

Co-regulation

Co-regulation is the mutual regulation of arousal states between individuals. For example, when a father engages with his baby, he is not only calming the baby – the baby’s response of relaxing and calming to the father’s vocalisations, expressions and gestures has the reciprocal effect, in turn, of regulating the father. Co-regulation is thus a two-way process bringing regulatory benefits to both sides of the interaction. Parents and other care-givers play a vital role in helping young children to soothe their intense emotions. These co-regulating interactions between parent or care-giver and child shape the child’s ability – or inability – to regulate their own emotions as they grow older. The process of co-regulation creates a foundation for neurosequential development for the child: once an effective co-regulation pattern is formed between infant and attachment figure, the child can grow in productive, healthy and predictable ways towards emotional maturity. Outside the home, children may experience co-regulation with other adults in caregiving roles, for example extended family members, childminders or teachers. In all types of relationships – familial, educational, therapeutic – co-regulation helps us to maintain more effective **self-regulation**. It is important to recognise that the caregiving adult – whether parent, teacher or doctor – is only able to offer co-regulatory support to a dysregulated child when they themselves are regulated and in their Just Right State. Children with additional learning needs often experience difficulty with self-regulation and so may have

to rely more than their peers on compassionate understanding, validation and co-regulatory support from their caregivers.