

If interested, this topic can be learned in greater detail through a full day workshop called “Trauma Informed Classrooms.” Please contact Sara at sara@growingrootstherapy.ca or 204-333-9804 for more information or to book a workshop.

Being Trauma Sensitive

What is Co-Regulation?

First, What is Self Regulation?

- Self-regulation is the ability of the student to maintain a calm, alert state that is associated with the brain’s ability to learn.
- In a school environment, many demands are placed on the student, and at times it is difficult to maintain an appropriate level of arousal.
- Throughout the day, normal fluctuations occur in self-regulation as it relates to eating, breaks, being tired, and amount of time spent on any task. Other factors such as emotions and social time also affect our ability to self-regulate.
- Development of self-regulatory skills requires predictable, responsive and supportive environments.¹ These types of environments may be missing in the lives of children who have experienced trauma, putting these children at a disadvantage.
- A child who is having difficulty self-regulating in the classroom may demonstrate poor attention, non-preferred classroom behaviours, strong outbursts of emotion and difficulty relating with peers.

Co-Regulation

- Co-regulation is an interactive process of regulation support that occurs in a relationship between people.¹
- Sets the building blocks of self-regulation. Children first learn how to regulate from co-regulation and grow their self-regulation skills from there.
- The adult strengthens positive emotional reactions and calms negative ones with attuned emotional responses.
 - For example, an adult can co-regulate a child who is experiencing intense emotions through a calm, soothing and emotionally supportive presence.
- Adults can support emotional development of children by acting like an emotional scaffold. This can mean maintaining sensitivity towards a child’s emotions, sharing in the child’s positive emotions, and valuing the child’s participation in classroom tasks.²
- There are a variety of co-regulation strategies, and it can be helpful to think about these strategies falling into 3 categories:
 - 1) Vocal strategies - such as vocal comfort and reassurance
 - 2) Active strategies - such as prompting, re-directing, and physical comfort
 - 3) Following strategies - such as following the child’s lead, emotional following

So what can I do?

- **Find ways to regulate yourself.** The first step to co-regulating with a child is making sure you are regulated. Try things like deep breathing, drinking water, reflecting on what triggers you, incorporating regular self-care into your routine, etc.
- **Establish a safe space.** You can do this by providing a safe physical environment and a safe relationship with the child. Speak in a relaxed tone of voice, determine how much space the child needs and present a calm body.
- **Problem-solve.** Determine what is going on that is triggering the child and try your best to remove those things from the environment or yourselves from the triggering environment.
- **Validate the child's feelings.** Name out loud that the situation is scary, overwhelming, frustrating, etc. and actively listen to what the child is telling you.
- **Incorporate regulating activities into your classroom routine.** See handout, "Classroom Strategies for Regulation" for ideas.

Resources

1. Rosanbalm, K.D., & Murray, D.W. (2017). Caregiver Co-regulation Across Development: A Practice Brief. OPRE Brief #2017-80. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, US. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from: <https://fpg.unc.edu/sites/fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/reports-and-policy-briefs/Co-RegulationFromBirthThroughYoungAdulthood.pdf>
2. Ting, V., & Weiss, J. (2017). Emotion Regulation and Parent Co-Regulation in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders*, 47(3), 680–689. <https://doi-org.uml.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10803-016-3009-9>
3. Adapted from handouts provided by Megan Land-McCarthy.

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