

Supporting Regulation Using a Neurodiversity Affirmative Approach

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Disclaimers & Statements

General Disclaimer

- Opinions are of the presenters
- Make informed decisions

Language

- Identity-first (e.g., autistic person)
- Person-first (e.g., person with autism)

Professional Disclaimer

- Specific questions
- Additional Resources



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Introduction

Whether you are an autistic and/or neurodivergent person, a parent, a caregiver or a professional, you might wonder how you can help neurodiverse people build their autonomy, improve their ability to identify personal needs and support their general state of well-being.



Agenda

1. Understanding dysregulation
2. Self-regulation and co-regulation
3. The neurodiversity affirmative approach
4. Remember: Everyone is unique



Regulation

Regulation

- A person's ability to modulate an emotional state and adopt behavioural and physiological responses adapted to the given context and objectives.
 - i.e., "I want this... therefore I have to do that."

Dysregulation

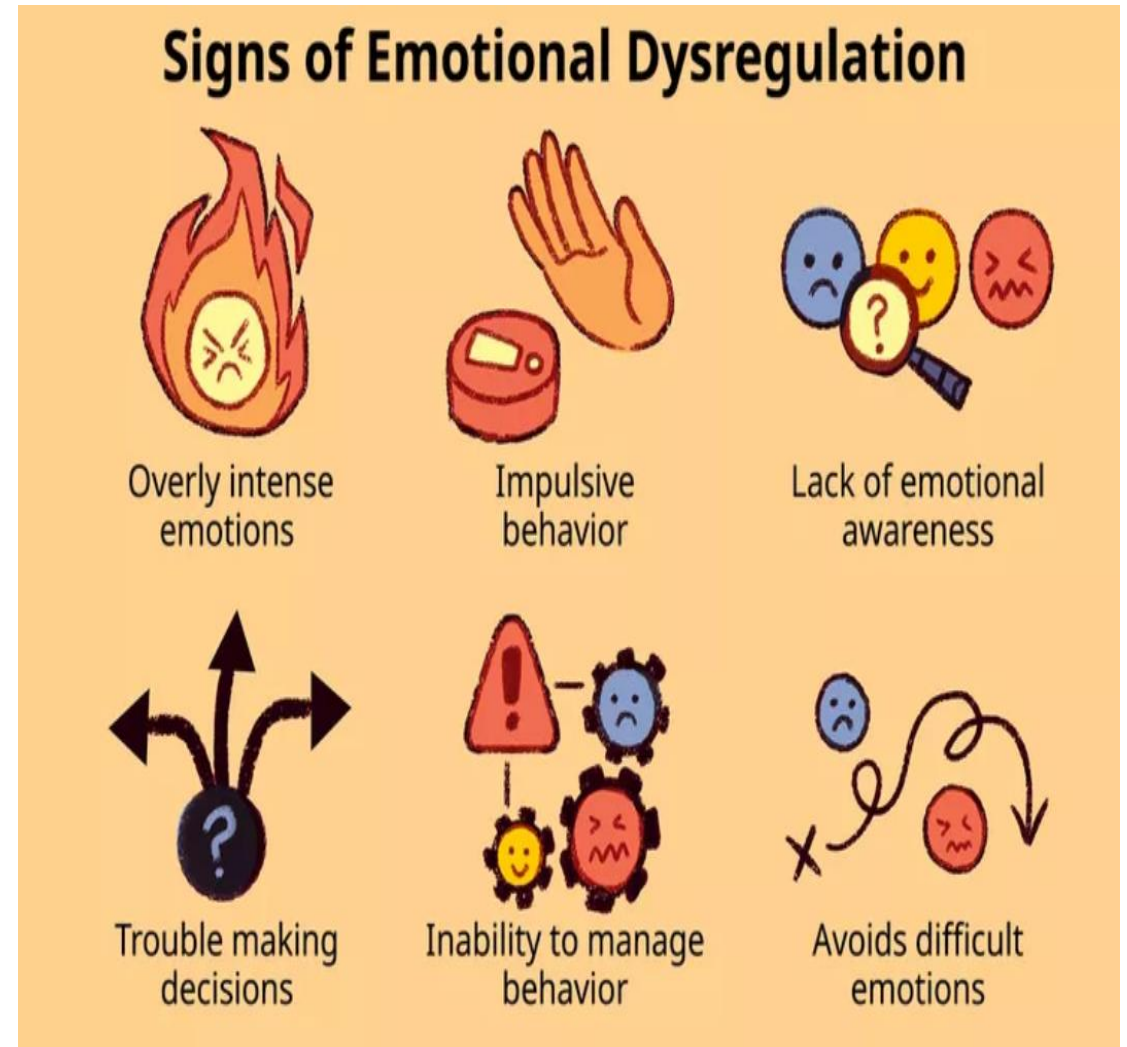
Refers to the difficulty a person is having managing intense or painful emotions.

- May engage in behaviours that are extreme, self-damaging or unreasonable behaviors in response to the situation, acting against their own interests.



Understanding Dysregulation

- Signs of dysregulation can include:
 - Outbursts of anger
 - Aggressiveness
 - Hyper-excitability
 - Frustration
- Dysregulation can lead to internalization and externalization of symptoms later in life such as withdrawal and aggression.



Sensory & Emotional Overload



- **Sensory Overload:** when there is more sensory input than the brain can process.
- **Emotional Overload:** when there is excessive emotional stimulus that the brain can no longer sort.
- They can occur simultaneously, making it more challenging for the brain to process.

Meltdowns



- A **meltdown** is when dysregulation is so heightened that a person can no longer self-regulate.
- Meltdowns can occur when a person is:
 - Overwhelmed by excessive sensory input
 - Experiencing too many emotions without being able to take a break or remove themselves from the situation.
- Meltdowns can manifest as:
 - Panic attacks
 - Angry outbursts
 - Strange behaviour, or unusual actions.

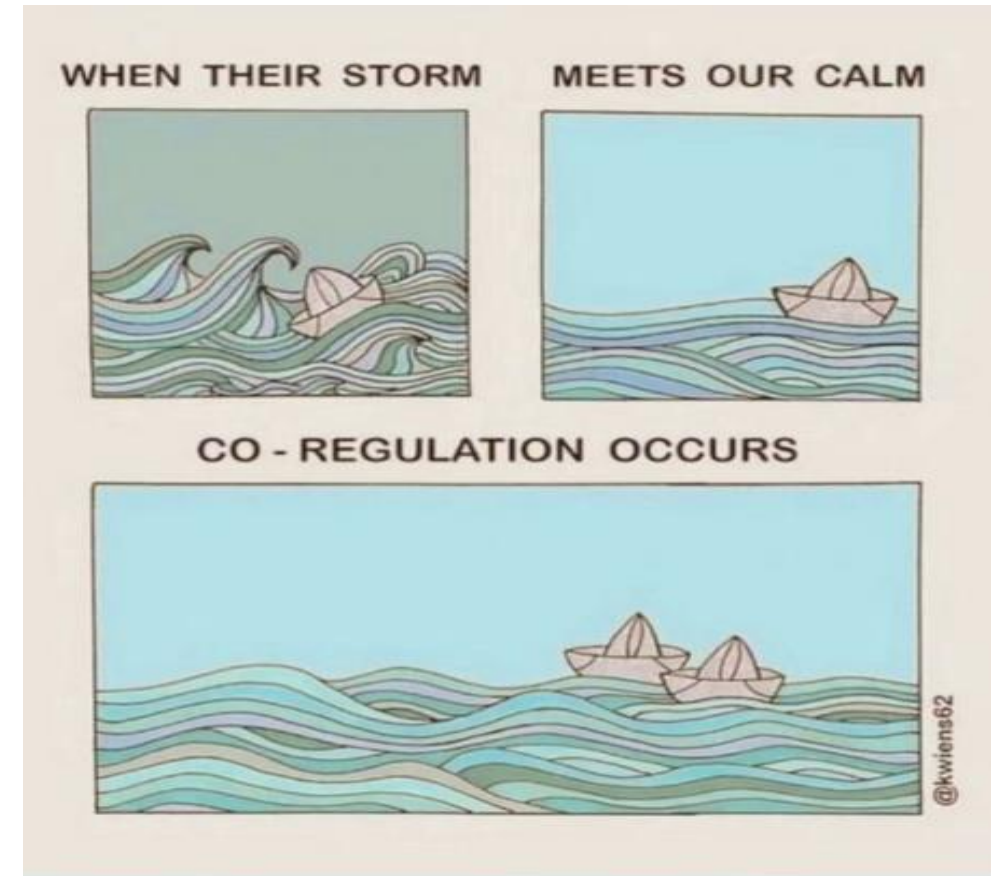
Self-Regulation

- Self-regulation refers to the degree of effectiveness an individual reacts to stress and returns to a calm state in which they can focus and remain alert (Shanker, 2012).
- Challenge for ‘neurotypical’ individuals and many autistic/neurodiverse individuals.



Co-regulation

- Through a connection with nurturing and reliable caregivers, children develop the ability to soothe and manage distressing emotions and sensations. This is called co-regulation.
- Co-regulation reduces the person's distress, and helps them to return to a state of calm.
- It can also be practised with adolescents and adults through positive behaviour modelling.



Self- Regulation or Co-Regulation?

Self-Regulation

- A person's ability to adapt their attention, emotions, thoughts and behaviour to effectively respond to internal and external demands.
- Self-regulation is not always possible in a sensory or emotional overload context.

Co-regulation

- Works by the presence of another regulated nervous system, helping a person regain a state of equilibrium or calm.
- Co-regulation is the first step towards self-regulation.

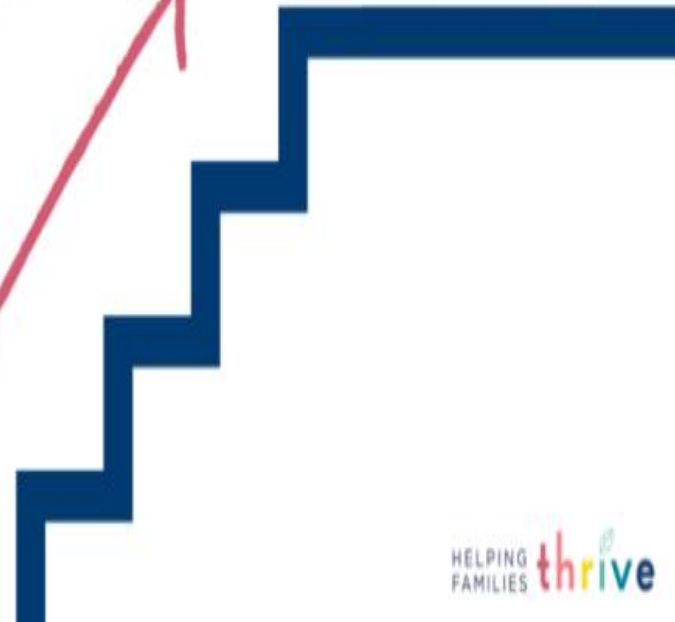
Self- Regulation or Co-Regulation?

building self-regulation
starts with
CO-REGULATION

self-regulation



co-regulation



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HELPING FAMILIES thrive

<https://helpingfamilies thrive.com/using-co-regulation-to-build-self-regulation>

The Neurodiversity Affirmative Approach



- Considers and respects the diversity of neurotypes and the uniqueness of how each person's brain works.
- Seeks to develop support plans adapted to each individual versus a uniform *one-size-fits-all* approach.
- Highlights that this type of difference is part of natural neurological variations (i.e. neurodiversity).

How Can the Neurodiversity Affirmative Approach Help?

Some of the key principles of this approach:

- Reinforces each person's abilities
- Promotes autonomy
- Provides individualized support and adapted communication
- Reduces stigma around neurodiversity



Neuroaffirming Care: A Positive Way to Support Regulation



- The basis of neuroaffirming care is the unequivocal respect for the autistic and/or neurodiverse person's boundaries
 - i.e., the need to take a break, to step back from a situation, etc.
- Neurodiverse people constantly face a lack of respect for their personal boundaries
 - it is important to encourage them to identify and set their limits.

Neuroaffirming Care Strategies

Helps the person to:

- Explore, recognize and identify their baseline and activation states.
 - What can cause or trigger an emotional and/or sensory overload?
- Target the reduction or increase of stimuli depending on the need identified.
- Identify and name their physical sensations through kinesthetic learning opportunities.

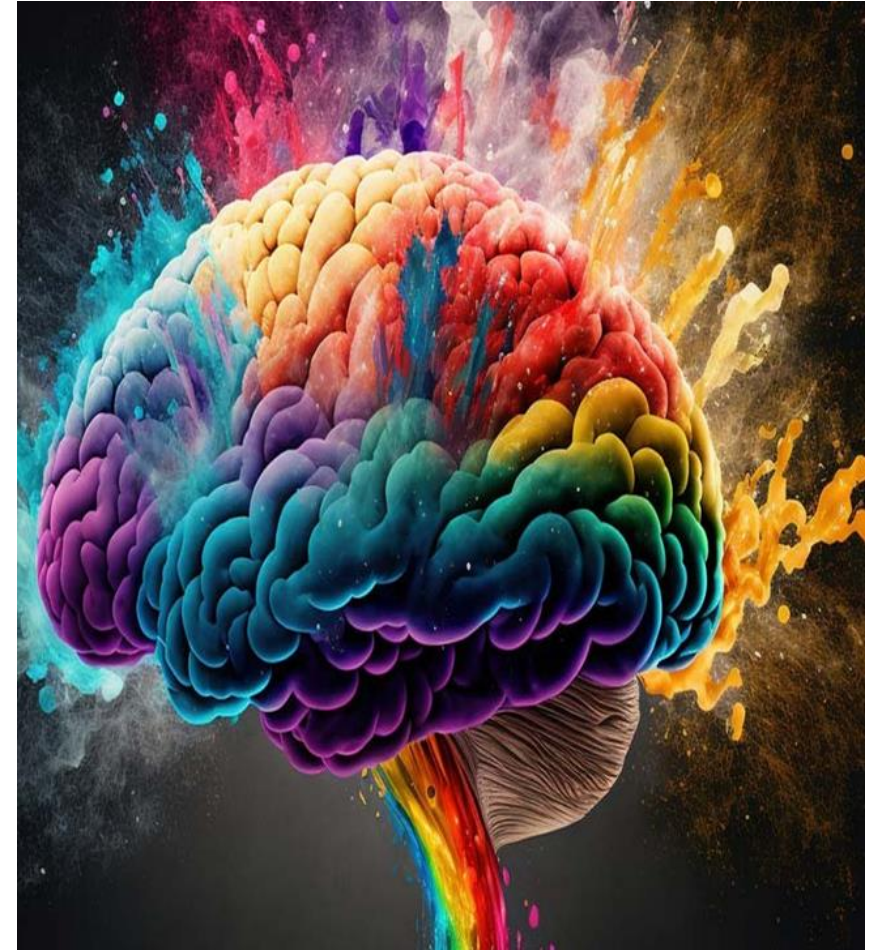
Neuroaffirming Care Strategies

As a parent, caregiver or professional:

- Be aware of biases as a neurotypical person.
- Check with the person if what we are proposing is helpful and to see what they need to feel at ease.
- Exhibit flexibility and compassion.
- Recognize that the person is the expert on what is happening in their head and body.
- Never force an intervention if the person indicates verbally or non-verbally that they are uncomfortable.

Neurodiversity =

- Everyone is unique, we are all full-fledged human beings.
- There is no magic solution.
- Interventions and support must be adapted to each person's needs and uniqueness.
- Support must take into consideration the needs and realities of the person while honouring their:
 - autonomy,
 - right to self-determination, and
 - integrity



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Resources

- <https://aidecanada.ca/fr/resources/apprendre/connaissances-de-base-sur-le-tsa>
- <https://autisme123.com/quest-ce-que-lautisme/effondrement-autistique/>
- <https://www.autismbc.ca/blog/resource-guide/neuroaffirming-care-matters>
- <https://www.autismontario.com/about-autism>
- <https://www.complextrauma.org/glossary/co-regulation/>
- <https://www.henryford.com/blog/2023/04/autism-masking>
- <https://www.psychiatry.org/news-room/apa-blogs/understand-stimming-repetitive-behaviors-purpose>
- <https://www.taalecole.ca/lautoregulation/>
- http://www.tdah-ressources.org/-/Qu_est-ce_que_le_TDA/Nouvelles_pistes
- <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-dysregulation>

