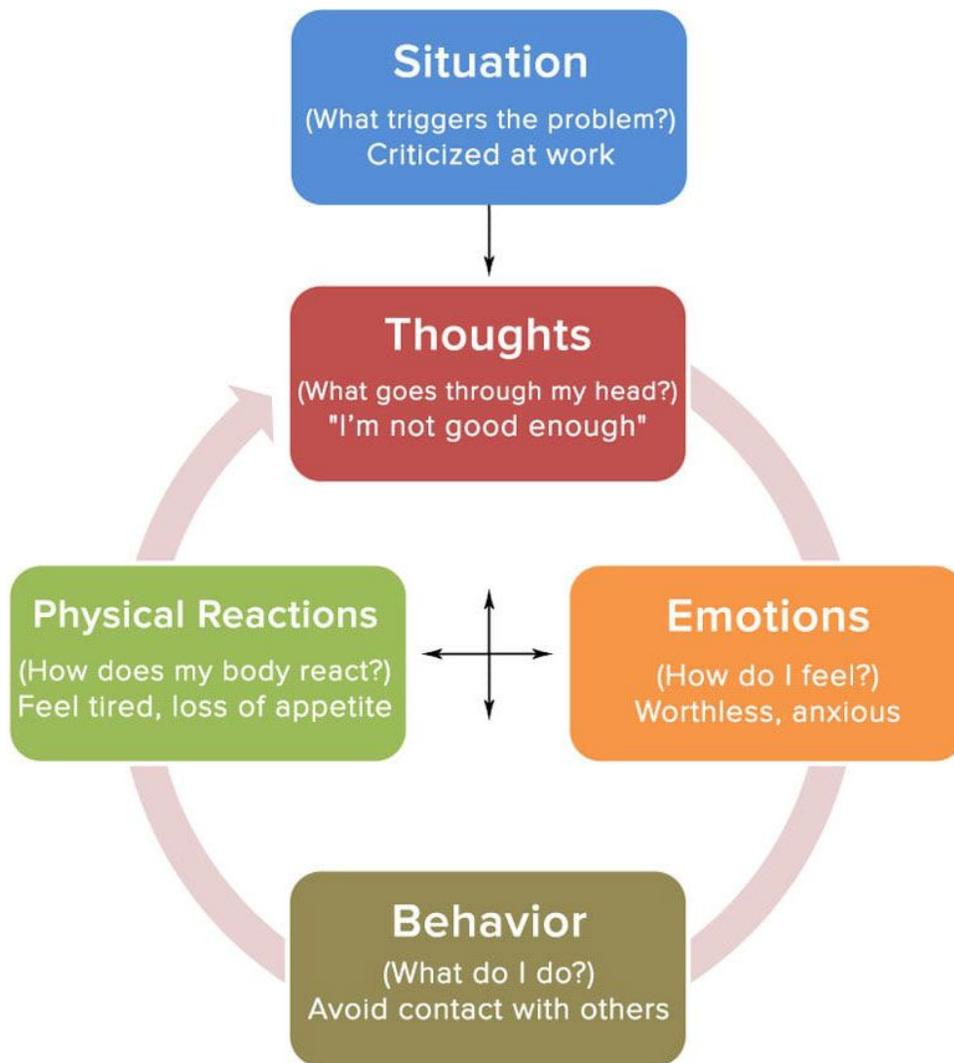


Dear Parents,

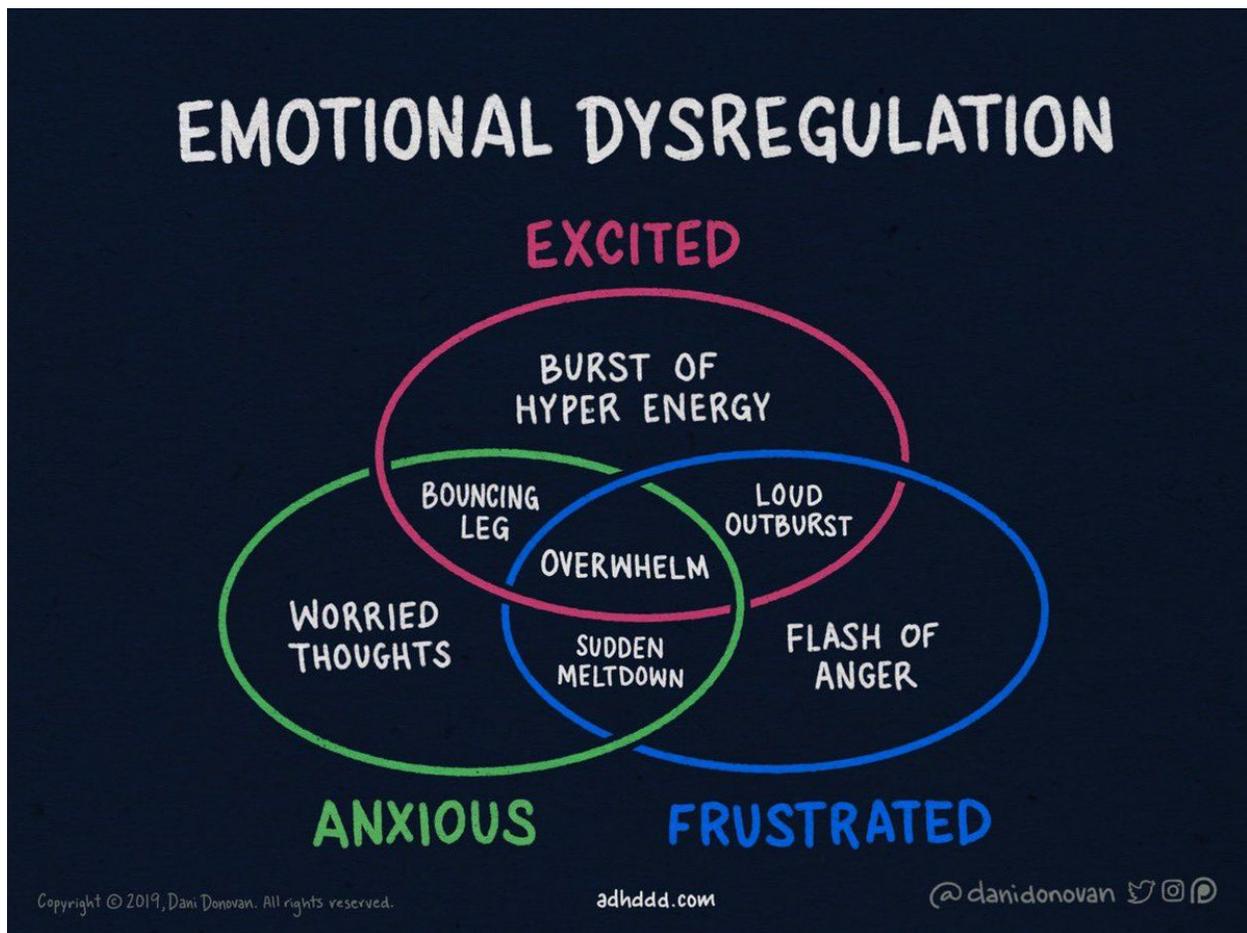
Are you noticing that your child is more irritable, anxious, or breaking down into tears more often? Are you finding it difficult yourself not to lash out in anger or being more impatient? When we go through periods of high levels of stress, we may also start to have difficulty regulating our emotions.

Emotion Dysregulation is a process where an external or internal event (thinking about something sad or scary) provokes an emotion or feeling. A thought is then followed by an emotion-related physiological response (heart rate increases, stomach ache, sweating). This then may all culminate in a behavior (yelling, avoiding, hiding in the bathroom and eating chocolate, etc...). The brain responds to sensory input and that input may trigger an alarm response.



When this happens, it is harder to listen, to think, to learn, to comprehend, and to cope.

When our emotions become dysregulated, it may begin to look like this (in either ourselves or in our children):



Sometimes, our fear of our emotions or worry about regulating our emotions may also cause us to be more unregulated. Sometimes, we aren't able to regulate ourselves because we haven't been taught the skills. Oftentimes our children are unregulated because we haven't been able to teach them the skills or they are copying us. The more we are unregulated, the more our children will be unregulated. Regulating our emotions on a good day can be difficult. Regulating our emotions during a pandemic ... may seem near impossible.

However, it is possible to work on it and get better at. Here are a few tips to help regulate your emotions or to work with your child to teach them to regulate their emotions.

1. **Practice STOPP: STOP** (just pause for a moment). **TAKE** a breath. Notice your breathing. **Observe** your thoughts, your focus of attention. Think through what you are reacting to. What sensations do you notice in your body? **PULL BACK**. Put things into perspective. What is the bigger picture? Take a helicopter view. What is another way of

looking at this situation? Is this thought a fact or an opinion? What is a more reasonable explanation? How important is this right now? How important will it be in 6 months' time? **Practice what Works & Proceed.** What is the best thing to do right now? For me? For others? What can I do that fits with my values? (We can always pray). Do what will be effective and appropriate.

2. **Engage in Repetitive Movements & Activity:** Repetitive and Left-right movements have been shown to be very effective in self-soothing and maintaining self-regulation in moments of distress. Colour, Paint, Knit, Jump Rope, Run, Drum, Skate, or Hop.
3. **Use an Opposite Action:** This can stop an intense or highly charged emotion in its tracks. It is possible to invoke an emotion by engaging in a behavior that is associated with that particular emotion. Instead of doing what you would usually do when you are feeling a certain way ... do the opposite action. Instead of yelling ... whisper. Do something that brings out the opposite emotion: listen to music, watch a movie, read a book.
4. **Engage yourself and your children in the community:** Help your kids (and yourself) to give your brain a break by doing something for someone else.
5. **Soothe your senses.** Do something that gives your senses a break and is pleasing to your senses. Do something that is relaxing.
6. **Breathe.** Breathing has a lot of research behind it in helping to calm us down and decrease our stress levels.
7. **Push Away and Take a Mini Vacation:** Being in a routine and in a schedule is very important for you and your kids right now. Equally important is allowing yourself and your kids to take a longer lunch, sleep in for a few minutes, eat lunch outside, etc... Breaking our routine can also be very life giving. If necessary, build an imaginary wall between yourself and the situation so that you can take a break.
8. **Prayer & Meditation on Scripture** - This helps us find meaning in our situation and then in our stress we can hold onto it.
9. **Refocus on the positive:** We are really good at paying too much attention to the negative that we need to pause and refocus on the positive. Do one small positive activity every day.
10. **Create a plan for self-care:** What have you been doing well so far to care for yourself? What are you going to keep in your routine? What are you going to add/change? See the attached Self-Care Plan.
11. **Remember the 3 R's with your Kids: Regulate, Relate & Reason.** First help your child regulate by helping them feel safe, calm, and loved. Relate to them by validating their emotions. Use a calm tone of voice. Connect with them. Let them know this is hard. Once your child is calm, talk about alternative behaviors and reinforce limits.

Understanding dysregulation: How to Support a Highly Emotional Child



Dysregulation occurs when the brain responds to sensory input in a manner that triggers the alarm state.



When a child is dysregulated, it is harder to listen, comprehend, and cope.

Remember the Three "R"s

Regulate

focus on soothing your child. Make them feel calm, safe, and loved.



Relate

Validate their feelings with your words and tone of voice. "I know you're upset right now." "This is very hard". Focus on connecting with your child.

Reason



Once your child is calm, now it is time to talk about alternatives to behaviors while reinforcing limits you set before. You can reassure them you love them but that the behavior they're exhibiting is not ok.

Until a child is regulated, they are unlikely to related to you (feel connected & comfortable). And until a child is related, they are unlikely to have the mental capacity to reason with you.

<http://www.thinkkids.org/regulate-relate-reason/>

<https://jessicalangtherapy.com/blog/regulate-relate-reason-brain-state/>

Emotion Regulation takes practice and is best taught through modeling. But no matter what, give yourself grace. These times are hard and we are all doing our best!