## Co-Regulation

- Co-regulation is the ability to regulate emotions and behaviours, manage stress (internal or external ), and return to a calm state, with the support and direction of a connecting person.
- Co-regulation is the nurturing connection of another person that supports regulation through the use of strategies, tools, and calming techniques.
- Co-regulation and self-regulation are part of the developmental process.
- The feelings and behaviour of someone in close proximity to another person, directly impacts how they feel, and respond to their own emotions.
- If when someone is dysregulated and outside their window of tolerance, someone else close to them stays calm, and models how to calm down, this can help a dysregulated person to, in turn, calm down themselves.
- Co-regulation is something to try when someone is emotionally over-whelmed and beyond their ability cope with a situation or circumstance.
- We develop self-regulation through co-regulation. This generally happens when we are young with a parent or care giver. With regular co-regulation we develop the ability to self-regulate moving from complete dependence on the external support of a parent/care-giver, through stages when co-regulation becomes less necessary, to a stage when we can self-regulate without any external support.
- If a child or young person doesn't receive the support of a parent or care-giver to co-regulate, or their emotional development is delayed or arrested, perhaps due to trauma or adversity, then they may struggle with self-regulation even into their teens or beyond.
- However, any trusted adult who has a healthy relationships with a child, or young person, can use co-regulation techniques at any stage of their lives to help them learn how to self-regulate. This trusted person could be a 'key adult' in school or an educational setting. That's the good news.
- The bad news is, if children and young people haven't received this type of nurturing care when they are young, they may have learned that they can't rely on adults for support and will not automatically seek support from adults. So when support is offered they may not accept it or may even reject it. This is why relationships and trust building is essential, when times are good, so that when support in the form of co-regulation is offered they feel safe enough to accept it.

## Conflict

- Conflict means different things to different people and there are various types of conflict.
- In basic terms conflict is a disagreement or argument.
- Conflict usually happens between people when they have different opinions on things. A conflict can happen between two people or between groups of people.
- Conflict is: is interpersonal - involving two or more people, happens when people disagree and is a natural outcome of human interaction, can be verbal or non-verbal, can be mild or severe, happens because people have different - personalities, values, expectations, attitudes, opinions, or goals, and isn't always serious nor negative.
- Learning how to recognise and work through interpersonal conflict in productive, healthy ways is an important skill that can help us have better relationships in life.
- Types of conflict include: misunderstandings or differences of opinion, disagreement over information or the truth of something, different personal values and those involved can't respectfully disagree, when those involved can't back down from an argument or accept a loss, and when those involved can't agree on an approach or action.

# Information Note

## The Conflict Cycle

- When conflict, stress and anger get together the situation can quickly escalate because anger in one person is often met, and matched, with anger, or fear, in another. This is called **emotional transference.**
- Emotional transference often creates a **conflict cycle** which, if not interrupted or broken, can escalate the severity of the conflict.
- In educational settings conflict can occur between learners, between adults and learners, and between adults.
- The conflict cycle (adult-learner context) involves:
    1. A young person is stressed, this triggers strong emotions which results in inappropriate or distressed behaviour
    2. The young person's behaviour then triggers stress, strong feelings and a response (behaviour) from the adult
    3. The adult's response can then trigger more stress in the young person and the cycle begins!
- Stressful triggers: can come from anywhere, or from an earlier incident/event, and may not be obvious (to others – adult or child); and can come from more than one source and can accumulate (trigger stacking)
- Remember - the stressor could be negative thoughts (perhaps from shame/pain origins)
- Sources of stress include: sensory, social, physical, psychological, learning or family/community issues
- To reduce risk and de-escalate the situation the conflict cycle needs to be broken.

## De-escalation

- De-escalation is reducing the intensity of a conflict (or potentially violent situation)
- De-escalation may also involve **co-regulation** with one or more of those involved in the conflict
- HOWEVER co-regulating with someone is not possible if you are one of the people caught in the conflict cycle
- De-escalation involves:
    o using strategies that take the 'heat' out of the conflict at the earliest point
    o identifying risk and intervening in a calm and controlled manner
    o preventing a situation from getting worse
- If you are not **CALM** it is impossible to effectively de-escalate a situation
- Approaches used to de-escalte conflict include:
    o The Basics: stay calm and if possible, nip things in the bud
    o Being aware of your body language (non-threatening, culturally sensitive,..)
    o Using attunement (see separate module)
    o Actively listening and using non-verbal communication (see separate module)
    o Being Curious not Furious
    o Using a 'no blame' approach and offering positive choices (and being solution focussed)
- Control what you can: yourself & how you respond (Ask yourself – how am I feeling now?
    o Take a few breaths
    o Reframe your thoughts and use positive self-talk
    o If necessary, and possible, give yourself some time, or some space
    o If necessary, and possible, seek some support
- Control what you can: the physical & social environment (Ask yourself: how is the environment affecting this person or the situation?)
    o remove any objects (or people) that may increase the risk level
    o use your knowledge of the person to know if you need to give them physical space, or move closer, to give them comforting support
    o if necessary, and possible, give them some time to regain their calm

- o say very little, do not reason with them (remember Regulate, Relate, then Reason)
- o if they are ready to talk isolate the conversation (or if possible, move to a quieter area)
- Get Curious Not Furious - Get to know those you work with to be able to identify: their early warning signs, their stressors, their interests/motivators, ideas to distract or divert their attention, and effective calming activities. Knowing these things will help you during de-escalation
- When you can talk – use language wisely because:
  - o Language patterns, vocabulary and ways of talking can shift the emotional state of the listener (Mahoney, 2003: viii).
  - o So regardless of what we say, how we say it is vitally important.
  - o We should try to: show empathy and be attuned to the other person, be as neutral as possible, use non-judgemental language, and use solution-orientated language if problem solving is needed
- Try using PACE: Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, and Empathy
- Try reframing our thinking and our language because:
  - o our internal use of language is important as it directly influences how we respond to a situation
  - o using accurate, positive, and helpful language helps us think differently about the situation and support the person we are working with. For example, thinking of angry as distressed, aggressive as frightened etc..

## Resolving Conflict

- After des-escalation we may still need to resolve the conflict through:
- Withdrawing – avoidance can cause problems with relationships however we may purposely withdraw in intense situations or when the conflict is unimportant
- Accommodating – involves putting someone else's needs first however one party should not always be the one to be accommodating
- Competing - involves pushing for your own perspective, it doesn't always mean using aggression or manipulation and when respectful, can lead to good outcomes
- Compromising - involves both parties giving some ground because it's generally better to get some of what you want than none and it can lead on to collaborative problem-solving
- Collaborating – creates a win-win result but requires effort on everyone's part. It ultimately has better long-term outcomes however it may be less popular because it takes time.

## Things to remember:

- Find your calm – you may need to pro-actively practice doing this
- Co-regulation may be necessary before you try to resolve a conflict (patience may be required)
- Stress, anger, or fear can easily create a conflict cycle (emotional transference)
- Conflict cycles can quickly escalate in intensity and increase risk
- If possible, break the cycle to begin de-escalation
- Reduce risk using some of the strategies mentioned - you may need to pro-actively practice using the strategies with different people in different situations to see what works for you and for them
- Consider the full range of approaches to conflict resolution

## Additional helpful resources and information

- Related Modules: Sel-Regulation, The Brain & Emotional Regulation, Regulate, Relate, Reason and Restore, Window of Tolerance, & Attunement
- Co-regulation Film: Co-regulation – What it is and why it matters? https://youtu.be/RRMBHQ-Bmk0
- PACE: What is meant by PACE? https://ddpnetwork.org/about-ddp/meant-pace/