

Healthy Strategies for Responding to Challenging Emotions in Children



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Overview

- ▶ What is mental health?
- ▶ What is emotion regulation and emotion dysregulation?
- ▶ What factors contribute to the development of emotion regulation?
- ▶ Parent-child relationship: How to help children manage their emotions
- ▶ How parents can use mindfulness and self-compassion to manage their emotions

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What is mental health?

Children's Mental Health

The term “child and adolescent mental health” refers to the social, emotional, and behavioral well-being of children and adolescents, and is considered an integral part of healthy development.



Children's Mental Health

- Just as with physical health, no one goes through life without some mental health problems.
- Many such problems are a normal part of life. For the most part, we learn and grow from them.
- For children and adolescents, however, adult awareness, sensitivity, and guidance are very important to help them to learn and grow from such problems.

Statistics on Children's Mental Health

- ▶ As many as **1 in 5 children and youth** in Ontario will experience some form of mental health problem.
 - ▶ 5 out of 6 of those kids **will not receive the treatment they need.**
- ▶ 70% of mental health problems have their onset during childhood or adolescence.
- ▶ 17% of children ages 2-5 years meet diagnostic criteria for mental health problems.
- ▶ 28% of students report not knowing where to turn when they wanted to talk to someone about mental health

Children's Mental Health Ontario (CMHO)



Determinants of Mental Health

Biological Factors	Family Factors	Environmental Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Temperament▪ Genetics▪ Learning ability▪ Social skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Attachment▪ Parenting style▪ Communication▪ Family structure & circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Social conditions▪ School▪ Community▪ Sense of belonging

Emotion Regulation

What is Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation refers to a person's ability to provide adequate control over his or her emotional responses

Three levels of emotional responses:

1-Neurophysiological and biochemical responses (basic)

2-Behavioural-expressed through a person's actions

3-Cognitive responses (spoken, written, thought)

Carolyn Webster-Stratton

Emotion Dysregulation

When emotional responses are **chronically**
out of control

Carolyn Webster-Stratton

Billy's Little League baseball team had won four games and lost four. On this particular day they were playing the best team in the league. It was a close game, but Billy's team was consistently ahead. The team was ecstatic. But suddenly in the last 10 minutes, the game turned and the other team was ahead by three points. The pressure was on! The pitcher for Billy's team became so anxious that he threw the ball to first rather than to home base, and the other team was able to get another player home. Finally, the other team struck out and Billy went up to bat, trembling. When he struck out, he was so mad that he threw his helmet onto the field. His father commented, "What drama! Can't he learn to control himself?" A second boy, Eric, struck out and stoically left the field, showing no emotional reaction. Jack and Ian, on the other hand, burst into tears as they realized they were going to lose. One parent yelled to them, "10-year-old boys are too old to cry! Don't be babies." Another parent advised, "Don't cry — get mad!" As the team left the field in despair one boy said, "I'm going to break their pitcher's leg." Later Billy explained to his father, "They were just lucky."

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How do children learn
emotion regulation?

The emotional experiences of newborns and young infants occur most commonly during periods of interaction with a caregiver (such as feeding, comforting, and holding).

Centre of Developing Child

By the end of the preschool years, children who have acquired a strong emotional foundation have the capacity to anticipate, talk about, and use their awareness of their own and others' feelings to better manage everyday social interactions

Centre of Developing Child

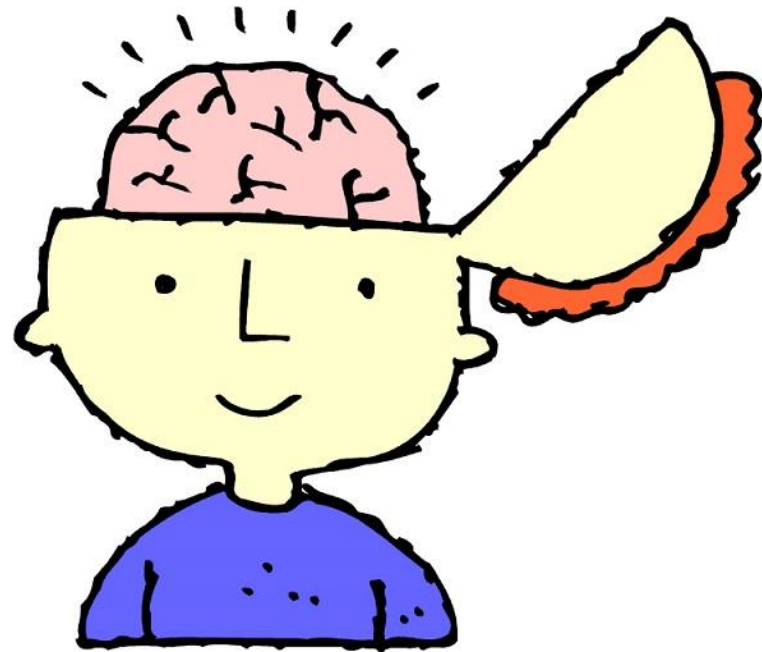
During the school age years, children develop their own ability for emotion regulation. They can have inner experiences that are not expressed outwardly or can express experiences more outwardly

Teenage years can feel like an emotional upheaval with hormones coming into the picture. It can feel like a regression in emotion regulation

Factors supporting emotion regulation

- 1-Maturation of the child's neurological inhibitory system
- 2-The child's temperament and developmental status
- 3-Parental socialization and environmental support

How do emotions develop as our brain develops?



Brains Develop from the Bottom Up

“Complex” structures of brain (neocortex): control complex functions (language, abstract thinking)



Limbic System: controls emotion processing, self-regulation, arousal, memory formation



“Lower” (primitive) structures of the brain control simple regulatory functions (heart rate, body temperature, sleep, appetite)

- Zilberstein (2014)

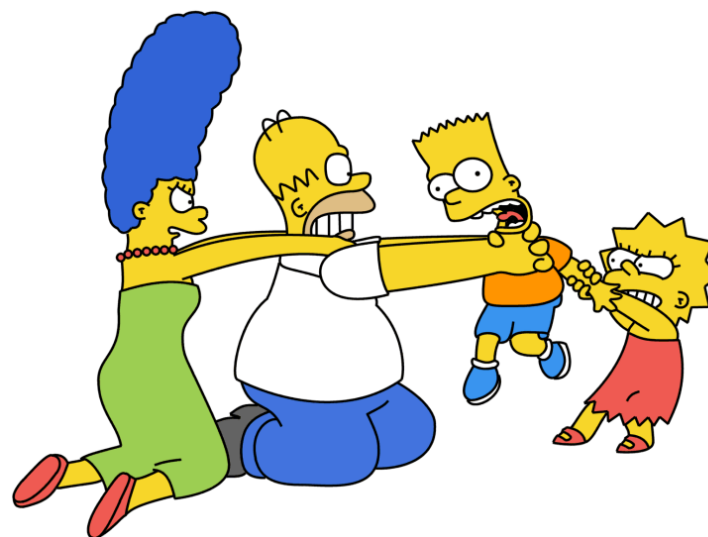
Integrating the Upstairs Brain and the Downstairs Brain

- ▶ Downstairs brain is intact at birth
- ▶ Upstairs brain is “under construction” during childhood and adolescence.

*****So don't expect your children to make good decisions all the time, or to remain in control of their emotions and actions.*****

As young children develop, their early emotional experiences literally become embedded in the architecture of their brains.

Parent-Child Relationship



Creating a secure base (attachment)

Children need a secure base to explore their fears in the world

Parents/caregivers are the secure base who can provide children a safe space to grow

Attachment



Provides:

- caregiving
- responds to child's behavioural cues
- emotional tie with child
- varies according to caregiver's reflective capacity

Develops:

- Sense of being cared for by caregiver
- gradually develops mental representation or schema of an attachment relationship

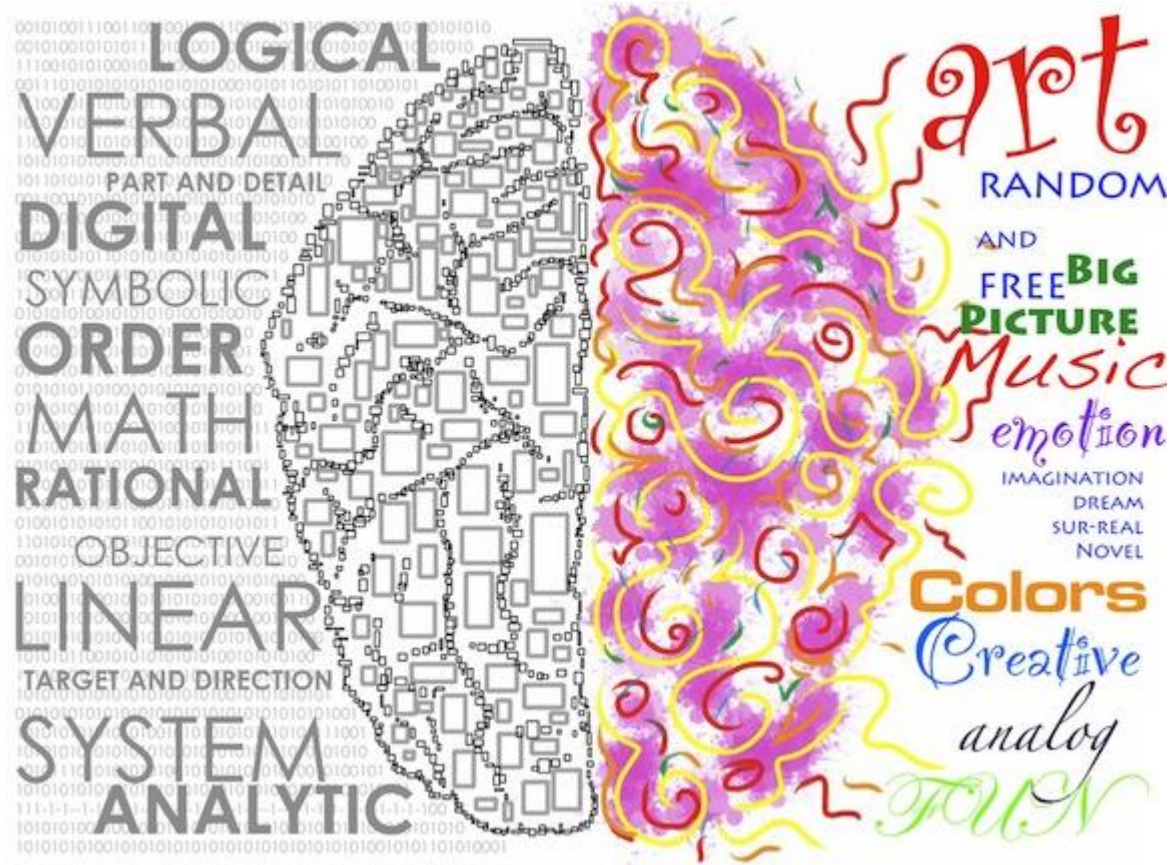
It is in the relationship with the parents/caregivers that children can safely learn how to manage their emotions...



Often things look more like this....



Left and Right Brain



Left=Logical

Right=Emotional



Connect with the Right Brain (Emotional Brain)

When your child is upset, connect first emotionally, right brain to right brain.

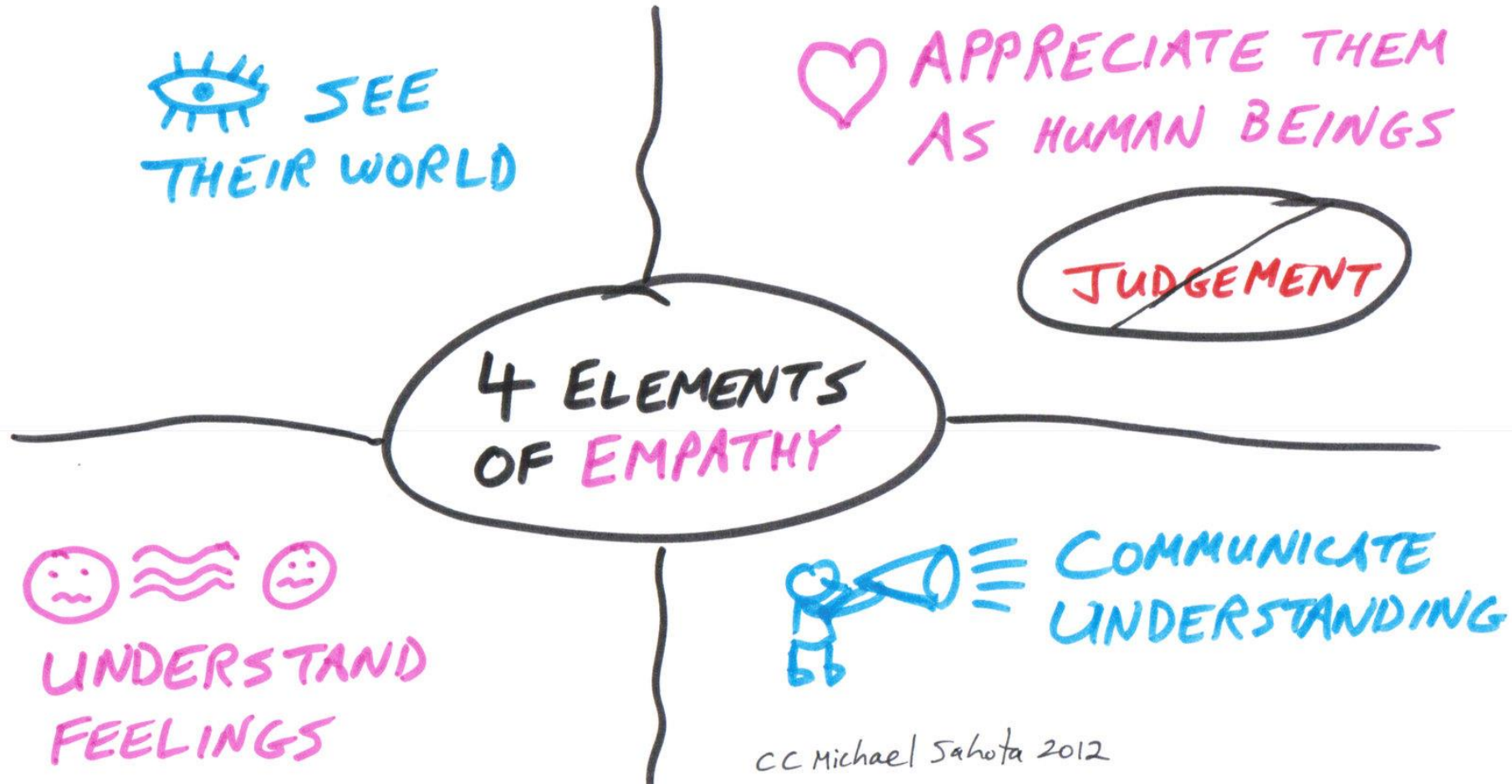
- ▶ Connect physically (when possible)
- ▶ Name it to tame it
- ▶ Empathy
- ▶ Validation

What is Empathy?

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another



Components of Empathy



Validation

- ▶ The first level of validation is being present.
- ▶ The second level of validation is accurate reflection.
- ▶ The third level of validation is reading a person's behavior and guessing what they might be feeling.



Validation Continue

- ▶ The fourth level of validation is understanding the person's behavior in terms of their history and biology.
- ▶ The fifth level of validation is normalizing or recognizing emotional reactions that anyone would have.
- ▶ The sixth level of validation is radical genuineness.

NEVER

**IN THE HISTORY OF CALMING DOWN.
HAS ANYONE EVER CALMED DOWN
BY BEING TOLD TO CALM DOWN.**



CALM DOWN

And now the Left Brain

Once your child has calmed down, help children role-play the situation that caused them stress

- 1-Define: What is the problem and how am I feeling in this situation
- 2-Brainstorm solutions: What can I do about it?
- 3-Evaluation possible solutions: What would happen if I did this?
- 4-Implement: Am I do doing what I decided to do?
- 5-Evaluate Results: How did it turn out?

What can parents do to support their children's development of emotion regulation?

- 1-Provide as much stability and consistency as possible
- 2-Accept your child's emotions and emotional responses
- 3-Talk about your own feelings
- 4-Encourage children to talk about the event
- 5-Model emotion regulation
- 6-Teach children positive self talk about the event

When parents emotions are in need of a
secure base....



Co-regulation

A person's ability to regulate/manage their emotions using a partner

Ask yourself:

- ▶ Am I calm?
- ▶ How do I feel about my child right now, this situation?
- ▶ How can I instill a sense of safety and calmness into this moment?
- ▶ How can I reflect the state I want my child to adopt?

Mindfulness

Paying attention to the present moment, on purpose, non-judgementally, as if your life depended on it.

-J. Kabat-Zinn



Mindfulness: Core Skills

- ▶ **Observe:** Notice without reacting; watch thoughts floating by.
- ▶ **Describe:** Label feelings as observations.
- ▶ **Participate:** Enter the experience fully.

Do these things...

- ▶ Non-judgmentally (with acceptance)
- ▶ With one mind; let go of distractions
- ▶ Focused on your objective (let go of anger)

Mindfulness and Parenting

Awareness

- ▶ Bring yourself into the present moment by deliberately adopting an erect and dignified posture. If possible, close your eyes.
- ”What is my experience right now...in thoughts...in feelings...and in bodily sensations?
- Acknowledge and register your experience, even if it is unwanted.

Gathering

- ▶ Then, gently redirect full attention to breathing, to each in-breath and to each outbreath as they follow, one after the other. Your breath can function as an anchor to bring you into the present and help you tune into a state of awareness and stillness.

Expanding

- ▶ Expand the field of your awareness around your breathing, so that it includes a sense of the body as a whole, your posture, and facial expression. The breathing space provides a way to step out of automatic pilot mode and reconnect with the present moment.

Self-Compassion and Parenting

“By teaching our children to have self-compassion, we can help them deal with the inevitable pain and imperfection of life. By being compassionate to ourselves, we can better handle the frustrations and difficulties of parenting, so that the worlds toughest profession-and lets face it, parenting is a profession, just an unpaid one-isn't quite so tough.”

Neff, 2011

Resources

Books and Websites

- ▶ The Whole Brain Child-Daniel Siegel
- ▶ www.hincksdellcrest.org/abc
- ▶ Pathways to Competence-Sarah Landy
- ▶ www.cmho.org
- ▶ selfcompassion.org

Children's Mental Health Centres

- ▶ Hincks-Dellcrest Centre 416-924-1164 or www.hincksdellcrest.org
- ▶ Michael Garron Hospital (TEGH) (416) 469-6580 ext. 3144

THANK YOU