



## Co-Regulation Comes Before Self-Regulation

Some of the little people in our lives struggle more than others to develop self-regulation skills. They need us to be their co-regulators in their moments of big feelings. Having a consistent adult that can be an effective co-regulator builds a sense of safety in a child that will give them the foundation to develop self-regulation skills.

### What is co-regulation?

Supporting someone else by being present with them as they move through emotions, while remaining regulated (calm), warm and responsive.

### How can we be co-regulators when children are experiencing big feelings?

*(This ideally happens during the “Escalation Zone” referred to in The Arc of the Tantrum Handout)*

#### Check yourself

Relax your body. Remember to not take the child’s behaviour personally. You are the pillar of safety for this child. Come to a level physically where you are not threatening. Remain calm and collected. Take a break if you are not calm or ask another adult that is more regulated to help.

#### Come alongside

Get down to the level of the child (physically and emotionally) and acknowledge their feelings and the event that led to them. The reason for their big reaction may seem like a small problem to you, as the adult, but it truly is big for them and their feelings are legitimate. Keep your language simple and short and do not try to talk them out of their feelings or ask them to “brush it off”. Show, with your confidence, that you are not afraid of whatever big feelings they are having by letting them experience them with you alongside. Let them know you see them. With compassion in your voice and your facial expression, you could say something like, “You have been waiting for a turn for a long time. I think you are feeling frustrated. I will help you find something else to do while you wait.”

#### Mirror their feelings

Subtly mimic the facial expression of the child and feel it (a little bit) with them. Acknowledge that it is hard to feel these big feelings and that you are there for them. Name the emotion that they might be feeling. Eg: “You look very frustrated. It’s so hard to feel that way.”

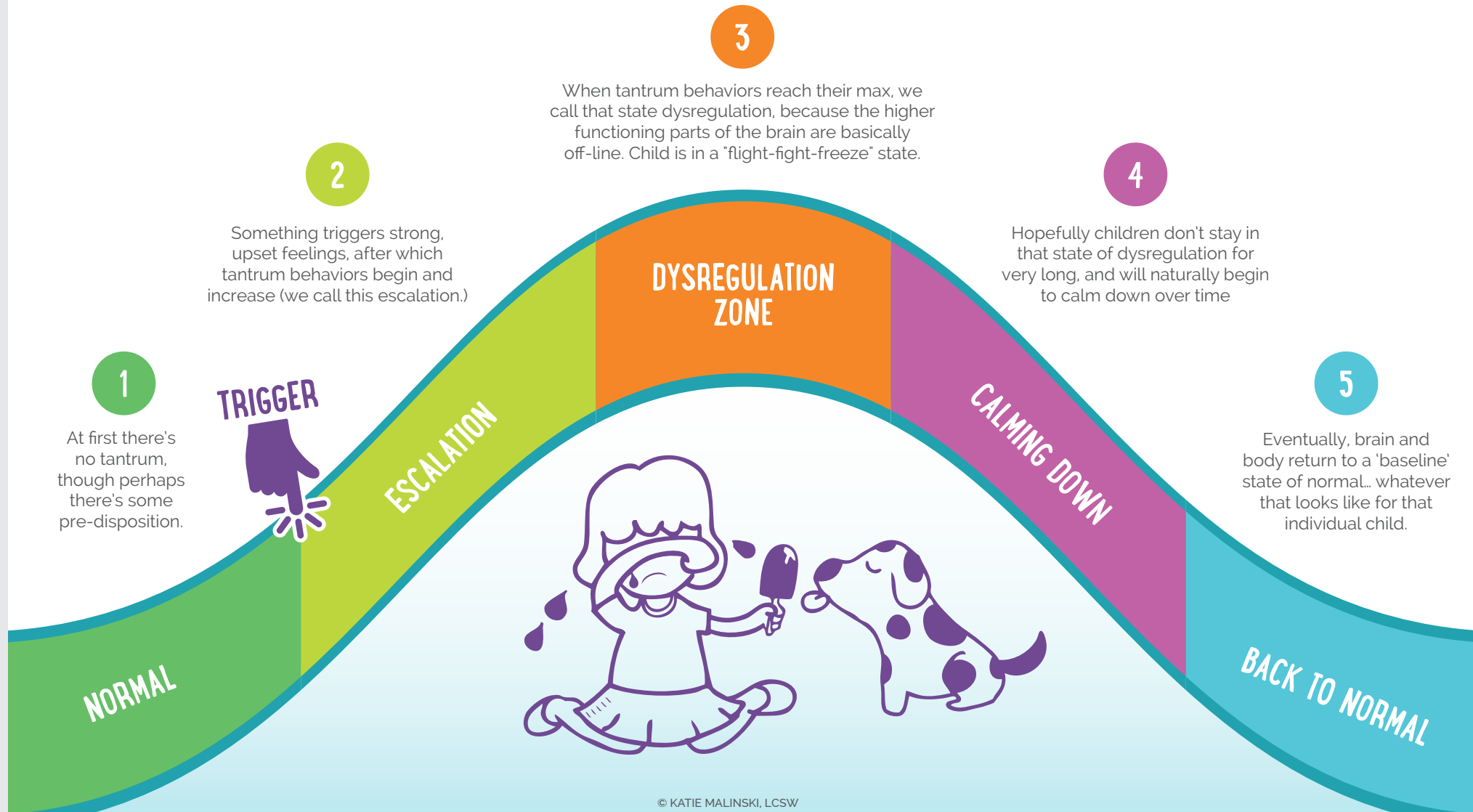
#### Hold Space

When you can’t get through, listen and wait. Let them know that you are there for them. Stop talking. Listen. When the anger turns to sadness, offer comfort. Let them cry – this will help release the frustration.

# The Arc of the Tantrum

IMAGINE THAT WE CAN PLOT A TANTRUM ON A GRAPH...

LEVEL OF TANTRUM



TIME

THERE'S MORE!

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## BEFORE TRIGGER

- Everything is OK, or
- Predisposed for trouble, ie: dinnertime, rough day, over-tired.



### PREVENTION TECHNIQUES

- Classic stuff like sleep, exercise, nutrition, consistent routines, and clear & consistent expectations
- “Front-loading”
- Overall help the child to be their best self.

## ESCALATION

- Whining
- Arguing
- Yelling
- Physical tension in body builds



### DE-ESCALATION TECHNIQUES

- Keep yourself calm.
- Send de-escalation signals: take deep, slow, quiet breaths. Check your physical posture—your body should be relaxed, and not too tall or too close to your child. Slow your physical movements. Reduce or stop talking.
- Put on your “Face of Compassion.”
- Let your child be “seen and felt.”

## DYSREGULATION ZONE

- Being “flooded”—brain isn’t working.
- Fight, flight or freeze
- Screaming
- Hitting
- Throwing



### SELF-MANAGEMENT & HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

- Assure safety for living things.
- Keep or regain your own calm. If you aren’t calm, take your own time out—staying present when you are upset only makes things worse.
- Be available to help your child regain their regulation, or manage their environment to help with this.
- Practice healthy emotional boundaries. Avoid: talking, lecturing, rationalizing, fixing, advising, debating, correcting, threatening. Verbal interventions unlikely to work.
- Some kids need more space from you during this time, some kids need you to be physically present, but generally without much talking or involvement.

## CALMING DOWN

- Quieter voices
- Slower movements
- Hiding
- Physical “slump”



### WAIT!

- If your child is de-escalating, LET THEM! Don’t intervene and mess it up.
- Time passing is helpful in de-escalation. Avoid rushing into the circle-back phase.
- Look for a physical slump or relaxation.
- “Do you want a hug to help you with your feelings?”
- Remember, you might need this time, too. Check your own physical state before re-engaging, too.



## BACK TO NORMAL

- Looks, acts, and reacts like your normal kid.



### CIRCLE BACK

- An hour or a week later, you can circle back to address important things related to the incident.
- Most important: reconnect the relationship and repair. Apologize for your part.
- Teach. For example, you can talk about the healthy coping skills YOU use when you have a hard time, that your child might also find helpful.
- Reparation. Work with your child to identify something that you can do together to ‘make right’ in some way.
- Please note, you don’t need to do all of these. Every situation doesn’t need a lesson and/or reparation, and some kids will have to work hard to build the ability to tolerate more than a few seconds of a circle back conversation.

## PARENTHOOD, UNDERSTOOD

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