



# SUPPORTING REGULATION THROUGH A BRAIN-BASED LENS

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## What Does Dysregulation Look Like?

Dysregulation occurs when individuals struggle to manage their emotions and behaviors effectively. In children, dysregulation can appear as hyperactivity or withdrawn behaviors, and emotional responses may seem excessive to the situation. It can often also be mistaken for a lack of empathy or care. Children may show a wide range of behaviors from acting out to withdrawing or ignoring their own needs.

Understanding dysregulation from a developmental perspective is crucial, as it's important for parents to recognize that executive functions, such as impulse control and cognitive flexibility, are still developing in children. These functions are foundational for self-regulation but may not be fully accessible in moments of stress.

## The Problem-Solving Lens

When faced with challenging behaviors, a problem-solving approach focuses on understanding unmet needs rather than labeling the behavior. Children generally want to succeed; if they are struggling, it signals a mismatch between their abilities and the demands being placed on them.

To prevent struggles:

- **Modify the Environment:** Adjust the physical or social setting to better match the child's capabilities. For instance, creating structured routines or using visual aids can support working memory.
- **Meet Human Needs:** Ensure foundational needs like safety, connection, and autonomy are addressed; work through your relationship.
- **Teach Skills:** Gradually scaffold (move from adult managed to child self managed) executive function skills like self-control or problem-solving, empowering the child to succeed independently over time.



## Strategies to Support Regulation During Times of Struggle

### Preventive Steps when something hard happens

- Normalize emotional expression at home, creating an environment where coping strategies are modeled and practiced.
- Use consistent visual cues and routines to reduce cognitive load.
- Ensure children have access to breaks or calming spaces to reset when needed.



### How to support after your child escalates

- **Regulate:** Help calm your child's nervous system through mindfulness activities or sensory tools. For example, mindfulness activities like breathing together, can help a child find calm.
- **Relate:** Build trust through active listening and empathy. Phrases like "That must be hard" or "I notice you're feeling upset" validate their experience. It is important that they know you believe them and support them.
- **Reason:** Offer clear, step-by-step guidance tailored to the child's current state. Using concise language like "Let's make a plan together" helps them understand expectations and that they will receive help for the hard thing.

**In Conclusion:** By integrating these strategies, teachers and parents can scaffold self-regulation, ensuring children develop the skills needed to navigate challenges independently. Supporting regulation is not just about managing behavior, but fostering growth and resilience in every child through the safe space of your relationship.





## RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE



### **Article:**

**Understanding and implementing non-compliance based parenting and behavior support.**

### **Podcasts:**

**Non-compliance based Discipline**

### **Website:**

**Executive functioning development**

**Supporting Executive Functioning**

**Co-Regulating Strategies**

### **Book:**

**The Whole Brain Child, by Dan Siegel**