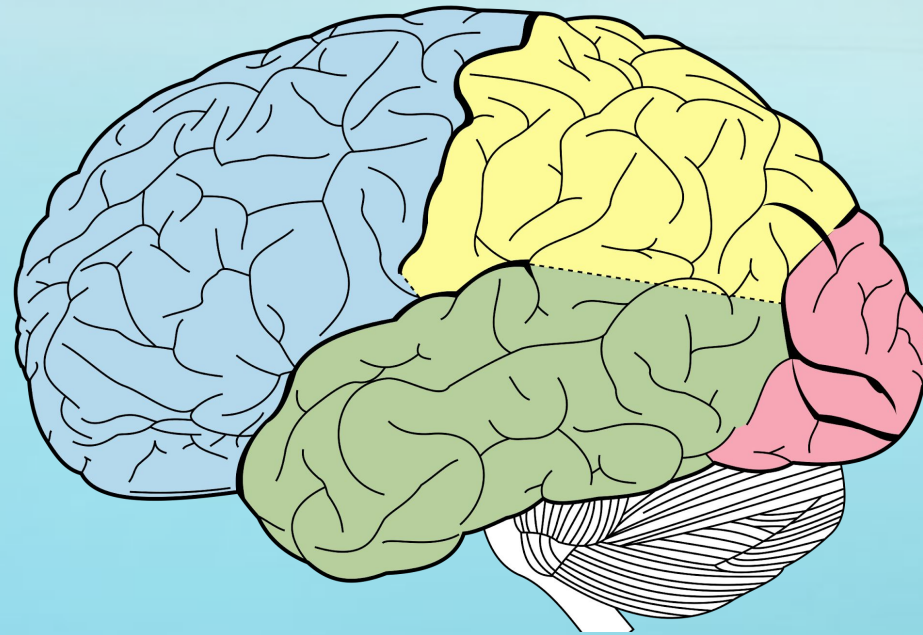


Left Brain responses like solving problems, using words, planning



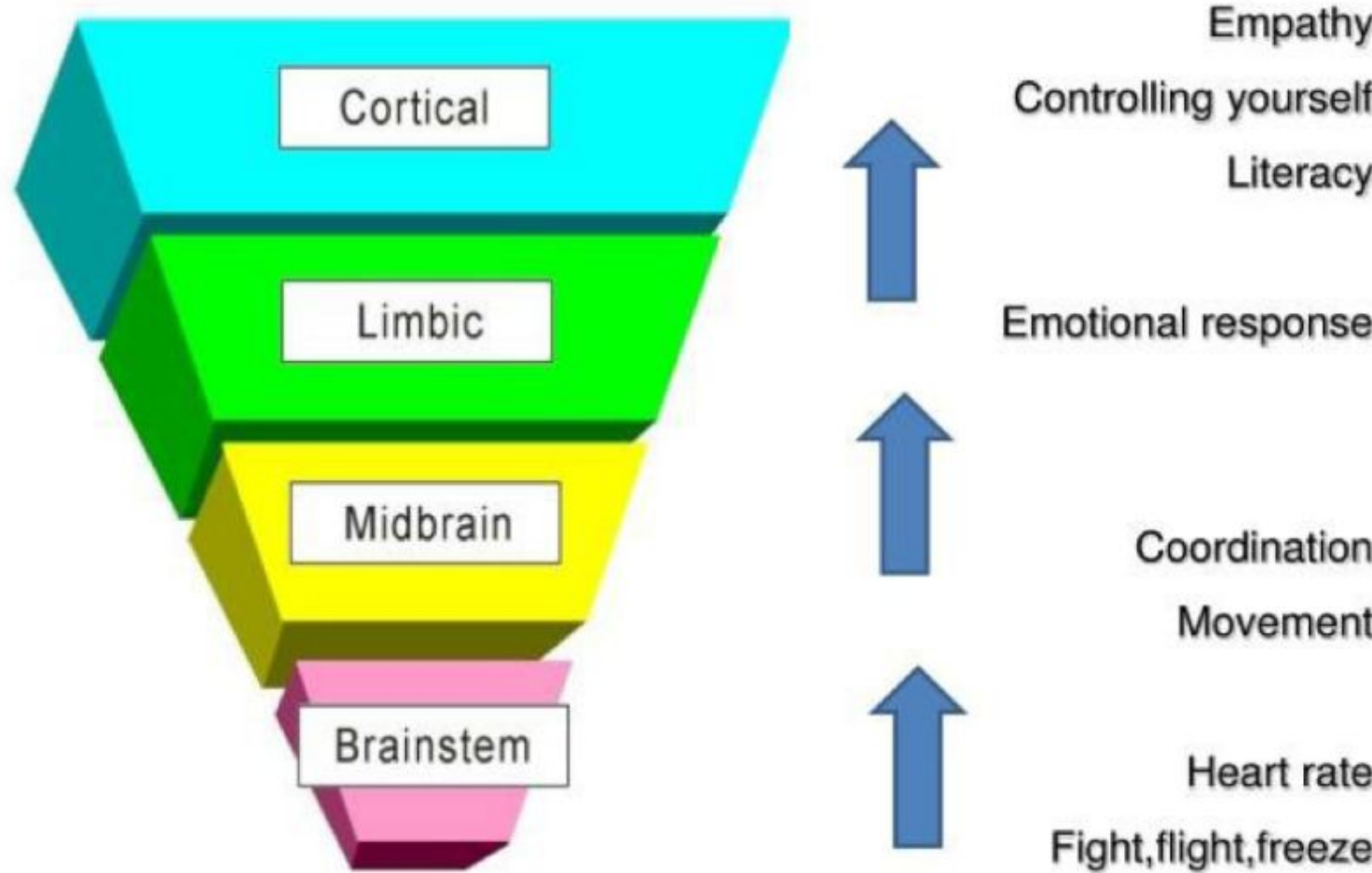
**INTEGRATION**

# Creating New Brain Patterns



- Everything starts at the brain stem (internal and external stimuli)
- We have to rewire the brain to get the emotional regulation and positive behaviors we want
- It takes TIME and REPETITION

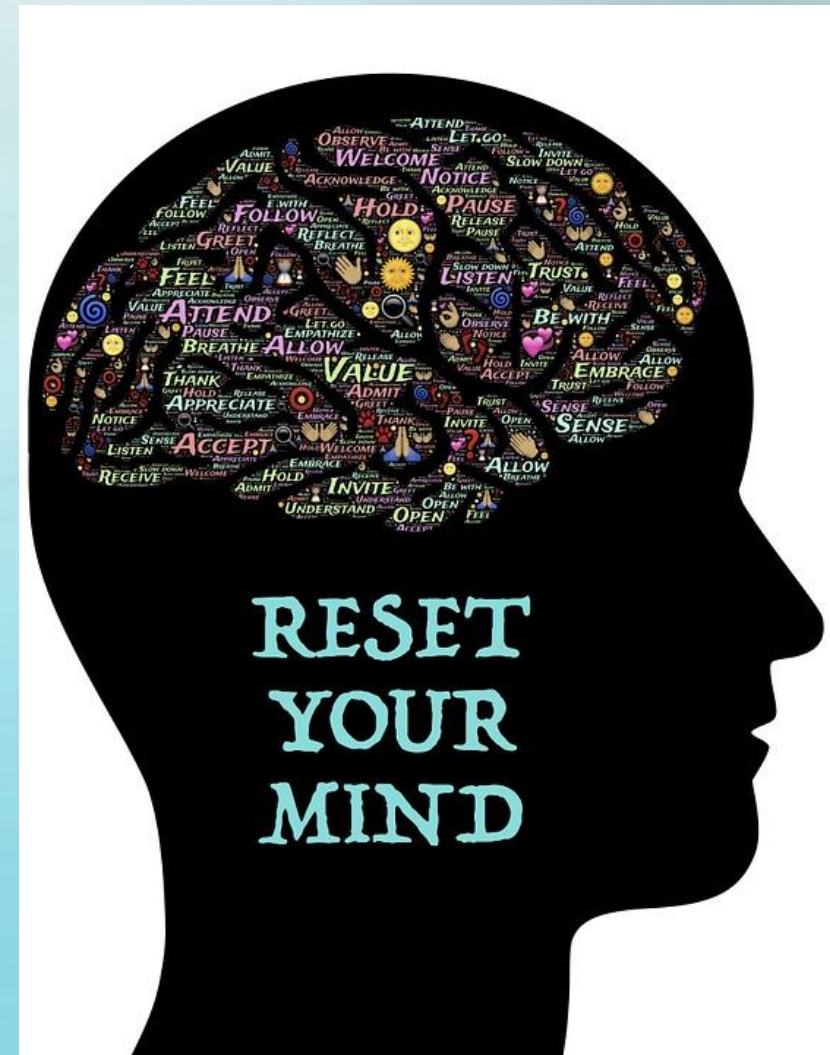
## Perry's Neurosequential Model



Perry, B.D. (2002). *Brain Structure and Function I: Basics of Organisation*. Adapted in part from "Maltreated Children: Experience, Brain Development and the Next Generation (W.W. Norton & Company).

# More Strategies

- Anger or emotional dysregulation isn't a BEHAVIOR; it is a state of the brain.
- Work in prevention things like daily mindfulness rituals, established transition routines, counseling if needed, starting and ending the day with a grounding technique to retrain the brain.
- During an anger or dysregulation episode, realize that the brain needs to be reset.

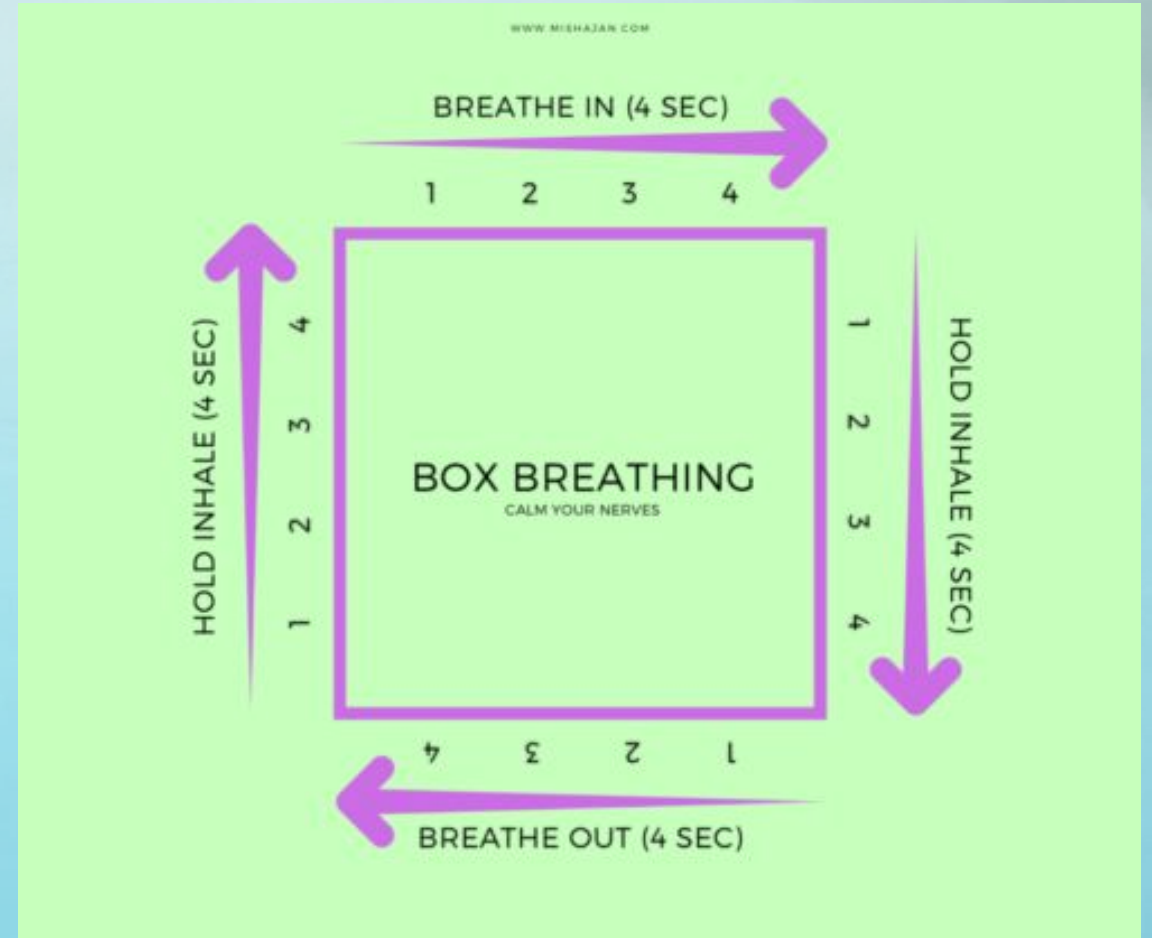


# Creating New Brain Patterns: Mindfulness

- Family Mindfulness Schedule  
<https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/family-mindfulness-schedule>
- Sesame Street Monster Meditations:
  - #1: Patience- learning to wait: <https://youtu.be/J9nE4RE8uiQ>
  - #2: Calming the Body for bed: <https://youtu.be/yhRWp0wOLyo>
  - #3: Focus: <https://youtu.be/T6XDe9jPfrl>
  - #4: Try Try Again: <https://youtu.be/mQAWSXQ1xOU>
  - #5: Belly Buddy Breathing: <https://youtu.be/-N1Xm4pleAg>
  - #6: Freeze (Self-Control): [https://youtu.be/\\_mh12qNHbgk](https://youtu.be/_mh12qNHbgk)
- Sesame Street: Count, Breathe, Relax: <https://youtu.be/n66r5Y6wguc>
- Mindfulness activities:  
<https://www.weareteachers.com/mindfulness-activities-for-kids/>

# Use Box Breathing for a Quick Reset: Let's Practice

- Box Breathing  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xaXvd8XiAcQ>





# Online or App Resources

- Therapist Aid website- videos, worksheets, interactive tools
  - <https://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-worksheets/anxiety/none> (Anxiety)
  - <https://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-worksheets/anger/none> (Anger)
- Positive Psychology Website:
  - <https://positivepsychology.com/cbt-cognitive-behavioral-therapy-techniques-worksheets/>
- Smiling Mind app
- Breathe App
- Breathe Kids App
- Mindful Powers App
- Anxiety Release App
- Netflix- Headspace channel: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13617024/>

# Letting go rituals

- Fire pit
- Writing things down and throwing in the trash can
- Paper shredder
- What are your favorite letting go rituals?

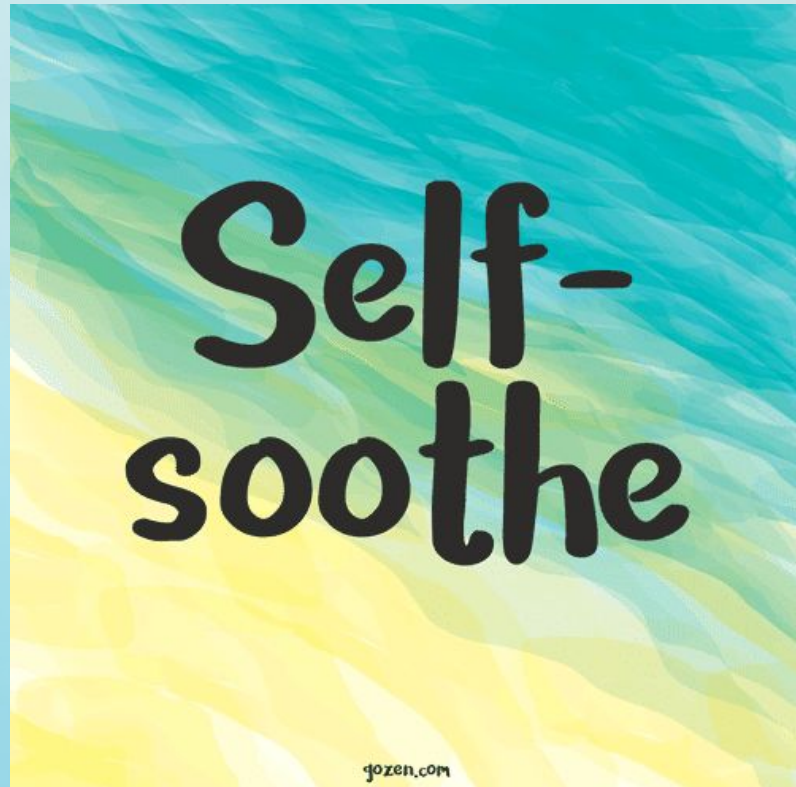


# Family Meetings

- Keep it short
- Have an agenda
- Get everyone to input
- Scheduling regular meetings helps us be proactive instead of reactive
- Guidelines for Family Meetings:  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LNi4mtUEmhaGHtd3CLvbssrrv-YxEAO-/view?usp=sharing>
- Family Mindfulness Schedule  
<https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/family-mindfulness-schedule>
- Daily check-ins to change focus: Best part of day, worst part of day, example of someone who was kind, example of when you were kind

# Bonus Section- Lots of Calming Ideas





- ▶ Give yourself a hug
- ▶ Rub your ears
- ▶ Hold your own hand
- ▶ My favorite: calm down aromatherapy lotion
- ▶ Smell chapstick
- ▶ Mindfulness breathing techniques



- ▶ Help redirect your child to something else (play catch, take a walk, listen to music, do some jumping jacks, make a snack together.) This helps your child self-regulate their emotional state.
- ▶ Stretch
- ▶ Dance to music
- ▶ Push against a wall
- ▶ Practice chopping wood
- ▶ Jump on the trampoline
- ▶ Facial tapping
- ▶ Strike a yoga pose or power pose
- ▶ Yoga Ball from 5 Below



# Disconnect to Reconnect

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- ▶ Do a technology detox
- ▶ Walk in nature

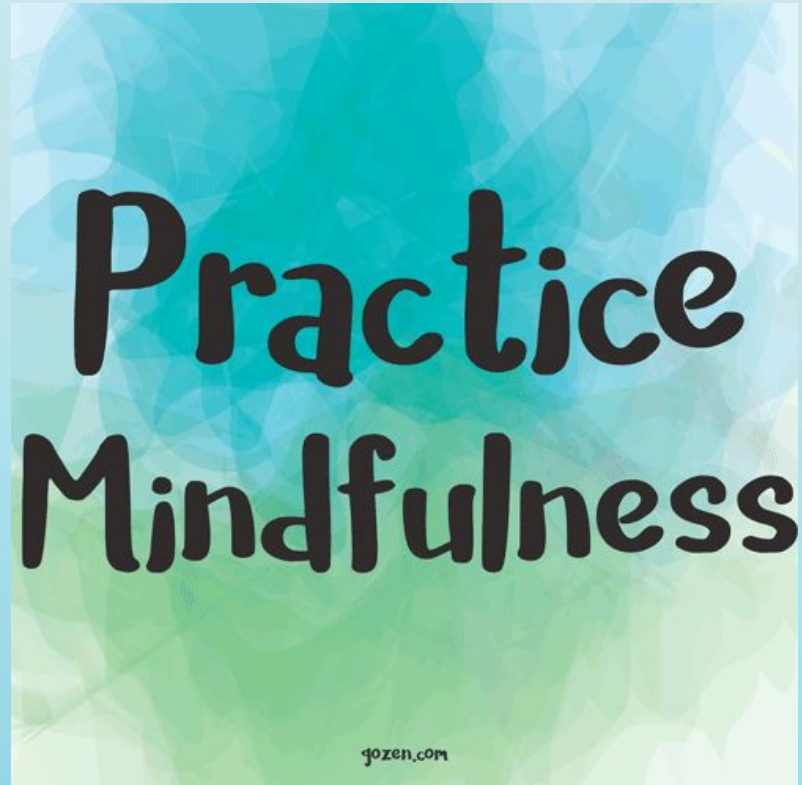


# Befriend Water

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- ▶ Drink more water
- ▶ Take a cold bath, hot bath, shower





- ▶ The brain is a remote control and you can change the channel! Mindfulness is moment to moment awareness of one's thoughts without judgment.
- ▶ Blowing bubbles—either with detergent or even with a straw in a glass of milk (like bubbles, thoughts are transient).
- ▶ Family floor time—everyone sits or lies together for 15 minutes at the end of the day or before dinner and just talk and hang out technology-free. Set a timer and let everyone just settle after a busy day.
- ▶ Go Noodle Flow:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVZuyjS7lv4&list=PLKB6nFlwn0C5LH0B3yIWqu0jxyFYBtlvY&index=9>
- ▶ Do a body scan:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9A0S54yAgEg>
- ▶ Take five- hear, see, smell, feel, taste



# Listen

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- ▶ Listen to music
- ▶ Listen to stories
- ▶ Listen to guided meditations on you tube or phone apps
- ▶ Listen to uplifting words



# Help Someone Else

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- ▶ Volunteer
- ▶ Be a good friend
- ▶ Look for the helpers- Mr. Rogers

# In the Heat of the Moment

**5-4-3-2-1 Technique** Using the 5-4-3-2-1 technique, you will purposefully take in the details of your surroundings using each of your senses. Strive to notice small details that your mind would usually tune out, such as distant sounds, or the texture of an ordinary object.

- **What are 5 things you can see?** Look for small details such as a pattern on the ceiling, the way light reflects off a surface, or an object you never noticed.
- **What are 4 things you can feel?** Notice the sensation of clothing on your body, the sun on your skin, or the feeling of the chair you are sitting in. Pick up an object and examine its weight, texture, and other physical qualities.
- **What are 3 things you can hear?** Pay special attention to the sounds your mind has tuned out, such as a ticking clock, distant traffic, or trees blowing in the wind.
- **What are 2 things you can smell?** Try to notice smells in the air around you, like an air freshener or freshly mowed grass. You may also look around for something that has a scent, such as a flower or an unlit candle.
- **What is 1 thing you can taste?** Carry gum, candy, or small snacks for this step. Pop one in your mouth and focus your attention closely on the flavors.

# Categories

Choose at least three of the categories below and name as many items as you can in each one. Spend a few minutes on each category to come up with as many items as possible.

Movies, Countries, Books, Cereals, Sports, Teams, Colors,  
Cars, Fruits & Vegetables, Animals, Cities, TV Shows,  
Famous People

# Additional Sources/Resources

- **Impact of Covid 19**

<https://www.loyolamedicine.org/about-us/blog/covid-19-impact-on-child-development#:~:text=Delays%20in%20Early%20Development,-As%20young%20children&text=One%20recent%20study%20compared%20early,language%2C%20motor%20skills%20and%20thinking.>

- **Dr. Bruce Perry Resources/videos:** Video on helping early childhood:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hp6fZrzgiHg>

- <https://www.childtrauma.org/brain-dev-neuroscience>

- <https://child.tcu.edu/about-us/tbri/#sthash.EoP69j5o.dpbs> TBRI

- **Dr. Barbara Sorrels (Tulsa practice)**

- <https://www.childhoodtraumainstitute.com/> Excellent website and resource for extra online training resources

- **Dr. Karyn Purvis: TBRI Trust Based Relational Intervention:**

<https://child.tcu.edu/about-us/tbri/#sthash.EoP69j5o.dpbs>

- Groves, B. (2002): Children who see too much: Lessons from the Child Witness to Violence Project. Boston: Beacon.

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