Stress Detectives and Safe Harbors: Helping Children Feel Secure

Presented by Dr. Kristie Pretti-Frontczak
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THE 4 S'S

Safe  Seen  Soothed  Secure

based upon the work of Dr. Dan Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson - The Power of Showing Up
Hand Model of the Brain

- Prefrontal Cortex
- Cerebral Cortex
- Limbic Regions (Hippocampus & Amygdala)
- Brain Stem (Base of Skull)
- Spinal Cord

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Common
ECE Stressors

• Confusion and/or overly demanding situations
• Difficulty with sensory-motor skills
• Directions and corrections
Common

ECE Stressors

- Experiencing intense emotions
- Exposure to violence
- Lack of sleep/rest
- Lack of opportunities for movement and choice
Common

ECE Stressors

• Large group activities
• Mindreading
• Overuse/reliance on technology and/or a “replacement” for connecting w/caregivers & peers
Common

ECE Stressors

- Poor nutrition and poor hydration
- Sensory overload
- Unpredictable situations
- Unresponsive adults
Safe

- System registers that there isn't a threat (no fear)
- Physical environment is safe (no threat of harm)
- “Feel” safe not frightened or guarded
- No “internal alarms” are going off
- Ok to be vulnerable
- Ok with what is going on
- Know what is expected, what to do, what is happening
- Understand the meaning of gestures, words, looks, tone
SLOW DOWN
Approach silently
Aim to connect
Avoid ignoring

CO-REGULATE
Stay in the moment
Empathize nonverbally
Avoid forcing calm

PROMPT (PRIME)
Get child off autopilot
Encourage possibilities
Avoid redirection

REFRAME
See needs vs. wants
Address needs
Avoid overwhelm

OFFER LIFELINES
Be there for the child
Invite calm
Avoid distress or harm

REPAIR & RESTORE
Grow coping strategies
Establish balance
Avoid revisiting issues
SLOW DOWN
Approach silently
Aim to connect
Avoid ignoring

PLANNED IGNORING

Photo taken from: Attending & Planned Ignoring: Everyday Parenting; The ABCs of Child Rearing, Dr. Alan E. Kazdin

1. Select a behavior you want to decrease
2. Select the type of ignoring
3. Ignore the bad behavior when it occurs
4. Praise the positive opposite

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**CO-REGULATE**

Stay in the moment  
Empathize nonverbally  
Avoid forcing calm

- Responsive Relationships
- Sense of Security
- Model and Mirror

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Step 1: I pause….meaning I don’t jump right in and say or do something.

Step 2: I notice what the child is trying to communicate or what emotions and information they are trying to process.

Step 3: I make a statement that invites discovery of the “why” behind the behavior. For example, I might say, “I wonder what you need,” or “I wonder what might happen,” or even “I wonder what you were trying to do.”
REFRAME

See needs vs. wants
Address needs
Avoid overwhelm

self-reg.ca/infographics
OFFER LIFELINES
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STUART SHANKER'S
5 DOMAINS of SELF-REG
WWW.SELF-REG.CA

- BIOLOGICAL
- EMOTIONAL
- SOCIAL
- COGNITIVE
- PROSOCIAL

- EACH DOMAIN HAS ITS OWN STRESSORS
- EACH DOMAIN INTERACTS WITH THE OTHER DOMAINS
- WE NEED TO BE "STRESS DETECTIVES" FOR ALL 5 DOMAINS

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REPAIR & RESTORE
Grow coping strategies
Establish balance
Avoid revisiting issues
What it means to feel safe...

- No fear
- No harm
- No threats
- Not frightened or guarded
- Not being controlled by someone else
- "Ok" to be vulnerable
- "Ok" with what is going on
- Know what to do
- Know what is expected
- Know what is happening or going to happen
- Understand the meaning of gestures, words, looks, & tone of voice (and lack there of)
- No "internal alarms" are "going off"

How I create a "safe harbor"

- I validate emotions
- I reduce sensory input
- I invite calm by being calm
- I offer individualized choices
- I slow down to give time for processing ideas and emotions
- I slow down so I can notice what my posture, tone, and pace are "saying"
- I notice what their emotions are trying to communicate
- I limit what I say when they are in distress
- I reframe what appears to be a "want" into something that is a "need"
- I pause to create space to think, feel, and understand the perspective of others
1. Validate vs. Fix
2. Less vs. More
3. Slow vs. Fast
4. Needs vs. Wants
5. Space vs. Answers
6. Calm vs. Compliance
Let's Stay Connected

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