



SHIELD Mental Health Series: Session Two Cultivating Regulation & Resilience Amid Ongoing Uncertainties & Inequities

[End Introduction – Begin Part 1]

Erin Sivak: So, now, I would like to introduce our topic for today, “Cultivating Regulation and Resilience Amid Ongoing Uncertainties and Inequities,” session two of our SHIELD Mental Health series. So, this is the second of nine sessions, covering multiple topics on supporting mental health for all students, and it will extend through February 2022. Please visit our website and registration page for information about future sessions.

Our learning objectives for today: we’re going to apply knowledge of William Bridges’ Transition Model to understand the emotional state and behaviors in children and adults associated with chronic uncertainty, identify one method to strengthen regulation, and resilience in students, and adults, discuss three strategies for fostering connection, belonging, and achievement for students, and adults, define equity, and what it may look like in your school environment, and identify one to two initial steps to take toward a more equitable experience for students and staff.

So, I would finally like to introduce our speakers we have today. We have Courtney Tucker, Associate Director for Business and Partnership Development at the Bridge for Resilient Youth in Transition (BRYT) program, and Paul Hyry-Dermith, the Director for Bridge for Resilient Youth in Transition (BRYT). Thank you, and welcome to you both, and I’d like to turn it over to Courtney.

Courtney Tucker: All right. Welcome everyone. It’s a pleasure. I’m going to attempt to share my screen, and I’m giving myself grace, because sometimes things go as we want, and sometimes they don’t, and we go along with what they are. I want to start off by saying thank you all for being here. A friend of mine yesterday said to start this, she was like a group to our group chat, was like, “I have a challenge for all of you all.”

And we were like, “Okay, what’s the challenge?” No one said that with enthusiasm. And she’s like, “Let’s just get through the month of October.” [Laughter] And it was like, “Yeah, we can get with that.” So, there’s a lot going on, and a lot of people are like, “This feels like a lot.” And there’s a lot of uncertainty, and trying to figure it out, some people are like, “I can literally only take it day by day”, right? And just in the midst of everything that’s happening, and how I can deal with it, and what I’m using to deal with it.

And so, as I said, we’re going to share everything at the end of the presentation. Feel free to dump things in the chat if you have questions, or you have concerns. I’m going to look to BU SHIELD to read those out to me, so that I can make sure, just speak up, and interrupt me, as I can make sure that we address them.



And so, one of the things that I'm going to share with you is we talked about William Bridges, and William Bridges talks about change and transition, and Bridges has this thing. He says, "You know what? We have to go through stages to actually transition, and deal with a change." He says, "Change happens fast. It's external. Most of the time, it's outside of our control, but how we deal with it is the transition piece, right? And that takes a long time. It's a greater locus of control, and transition is even harder when change continues to happen."

But he says that there are three phases within transition [see image below]. He says there's, "Endings, so something ends; something has to end." And he says, "There's this neutral zone." I call it "unknown territory," where you have to sit in it, where you don't know what is coming, or what's next.

Bridges' Transition Model

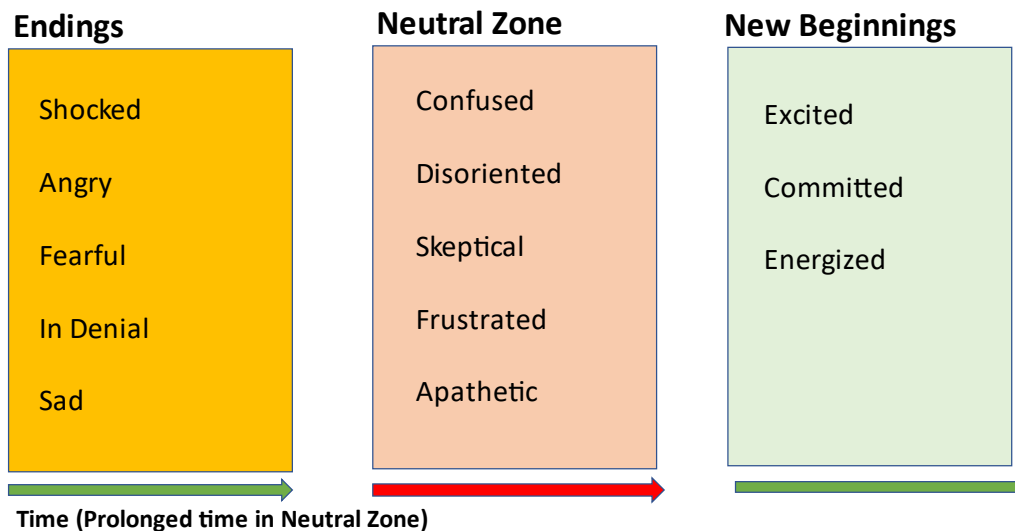


Figure adapted by SHIELD from *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change* (W. Bridges, 1991)

And then, there's the "new beginnings." Now, when we think about this, a lot of times, I tell people it's really hard to sit in that neutral zone, where you don't know what's the new beginning, but you definitely know something has ended, and if we don't sit in that neutral zone, then we just continue to long for, and go back to what's ended.

I don't know about you all, I would say in my younger years, I had relationships I knew needed to end, but the idea of me being by myself, I'm like, "I don't know if I can do this," so I ended up back in the relationship, and it lasted much longer than it should have, and so, just recognizing that we have to sit in this disorienting place,



before we can even get to a place to envision a new beginning. And it's almost like we also have to sit with the grief that something has ended.

But the thing that we're coming up upon, as we think about these COVID times, and we think about where we are, is look, I told everyone we are chronically holding the unknown right now. [pause] We don't know where the new beginning is, and if you're chronically holding it's easy for us to get to a place where we're like, "Wait, how do I have hope? How do I have faith that we're going somewhere?" Because I can't see what's starting. I just know stuff keeps ending, and I'm just here.

And so, it's a place that you begin to see the rise of people feeling disoriented. We begin to feel frustrated. I don't know. Some people say, "Look, we've been in this unknown territory." When we're chronically holding the unknown, some people say, "I just snapped, and I didn't have a reason to snap. I'm confused. The patience is gone. There's a lot of confusion, and you're like, I can't make out my head from my tail."

And so, we're chronically, and so, we're seeing people holding it, and you all in the nursing, what is that doing when people are holding that in their bodies? That means we're seeing people more tense. And so, one of the things I want you all to think about is what have you noticed? When you think about this, maybe you can share, what have you noticed about others and yourself in this chronic holding of the unknown? [Long Pause]

Linda says, "I'm crabby." [Laughter] Yes, others? She said, "I just react to stuff. I'm no longer thoughtful about a response; I'm just reacting. Karen's like, "It's depressing. It's hard to have hope. Irritable." Yes. These are things that happen when you're chronically holding the unknown, and I'm going to show you all, "Here's what we say it can look like."

You all mentioned some of these, but I just want you to look at what's here, and it's like, when we're holding, being confused, oriented, frustrated, skeptical, and apathetic, here are some things that will happen. People are tired. They're like, "I'm just tired. I'm out of sorts, constantly feeling behind, unmotivated; you lay still for a minute, and you're like, "I'm going to be attuned, and mindful, and check into my body." Then, all of a sudden, you're like, "Everything is short and tight, struggling with tension."

And some people say disassociating. You could be talking to somebody, and you're like, "Wait, wait. I don't even remember what you said." Right? And then, recognizing; another thing, I don't know how many of you all, you go to have a conversation, and you're trying to pull up thoughts, and it's like your brain just is completely empty. You're getting the brain fog.

And so, recognizing as we hold this, this is not just what's happening to us, but it's happening to other people, and it's happening at different intensities. So, how is it



happening? It's because we're chronically holding this unknown. And one of the things I want to say is when we chronically hold an unknown, we begin to see, depending on where we started, if we think about experiences, and that everyone was at a different place when all of this started.

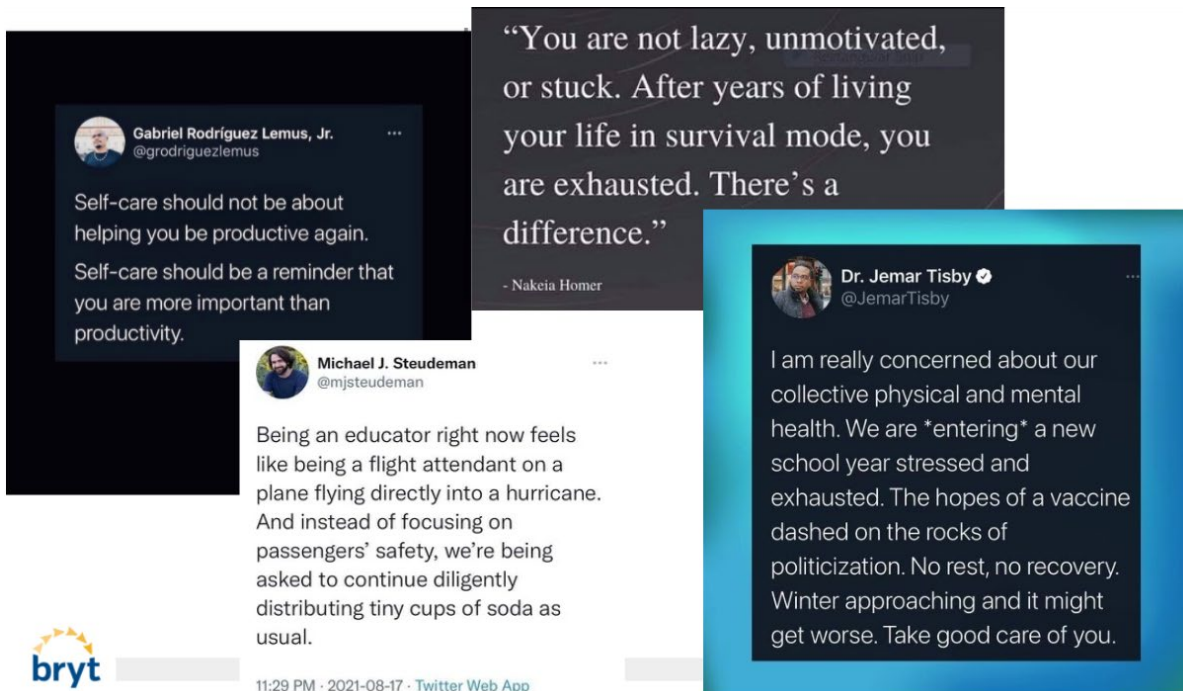
Some people were thriving, and some people were struggling; some people were already in crisis mode, but one thing that recognizes this chronic holding of the unknown, it decreases, or has decreased how people are able to present, or who they present out in the world. And so, for some of us, if we were already struggling, you're like, "I'm in crisis now."

And some people imagine constantly being in crisis. The only thing you can do is react, because you're always putting something out. There's no intentional – somebody's like, "What's your goals? What's your dreams?" And you're like, "Wait. I just want to survive today. Let's not talk about goals and dreams." [Laughter] And there are some people that are like, "I got the pace, and I'm trying to keep things turning over, but it's hard," and struggling.

And so, recognizing that everyone who comes to us is somewhere on this spectrum, somewhere between thriving and crisis. And we have to be attuned to that, and really think about, "Now, what does that mean, if they're coming to me, and they're seeing these things? How do I even interact with them?" I tell you what, when someone is not in crisis or struggling mode, it's hard to reason with them. It's hard to get them to think.

You're like, "Well, what is the first step you can take?" And they just look at you with a blank stare like, "I just...I don't know." Right? But that's because of where they are.

One of the things I want to say is I took these quotes [seen below], because it really talks about where we are, again. And the same, like what does chronic holding of the unknown tell us? That you're not lazy; you're not unmotivated, or stuck. You've just been living in survival mode for a long time. You're exhausted.



And how can we begin to recognize that there's a difference, when you're constantly in this mode, or this place? Someone else said, "You know what? We're entering this new school year, and I'm concerned, because people are still stressed and exhausted right now, and not feeling like there's been a period of rest and recovery."

And the other thing, a lot of us are holding, it's like, "Look, we haven't even gotten to winter, where time changes, and it's dark, and automatically we have seasonal shifts in moods. So, if we're already seeing this right now, what are we going to see later?"

And then, another thing – this is like, as someone else said, "Look, the only thing I can say right now is me in a school; me doing my job right now feels like I'm flying into a hurricane," and I'm saying, "Okay, everyone, be safe. And I'm just handing out cups of soda." And another thing that I keep hearing is that sometimes self-care is being weaponized.

Instead of acknowledging that the system needs to do something different, they're telling people, "You're not taking good care of yourself, and if you took better care of yourself, you would be more productive." So, how do we not weaponize that, and say self-care should just be about how are you loving yourself, and doing things that make you feel good? So, how do we become the mouthpiece for that?

And so, with that I'm saying like, "What do we do when our butt gets run over?" How do we support the healing and reflection for ourselves, our students, our families, and our colleagues? The number one thing that we can do for anybody is help them be aware. I tell everyone, "You can't change what you're not aware of." So, how do we begin to get them to a place of awareness, of even acknowledging that the bucket is full?



And I think sometimes within our culture, we've normalized the idea of, "You know what? You're supposed to be doing a lot. You've got to grind; you've got to do more." And I think about, some one of my friends used to be like, "We're going to grind hard, and we're going to grind pretty. Grind hard; grind pretty." And not recognizing that grind lifestyle of always doing, doing, doing, and jumping from one thing to the next, that wasn't good for our overall health or wellness.

And so, then, we wonder why have we got high blood pressure? Why are we struggling to sleep? Wait, maybe our lifestyle needs to change. But until someone brought that awareness to us, the idea of grinding was normal, and even validating. And so, our job has to be how do we open up space, and allow reflection to say, "Wait, is this working for me?" And if this isn't working for me, what do I need to do differently, or what can I do differently? And if I'm not willing to do nothing differently, why? What is the story or narrative we're telling ourselves?"

One of the things that we're proponents for right now is saying, "You know what? If we want to heal, we actually have to return." And a lot of people would say, "Wait, that feels... [chime noise]." Sorry about that. Can you all still see my screen?

Erin Sivak: Yes.

Karen Robitaille: Yes.

Courtney Tucker: So, one of the things that that does is when we say that healing is in the return, what we're saying is healing, it comes about, and is in a place where you return to the essence of who you are, and what makes you special, and what made you feel good. And so, when you hear, and we heard Karen's story, she talked about her healing was in recognizing who she was: What was important for her? Finding out what drove her.

And so, healing isn't returning to a place where everything is perfect. A lot of people be like, "If things would just go back to normal, and the way they were, I would be okay." And some of us need to acknowledge for some people, especially marginalized populations, and even for some of us, that might not come from those groups, normal wasn't okay.

And so, how do we recognize the healing is a return to the place where you know what? We can recognize the imperfections; we can see them, and we can still love on ourselves. Healing is the return to the appreciation of just who we are, letting go of the judgment, letting go of fixed ideas, and just embracing, "Look, this is me, living into self-compassion." So, healing is in the return to ourselves, and acknowledging what we need, and recognizing that that need, it's important that that need gets met.

If my body is tense, it's important that I stretch. If I've been looking at the computer all day, it's important that I get up, and take a break, and move my legs, and walk



around, and it's okay for me to meet that need, and not be constantly on responding to e-mail. So, healing is in the return to ourselves, and so, in that, as we recognize healing as in the return, I just want to set the context that for a lot of people, especially in the context of COVID, healing is going to be hard, because if we think about it this way, COVID has been a collective trauma moment.

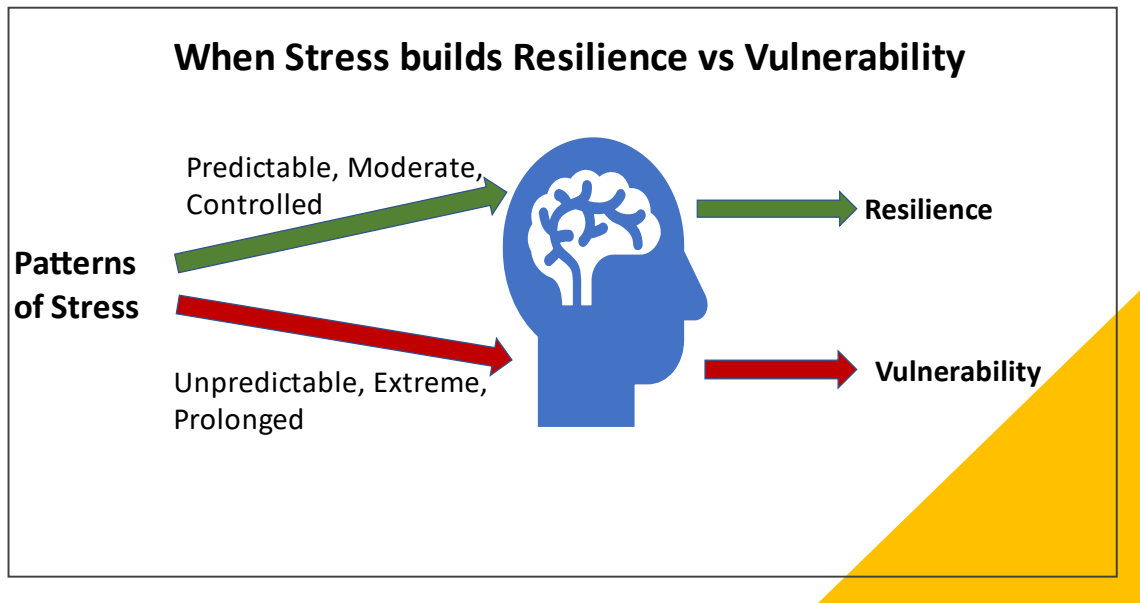
And I'm calling it trauma, because it's overwhelmed a lot of people's existing coping skills. It's caused a lot of grief, and that grief isn't just limited to the people that have been lost. It's the identities. It's the routines. It's the ways of being. It's the finances. It's a lot that's been lost. And so, one of things in this collective trauma moment is we can't say, "You know what? What's going to happen in this moment? Are the effects of this going to be short- or long-term? We don't know."

And I think ten years from now, we're still going to be figuring out what was the effects of this? And how did it reshape people's relationships to themselves, and their body? To themselves and their mind? Now, how is it having an effect? And I just want to share one of the things I tell everyone is, "where are kids?" And you all are on the ground, so you're probably like, "This doesn't surprise me."

Where are kids right now? Studies say that hospital visits increased, ED visits for mental health are up. One in four kids are saying they've considered suicide. Most feel isolated and disengaged, and these are the kids. And so, you know what? If these are kids, can you imagine? I didn't pull the data. What's happening with adults?

And so, as we're anticipating the return, as people are coming into our offices and interacting with us, I think we have to remember, and think about where are they in their brain? And so, when I think about where are people in their brain, what you're going to see are two brain scans: One, this one has optimal functioning. It lights up. The top part of the brain gives us a lot. The reason in a reflective-centric person gives us a lot. When they're stressed and depressed, there's not that much up there. There's not that much to connect with.

And that's why a lot of times when people feel depressed, you should be connecting with them, and they're like, "I don't want to." Look at the connecting part, the part of their brain that wants to relate to others, people it's shut off, so it does feel forced, and is also very beneficial when it can happen. [image below]



Well, this is taken from Dr. Bruce Perry, and just to remember, “Stress in and of itself is not bad. When we can make it predictable, and it’s moderate, and it’s controllable, it begins to build resilience.” And that’s what we want to begin to do. We want to build resilience, but we have to take the stress, and make it predictable, moderate, and controllable. I use this example of I played soccer, and so, my soccer coach, we would do trails, and we would do scrimmages; we would play different things, and so, when we got to a game we wouldn’t freak out, because we would feel like we know enough. We’ve got this, and that built our resilience.

Another thing that builds a student’s resilience, and I want to put this out here is this idea of connection, and relationship, and positive interactions. So, there is this thing, and again, it’s taking it from Dr. Bruce Perry, but it says that the number of positive interactions that an individual has, or a student has, or a kid has as they start their day with an adult can dictate the type of day that they have.

So, the more times that they have a positive interaction, the more hopeful they are about their life. And so, if somewhere along the way someone can give them an authentic smile, ask them an authentic question, it increases their positive interactions, and that builds their resilience. Karen talked about that one positive interaction in tenth grade built her resilience enough to completely change her life.

And so, our mindset has to be, “How am I being intentional about making sure that when I interact with someone it’s a positive one, because that will cause me to build resilience, versus when it’s a negative one?” I remember I had a teacher who said, “Courtney, you can’t write.” It took me forever to want to write something, and somehow, I got through a dissertation, but it sensitizes me. It makes you vulnerable. It makes you want to stop.



So, how do we not feed that? And how do we recognize that when people come to us that some people are in a learning mindset, and they're ready, and they're good to go, but a lot of people, because of chronically holding this unknown, they're in a threat-based mindset: Fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. And I think we've seen it. You immediately say something and somebody's ready to correct you, or they just don't want to talk about it.

You're like, "Wait, you act like I just didn't say anything." Or there's a freeze. Well, I don't know about you all, you've been in stuff, and you agreed to something, and then you're like, "What did I just agree to?" And it's a very surface-level engagement. And so, what we're seeing more is people coming to us activated: fight, flight, freeze, and fawn. Well, we're trying, and I'm telling myself, "How do we begin to address that, and deal with them in that space, versus immediately trying to teach them something?"

So, what I want you all to do is I want you to tell me on this scale, tell me where you think the majority of kids, students are. Where are kids and students? And then, I want you to reflect, and we're going to think about where do you think your colleagues and staff are right now?

Erin Sivak: Thank you for listening to the activity for Part 1. So, right now, we would like you to do the same thing, and think about where the majority of students and staff are in your school or district on a 1 to 10 scale, where zero is a learning mindset, and 10 is threat-based mindset? [Pause]

Courtney Tucker: And so, recognizing that this is where people are, they're not in the learning set. They're somewhere in the middle and have shifted over to more red. So, now I want you to tell me, where do you think the majority of your colleagues are? [Pause] They're like 8, 7, 8, 8, 7, 9. [Laughter] And Sharon is like, "Can I say an 11?" [Laughter]

A 6, a 7, an 8. You're all like, "Look, we are in crisis." And so, the bigger question becomes, "Now, how can we support each other, recognizing that that's where we are?"

And so, with that in mind, and I'm sure you all have seen this before, it's just the diagram about our core regulatory networks. And it starts at the bottom with our brainstem, and it goes up to our cortex, which will also lighten up, when we're ready, and that's creativity, the thinking, the values, and the hope. But sometimes when we're in distress, and we're in that red portion, we're kind of stuck with just trying to regulate our body. So, we're stuck in our brainstem. We're stuck at the base of the brainstem [image below].

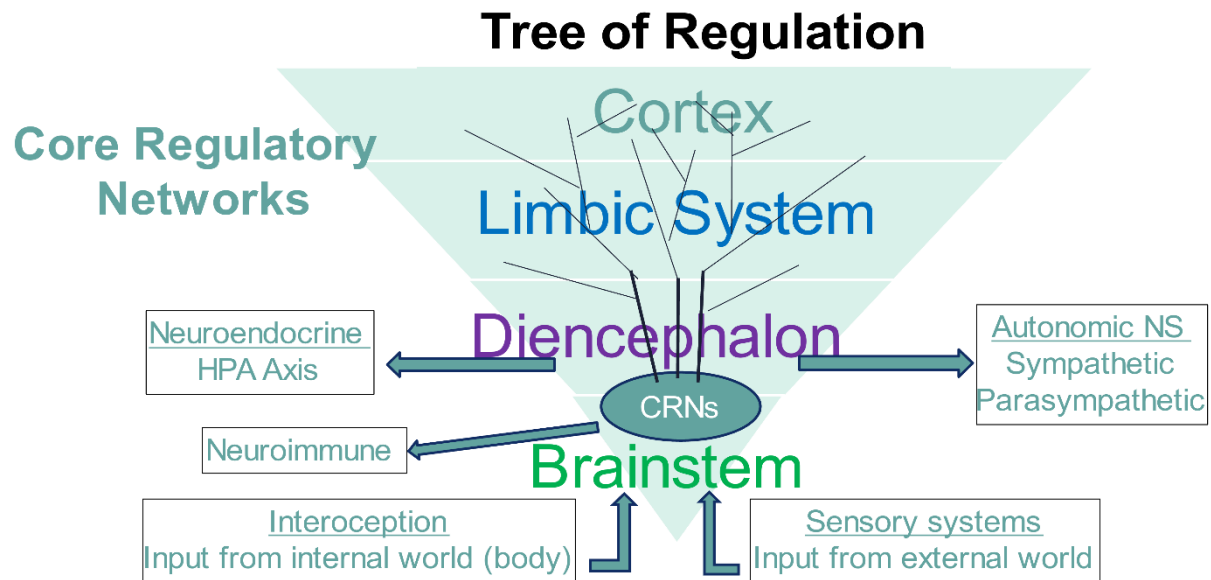


Figure adapted from Perry, B. & Winfrey, O. (2021) *What Happened to you? Conversations on Trauma, Resilience and Healing* McGraw-Hill.

Image used with permission of Carol A. Dolan, Ph.D.

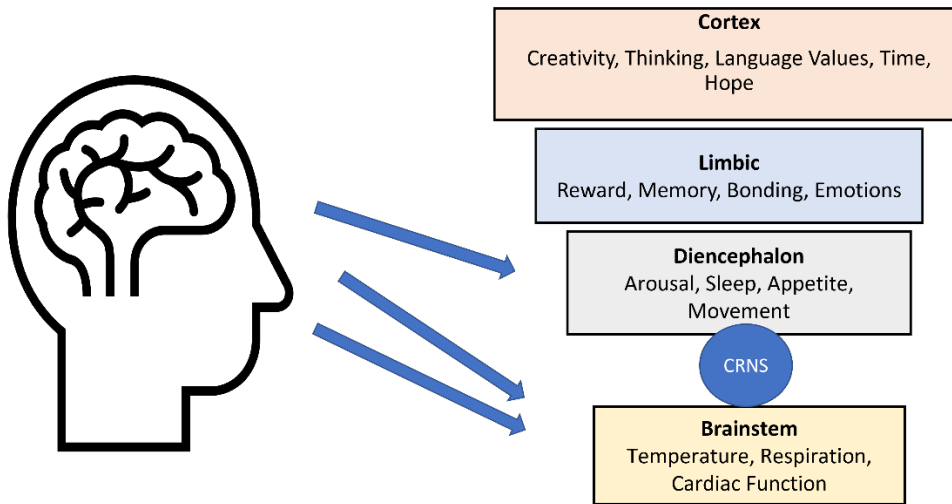
And so, one of the things that's important is when we're stuck at the brainstem – I tell everyone this – when we're stuck at the brainstem, historically, how do we try to communicate with kids and others? I use this example: I talk about my niece, and I say, "You know, my niece was acting up; she was doing something, and I tried to tell her, and reason with her." I tell her, "You cannot do this; this is why we're not going to do this."

And she screams, and she yells, and she storms off. And she closes the door. And so, one of the things that I realized is she was so dysregulated in the bottom of her brainstem, that I was actually trying to get her to use language, and get to hope, and start thinking about stuff, and even using reward, and she just wasn't there. And so, the best thing I could have done in the moment is just to acknowledge this is really hard. Let me give you a moment to deal with how hard that is.

And so, if you look at B [image below], B is telling us the way we deal that, and interact with kids, and even adults, is we have to first think about regulation. So, how do we help you regulate? And then, we get to the point where we say, "You know what? Now, let me relate to you. Let me actually do something that causes a relative effect. And then, let's get to reflect and reason."

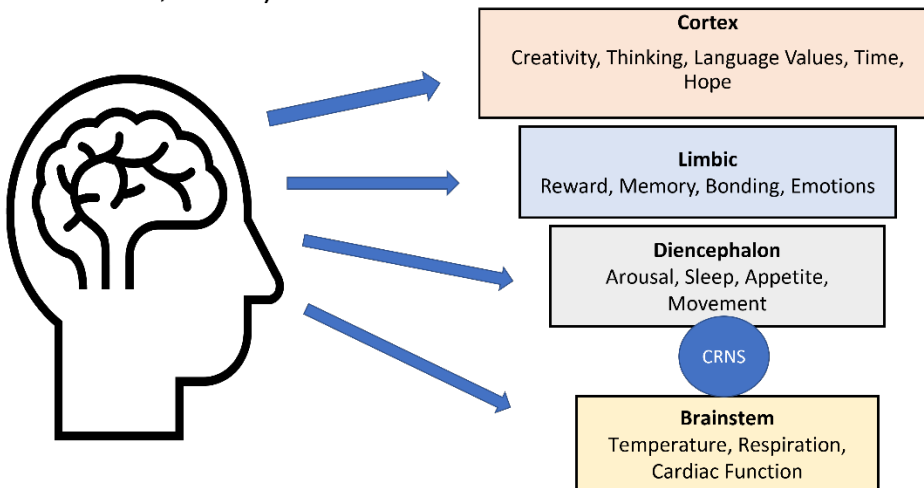


A- Historically, where and how we meet and communicate with kids



Adapted by SHIELD from Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D. @BDPerry

B - Rethinking “connection” through the 4 R’s (Regulate, Relate, Reflect, Reason)



Adapted by SHIELD from Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D. @BDPerry

And so, we call that the “four R’s,” and we always want to remind everyone, people can’t reason with you if they’re struggling to regulate themselves. They can’t, and if that regulation is really severe, they can’t relate to you. They’re not even hearing what you’re saying. And so, we have to first meet people in their bodies, before and especially during the season before we can get up in their minds.

And so, how do we begin to meet them in their bodies, and give them experiences so we can get to the reasoning, and reflecting? And again, this diagram [image below], I just want to say how important regulation is. As you can see, when you’re calm and alert, that neocortex is lighting up, and you have access to 85 percent of it. When you’re in flight, fight, freeze or fawn, you only have access to 5 percent.



Why Regulation Is Important

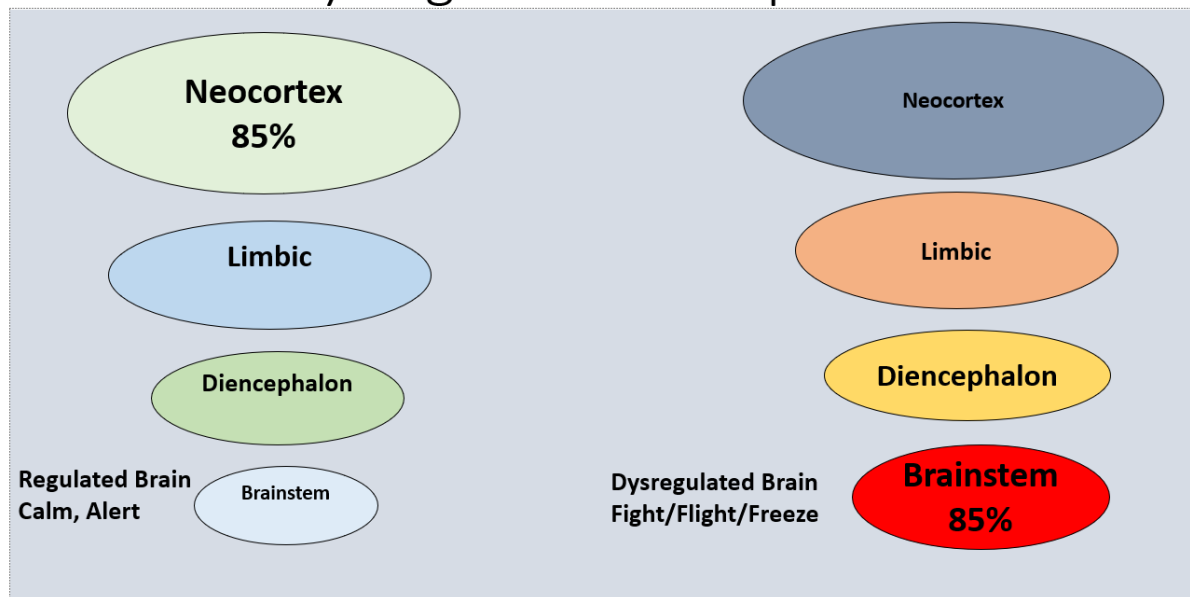


Image adapted from model created by [Neurosequential Network](#)

And so, this is why taking the time to think about regulation will really help us going forward, as we begin to build resilience.

Erin Sivak: Thank you for listening to Part 1 of Courtney's presentation. Please continue to Part 2 to learn more about regulation and resilience.