

RAW TRANSCRIPT

Introduction to Self-Reg
With Dr. Susan Hopkins

Susan Hopkins

Hello, everyone, I'm Susan Hopkins, I'm going to be your host for this three-part series on self-regulation. And I'm very much looking forward to these conversations with all of you, as we unpack the connection between stress, self-regulation, resilience relationships, and our own wellbeing as, as the adult caregivers for the children and youth in our care. So, I am the Executive Director of an organization called the MEHRIT Center. And this is the work we do full time with all sorts of folks in all sorts of contexts. And from the early years, right up through school and on into adult life as well. So, it's, it's my honor to be here with you. I am also a mom, and my daughter is 13 have spent many of my most of my parenting has been as a single mom. And you know, I remember when my daughter was first born, we lived in a remote community in the Northwest Territory. So, we she spent her first few years of life there and I spent 10 years there. And one Christmas. We were I was staying there for the holidays, so not going anywhere. And I had two weeks off. And it was just me and my daughter and she was almost two. And I A colleague of mine phoned up in a bit of a panic, because they had an infant. It's the last day like I'm literally one hour away from the end of my school year work I was working for the I was working at the board. The school board at the time is an inclusive schooling coordinator. And so, an hour away from two weeks of vacation. And his colleague phoned up we were all part of the of a collective. So, at this particular place, we had this model where education, social services, and health care were all one in all under one agency. So, it was wonderful and collaborative. And I learned a lot as a result. And so, they had an infant who had needed emergency and emergency caregiver and they had they had exhausted all of the options. They'd look for a kinship option. And they'd looked in among many of the of the parents and the caregivers that were often available. And they felt they couldn't find anyone so I was asked, and I still remember, you know how much I learned from little baby Rianna. I'm going to tell you lots of stories as we talk about self-regulation.

Susan Hopkins

In today's first session, I'm going to tell you about baby Rianna and then about a teenager named Jonathan. And each time I'll tell you a couple of stories that may or may not resonate for you. But stories are what helped bring the science and the strategies to life or it's one way of looking at it. So that's why I'm telling you the stories. So, you know, Rianna was interesting, and I was happy to help out. It certainly changed what, what my couple of weeks off were going to be and brought me you know, went and picked Rianna up and she was only six months old. She was just little. And she cried. And she cried. And she didn't just cry, you know, my daughter had been colicky. And I lived in the north and you know, didn't have a lot of family support around me. So, I can remember, you know, what, that some of that had been like not so long before. But this was it was an unsettling because I no matter what we try to try to everything. And I say we I mean my daughter's while she was so good with Rianna and we tried so hard to soothe her, and, you know, checked out food and looked at, you know, everything we could to sort of figure out what were some of the things that we could do differently. To allow her, you know,

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what I would now know is, is to, for her central nervous system. So, it was actually the stress response. I guess you understand that intuitively, but I hadn't really thought about it through through that lens. It was more just, you know, how do I do it? How do I soothe? How do I soothe? And was really quite magical, because after about five days that she was with us, she did begin to settle she began to have these moments, these little moments of, you know, to be sweet and laugh and, you know, would be playful and seemed seem to be doing better. You know, and it was, as I think back on my experience, my short-term experience I don't have nearly you know, the folks that are watching this today the difference that you've made in children's lives, you know, you will never know some of them. You may know some of the stories you may know you may be lucky enough to have some young adults that you still Consider part of your family and come and shit come to visit and share their updates or, you know, connect with via the phone or whatever ways that you have of connecting.

Susan Hopkins

And you know that you know that you were part of that changing a debate trajectory, and others you may not. And actually, it's the children that may have been the most challenging. That may have been the most challenging, they're the ones that need you the most, and that you can make the biggest difference for, and you'll you may never know, you may never know, but those ripple effects do matter. And so, we're going to unpack what it is we can take away from our caregiving experiences. What are the what are the priorities from a lens of self-regulation? And I'm going to, you know, have a look at the difference in particular between self-regulation and self-control. It's such a huge one, and what are some of the strategies that we can try to support the wellbeing the health and wellbeing of the children in our care, but also our own? Because you matter? Right, when you are overstressed. You can't pour from an empty cup. You can't lend an overstressed young person calm when you're not feeling calm. And so how can we understand that? And in different ways? And what do we need to do? So, I want you to begin by having a look at this list of, of challenges that many of us You and I included? Yeah, as I look at this list, there's a number on here that I struggled with in my life. So, you know, I think most humans can relate to having some struggles in some sort of areas. And I just want you to have a look through the list and try to think of what they might all having common: cancer and externalizing problems that's like explosive behaviors, internalizing the shutdown the hoodie, right? The, the closing out the world in all sorts of different ways, the risky behavior, the memory stuff, right? What happens when, you know, you can't seem to sort of hold on to something that you, you were just told two seconds ago, or are in processing multi step directions, you know, you're asking three things. And all of a sudden, they're out the window, or cardiovascular disease, obesity, developmental disorders, and challenges in school, what all of these have in common? Well, I'll tell you what they have in common, it's excess of stress. So that is not to say that there are not other underlying contributing. I mean, there can be diagnosis, it can be all sorts of contributing factors to each one of these areas, but excessive stress. So, this is in the research. So, this isn't just the idea of excessive stress as a problem within the research, all of these areas are linked to too much stress. And so, by saying that, I mean, it is part of the equation. And what I what I find hopeful about realizing that is that while we may not be able to change, you know, a developmental disorder, you know, we can't just, you know, do a couple of strategies and change that, we certainly can affect stress. And we can and we can have a look at the amount of stress in the children and youth in our care lives. And it we can look at our own stress, and begin to reflect on both the hidden stressors. And the obvious ones, the ones we

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can do nothing about and the ones that we can do something about, and focus on those two, as we dial down a little bit of the stress, we will see changes happen. Okay, so let's keep thinking on that. So, as we dial down a little bit of the stress, we will see better outcomes. So, what is stress, I want you to think about it in this brain body sense. And it's really important for the children and youth in our care that we recognize stress is not just an idea of stress, it is actually something that's happening in their brain and body and it can shift behaviors, because the brain and body are primed, and especially for children under who have lived through a lot of stress in their lives. And change in itself is stress. So even if we just leave it at a whole lot of changes, that can be a source of a lot of stress. We can get we can end up in places where we are always primed to, you know, always hyper vigilant and be looking for challenges and looking for problems all the time because we're trying to keep ourselves safe. You know, allostatic overload is another one that you may recognize. So that is, you know, the four signs. This is Mark McHugh and his work and it's the idea of a zero to 500 response. So, wait, you know, in just two seconds, it takes forever to come down, you know, that littlest thing happened, and you're still seeing the signs of it in the behaviors like the later that day that it's an overreaction. So, way over so goes really fast. But it's also an overreaction to a small thing in relation to whatever happened. And either always sort of physically volatile or emotionally, all over the place as these can be signs of stress systems, stress response systems that are stuck on and I've been stuck on, none of us are meant to be in those states all the time.

Susan Hopkins

And it takes its wear and tear, we can see it explode, you know, did we can see it commode in any of those behaviors that we've been talking about the shutdowns, the, you know, swearing, yeah, or, or refusing to do anything or, you know, throwing stuff out of frustration or angry outbursts. Any of these sorts of things can be stress behaviors, not just in young people in ourselves as well, right. So maybe you have all the patients in the world for the kids all day long. And then your partner comes home from work, and you're, you know, snappy with him, or her, or they you know, and it's, why does that happen? It's a stress, it's a stress response. It's a stress behavior. And so, beginning to think about, about stress a little bit differently, okay, and we all have individual experiences of stress. It's not never just one thing. And so, when we want to think of self-regulation, we want to think about it like this, we want to think about it as how well we manage stress how much energy we expend, and how well we recover. And so, when we hear this idea of managing stress, often you may be thinking about your, you know, your 50 things to do for stress management, and I'm going to read a book or go for a walk or debrief. You know, those are strategies that work for some of the people some of the time and they play a role. But understanding self-regulation through the brain body really is a game changer, because when we say manage stress here that makes it sound intentional, and that it's chosen, you know, for this prefrontal cortex, part of your brain is making this decision, making good choices.

Susan Hopkins

But most management of stress is happening the brain and body just do it automatically. And it is always trying to keep the brain and body in a certain amount of balance in there's like windows that the classic example is temperature. So, a few minutes ago, I turned on, I turned on the air conditioning, it's a bit early, but I'm in a room that is very hot. And it's sunny outside a bit early in the in the in the year, this is May, early May when I'm filming this, but it's very warm

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in this room, that was a cognitive choice to go down and turn on the air conditioning to make it a little bit cooler, so that I could film finish this filming. But our bodies also have strategies for it too. And that they do without any decision making, I start to sweat that actually is a strategy for the brain for the body to cool off, a little bit of condensation on the skin will cool will make you feel a little bit cooler, just as equally is if I was too cold, I might start to shiver. And when I shiver, I expend energy and the byproduct is heat. Right. And so, you know, so that's a classic example. But your you know; your blood is keeping a certain glucose range and a certain amount of oxygen. And there are all these systems in the brain and body that are always trying to stay in this balance. It's a dynamic system. It's really complex. But it's really interesting to think about stress, because if you know if somebody starts yelling out the window here where I am, and started yelling right now, you know, sensory, I pick it up, I hear it, you know, it might it might cause a stress response in me if I think somebody is getting hurt or need some help, you know, and the next day, so it should change this cascade of effects that would happen on my brain and body. And so that's how we need to think about all the stressors. We can't do anything about a lot of the stressors in the lives of the young people in our care, but we can put some and it's the hidden ones the little ones that we didn't really think about is energy gobblers that we want to be considering light is a great example. You know if you're somebody that's really affected by fluorescent lights, for example, you feel that you know, these, these are or somebody you don't even realize that that sometimes we don't even realize how much noise affects us imagine when the power goes out. Does that bring you a sense of calm for me it does for others It might be that it makes you feel a little bit anxious, right? individual differences. So, beginning to think about stress and how it's operating on the brain and body. And how that is, is we're literally changing states, our brain body states in response to how safe we feel how imbalance we feel. And that is really helpful because we can work on lightening stress backpacks, and we can do it through relationships. Number one, absolutely through relationships through how we see children, and youth. And, and the soft eyes, no matter the behavior, no matter the behavior, no matter the behavior. And you don't have to love that behavior. You in it's absolutely you know, something's not okay, it's not okay. But I can say that in care, I can say, 'that's not who you are', right? That's not who you are, you know, let's work through this together, I might need a moment to take a few breaths myself to get myself regulated.

Susan Hopkins

But then I'm going to be there for you and help you work through this. You know, and it's often not about words, we'll talk about all of this. So, there's a really big difference between self-regulation and self-control. If you started this video, thinking that they were one in the same, don't worry many people do. There are 447 different definitions in the research. And there are so many programs out there for self-regulation, and there are all kinds of different understandings. Some people think it's social emotional learning, or that there's a color card system, you know, where we are, we're naming, you know, we're that we're certain colors, or that we're so social, self-regulated learning. So, we're managing our, you know, managing ourselves so that we get all of our learning done or thinking it's executive function. So practicing, you know, the coaching of delaying gratification. restorative practice, even sometimes people think it's, it's that and it is connected, restorative practices are wonderful, and social emotional learning is so important.

Susan Hopkins

But what happens when we try to teach that or we try to facilitate a child or youth learning that? And either that, you know, or they take a social skills program, and they watch and they go, yeah, yeah. And then nothing changes? Right? Is it because you didn't do a good job? Or you didn't facilitate it? Well, or that there's no motivation there? No, no, probably not. It's when we're not in an underlying regulated state self-control's, not possible. Why? Because the brain and body change state, we will literally go into a threat response, a stress response, a danger response, versus a connection response, or a learning brain. And that's because our brain and body I mean, it's kind of brilliant are designed to protect us. But when we want kids to feel empathy, to be the sort of, you know, take responsibility, say sorry, and actually mean it, to know what they need, so that they can be, you know, take advantage of the best opportunities ahead of them, all these sorts of things, they need to be in an underlying, self-regulated state enough brain body balance. So self-regulation makes self-control possible, real shift in how we think about it. So many people think that you teach self-regulation or here sometimes they say, the kids are ready, oh, he's not ready, he's not mature enough are, you know, or we, so then we manage the child until he's ready? Well, what that what's happening is you're laying the layers of someone else's going to control all the rules and manage everything. And it's a really big shift to realize that some of the most challenging behaviors you're seeing the most maladaptive, you know, it can be explained as maladaptive modes of self-regulation. So, it is not something we teach or facilitate.

Susan Hopkins

It's part of being a human being, you come into this world seeking regulation, right, and infants need their energy intention. So, hunger and sleep, and soothing and cold, all of these things we, as caregivers, we regulate for infants, and you know, some of the children you're in your care, maybe didn't get all of that as much they didn't have someone regulating or it was sometimes there and sometimes not. And that can shift actually the development of self-regulation, you can do something about it. You absolutely can as a co regulator. We'll look at that next time. So next time we look at relationships and co regulation, so how you lend your calm to kids, how you suit how you lay the layers of self-regulation so kids can make it so young people can make the choices for growth promoting modes of self-regulation. And when they have, you know, the maladaptive, which we all do, right, we all have those moments, we don't, you know, we maybe deal with our stress by yelling at someone we love. And, and it just sort of happened. It's not great. But it actually it actually allowed our brain body to deal with the stress of it. So, we notice it afterwards, and we, you know, we come and we repair that relationship. So, we all have maladaptive modes, we want to spend most of our time on growth promoting, and how can we encourage that without being, you know, the self-control sort of approach. So really recognizing that things like video games and energy drinks, and you know, anything that you could you could attach an addiction to, but even just your something you're watching on your favorite episode, you know, that all of these are, I mean, I think you said junk food is another example. All of these recruit dopamine, and the chemicals of stress adrenaline and noradrenaline and make us feel a little bit better for a little while, that's dopamine is our reward system. And it, it makes us feel a little better for a little while, and then we feel worse, right? That's why they're maladaptive because downstream, later on, there's more stress.

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Susan Hopkins

So, if I'm a 14-year-old, and I storm out of math class, you know, I've actually managed my stress, I felt so much discomfort in that class, and we can unpack why we can see that is as high math anxiety, there's a reason for it, you know, and it's not that I'm lazy. And it's not that I'm not motivated, or I'm not trying hard enough, or I'm not smart enough, it's none of those things, the stress, the anxiety that it's causing, okay, now, not all anxieties is clinical or, or negative, even, it actually communicates something to us, and it can give us some energy. But if it's too much, we need to do something to get rid of that discomfort. And out the door, I go, I'm 14 years old at the door, I go, I miss the lesson, I fall further behind my teachers are going to be, you know, upset with me, and the phone calls are going home. And you know, you get this this cycle. But it was a mode of managing the stress. And the moment it wasn't chosen, it happened. So, there's a difference between choice and reaction. And that's a really important difference when we think about stress behavior. Okay. So, you know, the thing about co regulation, which is really within the relationship, and we'll look at this deeper next time, is that this shift from maladaptive to growth promoting mode, so really learning better choices. So, a simple one might be recognizing, like a sneeze coming on when you're really overstressed. And if you can imagine a young person recognizing when they're overstressed and knowing, I need to spend a few minutes and going into their room or their space, that's actually growth promoting mode of self-regulation. It's not avoidance, it's recognizing, you know, and I needed to dial it down in that moment, and then and then I can come back and talk it through. So, you know, it's, it's, it's actually and that's done through relationships that are safe, and make that space, and emotionally safe. And, you know, seeking understanding and seeking to be with not doing too. So, it's a really interesting shift and how we look at things.

Susan Hopkins

No, remember, this bottom line is really important under excessive stress, under excessive stress, so that is not stress as bad, that is more stress than I've got the resources, or perceived to have the resources, which matters, you might say, Oh, you've got all these counselors out there. But if you don't feel as a youth that that counselor is a safe place for you, or connects with you or would understand you where you want to go there. That's not a resource for you. Right? So, navigating to the resources that we need, this is my blinkers idea of resilience, and negotiating that those are delivered to us in ways that are meaningful to us. If the backpack is too full, we slip into maladaptive modes of self-regulation. And it's not just kids, you know, if you ever if it was all about self-control, you know, you would have done whatever you set out in life to do if you decided you were going to run a marathon or you were going to lose, you know, whatever many pounds or you're going to, I don't know, do whatever degree or whatever these things you set out to and maybe you had a lot of self-control, and then all of a sudden it goes out the window. Why? Because you're weak willed. No, you have a dysregulated stress this you had no energy bottom doubt in your energy and your attention was through the roof. You know, when we think of energy as primarily coming from glucose, that's our main source of energy that our brain and body use and it can bottom out on us and then we have an urge to feel a little bit better. And we get these patterns all of us have our patterns mind salt, vinegar, chips, you know, people Peanut Butter, there's like, those are two things that are sort of go to, you know, when I'm overstressed or I go out, and I'll go dig in my, my garden, and I'll do something sort of physical move some dirt around, that doesn't even need to be moved. There are ways that you know the patterns, but those are reasonably, you know, the gardening, one is growth promoting,

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that's positive, you know, what they're, they could be a lot worse, right? And how to how to help young people find their way towards growth promoting modes of self-regulation. So, this is what Self-Reg is, it's a process for understanding stress, and managing energy, and tension. So, we'll we will look more and more at that.

Susan Hopkins

I want to tell you about a young man that I knew he is a young adult, no. But I first met him, I believe he was in grade five or six. And he was in a special classroom at a school where I was a vice principal, and his name is Jonathan. And he really struggled. He was constantly getting in trouble; he would do okay for a while. And then he would do something with an explosive behavior. And he'd been involved in all sorts of things over a couple of years that I knew him at that school, grade five and six. And, you know, when he also this really sweet side that when he would settle down, he wanted, he wanted so badly to learn and to understand how to do, I can remember him with math, in particular, really wanted to get stuff and he gets so frustrated, so fast, that things would, you know, escalate out of control. And he'd shut down completely, he just looked like he could hit a window of tolerance. You know, if I have a window of tolerance that's about this big, you know, I can handle stuff in this ring. When it gets outside this ring. I need others just like you. It's not just young people, it's all of us had a window tolerance like this. He you know, the littlest thing was like a pinprick. And so, when we work with young people, we think about, okay, if his window of tolerance is like this, I'm not going to expect him to be able to deal with everything, you know, disappointment, frustration, somebody's supposed to come get you and they don't show up. That's devastating, that can feel devastating. And you know, you have a window of tolerance, you're trying to get it this big, a little bit bigger, but you have to have compassion for that that disappointment as well. Right. So, Jonathan really struggled. And he had this sweet side, he would have these moments. And I got to know Jonathan over the years, and he had been, you know, given up at birth, and his mom was very young and too young to raise them and not, not in a well enough spot in space in her life. And so, she made that choice, and found him what was supposed to be the forever home and just life happens sometimes. And Jonathan, Jonathan was moved from home to home. And he was in the child welfare system. And you know, he would last you would do join a new a new home and he do really well for a while. And then he would do something, he would just explode behavior wise, a temper wise, and something would happen. And the family would say he needs a new home, or he needs to go to another place. And so, he had this history of, you know, he just didn't trust anyone, he didn't feel safe anywhere. And he was struggling with so many things. He had so many maladaptive modes of self-regulation, and one of them was definitely a shut people out. That's how he kept himself safe. So, he definitely had a lot of clinical support, which he needed, okay. And so, this, this understanding is not about replacing any of that. And he had a psychologist, and he was, you know, he was under the care of a pediatrician, you know, there was all sorts of things that were going on for him, but make no doubt about it in the everyday life. So, I was thinking everyday school, but in the everyday home, it makes a huge difference when you imagine stress backpacks. And this is the place where you spend most of your time it matters. And we can always do something we can always be on the you know, the growth promoting side of things in our in little ways as much as possible. So, Jonathan, eventually, I believe it was when he was in grade eight, he found placements. So, a family in the community adopted him adopted. So, they took him in through the care system for ugly that was six months and then they formally adopted him. And he still considers this family goes mom and dad and

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he's a young adult, and he still he is it's a forever home for him, changed everything. And what a difference in a year does not mean he did not still have explosive behaviors and that he did not, you know, he was the classic allostatic overload he went zero to 500 total meltdowns, so reactions. And he was well, he was he was volatile, right? He could, you know, he did throw things and get angry and outbursts of all sorts of clients that they were they were trying to deal with. But they have been way less. And, you know, he, he, he was like a different child. So, I'm not sharing this with you necessarily saying the solution is that the kids didn't care that the only solution is adopting. It wasn't even just that it was about the because the turnaround was actually very quick. And it was in the first six months. And it was a built the messaging somehow, through the relationship, and the constant messaging of love and trust. And I believe in you, and you know, you are not your behavior. And no, that's not okay. There were boundaries and expectations. And he contributed just like everybody else in the home. And when he messed up, it was okay, well, let's put this right, we'll work through it, that sort of thing. And he really shifted, the first thing was that he was capable of way more and in school than we realized. And it was you realize, when that happens when a child that you thought was only capable of x, y, and z, and all of a sudden, they're thriving, and they're going like this, that the stress in the in the backpack? Actually, I mean, we know it gets in the way excessive stress affects memory, for sure. So how can it not affect learning and learning to read in particular was one that he just, you know, he went from being a very, almost nonreader, like very minimal. And he hated all these strategies. Everybody tried to get him to read to suddenly he was reading and he was reading for pleasure in reading every night and you know, and it's so it's just, it's really burst of this different job. But he also started building relationships with the adults in the school and beginning to be able to work through when things didn't go his way, which was one of his biggest his biggest thing. So, in reframe the behavior is the very first practice of Self-Reg we consider behaviors communication, the carrot on the stick stuff, which is behaviorist approaches, and they did not work around Jonathan. He was so sensitive to he hated like, you know, I'm, he hated his, you know, the calls home and he hated his name on the board. And the things that would happen is he would, you know, be losing his recess, which advocate for your young people, they shouldn't lose their recess recesses is important for wellbeing as snacks, we wouldn't take snacks away. And I know that that schools sometimes use that because they don't know what else to do. But that's a different problem.

Susan Hopkins

So, what else can we do? So, it's, it's so it's someone like Jonathan needed to physically move. He was very hyper. And so, they sort of the quiet calming things where they were not what he needed. He needed physical stuff. And he was better. So, they that when he actually started kind of getting in the rhythm of things, he also started using the gym, and they made special arrangements for this gym in the school for him to be able to use it at a certain portion of the day, and they didn't do it as a reward. So that's a really important one. It wasn't a carrot, oh, you do really well, and you get to work out? No, you need to work it so you can do really well. And so, they're not to say there weren't consequences, but they were all logical consequences. They made sense. They were restorative in nature, and the focus was on getting and keeping Jonathan that in the balance state and then helping him build his own skill set so that he could deal with the stressors as they came. And they made a difference. You know, unexpected behavior tells us something, it tells us something about the stressors in the biological domain, you know, he had allergies, he was always sick, which tells me your immune system is worn

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down emotions, he could not handle frustration, disappointment, rejection, anything to do with that would be a real meltdown for him. So those were stressors. They gobbled up energy, the cognitive domain, he really struggled. He struggled with multi step directions, but he also struggled with being metacognitive thinking about his thinking, you know, he if anybody I can still see him when you brought him a graphic organizer, he'd like he seemed go almost red, just thinking about it. And he had a self-perception that he wasn't smart. So, we really had to work on that. It was such a big change when he suddenly realized that he actually was we nurtured strikes around, everybody knew he was an artist, but this family fostered him. They saw so much more in him and they kept speaking to him about you know, they who he was his human spirit and it made a difference and the pro social stress so he sometimes with Jonathan, they would say he felt no empathy. Sure, he did. You wanted to see him with young people. But when they would see flat aspects, so no emotion on the face, or it looked like he didn't care. That's something that happens under excessive stress your actual the nerves the vagus nerve that that connects the muscles of the face than the ear and then the throat for the sing songy nature in your voice, they're literally connected to the heart. And that under excess of stress, when you your brain, when you don't have the resources to respond to the stress happens very quickly, that it can literally shut off those right? You're so you, you might see no reaction in the face, it's there. It's not that the child's not capable of empathy, it is that it's not available to them in the moment, totally different way of thinking about it. So, we look at stressors, we look across five domains, I'm going to look at this a lot more with you in the coming sessions, the next two sessions. But the real thing is to remember its stress detecting on the stress detective why and why now and you're looking for the hidden ones, the little ones that you can do something about because lots of things you can't. And that's a huge stressor for you, by the way, you know, it's a big burden when you've picked to a you know, a career or contribution to your communities, of taking care of children, you're a giver, and you are somebody that's trying to make a difference in the world. And that can weigh on you. Right? It's why we have all this all you know why? empathy is just such an expensive emotion; it is what makes our world go around. And, but it's also one that can be draining on us. And so that's why you're taking care of you is important as well. So, in Self-Reg, we reframe the behavior. So, this family looked at Jonathan, it's not that he won't, you know, it's not that he's choosing to follow the rules. It's when he loses, you know, blows his talk was the language he used to say, that's happening to him. And he can settle himself down, they began really looking upstream. So, what can they do before right before it's like the sneeze comes on, recognize it coming?

Susan Hopkins

But the big key was the mindset, they believed in him and beginning to see him differently. And they brought us along as educators, because it was like, wow, look, you know, we were, we were all trying to scaffold trying to support, there was so much more there. And just a different view of the child, I had an elder tell me the language of soft dyes. And, you know, they just had instant soft eyes they been and science backs that up, there's more going on in the brain and body, you could see the Fitbit of the future, you would see the chemicals of stress coursing through Jonathan and through the children in your care through their brains and bodies, but they're also through yours, too, right? We got to remember ourselves. So, we look at the things we can do to reduce stress to dial down a bit of tension. Okay, and so notice in the, in this image, there's, there's two people in the middle, if you want to think about stress can be contagious, right? So, we can, if we have a group of young people, and there's anxiety, and the

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anxiousness can go can go through the group, you felt that before, right? You know, so can humor, right or so can a sense of joy. So, it's recognizing that we're trying to think about ways to dial down a bit of the stress, take a few things out of the backpack, I like to think of the first one is my, my, you know, my store experience when I go into certain stores, the noise, the smells, the you know, the "buy, buy buy", you know, the bright lights, it's just it, I never feel really great in there. Some people love it. And but for me, it's just I get in, and I get out as fast as I can. So really recognizing the biological stressors in the biological domain. So, we realized that Jonathan was really drawn to the super stimulus, like cash sugar, he was drawn to like junk food, he would just, you almost couldn't keep it in that was one of the things that when I first met him was hide the junk food from him. And so, they began to really kind of realize that, that that's actually what he was doing was seeking. It's a form of maladaptive self-regulation. So, it was actually making feel better than it was making him feel worse because his body had to get that out of the system. But it wasn't just that he didn't have willpower is that the urge was so strong. He also struggled like he was sick all the time. And so the immune system was pretty rundown. And so, they worked on that, it definitely not getting proper sleep, nobody could settle him down to get a proper sleep. And just that can actually in and of itself, mimic ADHD, for example, sleep deprivation, right? So, he also found many things, you know, that we're connected to strong emotions, anything that would it would cause him to feel overwhelmed very, very easily and it would it would gobble up the energy. So, when you're thinking these are just some with the examples of stressors, but really recognizing that there's multiple stressors, there's multiple things happen they energy, and we try to think of which ones can I dial down into. So, if it's one or two, building stress awareness, so this was a huge one for Jonathan, because, you know, he would in the States, they would just happen to him, and then it would be everybody else's fault, right. But he did this, or he did that to me first, or you said, and, and he would just be like, he saw read. And, and he just had no idea how to dial that down. Later, in his teenage years, he also did the hoodie up, and they've kind of the shutdown and the inward stuff, too. But in the younger years, it was more of the explosive behavior. So, you can have both, and you can have them happening at the same period of time. He did wasn't aware, you know, stress awareness. So, and it doesn't really work. You know, like these, these ideas of, this is a joke about the history of calming down. But telling somebody to calm down never works, it doesn't work for you, and it doesn't work for me, it actually can make us more stressed out.

Susan Hopkins

So, one of the things that you can do in is as we learn the five practices of Self-Reg, over the next three sessions, is first of all, becoming aware of your own stress state. So, if you feel yourself really fast, or you know, your shoulders are way up here, it or you feel yourself just get frustrated right away, or you see it in the child in front of you, you know that they're that they're just instantly looking for fight or flight sort of all of these are signs of excessive stress. You recognize calm and recognize not calm. And it's not just a teaching calm, it's about looking for calm. What are those moments those just right moments? Oh, look how nice that feels. Right? And if you have almost none, what do you have the little two seconds, where are those moments, and so becoming stress aware, is part of Self-Reg. And the final one is rest, restore restoration. This is a big missing piece for young people that have had, you know, heavier, heavier stress backpacks, right, they they've had an awful lot of, you know of things that added stress to their lives that let's say my daughter has an experience, for example. And so much of it can be about coping and pushing through and, and we've got to remember that we're finite, and

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we all need chances to restore and the thing that what makes restoration is when you do it, because it feels good, and it feels better. And that's the reason you're not doing it so that then you can do your homework or, or I don't know, get your work done or deal with a situation, you're doing it because it fills up your tank. So, in some of the common ones are time in nature time with animals, I like gardening, but you know, reading books, it's funny with young people, you have to find what those are. And it takes a lot of listening, it takes putting the phone away, you know, 15 minutes, it can be as simple as about 15 minutes, "I'd love to do something together, what do you want to do?", "I don't want to do anything". Okay, well, I can just I can just hang here with you for you know, anything that you can do to begin building those connections that we time is a really important piece of restoration. Young people need to restore in they're stuck in this high the drive through this high energy, high tension or full-on stress response and then we're seeing the crashes and that's what you're seeing coming out in the behavior. So, thinking about restoration All right, so and you know, I love this this quote because it's before the peak is reached. And you're not going to do this overnight but beginning to think about this, okay?

Susan Hopkins

What you know, I'm noticing because you're very aware, you change the weather, you know, in your homes, you can change the weather, when you feel the tension going through the roof. Right, what do you do? What can you do in that moment? Maybe you know, sometimes it's as simple as turning off the TV and the noise and sometimes it's as simple as saying hey, let's turn on our coats and you know, let's go outside and you know if you have young children so schools I'm play for a little while or let's go walk the dog or you know, what are some of the things that you can do to restore before the peak is reached because that's key because the in when the peak reaches when it's just too much, that's when you get the shutdowns and that's also when you can get the explosive behaviors, but you can get the shutdowns and so noticing it coming before and knowing what to do about it can really help and it can help the young people in your care. Think about how to care for themselves to like you're laying the layers of self-regulation, by soothing by lending your car By being responsive by listening in and, you know, gradually over time as you do that, it's laying the layers and young people will begin to do this for themselves and little moments, they may not do it with you, they may do it with their peers, but it will happen, you know, so you're trying to always move it towards growth promoting modes of self-regulation. So where do you start? You might, if you see all of this and these five practices and you, you're like, Yeah, but what do I do? You know, it's seeing differently, understanding that there is more to understand always seeing the soft eyes, lending the calm, finding your columns, so you can lend it are all are all a good part of the process. But here are some strategies you can try. So, I'm not going to read them all, I'll just mention a few. But these are all things that might help some of the people some of the time in the biological domain, really thinking about your you know, the eating, you know, and thinking about when can I slow down, even if it's just noodles and cheese, can I sit and we can have it together, we'll turn off the TV, just me and you. Right. And so, it be these little moments can make a difference movement breaks. So, if you're having a child that needs to do homework, and they're refusing to do it, you can push and push and push and push. But that's an exercise in frustration for all for both of you have kids need to move and adults need to move. And so how can we take, you know, build that in some way, look at your sleep in any way that you can. That's one of the biggest areas and the first, that if you can figure out how to support sleep, higher quality sleep, even turning

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off the you know, the phone while you're sleep, you have to do it in a mentoring way not to where it feels like a punishment, but begin talking about what it does to your brain when you sleep in the waves that are going through your brain. Right. And, you know, the constant beeping, I saw a study where there's notifications, you know, something like one class of students had 1600 notifications on their phones and one day, so let's say that's 30 kids, I just think about it every time you have a notification, it jolts your attention. So just anything that you can do around that there's, you know, thinking about the routines in the evenings. And so, if you have young children, like the reading or storytelling is another really lovely one, or, you know, watching I don't know, the night sky or I mean, anything that you can do to build a little bit of time together that's not on the screen before bedtime can make a really big difference. decluttering looking listen for the noise. You know, there's all sorts of benefits to that. A couple that can help in the cognitive domain, one of the most important is just noticing that shift from learning brain to survival brain. So, if you want a young person to be learning something like genuinely learning, not just parroting not just saying what they're supposed to say or you know, compliance is not the goal, we want children to want to comply, you know, you want them to do these things when you're not looking and to honor, you know, the boundaries and expectations, for example.

Susan Hopkins

But when you see a shift into that stressed that excessive stressed survival brain, then that can be a call for you to shift what you do as well. We're not going to push through Yes, you're gonna do your homework, or, yes, you need to have this conversation with me right now. It's a cool, it's not a teachable moment. Okay. So, you know, we can come back to that, we can come back to that net lays that that lays another layer of knowing that we focus on finding our calmer balance first, and predictable routines. Your routine really does add safety, right? It's predictable, I know what to expect. But if you also want to have some flexibility not set in stone, so maybe not everything has to happen in these sorts of jolts that often that someone like Jonathan that really threw him off because he'd be really into something and then oh, you know it. And so, they had less transitions during the day made a lot of difference for him. childhood learning or youth led learning, what are they interested in? Whatever it is, how can you nurture that? How can you be curious about that, you know, and Jonathan had a lot of interest in anime. And he had a lot of musical interests too. And so they found ways to sort of nurture those and build through that, but that was a great chance for connection and relationship building. And think about how you start your day. So, you know, I think it's just really important to, yeah, I was a parent myself, I put my phone away. I was noticing I was having the routines in the morning were always stressful always every single day. And I probably thought I had my phone away. I didn't even think I was looking at it but I was there no notifications and I was thinking about work and it made a really big difference. Um, you know, doing as much as you can the night before, but even if something goes wrong first thing if you can focus on joy in connection even just for a few minutes, and then it makes a big difference. So, and I had play on that last slide, and it's really important to think about, whatever the age, what can we do that's fun. Some laughter and, and where can I bring this in, especially for a young person that hasn't been laughed a whole lot in their lifetime, right. So, looking for those moments, it's important.

Susan Hopkins

So, the emotion domain, you can think about, you know, making space for whatever emotions, we move away from trying to say You're a big boy, you know, none of the tears, tears serve a reason, they actually cleanse cortisol, which is a stress hormone out of the body is one of the reasons anyway, one of the three main reasons for tears. And so, you know, it's coming out for a reason, if we're feeling stressed, because we can't make it stop, that's different. That's because we care. And we can't sue them that's dysregulated for us, but that's really different from, you know, a child who needs to cry. And so, where did Where's your place that they can go, where's their safe space that they can go to just have their moment. And you know, thinking about all the different strategies you can to sort of stay connected with yourself, and lend your calm I, I focus on my exhales, it recruits the parasympathetic system in and it actually cues the brain of the person in front of me, right? I might, I might, if I'm trying to pass time and sit still in my account, something, you know, there might focus on the temperature of the breath. When it goes in my nose. I know, sounds strange, but try it. And notice which way it's one way it's warmer than the other. Or it might be the idea of the single point focus can sometimes help but it's a meditation strategy, but you can do it with your eyes open. Remembering that if you can engage you the large muscles, if you're like me, and you need to move, push into your feet and engage your lives. I'm doing it now even as I sit on this couch, and that that actually can be calming to the central nervous system. So, it's just kind of trying to figure out the things that help you deal with the strong emotions and help the young people in your life deal with the strong emotions. Okay, so the biggest one is there is no such thing as a bad kid. It's so easy to you know, get, you know, find it hard. It when children break our rules, misbehave, get in trouble, push our buttons. And you know, even when we know they've had heavy, heavy backpacks and unfair loads, we can still look and think it's choice, its choice, they could have chosen better. And so often that's not the case not from a science sense not when we really look through the lens of the brain body stress response system and realize that overloaded systems, you know, those things can be out in stress behaviors, and just seeing differently, just knowing there's no such thing as a bad kid that actually can send a send a message to our, you know, to the children in our care. That's what I tried to do with Rianna was very easy to know that she wasn't trying to misbehave, you know, we're pretty good with infants and kids up to two and then seniors over 80. But it's all of us, you might have a teenager that reverts to like a toddler at times. They're not choosing that it's happening. And it's the brain and body keeping them safe. So recognizing it for what it is not going to be perfect, you're going to have mold, I call the most awful human moments, if it makes you feel any better. I mean, this is what I do for full time. And I still have red brain moments, you know, in my own life, for human. And you know, having some soft ice for yourself really matters. Recognizing that if you know some of the things I've said, you've done differently in the past, oh, well, you know, it's like you did the best you could. And when you know better and when you know something resonated, try it or learn more about it and see if a little bit of the newer science of self-regulation can help inform how you respond with the young people in your care. And most of all, I just want to say thank you, thank you for who you are, what you've chosen to do, whether you think of it as a career contribution to, to community to the wellbeing of young people, whether you think of it as a calling, I'm just so thankful for the folks like you in this world. Take care and we'll see you next time. Next time we look at relationships, okay?