



WHAT DOES CO-REGULATION *really* LOOK LIKE?

WHAT IS REGULATION?

Before we really define co-regulation, let's define regulation.

Regulation is about balance.

When I talk about regulation, I'm talking about the regulation of the energy and arousal in our autonomic nervous system.



Our autonomic nervous system has an accelerator and a brake. Regulation means the accelerator and brake of our autonomic nervous system is in balance and there is an ability to both monitor that energy and arousal and change it, if needed.

HOW REGULATION DEVELOPS

A lot of the autonomic nervous system develops in utero and continues to get strengthened and refined in infancy. Think of it this way: Healthy full term infants have a lot of ability to regulate their heart rate right? But they are still developing regulation of their body temperature (we have to help by bundling them up for a while!) and they are definitely still developing emotion regulation, right? Babies are great at crying- not so great at soothing.



Regulation is developed through co-regulation.

A regulated adult offers soothing to an infant because infants are still developing regulation. That doesn't mean the infant is still developing a calm level of arousal right? Infants can be calm. What they struggle with is moving back and forth between activation and rest. When an infant is expressing activation by crying, they need a caregiver to soothe them.



To help soothe the infant, the caregiver doesn't just stay calm...

The first thing that happens with the caregiver is that they experience enough activation in their own nervous system that allows them to match the baby.

There's a little burst of "OH! The baby is crying!"

For a brief moment, the baby and the caregiver are in sync with their level of activation.

The caregiver then regulates their own activation because, if you've ever tried to calm down a crying baby while you are super activated, you know it definitely does not work.

The caregiver brings their activation down so that they can energetically lend their de-activation to the baby.

The caregiver is actually able to do both.

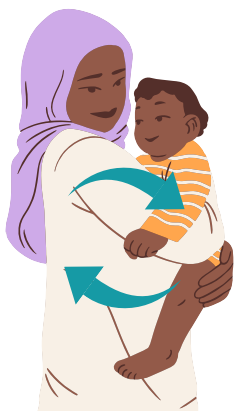
They are able to stay slightly activated in a way that matches and resonates with the baby, while also offering soothing.

The caregiver can keep a foot in both places. The place of "I feel you I'm here with you in this activated place" and a foot in the place of "I can soothe myself and soothe you, too."



If you've ever soothed a baby, you know that this process is not a straight line. Caregivers don't pick up their crying baby and then the baby soothes and it's over.





THE DANCE OF CO-REGULATION

There's a little dance involved!

Meaning, the caregiver responds to the baby. The baby responds to the caregiver. And then the caregiver responds to that. Then the baby responds, and the caregiver responds to that.

There's a mostly unconscious dance that is sometimes in sync and sometimes not.

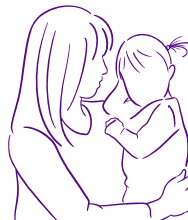
But the key here is there is what's called mutual influence. The caregiver responds to the baby. The baby responds to the caregiver. The next move can't be predetermined because it's based on what's going to happen next- and that's unknown until it happens.

*That's co-regulation -
the continued
presence & attunement
of the dance.*

THE INGREDIENTS OF CO-REGULATION

PHYSICAL PROXIMITY

You can't co-regulate a baby from another floor of the house. Or even another room. There is physical proximity and the closer you get to the baby the easier it is to offer co-regulation.



ATTUNEMENT

The caregiver allows the baby's emotional distress to resonate in their own body and responds to that.



MATCHING THE ENERGY

In co-regulation, baby's energy is first matched but by a regulated caregiver.

WHAT ABOUT OLDER KIDS?

- For kids who have developmentally delayed self-regulation, they need more proximity to the regulated caregiver.
- To offer co-regulation, the adult's nervous system is experiencing felt-safety and able to resonate with the child's intensity without getting flooded by it.
- Then the adult matches the child's intensity and activation- while also maintaining a connection to their own grounded and present self.
- Then the adult participates in the dance.

BEING, NOT DOING

Co-Regulation can feel a lot like doing, but it's really so much more about being.

Most co-regulation doesn't involve doing at all. It's the kind of co-regulation that is happening constantly between two people without us even thinking about it.

Like a heartbeat, it's just always happening.



*If you need a space to receive
co-regulation so you can give
more co-regulation, join us in The Club!*