Five Survival Skills for Caregivers of Emotionally Reactive Children & Adolescents

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What is Emotional Reactivity?

- Dysregulation
- Emotional Vulnerability
Dysregulation

- Yelling
- Verbally lashing out or attacking
- Slamming doors
- Crying
Dysregulation

- **Physical Reactions**
  - Heart pounding

- **Thought Reactions**
  - Judgmental of self or others

- **Emotional reactions**
  - Angry or irritable
Emotional Vulnerability

- High sensitivity to stimuli
- High reactivity
- Slow return to baseline
Why so reactive?

- Mental Health Diagnosis
- Sensory Processing Disorders
- Cognitive ability
- Bio Social Theory
- Attachment
- Trauma
Mental Health Diagnosis

- Mood Disorders
- Anxiety
- Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Personality Disorders
- Thought Disorders
Sensory Processing Disorder

- Sounds
- Lights
- Touch
- Texture
- Smells
Cognitive Ability

- Developmental Disabilities
- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders
- Traumatic Brain Injury
Bio Social Theory

Biosocial theory suggests that emotional dysregulation may result when an individual with a temperamental disposition encounters an environment that he or she experiences as invalidating.
“Attachment” describes the interaction between children and their caregivers that have a longstanding impact on the development of identity and personal agency, early working models of self and other, and the capacity to regulate emotions.
Attachment

- Problems with boundaries
- Distrust and suspiciousness
- Social isolation
- Interpersonal difficulties
- Difficulty attuning to other’s emotional states
- Difficulty with perspective taking
Trauma

- Biology
- Affect regulation
- Dissociation
- Behavioral control
- Cognition
- Self-concept
Burnout, Countertransference, and Caregiver related stress

- Warning signs
- Contributing Factors
- Prevention
Teachable Moment?
Transactional Model

An individual and their environment influence each other simultaneously
Our Reactions...

- What does it feel like to work with a dysregulated child?
Common Reactions

- Judgmental thoughts
- Emotional Reactions
- Physical Reactions
- Self Doubt
- Behavioral Reactions
Dialectical Behavioral Therapy
Five Skills

- Validation
- Relational Mindfulness
- Self Soothing
- Radical Acceptance
- Chain Analysis
Validation
Validation

- Validation skills build and maintain relationships.
- It is our job to figure out how to validate our child/children, it is not their job to figure out how to be validated.
- Validation is a skills that we continually learn and hone.
- Validation is the message that what a person thinks or feels makes sense in that situation.
- Self-validation will bring us self awareness, understanding and has a calming effect.
Validation

- Observing and describing
- Reflection
- Reading the unspoken
- Understanding the context
- Radical genuineness
Not Validation

- Not paying attention
- “Shoulding”
- Feeding invalidating thoughts
- Pathologizing/criticizing
- Over-generalizing
Relational Mindfulness
What is Mindfulness?

Two Sides

• Staying present in the moment

• Having an awareness of your own thoughts and feelings.
Why Mindfulness?

Identify Emotions

Recognize Beauty

Reduce Negative
Inner Dialogue
What is Relational Mindfulness?

What

Observe your child
Describe your child
Participate with your child

How

Non Judgmentally-
Mindfully-
Effectively
Remember that this is someone that you care about

Maintaining the relationship may be the most important outcome
Self Soothing
With Vision

With Hearing

With Smell

With Taste

With Touch
Take a brief Vacation

- Run errands
- Take a break
- Exercise
- Take a bath
- Meditate
- Read
- Watch a Movie/ TV
Self Care

- Respite
- Social/Family
- Health
- Address burnout
- Share responsibility
- Use available supports
- Time for yourself
Radical Acceptance
Acceptance vs. Change

We are perfect just the way we are AND we could do better
Much talk about the change side

- Diagnosis
- Behavioral Planning
- Individual/Family Intervention
- Medication
What is Radical Acceptance?

- Focus on Acceptance
- Understanding trauma and attachment
- We are all doing our best
- Not judging our judging
- The Wisdom to know the difference
Chain Analysis
A chain analysis is a step-by-step description of the events leading up to and following a behavior.
Chain analysis

- What were the vulnerabilities?
- What were the links that connected the chain (thoughts, feelings, actions)?
- What exactly was the breaking point?
- What was the behavior?
- What were the consequences?
- Where could have the chain of events been changed?
Define Behavior

- WHAT EXACTLY IS THE BEHAVIOR THAT I AM ANALYZING?
- WHAT THINGS IN MYSELF AND MY ENVIRONMENT MADE ME VULNERABLE?
- WHAT PROMPTING EVENT IN THE ENVIRONMENT STARTED ME ON THE CHAIN TO MY BEHAVIOR?
- WHAT ARE THE LINKS IN THE CHAIN BETWEEN THE PROMPTING EVENT AND THE BEHAVIOR?
- WHAT EXACTLY WERE THE CONSEQUENCES IN THE ENVIRONMENT?
Solution Analysis

- WAYS TO REDUCE MY VULNERABILITY IN THE FUTURE

- WAYS TO PREVENT PROMPTING EVENT FROM HAPPENING AGAIN.

- WAYS TO WORK ON CHANGING THE LINKS

- WHAT HARM DID MY PROBLEM BEHAVIOR CAUSE?

- PLANS TO REPAIR, CORRECT, AND OVER-CORRECT THE HARM.
Questions?
Acknowledgements


