Strategies to Improve Emotion Regulation of Educators and Students

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What is “Affect?”

• Specific Emotions + Diffuse Feelings
• Guides Attention (Orienting/Alerting)
• Origin of Motivation (Wanting/Liking)
• Guides Behavior (Reacting/Seeking)
• Imprints Memories—(Un)forgettable
• Creates the Self (I feel, therefore I am)

• Foundation of all Relationships
What is “Affect?”

“Ibn Arabi says, If it were not for this love, the world would never appear in its concrete existence.”

Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love*
What is “Dysregulation?” – States of Body/Mind that are:

- Too much/little (outside a tolerable “window” of arousal/intensity)
- Confusion (sound & fury / utter silence)
- Unknowable/Inexpressible
- Unpredictable/Uncontrollable
- Can’t be recovered from/re-set
Relevance of Trauma to Affect Dysregulation

Traumatic Stress = Dysregulation

Adaptation to Events and Internal Reactions that are Unpredictable/Uncontrollable and that are Outside of a Tolerable Window of Arousal/Intensity
Relevance of Complex Trauma to Affect Dysregulation

Complex Trauma Involves Disorganization of the Primary Attachment Relationships in which Affect Regulation is Learned

Survival Trumps Co-Regulation
Vignette 1: 15 yr old obese inattentive girl

- CSA, CPA, parental DV, emotional abuse
- >20 out-of-home placements since age 8
- PTSD, RAD, DissociativeDNOS, Bipolar Dx
- Described as: vengeful, impulsive, reckless, mood swings, explosive temper, self-harm
- Describes self: “garbage, worthless, reject”
- In school: always late, daydreams, requests hall passes often, leaves class like a rocket
- Strengths: determined, studious, articulate
Vignette 2: 13 yr old adopted Russian orphan girl
- Abandoned by substance using Bio Mother
- CSA, CPA by babysitters/foster parents
- 13 crisis hospitalizations suicidal/self-harm
- Diagnoses: IED, RAD, Bulimia, SUD, BPD
- Described as: isolate, controlling, explosive, sexualized, intrusive, vindictive, narcissistic
- Describes self: “disgusting, wish I were dead”
- In school: attends irregularly, defiant, irritable
- Strengths: engaging when in good mood, self-reliant, enjoys reading and drawing
Vignette 3: 14 yr old boy living with bio father
- Likely CSA by substance using bio mother’s boyfriend age 4-7, molested 9 yo sister x1 yr
- Diagnoses: ADHD, GAD, MDD, Mj SUD
- Described as: avoidant, worrier, ”
- Describes self: “confused, stupid, slow, easily bored, I sleep to escape, I need mj to relax”
- In school: “forgets” homework, gives up when taking tests, extremely self-critical on all work
- Strengths: intelligent, friendly, sense of humor
FREEDOM steps

FOCUS
  Slow down, Orient, Self-Check
RECOGNIZE
  Stress Triggers
EMOTION
  One MAIN Emotion
EVALUATE
  One MAIN Thought
DEFINE
  One MAIN Personal Goal
OPTIONS
  Build On Your Positive Choices
MAKE a contribution
  Make the World a Better Place
A Practical Template for Affect Regulation: “SOS”

• Step I: Slow Down
  – Sweep your mind clear of all thoughts

• Step II: Orient Yourself
  – Choose one thing you want to think about; whatever is most important to you at this moment
  – Focus on What Is, not What Isn’t/Should Be

• Step III: Self Check (Scale = 1 to 10)
  – How much Stress? How much Control?
  – How much Anger? How strong an Urge?
  – How connected in your relationships?
Affect Regulation is Most Crucial in Transitions

• Beginnings & Endings (of the year, semester, day, class, topic, activity, each interaction)
• Late Arrivals or Early Departures (note how these may parallel students’ life experiences)
• Important Relationships (make sure students have something tangible to remind them that you continue to believe in and think of them)
As educators, you make a contribution to every student every time you provide a living role model of how to recognize stressors and stress reactions while also focusing on what is truly important and choosing your options accordingly.