

How to Deal with Stressful Moments in a COVID Day

PaTTAN Behavior Byte

Session developed and facilitated by

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COVID Days = Stress (at times)

- Stress *dysregulates* us...causes us to act in physical and emotional ways that don't match the situation.
- Often, this dysregulation shows up in big movements and big emotions.

A stressed-out brain:

- experiences big emotions, little thinking
- tunes *into* visual cues, tunes *out* cues from what we hear
- signals the body to be "on go"

Intervene EARLY

When you see stress going up in your household, consider using these steps to move everyone to a more settled state. The earlier you settle dysregulation down, the better! Don't wait until a problem happens if at all possible but if a problem does happen still follow this sequence.

The Re-Set Steps



Step 1: Move Your Body...Using big movements, done in a pattern

Examples

- Jumping jacks with counting
- Wall push-ups
- Isometrics (butterfly pushes)
- Walk in a pattern (circle, square)
- Leg lunges ("Big Steps")
- Toe touches
- Big, fast arm circles
- Lift something weighted to a count

What this does:

Burns off a lot of stress chemicals fast, starts to calm the emotional part of the brain down so it can think.

Important to know:

- Pattern/count
- Pick things child can do well even when upset
- Deep pressure and weight
- AVOID practicing any aggressive action (e.g. Punch a pillow)

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Step 2: Modulate Down...Using slower/smaller movements done in a pattern and begin to tune into senses or breathing**Examples**

- Make smaller arm circles
- Stretch up onto tip toes and back down repeatedly
- Do a yoga position and hold (e.g., tree, warrior)
- Color
- Trace
- Do “Squeeze and Release” activity as follows
Imagine picking up a big lemon in each of your hands. Hold them there and feel their weight.
Now, begin to squeeze each lemon slowly, slowly, so the juice comes out of a tiny hole in it.
Squeeze until your fingertips are in the center of your palms.
Now, slowly, very slowly, feel those lemons beginning to come back to their original shape, pushing your hands slowly, slowly open.
Now they are back to the size they were before you squeezed them. Do they feel lighter?
Slowly, slowly allow them to roll to your fingertips and let them roll off your fingertips to the floor as you bend forward. Repeat, if desired.
- Belly Breathe (Sesame Street Belly Breathing videos https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_mZbzDOpyIA & <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xq3DwzX6MUw>
or do a High Five breathe as follows:
Start: Breathe in as you trace up to the top of your thumb.
Breathe out to slide down the other side.
Pointer: Breathe in and trace up to the top.
Slide down as you exhale.
Repeat with each finger, until you trace down the pinky to your wrist again.
Take your time and return in the opposite direction.

What this does: continues to burn off stress chemicals and eases the brain and body into a calm, focus state

Important to know:

- Pick things child can do well even when upset
- We tend to settle from big, controlled movement to small movement, to senses and breathing
- Avoid “stress balls” that are just about squeezing tightly
- Focus on long breath out not breath in

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Step 3: Activate Thinking...By starting to do easy thinking tasks

Examples

- Sing a song
- Say the ABCs
- Categories - Think of words that are in a certain category like types of sports, colors, animals, etc.
- Use each of the letters of name to think of words
- Recite Poems, Sayings
- Count by 1's, by 2's by 5's...etc.
- Roll dice and add or point to larger one or say "match" or "no match", etc.

What this does: primes the brain for more intense thinking, continues the settling process

Important to know:

- Pick things child is able to do pretty easily
- Do the activity with your child – taking turns (this builds connection which is good because stress breaks connection)

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Step 4: Make a Plan...

Either to get back to what was happening before or to fix a problem that happened

Option 1: Return to what you all were doing before you decided to take a settling break

Option 2: Talk about the "Toolbox" your child can use. Ask "What activities helped you become calmer?" Talk about what helps you feel calmer.

Option 3: Solve a Problem (If a problem absolutely needs to be addressed)

Problem-solving Language

1. What was the problem? (One sentence)
2. What can you do next time instead? (One sentence)
3. How can you make things better?

What this does: moves everyone back into a calmer state, focuses on how to prevent problems OR addresses problem in a growth-oriented way

Important to know:

Participating with your child provides a model (e.g., "I like to take 3 long breaths out when I am feeling stressed. It clears my head.")

If working on problem-solving avoid lecturing



Step 0: Cocoon *The Extra and Optional Step (If your child seems unready to begin with Step 1)*

Cocoon is a step we use when a child/young person is so overwhelmed that they cannot engage with us at Step 1. It is about establishing a sense of safety and respecting that the child needs to first feel listened to understood before they can move forward. Some children may physically cocoon (wrap themselves in a ball or envelope themselves in a blanket or a sweatshirt; others may simply stay in the place where they were.

It sounds like: Let me give you a couple of minutes for yourself. I will check back in shortly.

It looks like: backing away while giving the child an understanding facial message. It also may mean you offer a comfort item to them.

When you come back to them after a couple of minutes,

It sounds like: How are you? Think you can try one of the activities you said you like? Which activity do you want to do?

What this does: the brain can do nothing well if it feels unsafe. This cocoon time allows the child to feel respected and safe before needing to respond to any adult requests.

Important to know:

- Tone is everything. It should be positive and warm and express understanding and caring.

Hot Tips for all of the steps:

- Use a positive tone of voice
- Use less talking, more demonstrating. Keep language simple and minimal.
- Provide child with choices
- Do activities with child if they wish
- Typically, keep each step fairly short (just a minute or two)

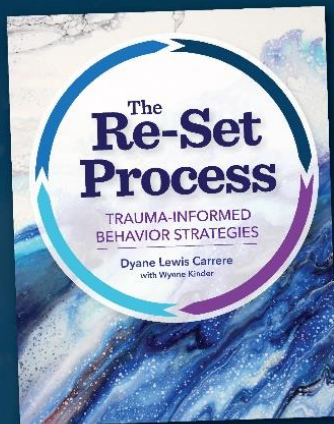
Want to know more? Have questions? Interested in the Re-Set Process book?

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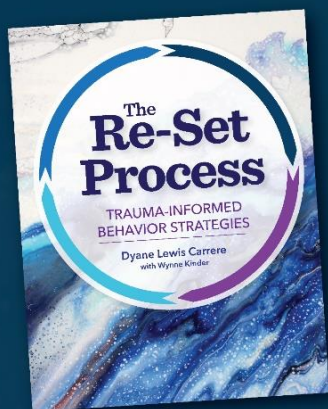
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[P]rovides a clear and concise “how-to” guide for teachers and administrators seeking trauma-sensitive, practical ways to work with students demonstrating challenging behaviors.

*—Jill Koser, Ph.D., Director of Curriculum and Instruction,
School District of the City of York, PA*



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