



Self Regulation in Neurodiversity

"PASSAGES" IS A PUBLICATION OF
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OUR MISSION

PIKE AUTISM SUPPORT SERVICES (PASS) IS A 501(C)(3) NONPROFIT WITH A MISSION TO PROVIDE INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM AND RELATED INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES (IDD) WITH SOCIAL, RECREATIONAL, EDUCATIONAL, HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES.

OUR VISION

WE ENVISION A DAY WHEN INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM AND IDD ENJOY FULFILLING AND INDEPENDENT LIVES, EMBRACING EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING, INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS, SOCIAL INCLUSION, PERSONAL GROWTH, SELF-DETERMINATION, AND INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS.

Opening Doors



to Independence



As a pediatric occupational therapist, I have the honor of working closely with children and caregivers to establish independence in their everyday lives. I provide strategies, education, modifications, and adaptations to establish lasting success across the home, school, and community environments. Although I do help strengthen muscles and improve handwriting, I am also working to establish healthy habits, routines, and rituals that serve an individual's well-being. Self-care is not just for an adult – it is a practiced skill that requires nurturing. It is our duty to teach our children how best to take care of themselves.

At the very base of the brain, our genetic coding provides the building blocks for learning. The brain base helps us breathe, pumps our heart, makes us sweat, reminds us to blink, and other basic survival skills to maintain humanity. We are no longer hunters and gatherers; we do not need to farm our own food. We are inherently social and have established communities and societal norms that have helped support continued success. We learn from each other.

Our children are watching us engage in our everyday lives to learn how to be successful. We set the standard at which our children self-regulate. This means you, as their caregiver, are the most influential person (or people) that demonstrate a healthy relationship without emotions. It is healthy to feel all our emotions and acknowledge their importance. It is not healthy to let our emotions take over and contribute to impulsive decision making. We must show our children the benefits of experiencing emotions and positive ways to cope.

Our goal should be to help our children first identify their emotions, understand their importance, and independently cope and regulate. As OT's, we use different programs and strategies to assist with this step.

Each emotion can be felt differently and has a different purpose. For example, when we are nervous or anxious, we feel a pit in our gut. We can feel happy all over our body. Our emotions are important to recognize to protect us and help us learn. When we feel happy, we learn to continue to participate in whatever is making us happy to recreate that feeling. This is how we learn – the more often we are rewarded for participating in a task, the easier the task is to learn.

Despite feeling "better" when we experience positive emotions, children are drawn to negative emotions, or actions because the reward comes quicker. Children often get what they want quicker if they tantrum as opposed to asking or performing a positive action. If our child can communicate, this is much easier and more appropriate. When they cannot communicate, we are left guessing as to why our children are interacting in a certain way. It is always important to recognize that most children are not manipulative and do not "know better".

Continued ...



Regulation comes with continued work, but prevention is key. Even adults struggle to regulate their emotions and maintain homeostasis. Watch your child interact with their world – recognize the signs of early dysregulation (heart rate, breath rate, sweating, increased or decreased appetite, difficulty sleeping and staying asleep, mood swings, hyper-responsiveness to stimuli). The more you can recognize patterns, the better equipped you will be to help regulate before dysregulation occurs. The sooner we can help, the easier it will be for the child to start to gain independence in recognizing their own dysregulation.

Some strategies to try:

Heavy work – anything that involved pushing/pulling/carrying to help bring calming awareness to the body such as carrying in groceries or pushing cushions on the floor.

Breath work – blowing bubbles using a bubble wand or into soapy water and deep breathing (“smell the roses, blow out the candle”).

Exercise – anything that involves running around and movement helps.

Sleep Schedules – maintain routines as best as possible, but specifically maintain a specific bedtime to teach the body to rest at night and remain alert during the day

Model appropriate behaviors – demonstrate what you want to see. Tell your child how you are feeling and where you feel it. Start to give your child the vocabulary they need to verbalize their needs and give them a model to look up to.

Check yourself - if you see negative behaviors increasing, look inward first and make sure you are maintaining your own self regulation – an emotionally dysregulated adult cannot help an emotionally dysregulated child.

What to avoid:

Do not try to teach your child regulation when they are already dysregulated – this will only lead to frustration and put a strain on the relationship with your child.

Do not punish a child because of melt downs – tantrums are different than melt downs. A tantrum has a specific goal (i.e. screaming/crying because your child is not getting what they want). A meltdown is usually out of the child's control – meltdowns are work and often take up the majority of their conscious mind. The nervous system is so overrun by stress hormones that the system needed a restart.

Do not rush the process. Each child will learn at a different pace – some children will be able to gain independence in emotional regulation faster than others. Many children do not gain independence in self-regulation and require continued work into their adulthood. Practice patience and persistence.

Meghan DiGerolamo, MS OTR/L, RSP-ADHD

Programs, Events and News

- The young adult/adults TTRPG Virtual Gaming Group is starting up on Aug 21st at 7pm. The cost is \$ 80 for 8 weeks, running until October 9th.
- Lauren's Board Game Group is starting up on Monday, Sept 9th at 4:30 \$35 for 7 weeks (no class on Columbus Day)
- “Intro to Pen & Paper RPG Figures” Instructor is Megan Hoitsma. The class will begin on Tuesday, 9/24, at 5 p.m. at St. Patrick's Hall, 111 E High St. Milford. The cost is \$30 for three classes. All classes must be paid for before the first class. Payments are made via Zeffy, watch for posting.

Save the dates:

- Cornhole & Brazilian BBQ Event - Sunday, September 29th, 2pm at SideStreet Café in Dingmans.
- PASS Halloween Party Friday Oct 25th. (2 parties, one for children and one for adults)
- Designer Handbag Bingo (*Adults only Fundraiser*) Friday Nov 15th

Jeannemarie Passaro
Executive Director