

Trainer Skills for Sensitive Topics:  
Promoting Optimal States of  
Regulation



WestEd  
Center for Child & Family Studies

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 What is a Brave Space?

*Boostrom's (1998) critique of the idea of safe space, and in particular his assertion that:*

**BRAVERY IS NEEDED** AS "learning necessarily involves not merely risk, but the pain of giving up a former belief (*condition*) in favor of a new way of seeing things" (p. 399).

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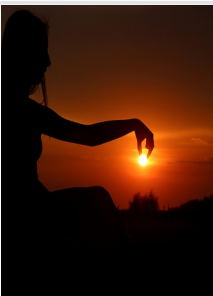
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 **YOUR SAFE  
GROUNDERS**

Write down a word or draw an image that describes a space/place/person or object you use in your life to calm, ground you or that helps you feel safe.



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## A Safe Space




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## Just Breathe!

- **Breathing** is your bodies **remote control**
- Take three deep and slow breaths. Work from the belly, and move the breath all the way into your lungs. How do you feel?
- With this movement, the most important piece is incorporating the breath. It is all about the breath.

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## Breathing

“When we inhale we stimulate the SNS which makes the heart increase. Exhaling stimulate the PNS, which decrease how fast the heart beats. In healthy and calm individuals, the inhale and exhale are steady and a good heart rate measures well-being.”

*-The Body Keeps the Score Page 269 Dr. Bessel Van Der Kolk, M.D.*

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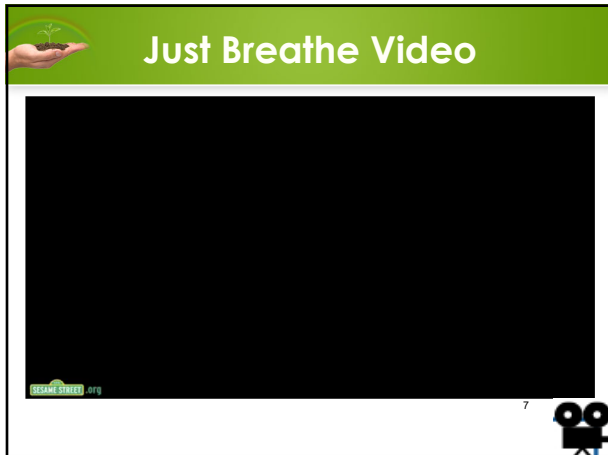
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**Provide a Sense of “Control”**



**Having a sense of control** is an important aspect of coping with toxic or traumatic stress and helping the adult return to a **situation that is predictable and safe is essential.**

*What strategies can a trainer use to help participants feel in control of their own person and space?*

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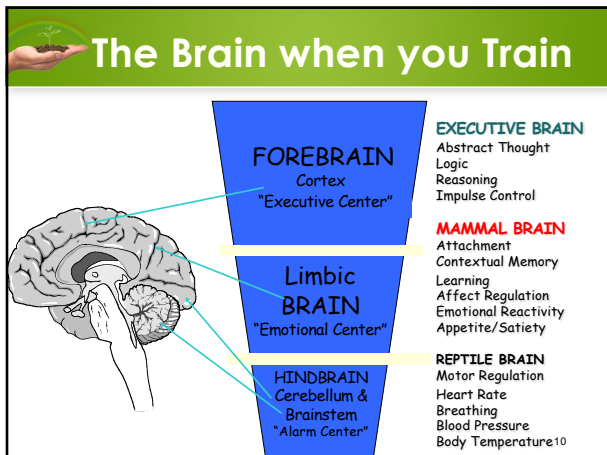
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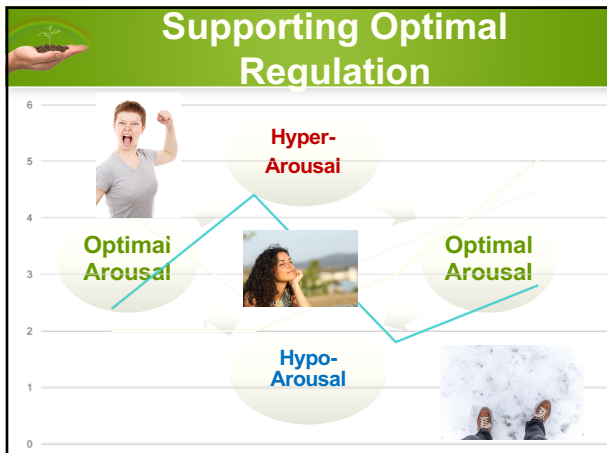
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WHAT TO DO WHEN SOMEONE IS TRIGGERED		
REPTILE BRAIN STRATEGIES	MAMMAL BRAIN STRATEGIES	EXECUTIVE BRAIN STRATEGIES
		

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SIGN AND SIGNALS	
DOWNSTAIRS BRAIN	UPSTAIRS BRAIN
  <p>Signs a person is moving out of the zone of optimal arousal?</p> <p>Signs a part of the room (small group) is moving out of the zone of optimal arousal?</p> <p>Signs most in the room are moving out of the zone of optimal arousal?</p>	 <p>Signs the room is too much in the CEO of logical reasoning and the subject matter is not being integrated in to their emotional state?</p> <p>Signs participants are using integrated brain functioning?</p>

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TRAINER STRATEGIES FROM A BRAIN PERSPECTIVE
<b>EMOTIONAL OR LIZARD BRAIN STRATEGIES</b>    <p>What strategies do you use to bring participants from hypo to optimal arousal?</p> <p>What strategies do you use to bring participants from hyper to optimal arousal?</p>

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### Trainer Strategies to Calm the DOWNstairs Brain

- Nurturing, calm trainers who can support co-regulation
- Safe, predictable routines and environments
- Sensory play or sensory communication (fidgets, movement, play, interaction)

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### Elbow Partner Discussion

**What are some of the “triggers” in the environment that may set off a fear response or increase stress?**

**Brainstorm**




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### Triggers that Affect Arousal States

A new trainer/s	Quick movements	Disorganized materials
Moving too slow or fast	Poor activity instructions	Unpredictable schedule
Noise level	Too many extroverted or introverted activities	Being called on unexpectedly
Smells	Threats	Little movement
An unexpected noise	Someone taking something away	Too much lecture
Change in lighting	New room arrangement	Not engaging participants
Change in schedule	Shaming	
Too many transitions	Too cold or warm	Tickling a child
Correcting or directing	Unclear expectations	Going over the time
No visuals	An adult towering over you	Side talking

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 **Elbow Partner Discussion**

**What are some of the  
“environment strategies”  
that can create calm and  
support regulation?**

Brainstorm



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<u><b>Visual</b></u>  	<u><b>Auditory</b></u>  	<u><b>Tactile</b></u>  
<u><b>Vestibular</b></u>  	<u><b>Proprioceptive</b></u>  	<u><b>Natural Outdoor Environments</b></u>  

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<u><b>Visual</b></u> Dimming the lights Reducing clutter on walls Providing rooms to take a break Reduce overall clutter Soft lighting Soft draping over windows Nature photos Timers Visual cues	<u><b>Auditory</b></u> Eliminate low frequency sounds Humming or singing Calming voices Playing instrumental music Playing nature sounds Calming music stations Eliminate side talking	<u><b>Tactile</b></u> Fidget toys Providing textured materials Sensory materials Calming Lotion Coloring books Play Dough Kinetic Sand Art projects
<u><b>Vestibular</b></u> Rocking Swinging Bouncing Swaying Taking a walk Sitting balls, twisty chairs, rocking chairs)	<u><b>Proprioceptive</b></u> Movement Yoga Squeeze toys Stress balls Pushing wall (hands on wall) Weighted blankets	<u><b>Natural Outdoor Environments</b></u> Loose parts Wonder and creativity Water sounds Visual photos of nature Bring nature in the environment Open windows

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**Non-Verbal  
and Verbal  
Relational  
Skills**

*How do we  
communicate  
safety through  
the trainer's  
actions?*

**IT'S ALL  
ABOUT  
RELATIONSHIPS**

You are only as good as your Relationships

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**RELATIONSHIP**  
Strategies a trainer can  
use to co-regulate and  
promote safety

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## Relationship Strategies

**Seen** – Trainer acknowledges and senses the internal sensory/emotional states. Provides individualized relationship building.

**Soothed** – When someone is in distress, the trainer calmly helps them move from reactive to receptive. Trainer sets up other strategies and prepares individuals to practice what to do if they become reactive.

**Safe** – Trainer is not a source of danger and helps everyone feel safe(predictable).

**Secure** –Help participants see that they will work things out together when feeling unsafe. <sup>25</sup>

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**Relationship Strategies**      Seen –Soothed –Safe –Secure –  
HOW?

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## Training Humans

“The internal state of the trainer is what the behavior of the participants will become”  
– Julie Kurtz

or

“The internal trainer states becomes the traits of the participants.” Julie Kurtz




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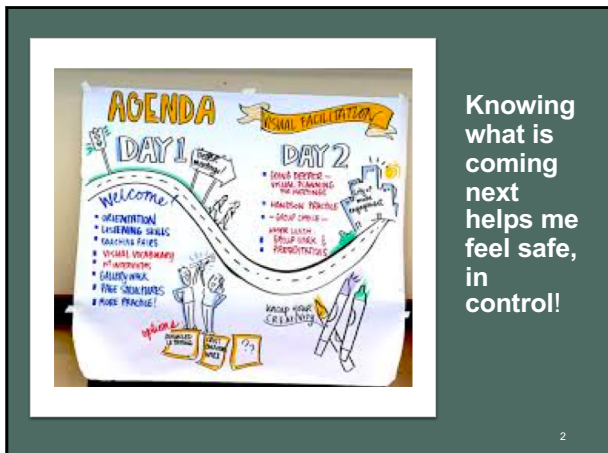
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### Predictable Transitions

- ❖ Create **rituals** for each transition so it becomes a familiar and predictable routine and habit.
- ❖ Use **visuals** to support transitions
- ❖ Use **auditory** strategies to clue a transition
- ❖ Share in the beginning the transitional strategies.  
**Expectations are clear.**

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### Teacher Supports Present Moment Regulation in the

When there is a triggering event or trauma reminder, an adult can get transported unconsciously back in time and respond to a present moment trigger as if they were being hijacked by the reptile brain. Some strategies:

- Say, **"You are Safe" or "You are Safe with Me Right Now"**
- Help the participant/s to be present in the moment by engaging in **sensory activities** that will bring them back to the present moment.
- Access identified **safe space**
- Have **identified people in the back that support** folks that need to leave and talk
- Create an expectation that no one can leave until they are re-regulated
- Provide written referrals and resources after they can access
- Take a break

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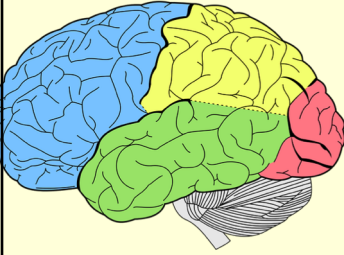
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**Engagement and Involvement**

"Tell me and I forget,  
Teach me and I may remember,  
Involve me and I learn."  
- Benjamin Franklin

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### Closing 3 Breath's and Safe Space for Grounding



- Together we will stand
- **First breath** release is a body scan from head to toe: notice **sensations** in your body
- **Second breath** release notice how you **feel**
- Third breath release tune in to what **you need** the rest of the day to restore and care for yourself

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