Transcript

The Resilient Kid Podcast

Season 7 - Episode 10

Being the Calm in the storm: Regulating Yourself to Help Your Child

How to be the calm in their storm. Regulating yourself as a parent to help your child. Now we all get anxious at times, but I'm here to tell you a little bit more about anxiety, what it is and how it relates to us as parents and what we can do. So today I really want to be able to explain and give you more of an understanding that how us as parents, our emotional estate really affects our children's stress, our children's anxiety, and then have a look at some tools that we can realistically use in the moment because we know that,

we can't calm a dysregulated child if you are dysregulated as a parent, you know? And that's okay. It's not about perfection. For me, it's about awareness and it's about recovery and teaching our kids those skills. So to be able to calm down an anxious child, we often talk about co-regulation. So what is it?

What is co-regulation in real life? It's the emotional wifi between us and them. So between you and your child, parents and kids. So, we know that even if we go, it's fine. There's nothing to worry about. They are like little antennas, aren't they? They're picking up on your energy. They're hearing your total voice.

They read your face, they feel your tension. There is a quantum physics theory called entanglement. You'll know it, you'll have felt it yourselves. The example I always give is if you go to a party and you walk in and you know that couple's at a row. And they've not even said anything, but you just feel it.

That's what kids are like, but times a hundred, they know. And if you are anything like me, maybe you've not got the poker face going on with your kids sometimes. So actually it's really important that we see it as that wifi, that connection, that invisible connection between us and our kids. Lemme give you a real life example.

Imagine it's the school run, right? And we all get stressed with that. Say they're refusing to get ready or refusing to get out of bed. You're panicking about going to school and you've gotta be at work in 30 minutes. All right, your brain, everything in your brain is, we're gonna be late. I've got a meeting like this is not the first time this week, so you say, come on, hurry up.

I've not got time for this. I've gotta get to work. But what your child is thinking is kind of three things. One, my safe person, my parent, is panicking. There must be something to

panic about, so there's the emergency two. And then three is work more important than me. I know that logically it isn't, but right now we need to crack on.

So what happens for them is their kind of alarm system starts to get louder and louder, and now both the nervous systems are inflamed, yours and theirs. The more you push, the more they resist. We've seen that. Haven't we? Now, before I go into kind of a regulated response, I want to just go through a little bit about what is happening in the brain, because once we kind of demystify anxiety and explain what's happening in the brain, then it helps us to.

Kind of understand that it isn't, you know, just behavior. It's a biological response. So the way I describe it to kids is their guard dog. So their amygdala, their fight and flight. We call that the guard dog. When we are working one-to-one with children, think of it. It's there to protect us. It barks when they're in danger.

The trouble is it doesn't know the difference between real and imaginary. And I talk about scary safe or scary dangerous. So scary dangerous is walking across the road and not looking and, and cars comes out nowhere. Scary safe is being excluded from your friendship group. You're not gonna die from that, but it feels exactly the same.

It's why we jump at scary movies. It's exactly the same response in the brain. So there's those two elements. So if it's a potential threat or if it's a real threat, the brain, the amygdala part, the fight and fight part of our brain acts exactly the same. Now we also have, our hippocampus. That's kind of where we store experiences and memories.

And then we also have the prefrontal cortex. Call that the wise old owl with the kids. And this is a logical part of thinking things through. It's where we talk about emotions. It's why actually it's hard for kids to hear the reassurance even when you're making sense. If all of those are not connected. Now we call it flipping our lid.

So we flip our lid when we perceive a threat, whether it's real or not, we flip our lid and those three parts of our brain cannot connect, cannot talk to each other.

Understanding this process means two things. One, we understand it's a biological response, fight, flight, freeze, or fawn, and also it's not defiance, it's distress. Okay, so it's really important that we understand that and I guess the most important thing is once they have triggered their fight, flight, freeze, or fawn response.

So that is running away, arguing back, being a real people, please. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I won't do it again. You know, things like that. Or they just stood there still looking at their shoes. That's a freeze response. You know, we've all had that. You've asked your child to tidy the room 15 times and they've just stood there and it's, they're very overwhelmed with everything that they've got to do that suffer response.

So when we understand that, that's what happens. We also then have to realize that for us to get any response out of them, we need to calm them down first. And that's where we come in as, as their parents to co-regulate, you know, to really think about how we regulate

with our kids, how we help them. So, for instance, if we're going to use the school example, you know, and sometimes this can happen, doesn't matter their age.

Try something like this. Okay, I can see you finding this morning really hard. What can I do to help you? Or I can see you finding this morning really difficult. We can get through this together. Okay but just

before, like I was talking about the poker face, we need to be regulated because they will pick up on that.

The quickest way to calm down our nervous system is deep breath in through the nose and out through the mouth. Check your shoulders are not up around your ears. You know, like when we're really stressed. Yeah. Drop your shoulders, get to their level. Now if like you, you have a teen that is taller. Then get near them, speak slower.

Because what we tend to do is we tend to rush the talk. You know, giving them directions. You are not responsible for the fear for that perceived threat. You just need to help them feel safe. That's all. And the more calm we are. The more contagious that is. But remember the flip of that is the more panicked, stressed we are, the more panicked, stressed they are.

So those deep breaths. Now I do this and I teach this a lot. It doesn't matter if you've got a baby that's upset, put 'em on your chest, deep breathe, toddler, sit 'em on your knee. If you've got a primary schooler, and they'll let you give them a hug, do that. But deep breathe.

But even my teens, all the teens I work with, I will exaggerate my breathing. And if you need more specific on teens, go back to last week's podcast because I did a whole podcast about anxiety in teens. And actually what I do is just exaggerate my breathing a little bit and innately they will connect with that and they will start to breath deeper. So think again about your body, softening your body and unclench that jaw even though you like you're desperate to get to work, unclench your jaw. Drop your shoulders, let your hands be open. Now there's a lot of research and it's really funny, we are trusted much more if we have our palms open.

And that is because if you think of the opposite, if we've got our fists tight, then it looks like we are in attack mode. The minute that we open our palms, the minute that we open our palms, particularly to our teens, but to anybody innately as humans, we know we are safe with this person. You see a lot with,

people who do public speaking, and even on Zoom wave with your palm open, it is saying that you are safe with me, and that's really important that children feel safe. Yeah. Have those mantras in your head. You know, this too shall pass, is a really good one.

I think a lot of moms out there will, will identify with that. You know, I can still be worried about the meeting, but I can still stay calm at the same time because one thing we do know is if we are rushing them because we need to rush, then we are not gonna get anywhere

soon. And so actually just being there with them, for them in that moment, whether it is, you know, okay, what can I do to help?

Is there something you need me to get for you? Do you need me to get your kit while you, you know, put your shoes on, things like that. To show that you are there and you are with them will help keep them calm and you'll get out much quicker. Now, all that said, you know, we're only human, we might snap.

And that's okay. It only takes us 30%. Get this parenting malarkey right? 30% of the time and they will still turn out okay. 30%. everybody. 30%. So we are expecting human error. They're expecting human error. And do you know what? Sometimes it's good to model the human error. What is the most important is we do those repair moments.

So, you know, things like snapping that in the morning because they're late for school or you are gonna be late, or you know, you ask them to get all this ready last night. Why are you not out of bed? All those kind of things absolutely fine. However. What matters the most is how we repair those moments that we have been snappy, that, that we have been ratty with them.

So things like I am sorry, is the first thing to model. I am sorry I was stressed earlier and that didn't help take responsibility. So apologize first of all, because as well that brings down their defensiveness. Because I don't know about you, but particularly my teens, I will go, can I talk to you? And already I can see them gonna go, I'm gonna get in trouble

now. It's like, I'm sorry. And they go, oh, wasn't expecting that. So first of all, apologize, second of all, take responsibility. I was stressed earlier and that didn't help. Alright, I'm working on me too. So you're also then modeling not only the emotional responsibility, but also the self-compassion because it's really important, isn't it, that we model self-compassion.

I think as adults, we don't give ourselves enough self-compassion. I think we don't model it enough for our kids. And so actually doing that three step restore process of apologize, take responsibility and self-compassion is really important as a model for sure.

So there's lots of, you know kind of breathing techniques. There's lots of, you know, kind of positive affirmations that you can say to yourself. But also as well, what I would say is think about little resets for you. Because sometimes you are so angry. Sometimes it's really important. Maybe this is the third day on the trot, you know that they've been late or they've forgotten something, or you know, you've gone back in and they're on the phone, whatever it is.

But kind of think about how do you reset yourself? Because we know that if we are stressed, if we are anxious as parents, then that cortisol, that adrenaline is running around the body and it can last up to an hour. For adults, it's longer for kids, by the way. But for us as adults, that can sit with us, you know, for a good 60 minutes if we're not careful.

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So, getting outside for a little reset. Take some deep breaths outside in the fresh air, even if it is kids are in the car. Just before you open the door to get in that, driver's seat, just take a few moments to breathe in fresh air. Okay? Giving yourself those positive affirmations like, I am safe.

I am happy, healthy and safe is one of my mantras. I use that all the time, whether I'm in the dentist chair, whether I'm gonna go and give a big talk to a large group of people. I am happy, healthy, and safe. And you're giving that feedback loop to your amygdala, to the fight and flight response that we have, giving it that feedback

loop is really important because again, it's a perceived threat. Nobody dies for being late to work, so to give our brain that feedback is really important and is really good. Maybe hold a cool glass in your hand. Get a glass of water, you know, or your water bottle. Hold that in hand. Take a drink that helps ground our nervous system.

Splash cold water on your face. If you've not already done your, your face full of makeup for work.

Put on your favorite song getting in the car. Have a playlist especially that will lift the mood, as you get going where you need to go because it's really important that not only do we try and be there for our kids and co-regulate our kids, but actually that we are grounding ourselves, that we are regulating ourselves.

I think for me, one of the most important things is, and this might be a good analogy, children irrespective of age, look at us as their safe person to see if they're okay. The minute that we flap, the minute that we get stressed, then everything in them is saying it's not okay. And I talk a lot about separation anxiety are those children who struggle to get into school?

I talk to the parents a lot, you know, and this, and we know I think the educational authority, call it school refusers. It's not what I would be calling it. But those kids who can't get into school, those kids who are struggling with anxiety, crippled with anxiety getting school irrespective of their age as well, you know, we see it both ends of the spectrum.

Kind of high school and primary school is one of the first things I ask the question is. When you do get them, you know, if you, if you are getting them to the, to the door, and then that's where it starts. What are you doing? What's, what's happening with you? Because my guess is you are stress because you're, you're expecting them not to go in.

So tell me what's happening with you. And I think thinking about how we respond in that moment. You know, are we stressed or are we trying to be that calm in the storm for them? Because if they're looking at us and we are stressed, then they'll feel not safe. So we need to really try to keep regulated, you know, whether it's physically, emotionally, everything, so that when they look at us, they know they're safe, they know we are handing them over to somebody else who's safe.

And that's, you know, that's really kind of a thing to have in the back of your mind if you are struggling with your kids getting into school.

One of the things that I kind of wanted to explore on this podcast is, so get a pen and paper or pause it here if you can, or maybe just take these little prompts and mull them over walking the dog, listening to this. But questions that I kind of ask some of my parents is in that moment, what did you need?

What did you need in that moment that you flipped your lid, you were stressed, you were anxious, what did you need right then and there? And sometimes it can be as simple as, do you know what I just needed to know they'd listen to me.

Now, I've had this before where, you know, I've said. I'm gonna record the podcast like I need quiet in the house and then the dog set off barking, or one of the kids has like slammed the door. Not purpose, but it's, you know, it happened and that's all okay if that's communicated. But if they, you know, if I hadn't have said, by the way, this is what's gonna happen for the next kind of half an hour.

Or they've not said, I'm really sorry, I didn't mean to do that, or whatever. But if, you know, if I'm having to start the podcast like two or three times because you know, nobody's listened, then I feel not listened to, I feel disrespected. And actually all it would take is a, a simple apology. And I go, mate, don't worry about it

accidents happen.

I could fly off the hand and be really stressed, or I could ask myself, what did I need in that moment? And if I feel like I have been listened to, then I would probably be fine about it. If it is that I feel like I'm being ignored,

then I guess what I would be asking is, what could I try next time? So either in that scenario, I'll record the podcast saying nobody's in, 'cause that's easier. Although the dog usually barks then. I could say, what is it gonna take? I'm going to need quiet for 30 minutes. What are you guys going to do while I'm doing this?

You know, those kind of setting out my expectations. Set out your expectations with your kids and also. What else? What do they need in order for you to get that? So if we go back to the school scenario, listen guys, tomorrow I've got to get into work early. So let's get everything ready tonight, just know that I really need you to help me in the morning by jumping up, getting ready,

then we'll go down for breakfast and then we're gonna leave. Alright? So you might be doing things a little bit differently. Just top tip by the way. Always get them to get dressed before breakfast. You might have a few dribbles if they're younger, down the uniform or whatever, but actually it's a need that they have.

They'll want to eat, so therefore they'll get ready faster. If you put the TV on, give them the breakfast. They don't wanna go anywhere. Just top tip, while we're there, another kind of

question I ask as well, what helps me return to calm. What brings me back down to Earth? For me it's, it's definitely having a drink of water, music is a really good one.

I also often listen to audio books as well, so if I know I'm in a heightened state and Im a bit dysregulated, then the quickest way for me to do that is to, either have a drink, have a snack. I'm not talking about wine by the way but have, you know, have some water, have a snack, and actually listen to something because music particularly because it lights up a part of the brain that not a lot of other things get to and it just completely changes your mind state.

So, you know, it's a really quick way of doing that. Another one is put your wrists under cold water, getting outside, that really helps all of these things help regulate our nervous system. Another thing as well, and I think this comes under the self-compassion for me, is what am I proud of myself for?

Even if it felt a bit messy today, am I proud that I didn't lose my rag? Am I proud that I didn't go, right thats it, you're not having your phone or you're not having you're console or whatever. You're not going on the PlayStation because it's really easy, isn't it? When we're really stressed to

kind of use those threats. And actually we are usually the ones that end up punishing ourselves if we go right, that's so you're having it for a week because then the moaning at us all week. So yeah, what are you proud of even if it didn't go completely according to plan. So sometimes it's just not, not losing it, you know, not losing your crap because you're gonna be late for work.

And be self-compassion. Please show yourself some compassion in parenting. It's the hardest job in the world. I've been doing this and working with kids for nearly 30 years, and parenting my kids is still the hardest job I'll ever do. Without a doubt they can touch your buttons like no others. And then kind of the last one is, what's one small kindness that you can offer yourself right now?

So even if it didn't go according to plan. Even if the, you know, you did lose your rag, what is it that you can be kind to yourself about? I think that's, you know, for me is, is really what it comes down to because often we do, you know, we do give others the benefit of the doubt. We do offer that kindness to others, but we don't often give that kindness and self-compassion to ourselves.

Okay, so what, how do I want to conclude this for you all? It is perfectly normal for us to be anxious about our kids. And I think sometimes we are more anxious than them. We find it harder to allow them to be independent and stuff, and actually there is times when we don't feel safe, let alone trying to be that safe person for them.

We are not robots. Remember the 30%. You are allowed to lose it sometimes it's how you repair afterwards. All right. So don't forget the repair. You are their north star. You are their safe place, even when it's messy. And you know, we're all learning. We've never had kids at this age, at this stage before until we have, you know so keep, keep going.

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This parenting Malaki is really hard, but you're doing better than you think. Absolutely doing better than you think. If this episode resonated with you, please share it with another parent who might need a reminder and check out our Reversing Anxiety 90 Day course because we've got loads of tools and strategies.

If you look at the reverse anxiety checklist and there's a free downloadable booklet on there with loads of top tips. And then we have a 90 day course as well. If you wanna come on. Now, in that course, you'll not only get kind of more detail about how to help kids reverse anxiety.

But you'll also get a community. We have a, a closed group community. You'll get the benefit of our coaches, and you'll also get a one-to-one with me every month for three months, just specifically helping you and your family. Thank you for joining us at the Resilient Kid Podcast. Lovely to speak to you all and take care everyone.

Bye for now.