

# **Assisting Parents with Emotional Regulation Challenges in our Children**

*And how mindfulness can help*



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# What we will cover in this presentation:



1. *Emotional Regulation vs. Emotional Dysregulation in our children*
2. *Key parts of the brain that play a role in decision making and controlling our feelings*
3. *Strategies for what to do in the moment*
4. *Mindfulness and how it can benefit our children*
5. *Resources for parents/adults*

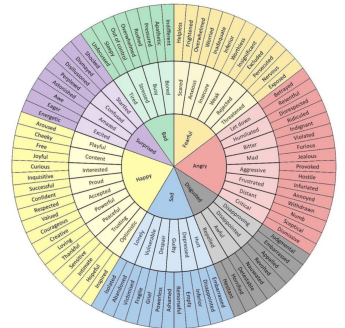
3rd - 5th  
grade SEL  
lessons are  
focused on  
these topics!

Emotional Regulation vs.  
Emotional Dysregulation  
in our children



# What is emotional regulation?

- Developmentally appropriate display of expressing your emotions
- First = Identifying an emotion present
- Second = Identifying what is causing that emotion
- Third = How can you manage or regulate that emotion

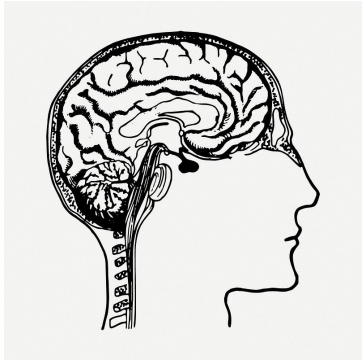


## What does emotional dysregulation look like?

- Experiencing difficulty identifying which feeling is occurring
- Challenges with registering, responding and reacting to situations that may cause hard feelings
- Reactions include irritability, crying, yelling, aggression, high levels of sadness
- Typically, the reaction is “out of proportion”

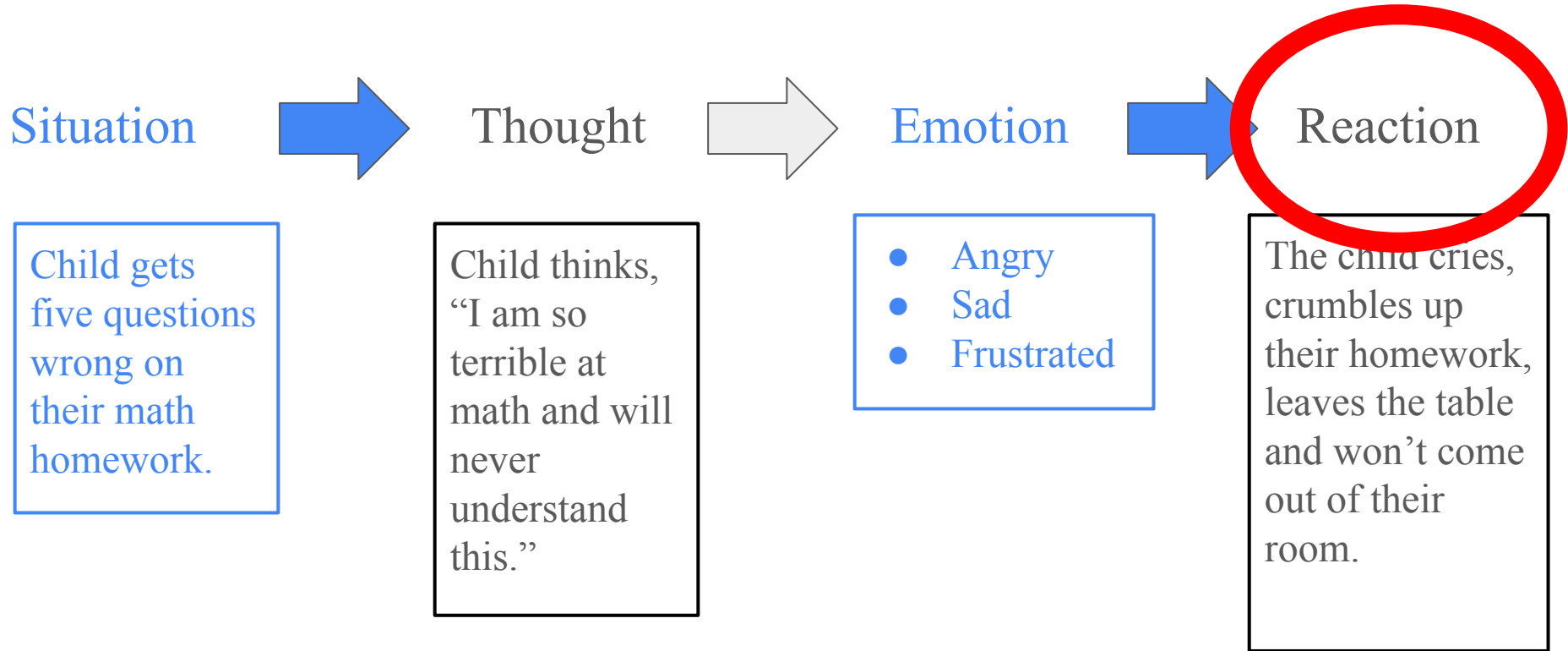


# Healthy Emotional Regulation



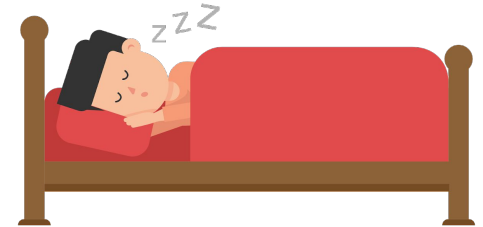
1. Identify the emotion
2. Express the emotion
3. Manage the emotion

# Stages of Identifying Emotions



# What factors can potentially play into emotional dysregulation?

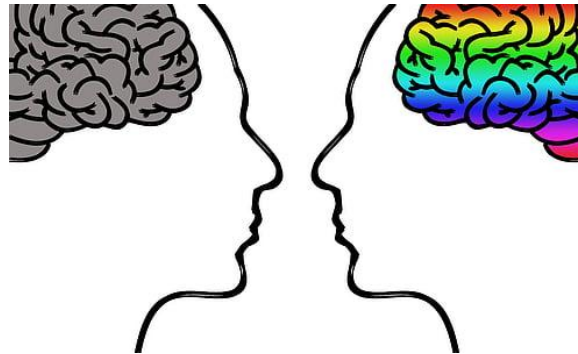
- Brain chemistry/development
- Temperament
- Family dynamics/support
- Attachments
- Environmental
- Social situations
- Classroom/school day
- Sleep functioning
- Screen time
- Types of food they eat
- Amounts of physical activity
- Overstimulation/Lack of stimulation



Key parts of our brain that  
assist in decision making and  
controlling our emotions

# What happens to the child's brain during those moments?

It is important to understand **key parts** of our brain. The more we understand how our brains work **the more control** we will have over how we think, behave and feel.



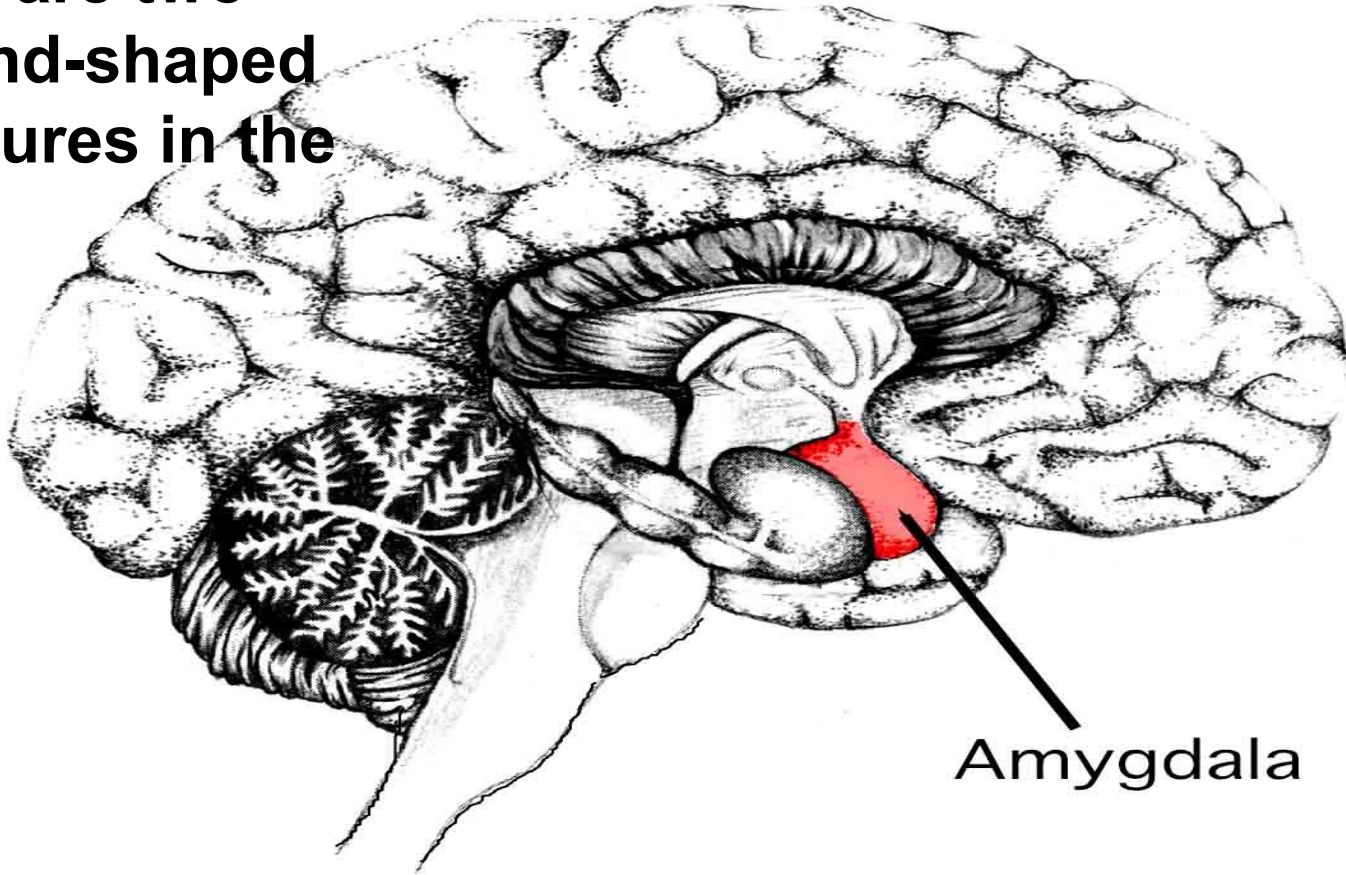
# YOUR PREFRONTAL CORTEX (wise owl) HELPS YOU:

- PAY ATTENTION
- MAKE GOOD DECISIONS
- ANSWER QUESTIONS
- MAKE PLANS AND SET GOALS.
- UNDERSTANDING WHAT SOMEONE ELSE IS THINKING OR FEELING (EMPATHY).
- INTERPRETING, ANALYZING, AND PROCESSING INFORMATION

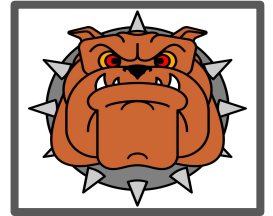




**There are two  
Almond-shaped  
structures in the  
brain**



Amygdala



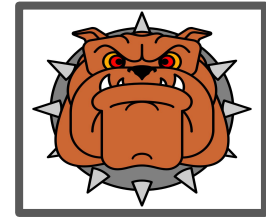


Our **Amygdala**, controls  
our **reactions** to stress  
and danger.





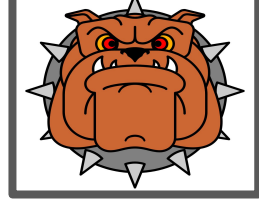
**SOMETIMES WHEN OUR CHILDREN  
FEEL A STRONG EMOTION THEIR  
AMYGDALA IS IN CHARGE.**



# ANXIETY

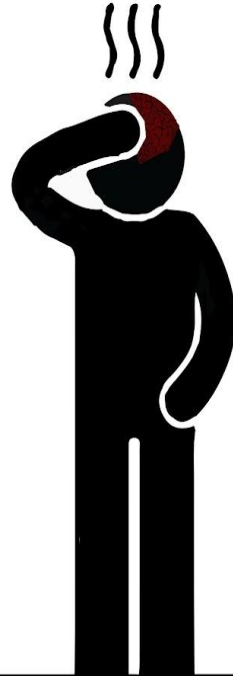
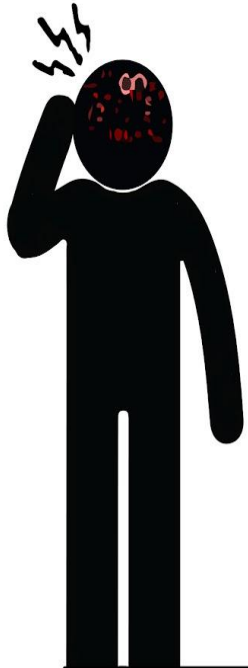
# FEAR

# ANGER

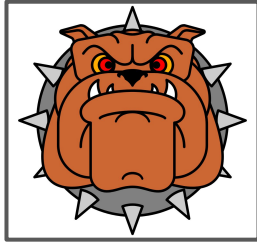


SOMETIMES ADULTS FEEL STRONG EMOTIONS AND THEIR AMYGDALA activates.

# DEPRESSION



# There is a biological Change When the **amygdala** is in charge:



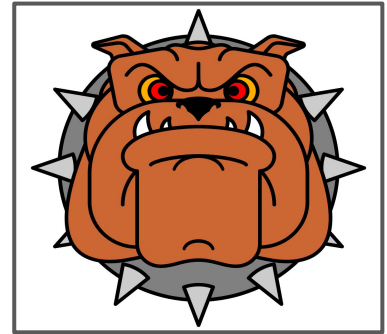
- your blood **pressure rises**,
- your **heart rate speeds up**.
- We are more **reactive** and **reflexive** with our responses {Fight, Flight, freeze}.
- We are **less focused** on rational thinking.
- Your body may feel tight, hot and **uncomfortable**



So when this happens there is a **release of stress hormones** which **prepare the body** to **fight** the threat or **flee** from **danger**.

**Our Amygdala only knows how to protect us in 3 ways:**

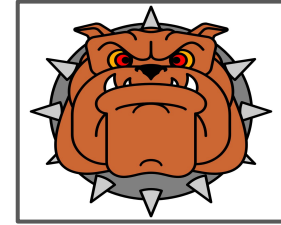
- 1. Fight**
- 2. Flight**
- 3. Freeze**



Our **Amygdala** helps keep us safe by making us act **FAST** in situations like....

# FIGHT

AMYGDALA

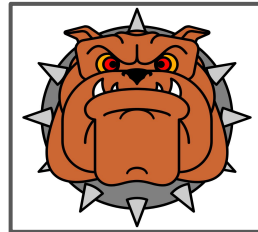


FIGHT CAN MEAN FIGHTING SOMEONE BUT IT CAN ALSO MEAN **YELLING**, USING **MEAN WORDS**, **BLAMING OTHERS**, STOMPING YOUR FEET AND **SLAMMING DOORS**.



# FLIGHT

AMYGDALA



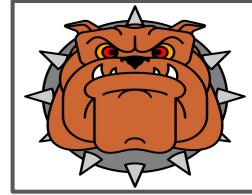
FLIGHT MEANS **RUNNING AWAY** OR TRYING TO **ESCAPE**  
IT CAN MEAN **LEAVING A ROOM** OR AN AREA



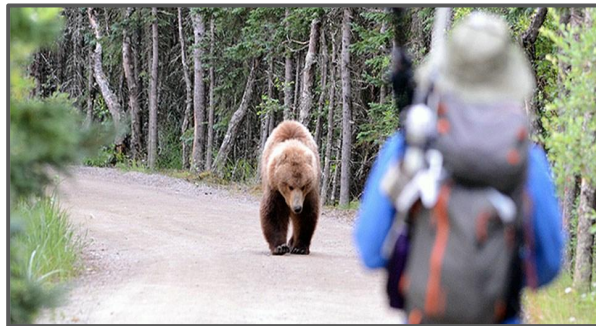


# FREEZE

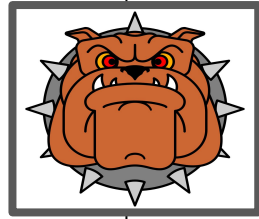
AMYGDALA



....IS WHEN YOU ARE "SHUT DOWN". IT MIGHT MEAN YOUR **BODY IS FROZEN** AND YOU CANNOT MOVE, OR IT CAN MEAN THAT YOUR BRAIN HAS **STOPPED UNDERSTANDING** WHAT IS GOING ON.



Our **Amygdala** helps keep us safe by making us act **FAST & REFLEXIVE** in dangerous situations like....



Your Amygdala doesn't know the difference between a big deal or a little deal. (It is always a BIG DEAL)



Your Amygdala lets you feel strong emotions to keep you safe.



Information

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When our (guard dog) **Amygdala** is activated, it shuts down our ability to **think clearly by blocking information** from going to our (wise owl), our **Prefrontal Cortex**.

So what if you or your child feels angry, anxious or sad and your **Amygdala** (guard dog) jumps into action and your **NOT in real danger...** it is a **small problem**.



What if you're just feeling upset, or stressed? Worried or mad? And you **don't need your Fight, flight, freeze?**

Who do we want in charge? How do we get our Prefrontal Cortex back



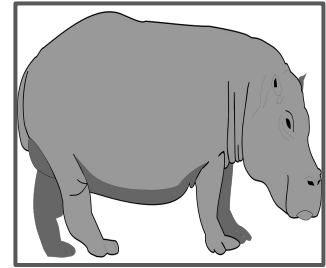
in control?



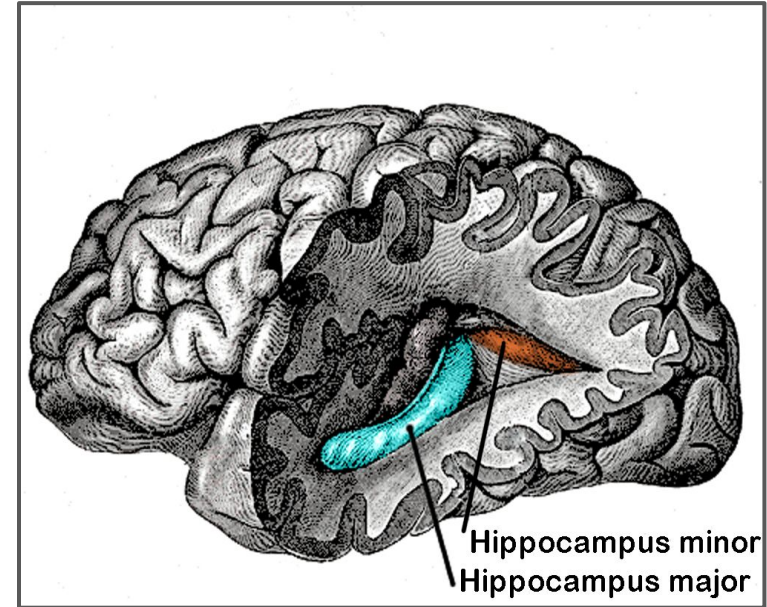
- **Identify** what **emotion** you are experiencing by being aware of how your body feels.
- You can **tell** someone how you **feel** and process the event in a healthy way.
- Tell yourself that **"It's ok"**, it's just my amygdala. My guard dog is on alert because I feel stressed but **"I am not in danger"**.
- **I don't need to fight, flight or freeze.** I need to **calm down** my guard dog by taking some **deep obvious breaths.**
- Mindfulness practice



Just like the **Hippopotamus** is capable of holding lots of food storage the **Hippocampus** can hold lots of **memories**.



- The **hippocampus** (hippo) is found in the **inner folds** of the **bottom middle section** of the brain, known as the **temporal lobe**.
- The hippocampus (hippo) is where **short-term memories are turned into long-term memories** and transferred to other parts of the brain.



- By utilizing your **hippocampus** (Hippo) you can increase **dopamine** in your brain by thinking about a **happy memory** like sharing a cup of hot chocolate with a friend or a fun vacation you went on with your family.
- Bring up a happy memory that your child can think about when they are feeling blue.
- Notice if you feel **happier** once your brain retrieved a happy memory.



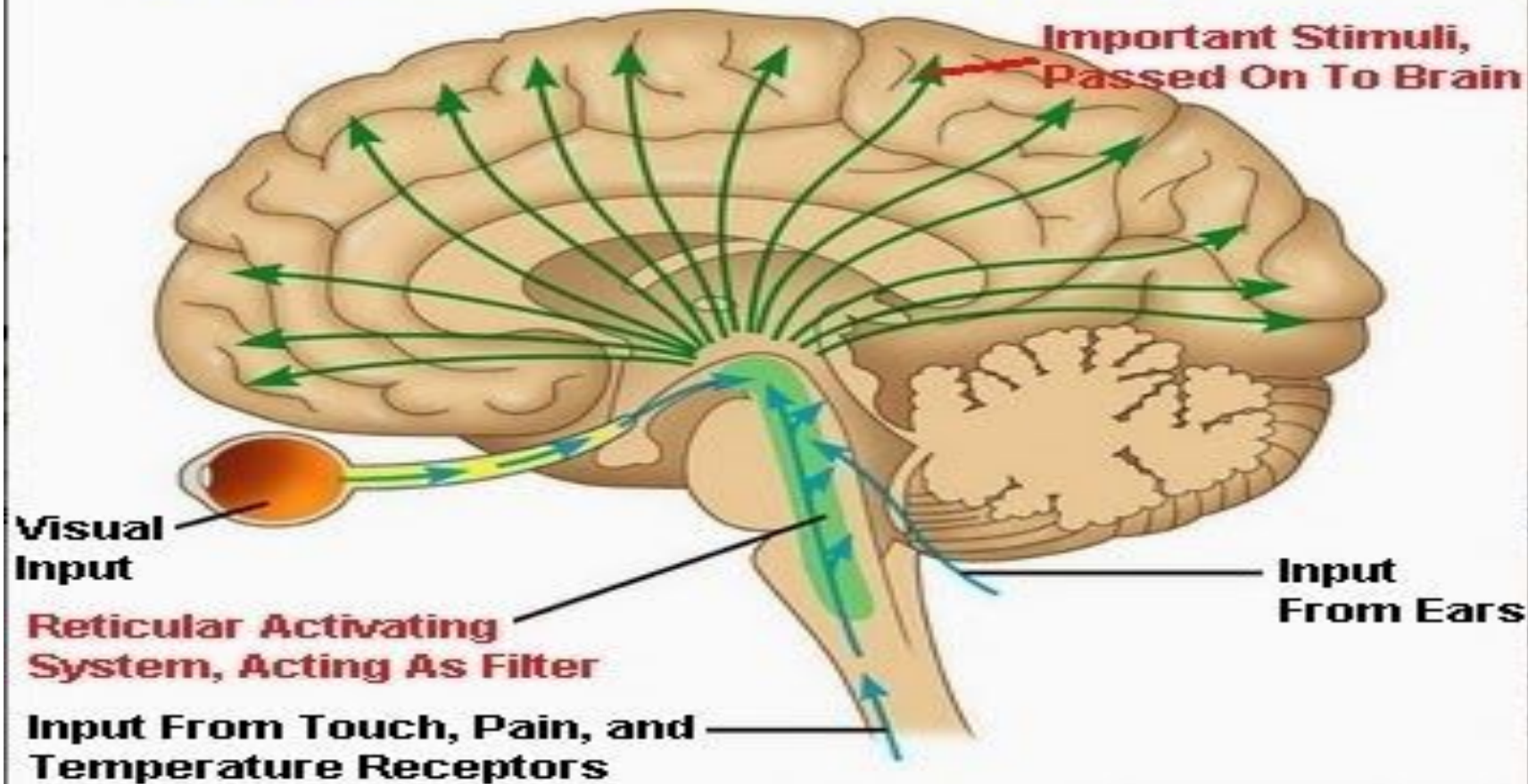


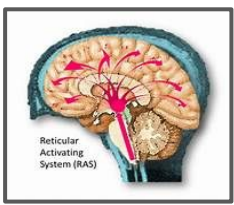
# RAS

RETICULAR  
ACTIVATING  
SYSTEM



# The Reticular Activating System





Your RAS acts as a **filter** against **all the** "data" that is around us.

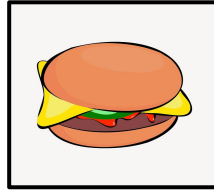
Sounds



Images



Tastes



Colors



Pictures

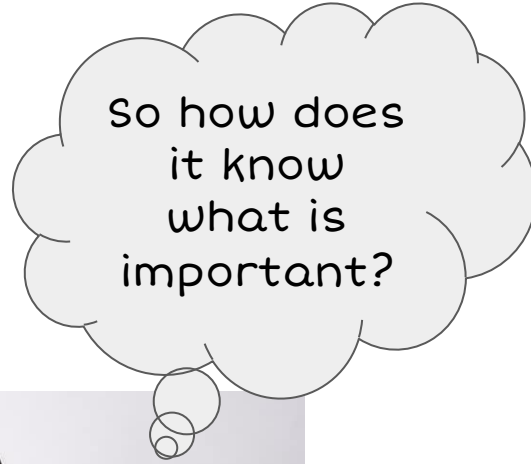


There can be up to **2,000,000 bits** of data around you!



Your **Prefrontal Cortex** can **not process** all the data around us so our **RAS** helps us **filter out** what is **NOT** important to us!

So, your RAS “filter” only lets things through that it thinks is **important**.



**By what you  
tell your RAS  
to focus on  
the most!**

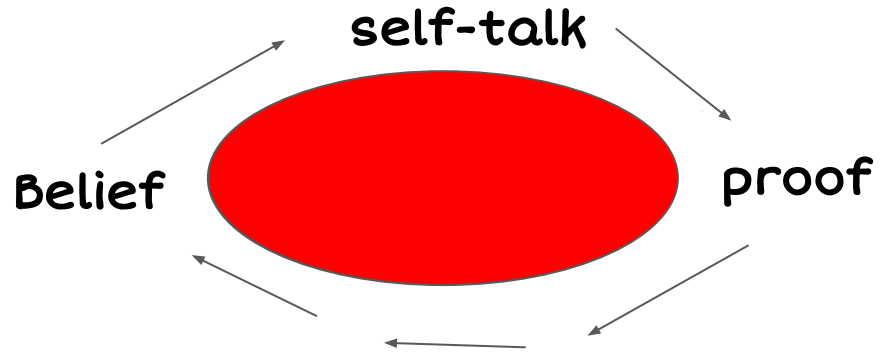




# So be careful what you focus on



Because your RAS will show you things to prove that this is true for you!



The stronger the belief is...  
The more you will likely tell yourself it!

So set up your RAS for **positives....**



...then your **RAS** will start to **show** you things to **prove** that your **new belief** is true for you!

A student sitting in a classroom likely has competing sensory experiences:

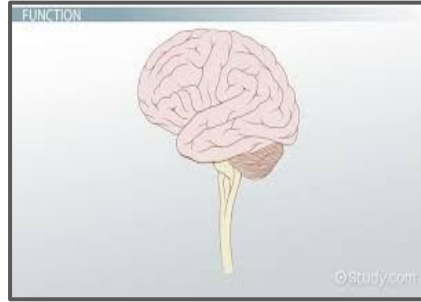
- the voice of her teacher
- A chilly blast from the ventilation system
- the sight of a bird outside the window
- the aroma from the cafeteria.



A mindful, focused individual is able to redirect her attention to the task at hand, reassuring herself that lunch will come after math.



However, it is not easy to focus on things we think we should be focusing on all the time.



Many times, **we drift off paying attention** to future or past events as if we have no control over it at all.

But by understanding how our brain works we realize that we do have control.

Strategies of what to do  
“in the moment”

# What is co-regulation between parent and child?

- Co-regulation all starts between adults and children.
- Brain wiring begins at a very young age but can be fostered later in life.
- Children will benefit more if they see adults in their life “respond” rather than “react”.
- It creates an environment for children to feel that they can positively speak and express themselves and their feelings without judgement

Co-regulation =

Acceptance, calm,  
problem solving and  
then connection

# How can an adult best support a child during moments of dysregulation?

- Patience = this takes time, energy and practice
- Boundaries = children still need structure and to know what is expected = tell them beforehand
- Tone of voice = sometime can hold more importance than what is actually being said
- Body Language = sitting close, positioning
- Engagement = asking questions, showing interest

# Understanding different feelings

- Parents understanding and being aware of their own triggers
- **Anxiety** = worry, perseverating thoughts, irritability, difficulty releasing control
- **Defiance** = opposition, argumentative behavior, often saying “NO”, not wanting to follow rules
- **Sadness** = lack of interest in social activities, wanting to be alone, little talking
- **Mood disruption** = “one thing sets them off”, often in an angry or irritable state that is hard to get out of

## “In the moment”



- Get on their level = builds connection
- Less verbal communication = less overstimulating
- “I can sit here with you while you feel \_\_\_\_\_.”
- Physical touch can increase calmness
- Continue modeling that “calm” behavior
- Positive forward comments

## What to say instead of “CALM DOWN?”

- “I can tell that you are feeling very \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “I totally understand, that would make me feel \_\_\_\_\_ too.” = Building empathy
- “Feeling \_\_\_\_\_ can be really hard sometimes, but your reaction is too big right now.”
- “I’m going to let you \_\_\_\_\_ for 5 minutes and then we have to talk about this big reaction.”
- “While you’re feeling \_\_\_\_\_, do you want me to stay close and sit with you or do you need some alone time?”



# EMOTIONAL REGULATION HIERARCHY



- **EXTRINSIC REGULATION**  
Regulate your own body to help the child regulate.



- **MUTUAL REGULATION**  
Engage in regulation strategies with the child.



- **VISUAL REMINDER**  
Provide a visual reminder of a strategy the child can use.



- **VERBAL REMINDER**  
Provide a verbal reminder of a strategy the child can use.



- **OFFER CHOICES**  
Offer choices for possible strategies.  
Start with visual choices (2-3 options).



- **ASK ABOUT NEEDS**  
After identifying the emotion, ask the child what might be helpful.



- **SELF-REGULATION**  
The child regulates independently.

## “Appropriate display of emotions”

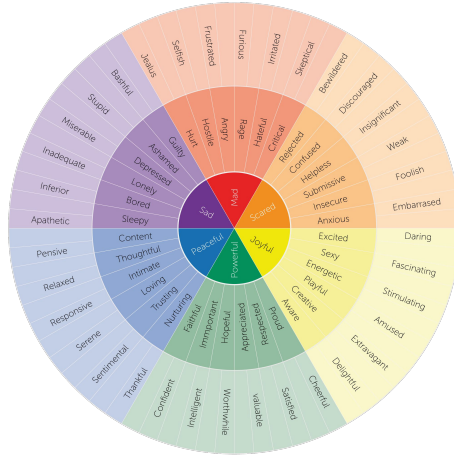
- Extrinsic = adult is supporting child
- Mutual = practicing strategies together
- Visual Reminder = Making a book or drawings
- Verbal Reminder = Telling the child which strategy they could use (or options)
- “What can I do to support you?”
- Independence = child can access proper skills at appropriate times

Mutual regulation (sometimes called co-regulation) = **practicing** strategies together



- Takes time, effort and dedication to actually practicing being calm together
- Parents/adults have to be their child's calm with boundaries
- "As your parent, I have to help you make this reaction smaller."
- "I'm going to take a few deep breaths because I am feeling myself getting \_\_\_\_\_"
- Going through strategies together before a stressful situation
- Continue modeling that "calm" behavior = accessing strategies

# Visual Reminder = Making a book or drawings of strategies



Blue, red,  
green and  
yellow zone

### "I" STATEMENTS

I FEEL \_\_\_\_\_

BECAUSE \_\_\_\_\_

WHEN \_\_\_\_\_

WHAT I NEED IS \_\_\_\_\_

poolcounseling

**I love myself**

**I am proud of myself**

**I am a good friend**

**I am enough**

**I am special**

**I am capable**

**I can do hard things**

**I believe in myself**

**I am patient**

**I am loved**

**I am creative**

**I am strong**

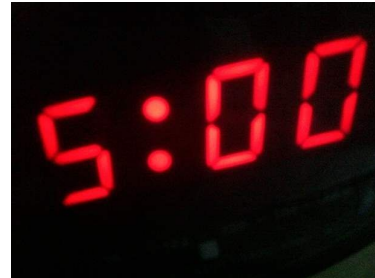
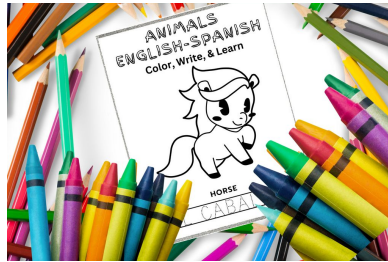
**I am smart**

www.journalfor

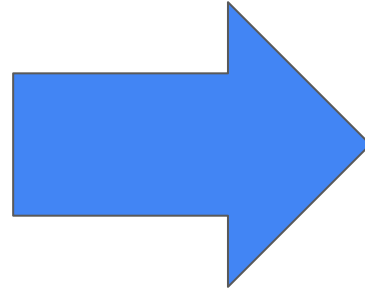
Verbal Reminder = Telling the child which strategy they could use (or options)

- “You look like you could use a break right now.”
- “You always do such a great job when you practice your breathing techniques.”

Non-verbal reminders = just prompting them



“What can I do to support you?”





Independence = child can access proper skills  
at appropriate times on their own

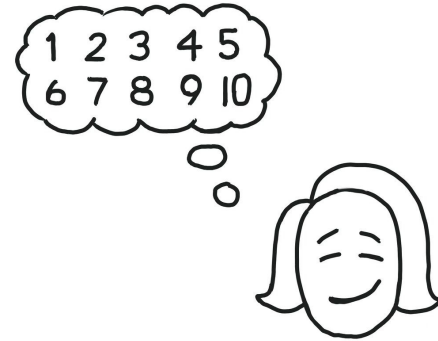
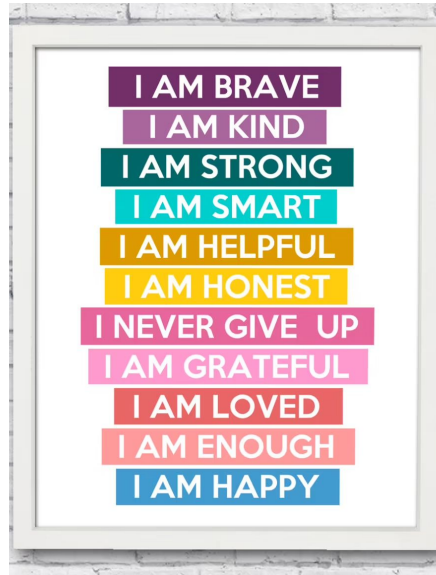


# COPING STRATEGIES = distracts our brain



CALMING SKILLS = slows our brain and body down  
to focus on the present = MINDFULNESS

### MINDFULNESS BREATHING CARDS





Mindfulness and how it can  
benefit our children

# What is mindfulness?

- Focusing on the present moment
  1. Mindful Bodies
  2. Mindful Listening
  3. Mindful Breathing

## #1 - Mindful Bodies

- Keep our bodies **very still** and quiet.
- Let your **eyes close** if you want to

## #2 - Mindful Listening

- The second thing automatically happens when we get still... what is the noise like in here right now, when you are still? You will **notice you end up hearing more things** when you are still.

## #3 - Mindful Breathing

- Noticing your breath
  - Intentional breath
- Temperature of your breath (air coming in and going out)
- Rhythm of breath (how your body moves)
  - Sensations of your breath (nose/throat)

What is an anchor? What does it do for a boat?



# Mindfulness can help calm our **Amygdala** down

- It will help us **calmly respond** and not react with our amygdala activated.
- Controlled breathing can **override** the **fight, flight, or freeze response** set off by the (guard dog) amygdala, and instead enable mindful behavior.
- The more you **practice**, the more control your brain and body will have over emotional reactions.

## “Mindful Minute” ideas

- “We are going to begin breathing, feel the air enter your nose/feel how it exits your mouth”
- “Feel your belly how it rises and falls”
- “Notice how your feet are grounded on the floor”
- “Let’s close our eyes”



# When can you use mindful bodies, mindful listening and mindful breathing?

Practice anytime with your kids!

- playground
- classroom
- home
- at your desk
- walking in the hallway
- playground
- when trying to fall asleep
- when we are feeling sad, angry or anxious

Resources for parents/adults

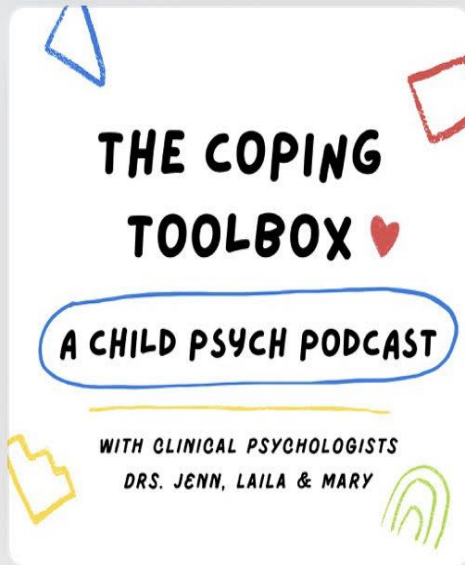


January 3 · S1 E61 · 36 min left

## 61. Nurturing Connection, Navigating Discipline and Staying Sane as a Parent w/ Eli Harwood, Episode #61

The Child Psych Podcast >

- How to nurture connection and mix in discipline with children when there is “road bumps” in regulating emotions
- Talks about how parents need to develop calming skills and regulation strategies first before their children are successful
- Emotions/Feelings are like waves
- Parents need to build their surfboard first so they can ride the “emotion” waves with their children



May 28, 2021 · S1 E12 · 26 min

## Mindful Parenting with Dr. Marina Heifetz

The Coping Toolbox, a Child Psych Podcast >

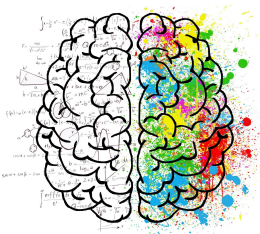
- Child Psychologist and Mindfulness Educator
- Responding vs. Reacting to children
- TINGLE method
  - T - "Time out"
  - I - "Inhale/Exhale"
  - N - "Name the feeling"
  - G - "Grounding"
  - L - "Loosen Up"
  - E - "Evaluate the mind"
- How self-compassion for adults can increase emotional regulation in children

# MINDFULNESS

on **You** 

- “The Mindfulness Teacher”
- “Go Noodle”
- “Fablefy - The Whole Child”
- “Every Mind Matters”
- “The Mindful Movement”
- “Mindful Schools”
- “Cosmic Kids: Yoga”
- “BrightenUP! Kids”
- “Yoga Guppy”
- “Pure Star Kids”

*Thank you for attending our  
presentation!*



*You can always reach out to your child's  
school social worker for assistance.*

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