ECHO IDAHO

K12 Supporting Students with Autism

Using Coregulation To Support Student Stress In The Classroom

11/20/25

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Learning Objectives

- Participants will develop a basic understanding of how the brain and body react under stress and importance of felt safety and use of co-regulatory strategy

- Participants will identify basic physiology of co-regulation

- Participants will identify key “ingredients of co-regulation” how to coregulate with a student

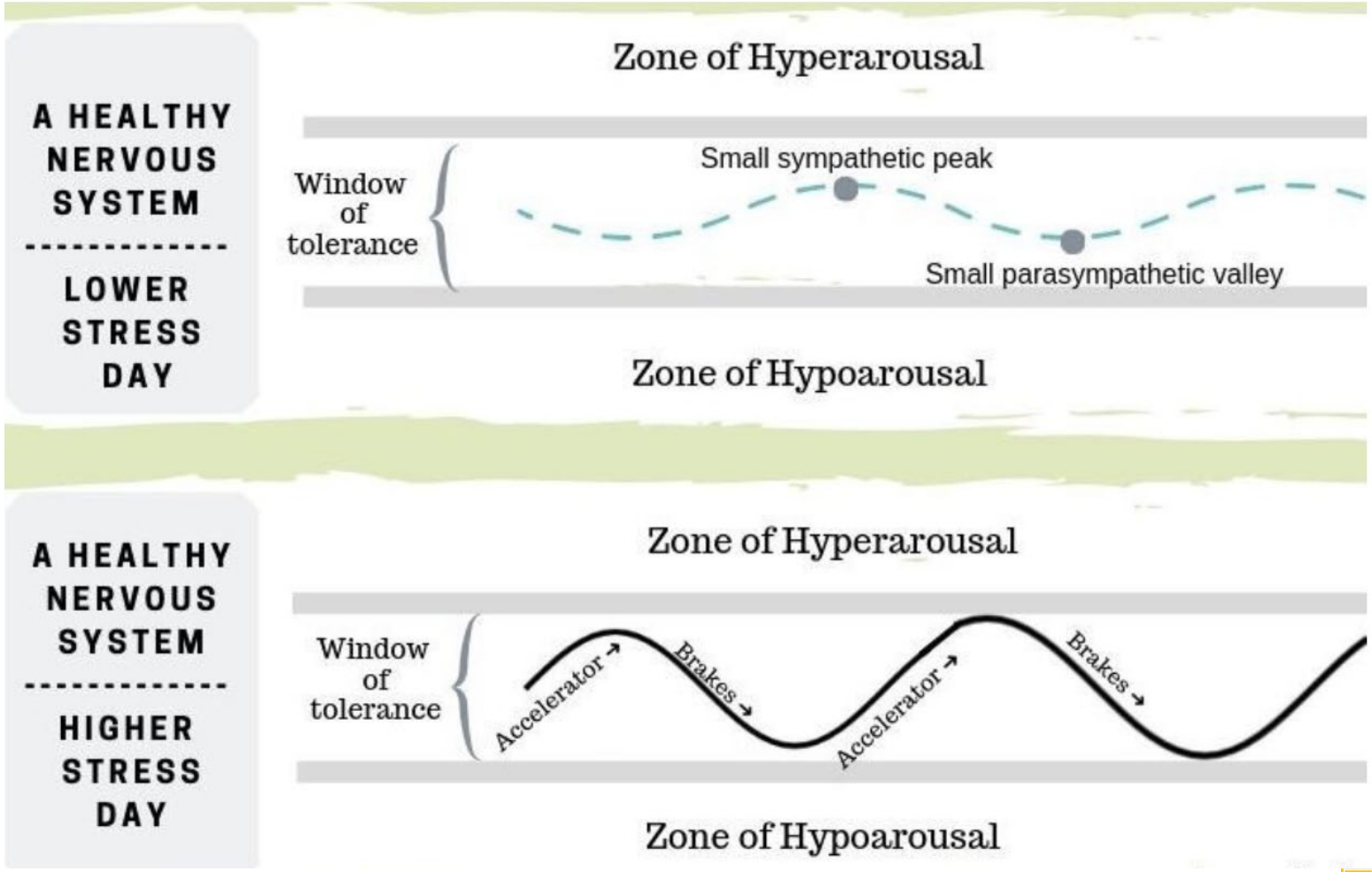
- OTP's have an educational background in sensory processing, motor development, neurophysiology, anatomy, pediatric development and mental health.

- OTP's have the "lens" to address the interplay of a child's individual differences in their development and how these differences may interfere with the development of a child's regulatory capacities and vulnerability toward stress responses.

What is Regulation?

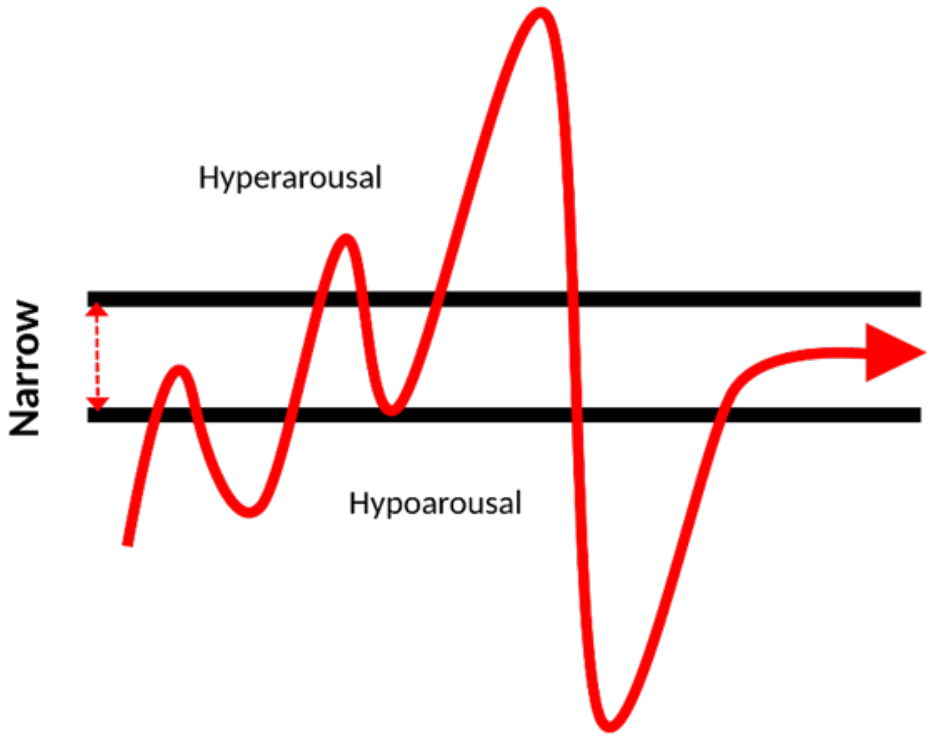
- Regulation develops from infancy in **ALL HUMANS** children are biologically wired to connect with others.
- Regulation is mediated by the autonomic nervous system, “safe and unsafe”
- Regulation is how a student is able to shift and maintain their arousal/alertness states according to the demands of an environment
- Window of tolerance: the term to describe the optimal state of emotional and physiological arousal where a person can function effectively, and manage their feelings.

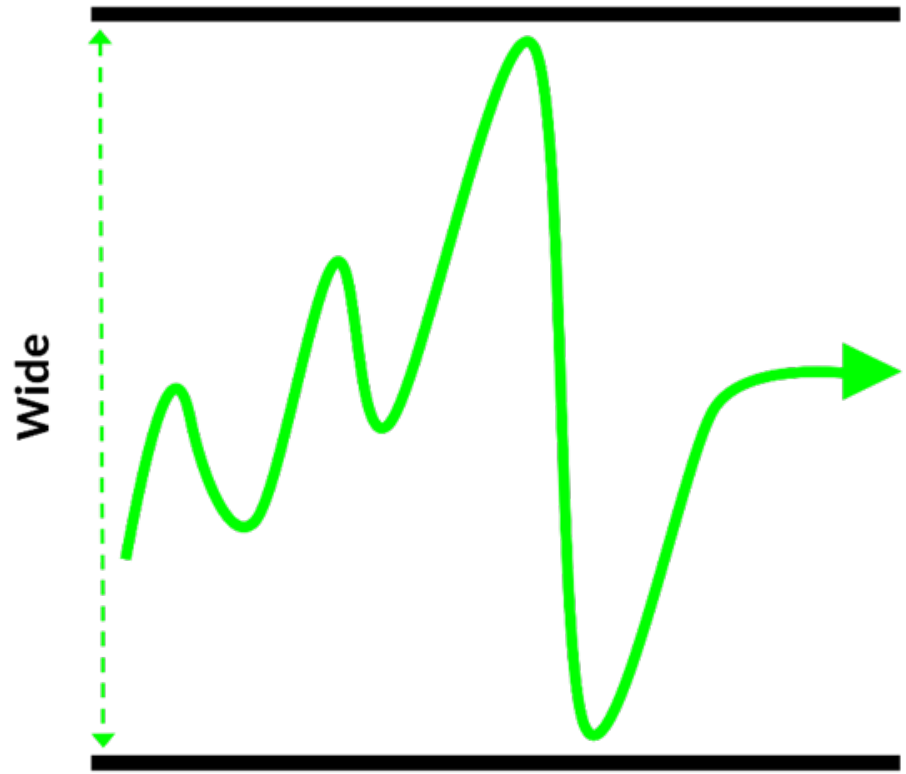
A Regulated Nervous System Able to Cope with Stress



- Gobbel, R. (2024).

Increasing Your Window of Tolerance





Narrow Window of Tolerance:
Limited Capacity to handle Stress

Wide Window of Tolerance:
Resilient & Resourceful under Stress

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Stress Load Derails a Student's Regulatory Capacities

- Neurobiological differences:
  - Sensory processing and motor differences: sensory sensitivities, sensory overload
  - Neuroception differences
  - Communication differences and language load
  - Unpredictable environments, people, and activities

- When stress begin to **outweigh** a student's ability to cope, a student´s window of tolerance narrows significantly and dysregulation occurs

We All Have Our Own Windows of Tolerance!

- The “Window of Tolerance” is the space inside our own nervous systems where we can manage stressors, AKA Connection Mode.
- It is critical that the adults who work students with vulnerable regulatory abilities be aware of their own stress levels and if they are able to interact with a student from a sturdy regulated platform.
- We must be able to access our own regulation or “oxygen mask” first before we are able to ¨lend our calm¨ or coregulate with a student in stress or protection mode.

What is Coregulation?

- A person's nervous system can be influenced by the state of another's.
  - For example, a calm and regulated nervous system can act as a buffer, helping to down-regulate the stress response in someone who is dysregulated.

- The core of co-regulation is the nervous system's ability to sense safety or danger from another person.

More Coregulation

- Coregulation uses “portals” through which the physiological state can be mediated using cues of safety to the other person.
- Regulation sends physiological signals to a student’s nervous system to shift from dysregulation to a more connected regulated state.

How Coregulation Physiologically Works

- Oxytocin (a neurotransmitter) is shared between two people in a “blue tooth” mode through cues of safety during coregulation.

- Oxytocin regulates and dampens physiological stress responses by “halting” cortisol which is released during stress responses.

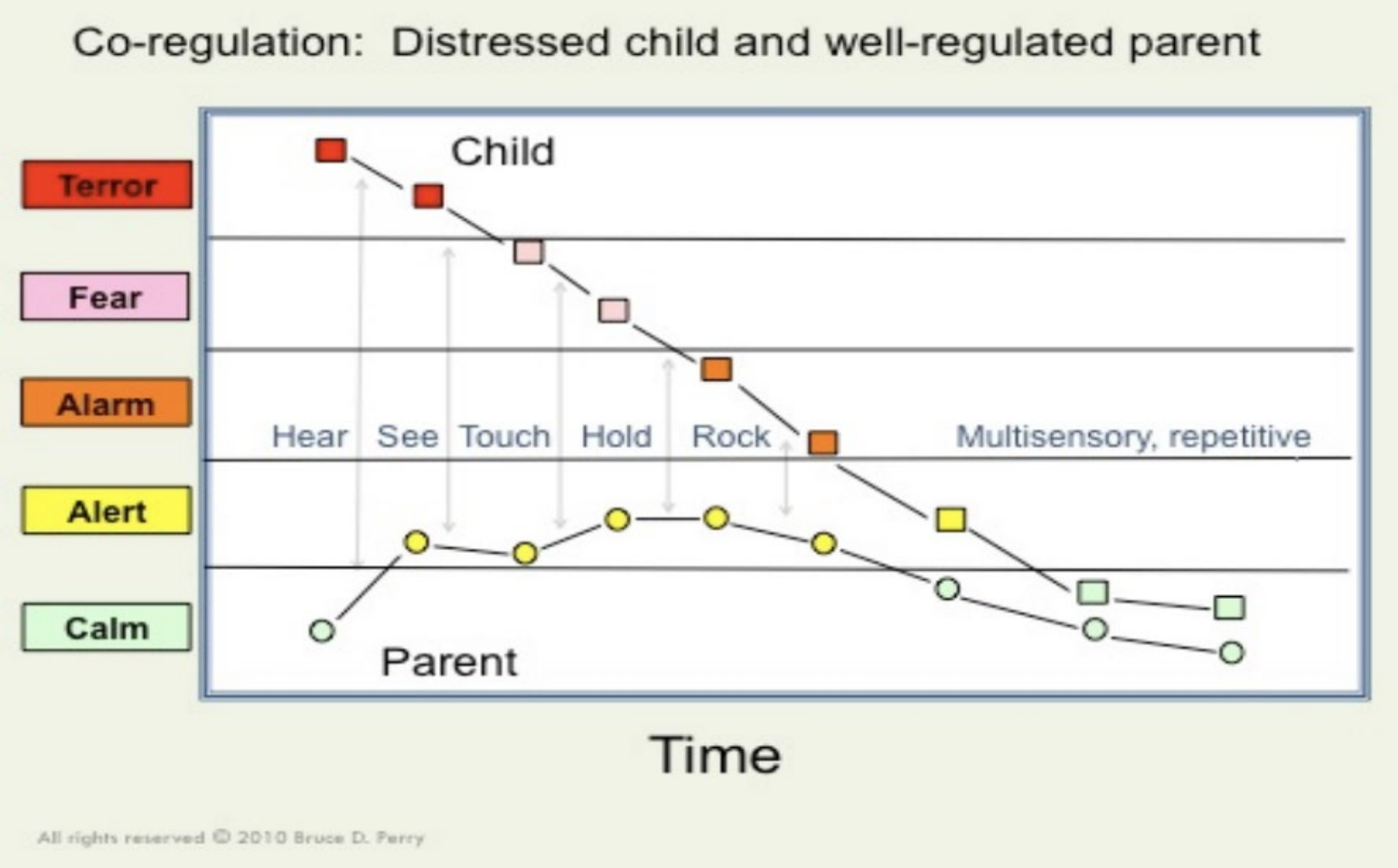
- The autonomic nervous system activates the parasympathetic nervous system to support a return to a more connected regulated state.

How to Cue Physiological Safety to Another

- **Presence**: Am I working from a regulated platform myself?
- **Facial Expression**: Is my face expressive of safety and engagement?
- **Tone of Voice**:
  - Is there inflection or prosody in my voice?
  - Is there warmth and a caring tone and volume to my voice?
- **Posture**: Do I have a relaxed posture and inviting gestures?
- **Pacing and Timing**: Am I pacing with the child in accordance with their needs?

Delahooke, 2019

Coregulation in Action from Attuned Adult Partner



Coregulation Builds Self -Regulation

- Consistent coregulation from attuned/trusted adult partners allows for widening of the ¨window of tolerance¨ which results in a more resilient nervous system able to manage more stressors without their autonomic nervous system shifting to protection mode.

- Through connection and coregulation with others, we are able to proactively gain a more regulated nervous system state in our students.

Key Points: Neuroplasticity Matters

- Well -regulated adult partners can connect with children and build supportive relationships using coregulation.

- Supportive, positive adult relationships can *reshape the brain and help students create new neural pathways through neuroplasticity.*

- Through the repeated and predictable neural process of coregulation, students build sturdier self-regulation and wider more stable “windows of tolerance.”

- Coregulation builds self -regulation!!

References

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