EMOTIONAL REGULATION: WHAT IS IT AND WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT

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“My primary emotion is, and has always been fear.”

- Temple Grandin (2006)

“Other people do not always act as they should.”

“The opposite of anxiety is not being calm, the opposite of anxiety is trust.”

-Micheal John Carley

Autism from the Inside Out
Learner Objectives

- As a result of this presentation, participants will be able to define emotional regulation and its effect on learning, communication, and social interaction.
- As a result of this presentation, participants will be able to identify signs of dysregulation with both high and low arousal levels.
- As a result of this presentation, participants will be able to list 5 strategies to assist children with mutual regulation.
What is Emotional Regulation?

- The ability to recognize one’s emotional state/activity level and respond appropriately in the environment.
- Refers to level of alertness during activities.
- Levels of alertness or arousal change throughout the day.
- Learning can only occur during regulated times.
Why does ER matter?

- Learning can only occur when a child (or adult) is regulated.
- Think back to a class that was boring…
  - Were you able to actually understand the information that was presented?
  - What strategies do you use if you are falling asleep during a meeting (or autism presentation 😊)?
- Remember a time when you were really excited…
  - Could you listen to another person’s story?
  - How did you respond in conversation?
ER and ASD

- Why are individuals with ASD at “high risk” for experiencing periods of emotional dysregulation???
  - Deficits in social communication
  - Sensory processing differences
  - Problems in social understanding
  - Limited/ineffective regulatory strategies
Arousal State

TARGET ZONE

Arousal

Attention

Low Arousal

High Arousal
Emotional Regulation Goals

- ER goals can be identified across school, home, and community contexts
- ER goals and strategies must be individualized and developmentally grounded
- ER is best supported in the context of trusting and mutually respectful shared relationships
Emotional Regulation Goals, cont.

- Self-regulation
  - ER that is achieved independently without the support of others
- Mutual regulation
  - ER that occurs in the context of supportive social interaction
- Above strategies used in order to
  - Maintain a well-regulated arousal state
  - Recover from extreme dysregulation
Mutual Regulation Goals

- Expresses range of emotions
- Respond to assistance offered by partners
- Requests partners’ assistance to regulate state
- Responds to feedback and guidance regarding behavior
- Recovers from extreme dysregulation with support from partners
Self-Regulation Goals

- Demonstrates availability for learning and interacting
- Uses behavioral strategies to regulate arousal level during familiar activities
- Regulates emotion during new and changing situations
- Uses language strategies to regulate arousal during familiar activities
- Recovers from extreme dysregulation by self
Emotional Regulation Strategies

- Behavioral Strategies
  - Sensory-motor strategies

- Language Strategies
  - Words or other symbols

- Metacognitive Strategies
  - Ability to reflect on/talk about cognitive processes that support organization/regulation
Why strategies are important

- Self and Mutual Regulation strategies allow the child to
  - Be organized and focused
  - Problem-solve in a social interaction or independently
  - Communicate
  - Maintain social engagement
  - Be “available” for learning
Important things to remember with ER:

- Target regulation equals target engagement
- When a child is dysregulated, should not expect most sophisticated language or coping strategies
- It is human nature to regulate by controlling
- Stim behaviors should be interpreted as communicative
  - Communicative intent is a coping strategy
  - What contexts does stimming increase?
  - Self-regulation strategy
ER Strategies

- Monitor emotional regulation
- Determine function of unconventional behavior
- Model appropriate behavior
- Address and identify dysregulation
- Redirect attention
- Teach “no”, “don’t like”, “stop”, “mad”
- Use positive behavior language
- “Take a break”
Low Arousal Bias

- What does low arousal look like?
  - Glazed look in eyes
  - Slouched in chair
  - Quiet (not disturbing others)
  - May seem to be paying attention

- Emotions: bored, calm, content
Strategies for Low Arousal Bias

- Fast swinging
- Jumping/bouncing
- Cold water play
- Running—chase, hide/find
- Sitting on ball chair/air pillow
- Music with motions
High Arousal Bias

- What does high arousal look like?
  - Fidgeting in chair
  - Standing up/walking around
  - Kicking legs
  - Touching things in their space
  - Talking/perseverative speech/making noises
  - Loud voice
  - Tantrum

- Emotions: mad, excited, overwhelmed
Strategies for High Arousal Bias

- Deep pressure
- Bean bag chair
- Weighted/compression vests, blankets, pads
- Slow rocking/swaying/swinging
- Fidget toys
- Quiet corner
- Quiet music with a steady beat
- Bear hugs
General Strategies – Class

- Heavy work – good for low and high arousal bias
  - Pushing chairs, tables, the wall
  - Pulling Therabands, Theraputty
  - Carrying stack of books between rooms
- Provide movement between activities
- Alternate high-movement activities with low-movement ones (playing outside, followed by silent reading)
- Use visuals, schedules, etc.
- Remember lighting, noise level
General Strategies – Home

- Provide specific area for homework
- Use visuals/schedules for parts of day
- Heavy work prior to tasks that require attention
  - Pushing chairs, tables, the wall
  - Pulling Therabands, Theraputty
  - Jumping on a trampoline
  - Climbing a tree
- Review community activity routine/expectation prior to outing
Emotional Regulation Examples

- Hitting a child on a bridge at the playground
- Getting up and screaming at circle
- Slouching in a chair with an empty gaze
- Pushing the TV/children during remember time
Client will decrease the time needed to recover from extreme dysregulation to 2 minutes when provided with pictures, words, and sensory input from a familiar adult.

Client will respond to and use words and/or pictures (wait, okay, mad, happy) 80% of the time as needed to regulate his arousal with minimum cueing.

Client will use self-chosen strategies to regulate his arousal in a group setting 80% of the time with minimal cueing.

When in a frustrating situation, Client will describe his emotional reactions to problems based on the perceived size of the problem with minimum cueing 3x per session.
Resources

- The SCERTS Model (Prizant, Wetherby, Rubin, Laurent, Rydell)
- The Out-of-Sync Child (Kranowitz)
- How Does Your Engine Run?: The Alert Program for Self-Regulation (Shellenberger & Williams)
- Stacy’s Sensory Solutions
Questions?

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