



Self-Reg – Stuart Shankar

Are you... confused and worried about your child's behaviour? Unsure how to manage meltdowns? Feeling stressed and overwhelmed with parenting?

The Self Reg framework has been developed to help you answer these questions and deepen your understanding of your child, the impact of stress on the brain and behaviour, encourage curiosity and compassion and support your child and your relationship to flourish.

What is Self-Reg?

- A framework to help us understand our energy and tension levels and how this impacts on our ability to do what we need to do. We can use the analogy of a battery to make sense of how much energy we have to meet the demands of our lives. Some things take our energy away, or drain our battery and this leads to stress.
- When the brain and body is under stress, our ability to make choices and regulate our emotions and behaviour becomes compromised. In addition, we have difficulty paying attention, learning and getting along with others.
- When we are in balance, we are able to recognise stress, reduce stress and recover from stress. We can charge our battery by choosing activities that restore and nourish us, or making changes to our schedule to reduce stress.
- Sometimes, we can get caught in a stress cycle - which can lead to a "draining or flat battery". Functioning on a flat battery is difficult for all of us! Operating on a low battery has long term negative health implications and can make us more sensitive and susceptible to stress.
- When making sense of our child's behaviour, we need to remember to ask the questions 'Why and why now?' and step back from judgement, assumption and catastrophising.

The Self-Reg framework uses the following 5 steps to develop self-awareness, help us understand and manage our stress (i.e. things that drain our battery) and energy (i.e. things that charge our battery). This framework is relevant to all of us - young and old!

1. Read the signs of stress and re frame the behaviour

2. Recognize the stressors

3. Reduce the stress

4. Reflect: enhance stress awareness

5. Respond: develop strategies for responding to stress and returning to calm

Understanding Stress

An individual's stress load is complex and synergistic. There are many layers that contribute to how charged your battery feels at any given time. In Self-Reg we can understand the stress load of the person by exploring 5 domains.

The Biological Domain

- This includes anything related to the body. For example, how much sleep we have had, nutrition, coordination abilities, sensory processing differences, interoception (i.e. understanding our internal body states), how well we feel and our level of arousal / energy levels. If there are challenges in any of these areas: your battery will begin to drain.

Emotional Domain

- Understanding one's own emotions, including making sense of the body and brain sensations. Children need to learn to name, make sense of and manage feelings.
- When children are stressed, their emotional and survival brain (i.e. limbic system and amygdala) is activated and it takes them more effort and energy to pay attention, learn and get along with others. They may become overly emotional or be quick to anger. Young children are learning to make sense of their inner world and their battery can be easily drained by stressors in the emotional domain.

Cognitive Domain

- This domain is concerned with mental processes involved in learning and organising oneself, including: attention, sequencing, planning, monitoring, problem solving, thinking flexibly and processing information. These processes are reliant on the pre-frontal cortex or the "upstairs brain" which is under development in the growing child. Attention and learning use up a huge amount of battery power for any child, however for a child who is having difficulty with one of the foundation mental processes - then the cognitive domain can be energy greedy!

Social Domain

- Including a student's ability to read and understand social cues, understand how their behaviour impacts on others, adapt their behaviour to the social context and resolve conflict. A child who is having difficulty in this area needs support to understand and manage their stress and learn to connect and play with others in ways that feel safe and fun for them.

Pro-Social Domain

- Including how a child responds to other people's stress, the development of empathy, morals, values and a sense of justice. Some children become stressed when others break the rules, or seeing their friend's upset. This can contribute to their stress load and drain their battery.

Understanding whether we or our child are in a heightened state of stress (e.g. fight or flight) and operating from our emotional and survival brain rather than logical brain is an important step in re-framing behaviour. When we or our children are in this state, we have difficulty thinking and behaving rationally.

So, What Can I Do?

- Charging your own battery is the most important thing to support your child to charge their battery. Your child's battery is sensitive to the stress around them - in other words they have a hardwired emotional / stress wi-fi system! You need to "lend them your calm" - and co-regulate with them so they can learn to understand their feelings and calm down. Model healthy ways to manage life's bumps in the road.
- A loving, connected, attuned and responsive relationship with your child is the most important thing for their mental health and well-being.
- Understand that your child's misbehaviour is in fact a sign of stress. Their battery is low and they need your help to understand how they are feeling and charge their battery. Be a stress detective and ask the questions: ***"Why and Why Now?"***
- When your child is having a meltdown or becoming upset: Keep calm and connect. Your child needs you to their safe harbour.
- Your child is unique and has strengths and talents to be uncovered. Be aware of your assumptions, judgements and anxiety about their development and free yourself of these. Treasure and celebrate your child for who they are.

Learn more Contact The MEHRIT Centre at info@selfreg.ca or visit www.self-reg.ca for further information.