

Arousal & Regulation

Session Strategies and Activities



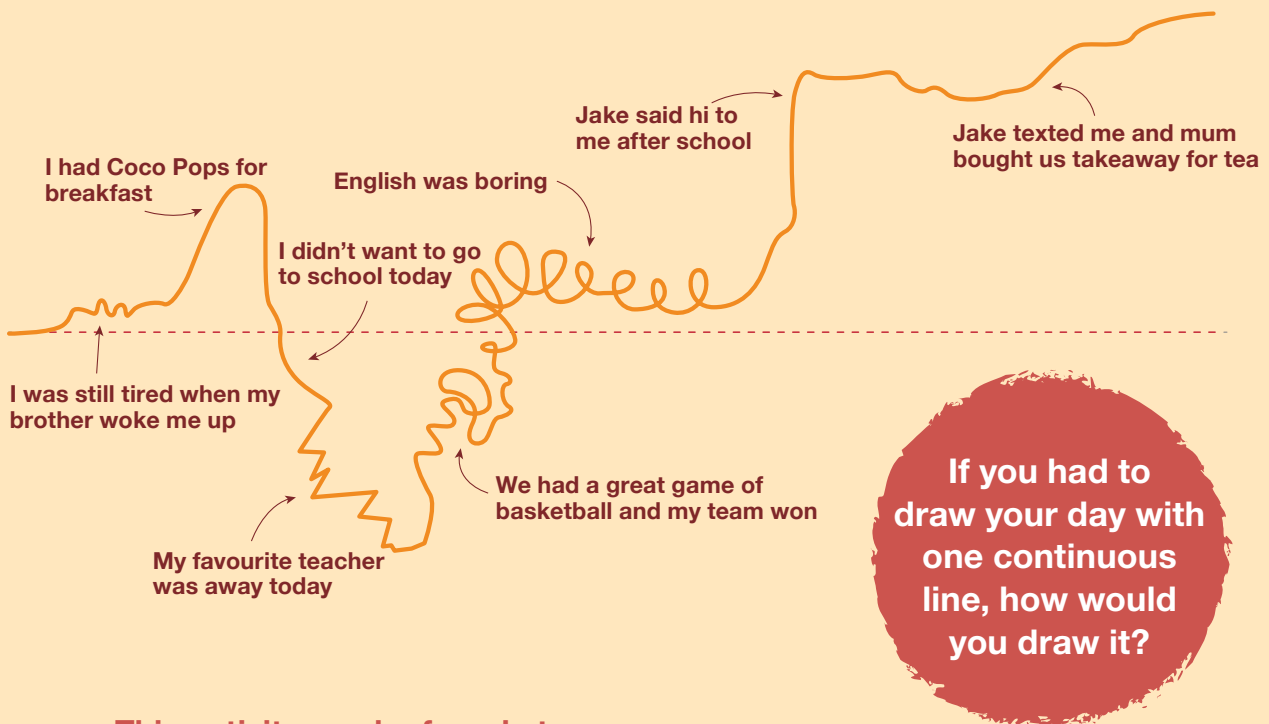
Line of My Day Activity

The goal of this activity is to map out with or for an individual student's arousal over a time continuum. This could be over a lesson period, a day at school, or over a week.

Using the document "Tracking your student's Own Window of Tolerance" (in the Handouts section), track the movement in and outside of the Window of Tolerance over your chosen time frame.

The purpose of the activity is for the child or young person to gain an understanding of how they are throughout their day and to anticipate when they may be feeling, say, more anxious or worried or excited. This can then assist to help both the adult and child to know what they need the most at that time.

For those working with children and young people, this can be used as an assessment or reflection tool to monitor their hyper arousal and hypo arousal, and when they are in their Window of Tolerance or overshooting or undershooting it.



This activity can be found at:

<https://australianchildhoodfoundation.crackerhq.com/pvl/9b20e31a6fa3c43f414af2fcb00f1a52/share/v1/1aaffc3d-7c3c-4df1-993f-50c0d5062a16>

Arousal & Regulation Session Strategies and Activities



Senses Activities

Engage the senses

Set up table stations or stations around the room. Have different items available to engage the participant's senses. ie use fruit smelling textas or scratch and sniff stickers, wrapped peppermint lollies to eat, essential oil on a cotton wool ball to smell or various textures to touch. Which ones calm? Which ones alert?

Notice and name

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch/feel/sense
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 thing you can taste
- 1 thing you can smell



Aligning the Spine Activities

Our midline extends down our spine and when it is aligned there is no collapse or compression of the spine.

Under stress it is hard to maintain spinal alignment

Think, too, about seating options for students.

Movement breaks help

Activities to try:

- Move like you have a tail
- Tick tock like a clock until you find your centre
- Imagine being lifted by a hook from the top of your head, while feeling the pull of gravity on the tail of your spine.
- Zip yourself up or pull yourself up with an imaginary string
- Walk with a toy balanced on your head
- Stretch up and become a tree or a tall tower



Strategies remaining in the Window of Tolerance - Use of self

Creating safety – supporting the social engagement system

Environment



A safe environment is paramount. Consider physical, emotional and cultural safety. Is the environment free from violence and abuse, responsive to physical and emotional needs and inclusive of cultural needs. Also ensure the environment considers the sensory needs of the child. Spaces that have too much stimulation - loud noises, bright lights, strong smells or too many pictures on the walls can be overwhelming for children experiencing trauma. Understanding the child's individual needs and providing enough sensory stimulation for growth but not too much so that the child is overwhelmed is the key. Remember safety is an individual experience. What seems safe for one person may not be for another.

Proximity



Consider the child's need for closeness or space. Each child is different. Take into account the context, your relationship and the developmental age of the child. Being attuned to the child will help you to navigate what the child needs. If a child is dysregulated always remain within the line of sight of the child, unless your safety or the safety of others is at risk. Remember time in rather than time out. Any direct contact with the child should be initiated by the child.

Eye contact



Eye contact is an important aspect of social engagement and enables feelings of connectedness and validation. Eye contact can be threatening though to a child who has experienced trauma as their social engagement system is usually on high alert. Consider ways to engage with the child using minimal eye contact. Chatting while driving along in the car, creating art or shooting hoops is a great way to engage the child in conversation and is less threatening than sitting face to face. Remember, each child is different so be guided by the child.

Facial expressions



Children who have experienced trauma can often have trouble reading facial expressions and will often interpret expressions as anger or disappointment. Be aware of your facial expressions when engaging with the child. Aim for contingent facial expressions that look to mirror the child's inner experience – this conveys empathy and helps the child to understand themselves and feel heard. When the child is regulated, look for opportunities to assist the child to develop emotional literacy by using cards/games that match faces to feelings.

Tone of voice



Prosody is the rhythm, pitch and tone of the voice, like when a mother alters her voice to soothe her baby. Tone of voice can have a powerful impact on a child's sense of safety. In situations where a child is dysregulated, consider the tone and pitch of your voice. A soft and gentle voice is more likely to deescalate an overwhelmed child.

Posture and gestures



Consider your posture and gestures. How you approach the child will determine how safe or unsafe they may feel. If your posture is puffed up with your shoulders back, the child may read you as defensive and primed to fight. A posture that is strong, yet open and welcoming will help to calm the child. The child's implicit memory system may interpret certain postures or gestures as threatening, so stay attuned to the child and again be guided by them. Mirroring (whilst staying within your window of tolerance) is also important. Mirroring can convey empathy and a sense of feeling heard and this will help with coregulation.

Window of Tolerance Session Strategies and Activities



Breath-based activities

- Bee and Snake breathing
- Shape breathing – squares, triangles, stars
- Sighing activity (1 2 3 Sigh - then re-peat)
- Tracing around fingers – breathing in on the up tracing, breathing out on the down tracing
- Falling feathers or silk scarves or leaf
- Blowing a pin wheel
- Blowing bubbles/Bubble Tennis
- 3-dimensional breathing
- Blowing up balloons
- Breathing apps



Grounding Activities

- Name objects in the room out loud
- Open a window or door to let in fresh air
- Encourage the child to look up and out rather than down
- Move outside if you're inside and in-side if you're outside
- Hang an interesting object at height in the space
- Ask she/he the time
- Encourage students to take their shoes off and feel their feet on the floor
- Offer the student a cold drink
- Ask student to point to a particular item – something green, something square
- See – diencephalon for more strategies
- Count how many things you can see in the room – ie circle shapes
- Tree Roots Grounding activity (see page 28)



Movement Activities

- Drink or splash face with cold water
- Fast paced/upbeat music
- Holding ice in hand or mouth
- Smell strong scents
- Try being in a cool room
- Touch Rough or prickly textures
- Use light touch i.e. feather
- Try fast and or jerky movements
- Aerobic exercise
- Use bright or flashing lights
- Practice stretches/yoga
- Eat sour or spicy foods/candy
- Go for a power walk
- Chew on crunchy food
- Try rubber band wrist snapping
- Spine alignment activities

Window of Tolerance

Session Strategies and Activities



Tree Roots Grounding activity

1. Find a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes or look downward and turn your attention to your tailbone at base of your spine.
3. Imagine that from the base of your spine you are a tree connected into the earth with roots growing very, very deeply into the ground.
4. Feel your roots held strongly in the soil connecting down from your tailbone into the deep center of the earth.
5. Feel how deep your roots grow.
6. As you are imagining your deep, deep roots, take a few slow, deep breaths. Breathe slowly in then pause, then out and pause.
7. Now that your roots are deeply planted, pay attention to your body that is the trunk of the tree. Does it feel strong and solid? What happens if you imagine some wind right now? When the wind comes, does your body feel strong? If you feel like the wind can still push your body around, then add a bigger root system. Imagine that you have heaps and heaps of roots holding you firmly to the ground. You might even grow kilometers into the earth. Feel how great it is to be strongly connected to the earth, how strong your body feels. Let's stay with that for a while.
8. Now let's take three more breaths before coming back into the room

