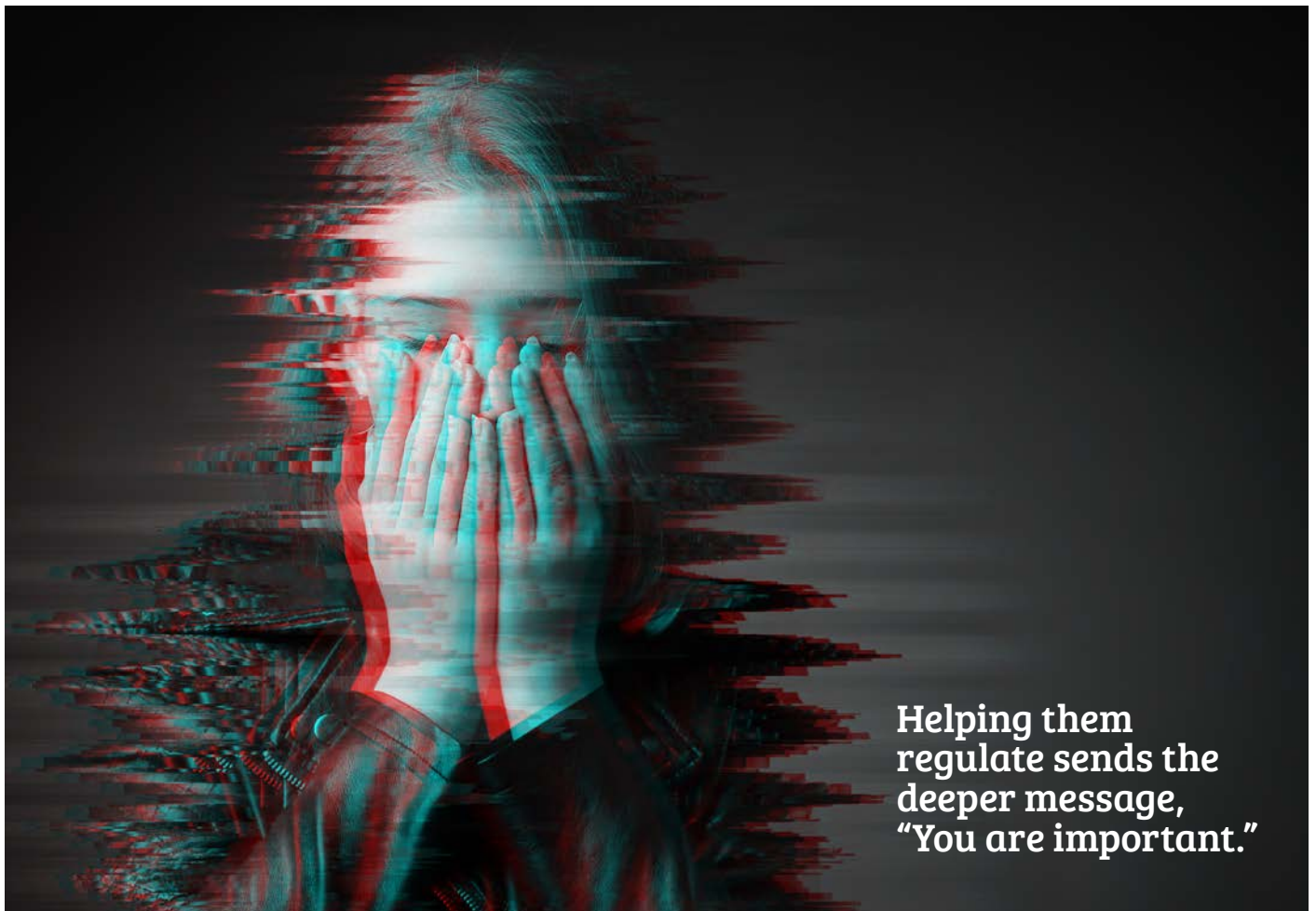


Help! What Type of Support Does This Child Need Right Now?



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Helping them regulate sends the deeper message, "You are important."

Picture the scene. A small, vocal child. "Waaah, waah, whaaA, whAAAAH, WHAAAAHH, **WHAAAAHHH!**" Crying, screaming, legs thrashing, tears. "I don't want to!" bellowed loudly, indicating the child is not okay.

In extremis, a deeply distressed child might be silent, throwing a torrent of expletives or punches, sobbing, wrist slashing or just rocking.

What do you, the adult, do? What do you think? How do **you** behave?

This article offers a cohort of models, criteria and methods for supporting a dysregulated child in that moment and enhancing their future. By combining Logical Levels and the Coach to Awakener framework with the Window of Tolerance stress model, a strategy evolves. Even though we're just focusing on the chronologically young, this framework is equally valid and useful for adults.

The Window of Tolerance

Lacking understanding, some parents wrongly try to reason with a screaming child. Dr Bruce Perry, founder of the Child Trauma Academy, says the best process is to:

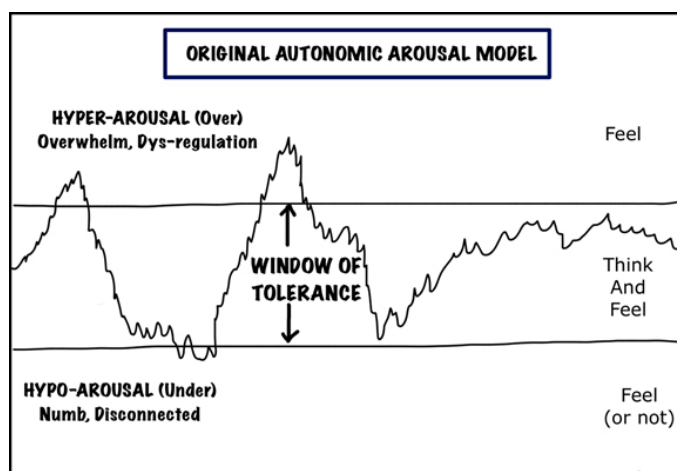
1. Regulate
2. Relate
3. Reason

in that specific order, because these processes roughly map across to base brain, limbic/emotional system and thinking brain. It makes sense to calm base and emotional brains before trying to engage the thinking brain. Offering logic to a sobbing person tends to escalate the situation, leaving all parties unsatisfied.

Step one is regulation of the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS). Get into the Window of Tolerance – firstly yours, then theirs. See diagram opposite.

Calibrate. How dysregulated is this child? High, medium or

Offering logic to a sobbing person tends to escalate the situation, leaving all parties unsatisfied.



low? Think of at least three interventions. Choose the best in the circumstances. Is it a hug, a word, restraint, humour, space holding, gesture, distraction?

Step two: connect to the child. Empathise. Establish rapport. Respect/acknowledge their feelings of being sad/angry/frustrated/hurt. *"I wonder if you're sad and angry."*

Step three: reason. Now you can use words because they have the capacity to listen. Maybe explain. Maybe ask what/if they need help. More rapport. *"I know you don't want to leave the playpark, but it's dinner time and we're all hungry."*

At step three, pause before you jump in proffering help. Breathe. Reflect. Consider: where might this issue sit within the Logical Levels?

Using the Logical Levels

Robert Dilts' Neurological Levels model has the premise that each level in the hierarchy has a different structure and function in our lives. Hence, different types of support are required at each level. We:

- *guide* people to learn about new **environments (E)**, and provide safe supportive *caretaking*
- *coach* them to improve specific **behavioural (B)** competencies
- *teach* them new cognitive **skills and capacities (SC)**
- *mentor* empowering **beliefs and values (BV)**
- *sponsor* growth at the **identity (I)** level and
- *awaken* people's awareness of the larger system/field **beyond identity (BI)**

So, applying this framework, we might show a child the route to the classroom (E), offer tips on holding a bat (B), share a method to solve a maths problem (SC), acknowledge their effort (BV), observe potential and genuine development (I) and, ultimately, help them connect to their visions (BI) without treading on their dreams.

However, you often don't know the issue. Are they tired/hungry/terrified/guilt-ridden/in pain/frustrated/angry/sad/overwhelmed/scared/disgusted/lonely or a hundred other possibilities? When hyper-aroused and screaming, infants are just bundles of overwhelming emotions. That's scary. If prolonged, it's terrifying for the child. That's why you must facilitate their return to calm. Regulated deep breathing, soothing tones, connection. ▶

Positive Sponsorship	Non-Sponsorship	Negative Sponsorship
You are seen <i>relief, relaxed</i>	You are not seen <i>anxious, invisible</i>	You should not be here <i>afraid</i>
You exist <i>centred, at peace</i>	You are not noticed <i>desperate for attention</i>	You are nothing <i>undeserving</i>
You have value <i>satisfied</i>	You are not valued <i>empty</i>	You are a problem <i>blamed and ashamed</i>
You are unique <i>creative</i>	You are nothing special <i>passive</i>	You are worse than others <i>inadequate</i>
Your <i>contribution</i> is important <i>motivated and energetic</i>	You contribute nothing <i>worthless and unwanted</i>	You detract <i>guilty and a burden</i>
You are welcome <i>at home, loyal</i>	You are not part of the group <i>displaced</i>	You are unwelcome <i>desire to leave or escape</i>
You belong <i>committed</i>	You can easily be replaced <i>uneasy</i>	You do not deserve to be here <i>rejected and abandoned</i>

▶ This process of attunement is how the child gradually learns to create, ‘manage’ and widen their own Window of Tolerance. They learn from you. Your behaviour. Your state. How wide is your tolerance window? A dysregulated adult can’t calm a dysregulated child.

Helping them regulate also sends the deeper message, “You are important.” You want to alleviate their distress; you love and care about them. At the Logical Level of identity, you are ‘sponsoring’ them. That’s profound.

This chart in Dilts’ book *From Coach to Awakener* gives a comparative summary of the emotional impact of positive, non and negative sponsorship. Keep this in your head as you subtly watch parent and child interactions. It’s enlightening. A child’s sense of self and ‘identities’ develop over time, hence as parents we must find multiple ways to adapt our behaviour and response at every child development stage, for over 25+ years.

Now ponder. What meaning does a child make of being ignored, berated, abandoned, bullied or criticised?

It’s why the grim legacy of child maltreatment is so deep-rooted and difficult to change. Furthermore, their Window of Tolerance is narrow because during infancy no one regularly soothed their dysregulated nervous system.

I believe psycho-education empowers parents, teachers and children. A child who regularly ‘loses it’ will benefit from understanding the Window of Tolerance and learning breathing techniques, early warning signs and strategies – as will their teachers, parents, social workers, therapist etc. Hence, I created this chart as a tool for calibration. (A colour version is downloadable from www.FABparents.co.uk) ■



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Rough Guide: Autonomic Nervous System & Polyvagal Theory					
UNDERSTAND. CALIBRATE. APPLY.					
Arousal Level (Gradients)	Mobilizing Behaviours	Part Of ANS	Metaphorical Temperature	Metaphorical Colour	Possible "Feelings"
Hyper (Over) Aroused	Flight & Fight	Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS)	Volcanic Burning Boiling	Red	Rage Out of control Anger
Dysregulated Up	eg Activity / Play	Both VV & SNS	Hot Hottish	Burnt Orange (Brown)	Anxious Excited
Window Of Tolerance	Social Engagement	Ventral Vagal (VV)	Warm Comfortable Cool	Green	Flow Calm Alert Content
Dysregulated Down	eg Loving Connectedness	Both VV & DV	Chilly Cold	Cyan (Turquoise)	Relaxed Sluggish
Hypo (Under) Aroused	Freeze	Dorsal Vagal (DV)	Icy Frozen Arctic Freeze	Blue	Zoned Out Disassociated Numb

If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants including Levine, Ogden, Perry, Porges, Soosalu, Van der Kolk, #mbIT, and #NLP.

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Resources: Robert Dilts explains how Logical Levels are impacted by trauma in two 15-minute interviews that can be found on Helen Oakwater’s YouTube channel. The sponsorship table is reproduced from Dilts’ 2003 book *From Coach to Awakener* and is shared with kind permission of Robert Dilts.