



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

[End Part 1 – Begin Part 2]

Erin Sivak: Welcome back and thank you for joining us. In this segment, Courtney will tell us more about regulation and resilience.

Courtney Tucker: As I said before, we're going to go into a little bit more about each of these – is how do we begin to help regulate and build resilience? You all heard me talk about earlier the idea of connection, and authentic connections, not asking how someone is doing, and then walking away, but really asking how they're doing, and staying there, and listening.

I tell everyone, "How do we begin to offer therapeutic doses?" And a therapeutic dose, as I stated earlier, is simply a positive interaction. How do we begin to offer that, be it, "Oh, I notice you changed something up today"? How do we begin to say, "I'm so glad you're here," instead of leading with, "You haven't been here in forever?" How do we begin to offer a therapeutic dose?

But other than just really recognizing how do we make sure that people are interacting with multiple different adults, or multiple different kids, because there are multiple different needs that need to be met, and if it's only the same people over and over again, if the quality of those relationships aren't strong, then it's going to be dysregulating, and it's not going to build resilience, but it's going to rebuild vulnerability.

The other thing I tell my everyone, we have to remember is coregulation. The way we breathe, others breathe. And the next thing is creative predictability, where we can, and then moderation. How do we begin the strength to change? And then, how do we offer opportunities for agency? When we're chronically holding the unknown, it feels like everything is out of our control.

So, how do we begin to offer opportunities for people to have some bit of control, where they can feel like they're in control, and that everything isn't out of control. And I tell everyone that you never want to feel like everything is happening to you, and nothing is happening with you. So, how do we begin to have more "with" moments?

And again, this is the piece where we're talking about how do we catch calm with the therapeutic doses? And I'm reminded, and I give you all another example of a therapeutic dose. I'm reminded, I was in a store, and so, I'm in a store, and I'm walking past, and I see this gentleman. He actually has a cast on his arm, and he's trying to get stuff off the shelves, and put it in the bag, and this simple thing I did was I said, "Hey, would you mind if I got a little close, and help you get that off the shelf?"



And the smile that came over his face immediately relieved his distress. That was a therapeutic dose. It wasn't much. It was just me offering a positive interaction. And so, these are the things. The other thing is there is an article that was published in NPR, and it says, "People will regulate their breath to the adult in the room, or the person that they feel like is an authority."

NPR Article: [When Teachers Take A Breath, Students Can Bloom : NPR Ed : NPR](#)

One of the things that's really important that people don't realize in this time that can really help with the regulation, and building resilience, is what type of music are you playing in the background? Is it one that allows people's heart rate to come to a place that they're able to regulate? When you enter the room, are you offering that opportunity for them that people get regulated with you, that you're like, "I'm calm enough that if people regulate to my heartbeat, it's going to be good."

The other thing is how do we begin to change our language, and make it more about validation? I think the number one thing that kids say is missing from their lives is they say nobody validates them and validates how they feel. Validation doesn't mean you're right; validation just helps you feel seen, and heard, and valued.

And so, one of the ways we can do that is with our language. We can lean in, and we can say, "I've noticed. Tell me more. Really? That's how you feel? Tell me more about that. What do you need? How can I help? What's happening for you? I'm noticing you're tired. What can I do to help take something off your plate?" And the main thing is making sure that we stay regulated, as we listen.

When we talk about predictability, and building resilience, the number one thing I say is, "Ritual, and routine, and rules." But one of the most important things with predictability, if you say you're going to be somewhere, and you're going to do something for someone, be there, and do it, especially for kids who are struggling with regulation and resilience, to know that there's an anchor, or a constant in their life means a lot.

The other thing that's important is just boundaries, having rules. And even allowing people and helping people to set their own rules is important. And so, even the thing is as we're in this time, is it okay for me to have my own rule about what makes me feel comfortable being COVID safe, versus what makes everyone else feel comfortable?

I tell everyone boundaries, it is okay for me to say, "You know what, after a certain period of time, it's okay for me to turn my phone off. It's okay for me not to respond to text messages, and e-mails immediately." Routine? How do we even get people to the point where it's like repetition, and consistency? One of the best routines that people can establish is what can be my morning routine, and what can be my evening routine?



Something as simple when I'm working with people, and I get them to say, "In your day, thinking about what went well. I want you to write down before you go to sleep three things that went well." And when you get up in the morning, I want you to write on that sheet of paper, to write down three things you're looking forward to. Just getting in that habit, and that routine, changes the framework in which they see their day.

The other thing with routine is it, also, prepares your body for something. Getting into a routine, "Okay, now, what do I need to make sure I do..." – everyone the most common is a bedtime ritual. "What's going to be my thing that prepares me, and tells my mind it's time to shut down?"

When we think about rituals, another thing is some people say, "I have rituals where people come to meet with me. When they walk into my office, the first thing I do with everyone is I say, "I am so glad to see you today." And I have one friend, she says, "I've decided not only do I tell them I'm glad to see them, but for everyone that enters my space, I try to find one thing to compliment on."

She says, "I do that for everyone." And she says, "It really changes." For her it changes how she sees the people coming in to visit her, and for them, it gives them a positive interaction that's building their resilience.

And so, the other thing that we talked about that's important is boundaries. And if you think about it, and you've had kids, you know you swaddle them, and they sleep really well when they're swaddled, and they're held tight. And so, with kids and youth, again, even when we have to tell them, "No," saying, "No," but then, also, saying, "Here's what I can do," and knowing, and acknowledging which boundaries are flexible, and which ones are not.

And knowing that they're going to try you, to see which ones are flexible and which ones are not, but being clear about what is. That helps build their resilience. And again, a ritual. One of the things that's important, another thing that we think about within rituals is this idea of content versus process. So, you do want to make space, like I was saying, for the content.

So, write down the things that went well; write down the things that you're looking forward to, but you also want to make space for, "Where is there a space to process what's happening? Where are the check-ins? And even doing it for adults and children, where are the restorative circles? Where's the opportunity to share out? And I tell everyone, "Where is the space to take off the mask?" and say, "I don't have to be strong; I'm letting go of any shame and guilt, but I'm just going to be present."

And so, how do we create spaces, and activities that allow that, because someone's able to be vulnerable, and to share in a space that allows them to feel included, and doesn't feel threatening, that fills their bucket. That makes them feel like, "I'm okay. I can interact with people. I can be my authentic self."



The other thing that we said is really important right now is we have a saying, and we say, “Kids do well if they can; adults do well if they can’t.” It’s moderation, and so, how do we begin to moderate the change? Instead of having to happen that we expect the change to go immediately, and I use this example all the time, I say, “For moderation for me is when my doctor comes in, and like, “Courtney, you need to lose 20 pounds, and I’ll see you in three months.”

I’m like, “I had to lose 20 pounds in three months. It’s not going to happen.” The moderation, and so, I tell myself, “You know what? I’m going to commit to doing 30 minutes every day, and we’ll see where we get,” or, “My goal is going to be...can I get 5 pounds a month?” And that’s strength to change, and it makes it seem more doable, and available.

And so, the other thing is moderation causes to fundamentality shift how we talk about learning, how we talk about quality of interaction. And so, one of the things that’s really hard right now, is I’m beginning to hear from people, “I’m behind.” And I’m looking at a six-year-old, and he’s like, “I’m behind. I don’t know if I’m ever going to catch up.” I’m like, “Where did you hear that?”

Life happened; things change; but I don’t want you to ever feel like you’re behind, because then there’s hopelessness; there’s anxiety. “Will I ever catch up? Am I ever going to be good enough?” So, if we don’t moderate and change how we’re talking about this, even in that, we’re going to increase everyone’s anxiety, and then the adults that are working with them are feeling stressed. And so, “I don’t know what to do.”

Another thing that’s important is moderation, again, through rhythm, movement, music, and nature. Can we take breaks? How? Making sure there’s some movement in the body. How do we transition out of room and spaces? I’ll tell you what, even if we’re doing this online, are we allowing moments for a break? Or the expectation is everybody is going to look at the screen for three to four hours? We have to moderate what we’re doing.

The other thing that I said is agency, and that’s the idea about control. And so, how are we helping people to be able to differentiate what’s in my control, what’s in my influence, and what I need to let go of?

And so, I’m just wondering, if you all put in the chat how do you all think we can advocate, and help facilitate the sphere of control conversation, and getting people to recognize what’s in their sphere of control, because right now, with this chronic holding of the unknown, and the chronic uncertainty, everything feels out of control. What do you all think we can do? [Long Pause]

Oh, the question is how do we get people to focus on sphere of control? And plus is just use that frame, and I use the example: A friend of mine feels like, “Everything



feels out of control. I don't know what's happening." She's like, "Courtney, you know what you know what you can control? Don't eat two bags of chips every night. Just eat one." You don't have to do that.

Or even inviting the space to inviting the space to strengthen things down. Think about timelines. What can I do? What am I preparing to do down the road? And I tell everyone sphere of control is even to having someone say, "What's one small thing you can do today that would make you feel good about where you are? What's just one small thing?"

And for some people that small thing could be, "You know what? I'm going to go make my bed. If my bed was made, things wouldn't feel so chaotic." So, it's like if I can just walk my dog. So, it's like sometimes just listening. And Mariah's was like, "Sometimes they've already done it, and don't know it." So, just pointing out, "Look, here's how you've been. You got here! So, things can't be all the way out of control. You made it. You value yourself."

One of the most important things we can tell people when we're thinking about agency and control, is saying, "You know what? I know you care for yourself. I know you care, but can we think about how the caring may need to look different for it to have the affect you want?" Right now, how you're caring yourself might not just be effective for you, so how can we shift how we're caring for ourselves?

Someone else says, "Write down the list, and do some prioritization, and let other people look at it. Let someone else look at the list and tell you whether or not you're doing well." The thing I want us to always remember is if I'm a dysregulated adult, I'm really going to struggle to regulate a child or a student.

And so, sometimes when we're interacting with others, we have to help the adult breathe before we can even get to the kid or a student, or we have to – it's almost like now we just say, "Let me put my life mask on first if I'm flying, before I help someone put their mask on." So, we have to remember that, and we have to hold that.

Erin Sivak: Thank you for listening to Part 2 of the presentation. Now, please move on to Part 3 of the podcast.