

TRANSCRIPTION OF CO-REGULATION: BUILDING SKILLS IN SAFE SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS BY MARGERY ARNOLD

Hello. I am Marjorie Arnold. I'm a licensed psychologist in California. I work with kids and families for many years and have a special place in my heart for adoptive families, for kids and families involved with the foster care system in various capacities. And I am an adoptive parent of two young women, and I also volunteer on the advisory board for Traumawise.

Before I get started, I want to show you something that will help you follow along. It is in your packet. You're Welcome Packet. There's this tool which is the saying Needs and Meeting the Needs tool. It's just a spreadsheet, but we're going to refer to it. If you look at it all at once, it's a little, little overwhelming. Don't worry, we're going to break it down and we are going to use that today. So hopefully this will be a helpful tool for you or for people that you work with, and you can adapt it however you like.

So, we're going to talk about co regulation today. That is the process by which we learn to calm ourselves with the help of caring and supporting others. We learn to regulate our own emotions in the safety of others. For example, if a six-year-old boy gets stung by a bee, he for the first time I remember the first time I got stung by a bee, I, you know, ran to my mom and I was just beside myself and my mom stayed calm. She knew exactly what was going on and, and she just can look, and she just looked into my eyes and said, you know, it's okay, here's what's happened.

Here's what we're going to do. All right. So, let's use that example. This one. There we go. Okay. So, we're going to use the bee sting example. And I'm going to explain to you what happens generally in co regulation. And I came up with a little acronym. It's not that original is Koko. So let's start with the B example. So the caregiver might take a deep breath, regulate themselves, access their own felt security, and get down to eye level with the child and look them in the eye. And then the caregiver might offer some compassion and some safe options. So the caregiver might say, I'm so sorry that happened. Really hurts, doesn't it? Let's get away from that bee's nest and put some bee sting medicine on it on that spot. Okay. And also, if the child is well, we're using the bee sting, and this is a child in co-regulation. You might also coach a skill to help them meet their need so that so for example, in this example, you know, it hurts so bad. Here let me let's take three deep breaths together to see if that helps while we wait for the medicine to start. Okay. We're going to breathe together. We're going to go. Okay. Or maybe the child is just jumping around so much they can't take a deep breath and that's okay. You can talk. I see that you're jumping to get that bee sting out. That's good. Let's jump higher. Good job, because exercise is going to help get those chemicals out. And also, I see that you're crying and that is so good because that's going to help get that bee sting out. So, you just let those tears flow.

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And finally, all of that is done in the context of the caregivers own, calm, nervous system. And what happens if the caregiver can't regulate themselves in that situation? Well, they probably shouldn't be offering co-regulation, and that's okay. There are times when we cannot offer our nervous system. It's not for everyone all the time. So, we have to take good care of it.

And so, one thing the caregiver might do, not necessarily in a bee sting situation, but something that's a little bit harder to get to your own nervous, your own calm, nervous system. Say, I want to help you, but I can't right now. So, I'm going to go calm myself and take care of myself and then we'll come back and we'll work through this. Not necessarily something you would say in Bee Sting again, but very useful for other situations.

Okay, So what I want us to learn today about co regulation when you we're done here is that I'm hoping that you can tell five ways to know that a person is calm and safe and where you are safe to co regulate yourself. I would like for you to also tell five ways to know that a body would benefit from co regulation. It's something that our bodies know. Nervous systems know about other people, but maybe we've never verbalized it and I want us to verbalize it so that we'll just remember things to look for. And I want you to have a list of go to coping skills that work for you. And I want you to know what to do when you cannot get to a calm state.

All righty. So, let's do a, before we get too much further, let's do a review of the concept we learned the other day, which was felt security and the example I just use the adult is using their own felt security to help the child feel more calm. Here are some things to know about felt security, how it develops and what it helps us do. So, it is personal to you when someone you care for shows you with their words or their behaviors that their needs are not being met. Believe them. They may be showing you in a way that is, as we say, not appropriate. That's okay. Now is not the time to tell them. So now is just the time to notice that that they something's wrong and we don't try to convince them in that moment that nothing is wrong with our words. We can convince them with their bodies, though, in some situations which we're going to talk about. All right. Growing felt security takes repetitive attachment. Let's go back. Thanks to repetitive attachment. I mean, repetitive practice of seeing a need and meeting the need, seeing the need, and meeting the need and that gives us, once we have a lot of that repetitive practice, that felt security, gives us the freedom to go out and to learn and to grow and to explore. And we won't be able to learn or grow or explore if we do not feel safer.

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And finally, all of this building felt security does take discomfort going through discomfort. And in it we also have to take risks for going to build it. Hopefully they are tolerable risks, and we will do that with coping skills. But most importantly in the context of co regulation of other people's nervous systems who can scaffold us, we can depend on to help us get our needs met. Okay, what if you don't have a felt sense of security? Can you get it? Yes, you can. You can get it with help. And we're going to talk about well, we're all, we all have situations in which we need to get somebody to help us regulate and we also help others regulate themselves. It's something that us mammals do.

So, I'm going to switch back and forth throughout this presentation. Sometimes you're going to be the person whose needs need to get met, and sometimes you're going to be the person who is helping your nervous system to co regulate someone else. So, let's think about co regulation as a map for exploring the unknown, because like I said before, when people have felt security, they can go out and explore. If you don't have it, you might be able to scaffold and learn new things with somebody else. So, if we have that map, you got to you have to know where you're going. I mean where you are to get to where you're going

. So, in the case of co regulation, the body tells you and, and really all the other mammals around you that that the body isn't safe, and something is wrong here. Another person can help that body co regulate. Co regulation often starts with the naming of an emotion, so to help you figure out where you are on that map and if you don't know whether you're feeling fear, anger or hurt, another person might be able, who is calm and feels regulated, they might be able to help you name it. And when a body is dysregulated, there's a lot of emotions that a person might be feeling. But these three are a good guess: fear, anger, hurt.

These are, there's a lot of other things that bodies need when they don't feel safe. Food, water, first aid, all kinds of things. But today, we're going to talk about emotional needs. So, if you had a special thermometer that could rate the intensity on a scale from 0 to 10, it might look like this, the colors to mean something. We're going to get to that. So, my nervous system, if I'm co regulating you, it's going to tune into yours. I'm going to take a deep breath, regulate myself and ask you what's happening? It's happening. What do you need? Such a good question. What do you need, in this moment? If you don't know how you're feeling, I might say you look afraid, and you'll tell me if you're afraid or not. Or you'll tell me, no I'm mad and I might say something like, Well, how bad is it? You know, like 1 to 10. So, we know the emotion we're dealing with and we know the intensity of the emotion. Those are both very important for how we're going to co regulate.

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Okay. So no matter, you know, no matter what emotion you're in, if you're from 0 to 3, you're you know, you're pretty chill. But if you're from 4 to 7, the intensity is increasing, it's being noticed. And if you're on 8 to 10, on a scale of fear or anger or hurt, you should probably withdraw to a place where you can be safe and get some comfort. You are not going to be learning or exploring or growing. The only thing you're going to be growing is those neurons that help you go to a place of healthy safety.

Okay, so but that zone between four and seven, let's call that the learning zone, that yellow colored zone is what is where we're going to really focus on today. You can co regulate anywhere from 0 to 10, but like I said, from 0 to 4, you probably don't really need to co regulate. You're not going to be, your body's not going to be sending out signals, letting other people around, you know that something's wrong. However, that zone between four and seven, that is where co regulation is going to allow you to, to go out and explore, to learn. This is a moderate amount of discomfort, a moderate amount of moderate intensity of a just an uncomfortable emotion. But that's the place where we learn to deal with uncomfortable emotions. So, in this zone, you might be coaching someone in a coping skill, or just being there to help them regulate themselves, so that, until they can get the confidence to be able to do whatever it is that they want to they're trying to do at that moment. We're going to come back to that zone, for a moment, but let's look at the other two a little more intensely.

Okay. Let's take fear, for example. If you're working with a therapist on anxiety, you might be using an image like this thermometer. Psychologists have learned that that zone between four and seven is the ideal zone for practicing coping skills from yeah, from 0 to 3, Our anxiety is so low we don't need help coping. But and also from 8 to 10, we're just kidding ourselves if we think that taking some deep breath and some positive self-talk is just going to help us do whatever it is we need to do. Now, if you have fear at a level of 8 to 10, you need to seek safety and comfort. And, and, if you're really that afraid, your body's that ready for danger, you're probably going to need about a good 20 minutes of safety and comfort before you can calm down and come back to whatever it is you were doing.

Okay, That's okay. So, when you're 0 to 4, your body is in the state of rest and digest. Your body can do things. It can use its energy to do things like just rest and digest your food. Let's talk about that a little bit. So, one of the most important things for us to know in co regulation are the sensations that help us know that we are safe. It's you know, a lot of times we focus on those that zone between four and seven to know how to regulate our emotions. But it's really important also to get really good at checking in with the

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sensations that help us know that we are safe. So, in your, on your list of seeing the needs and meeting the needs on that tool in your welcome kit, there's this list and it's in blue and it talks about things that let you know that you're safe. Your stomach rumbles if you start to if you get really good at noticing your levels, when you get to being like a level four on fear anxiety, you could just stop and take some breath and just wait. You'll hear your stomach rumble. And once you clear that anxiety, you'll hear it. You might also notice that your breath is very even keeled. It comes at regular intervals. Your exhales might be longer than your inhales. You're just in a state. You're that's when your exhales are longer than your inhales. That helps activate your parasympathetic nervous system, which is the one that calms you down. You might yawn, you might sigh, you might swallow. Because again, those digestive juices are flowing, and you might need a swallow. Your heart rate's going to be low, your pupils constrict, you can't see those, but you can look in the mirror and your muscles are going to relax. And pretty much the opposite of all of those are some of the things that tell us when we're not we're not safe, Right. That again, that that's called the rest and digest system.

Okay. The next zone is really important if you're co regulating either infants or toddlers or other humans who have had a lot of trauma in early childhood. And those folks may not have had enough of the repeated patterns of needs being noticed and needs being met to have a sense of felt security. So in my last presentation, I asked you to come up with three people you could go to if you were overwhelmed. And also, I would like you to think about three places you can go to when you need to seek safety and comfort. You don't need three, you just need one. But especially the places it's nice to have places in your usual environment. So, one for home, one for work, one for school, whatever your environments are, it's nice to know where your safe spot is that you can go for comfort and just to calm down. It might be your car, it might be behind a closed door, it might be walking. And a lot of schools now have come down, places which something that we've been trying to get for a long time in the mental health field, just letting schools, schools are starting to understand that when children and nervous systems are not feeling safe, they really can't learn. So they do need to know, what they need to learn is how to calm, how to get themselves back regulated so that they can learn.

Okay, So also on that tool, you're going to see these colors in red, some things that, you know, some places you can put those. And we already, I already asked you to put in the other day the people's names that you can go to when you don't feel, something's wrong. And with healthy comfort here, these are just some examples that I have and that when your brain is not okay, well, so these are some examples of, you know, honestly things that help me and I like to put on my Uggs. I have like time of day with just my Uggs or my slippers. You don't have to put on regular shoes to go out and do things. I like to wrap up in a blanket. I have a weighted blanket, even just drinking cool water, just taking a few sips, and swallowing, that helps bring

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things down and maybe drinking some warm tea, the smells of it, any kind of healthy distraction. When you're really elevated, you know, you don't have a lot of energy to be doing anything that takes effort. So something just watching Netflix, you know, whatever, or your favorite streaming service, maybe you have a friend you can call. I like to go outside, be in nature. Exercising is really good for getting all those chemicals out that get our body ready to fight or run or flee or freeze exercise. It's really important, stretching, yoga, whatever is your thing that helps you to feel safe and comfortable. Go do those things.

Now, let's look at what's not on the list? What's not on the list is, are things like, you know, escape or unhealthy ways of getting to comfort, such as there's no alcohol, there's no workaholism, there's no chemicals or behaviors that give us those chemicals like overworking or gambling or obsessively playing video games. Those are not healthy. So we're not going to do those things. But if you're going to help somebody co regulate who's in an eight, nine or ten, you're going to need to engage in activities that take a lower mount a concentration, and you're going to need to give that person space and you're going to need to help them access what they think is safe.

So we this is a slide from before where we're just going to we're going to skip through that because we're running out of time here.

So let's go back to that learning zone of 4 to 7. Our felt security gives us that opportunity to take some risks. If we have security within us, we can maybe try some new things. But if we're feeling too overwhelmed, we might need somebody there to help us. And so this is going to be the place where you can really coagulate with someone. And all co regulation is, is seeing a need, regulating your own body so that you can help another person with that need, and then offering your own, offering that person some safety.

Okay. So but how do you see the need? There's a lot of signs that are going to show us that a body needs some help and some of these sensations. This, again, is on your sheet that these are things that show that a person's nervous system is getting ramped up for something that might be a challenge. And you can learn to read these yourself. They're kind of, like I said, the opposite of those other ones that we did now. But also, our bodies do behaviors when we are upset and we haven't quite figured it out yet. So, you, whoever you care you for, or maybe even for yourself, it's good to know what are the things? What are your signs that

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say, I need to regulate myself or I need someone to help me regulate. For me, it was hearing the urge in my voice. I'm not very good at reading my own body. I've gotten a lot better. But before I wasn't as good with that. But. But I tune in to sound, and when I would hear the certain kind of edge in my voice, I'd be like, I am at five, six, or seven, I really need to come down. And so, you're going to have to know for yourself what yours are and for those that you caregive for, you know, what are the behaviors that other people might see when that person's getting upset.

So you have to see the need. All right. And then you meet the need. And as we talked about before, there's a Koko we can go through that. But it's helpful to have these things for yourself and for those people, your caregiver for what are the activities that help me cope with small amounts of risk When I'm uncomfortable in that 4 to 7 zone, what are the things I can do to help me reregulate myself?

And then who are three people working correctly with? All right. And so let's go back to our Koko here. When we're in that learning zone of 4 to 7, the caregiver notices that somebody is in that zone. If you if you think they're an eight, nine or ten, you help them get comfort and safety. But if they're in that learning zone, you just regulate yourself, access your own felt security, then offer compassion and safe options. So offer empathy, naming that emotion. Here's two things you can do. I notice that you're really angry and upset. There's two things you can do, and you might even coach them in a skill if you're helping them to learn some coping skills. And you know what their coping skills are, and they are willing to do that with you, then you can do that.

And all the while you're accessing your own calm, nervous system. So COCO, we're going to use COCO again. I want to use COCO, I want you to use COCO did script out a difficult interaction in your own setting. I'm going to give you an example and then I'll have you do one for your own setting.

Okay, so let's say you set a limit with your teenager. They can't go out with their friends until their homework is done and they yell and throw something. So what is the need in that situation? It's not that they need to go out with their friends. Hey, the need is that they need help expressing their anger appropriately and safely. Okay, so if that person is at an eight, nine or ten, which they very well might be, if they're yelling and throwing things, let them get to their safe place. But if they, and then once they're calmed down enough, they're going to get a chance for a do over in my house. That's what we do. Sometimes it takes the next day until we do a do over, but we get a chance to express our anger

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in a different way and, and that gives me the chance to be compassionate with the person. Yeah, I know you're really upset. I know you wanted to go. I just, you know, but what are some things, here are some things you could do instead of yelling and throwing things. You can tell me how upset you are. You can say, Mom can we please talk about this? Let me. This is really important to me. Can we talk about this and give them ways to, to advocate for themselves? All right. And that's me coaching them in a way in a skill which is advocating for themselves. And so we need to do that. All the while, my nervous system is calm might also be that my nervous system isn't calm enough.

And I'll say, you know, we're going to talk about that later when we're both more calm. We don't try to address that problem there. But we I do let that person now, that teenager, know that that they've kind of gone beyond that. We have higher expectations in our house.

Okay. So I want you to now use a COCO for yourself. And what are some, some situations that you might need to use this for and how can you script some of those things out? And it really helps if you have that spreadsheet or parts of it that you, you talk about ahead of time before you get to this need to co regulate. It's better if you, you're going to learn those skills, you're going to agree to things when people are regulated and then you practice when they need a little bit of regulation and then you help them get to safety and comfort that they need a lot.

And that is what I have for you today. So, thank you for joining me, and good luck on your journey.