



# FOCUS ON THE NERVOUS SYSTEM *To change behavior*

A PARADIGM SHIFTING EBOOK FOR PARENTS  
OF CHILDREN WITH BAFFLING BEHAVIORS

BY ROBYN GOBBEL



*bonus!*  
2 PRINTABLE  
QUOTE  
POSTERS

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*what's inside*  
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*about the author*  
**ROBYN GOBBEL**



Hi there, I'm Robyn- a therapist turned speaker, writer, and community creator. My favorite thing to do- after aerial silks!- is translating the science of behavior for the folks who need it the most...you! Parents, teachers, therapists- the real live people who make a real impact on the world.

A student once described me as **Neuroscience with Heart...wrapped in Glitter and Fun!** If that isn't the best way to be described, I can't fathom what is.

The Relational Neurosciences and Attachment Theory have changed everything we thought we knew about people and why we do what we do. Studying the science, along with fifteen years of clinical practice and teaching thousands of parents and professionals how to help kids with significant behavioral challenges (most with histories of toxic stress) has completely shifted my understanding of what behavior really is. I adapted this ebook from my popular masterclass so you could have accurate, easy to understand information about behavior at your fingertips...when you need it most.

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# Focus on the Nervous System TO CHANGE BEHAVIOR

Welcome. I am so glad you found your way here.

I can't be completely certain, of course, why you have downloaded this ebook, but I can make a guess based on the hundreds and even thousands of families that I've worked with both in my therapy office, as well as all the families, parents, professionals, and educators, I've had the opportunity to meet as I have led trainings and workshops for the last 20 years.

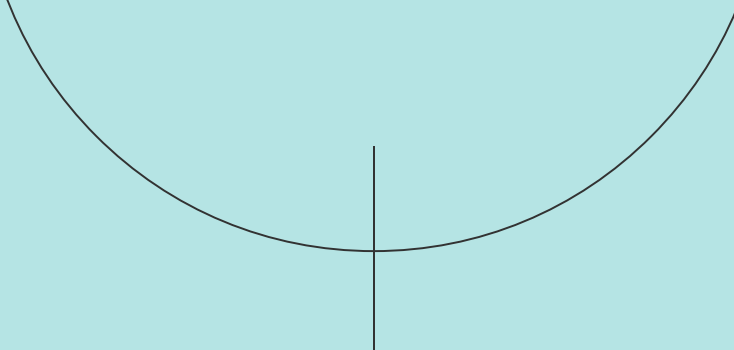
My guess is that you know a child, maybe in your family or in your classroom or therapy practice,

whose behaviors feel very baffling, confusing, and overwhelming.

**You are *done* playing behavior-whack-a-mole.** Maybe every once in a while, you're able to address the behaviors with some pretty typical behavior modification techniques, but more often than not, those behaviors just keep popping up somewhere else, right?

And it feels like this huge guessing game, because most of the time you are just reacting to problems after they've already emerged.

Does this sound familiar?



And then of course, the behavior-whack-a mole scenario just gets exacerbated when you're parenting a child who has been impacted by trauma, toxic stress, loss, attachment trauma, and/or adoption.

This just adds a whole new layer of complexity to these baffling, confusing, overwhelming behaviors

**What I do know for certain is that it's not that you aren't doing this whole parenting thing right. That isn't the problem.**

The problem is that you haven't been given information that's up to date with what we know now in 2023, about the relational brain and how the brain impacts behaviors. So we're still stuck using things like rewards and consequences, punishments and timeout. You name it, I know you've tried it.

And these strategies are not working, not because you're doing something wrong, but because they aren't addressing what the real problem is.

Before we go into exactly what this paradigm shift is, let's first look at "why." Let's reflect on **why** we want to take the time and energy to change the way we see behavior. Because honestly, it takes a lot of guts to consider making a huge paradigm shift into the way that we see behaviors and ultimately, the way that we see people.



# A PARADIGM SHIFT

## *what you will learn*

- Why a paradigm shift?
- The brain is behind everything we do
- Behaviors reflect what is happening inside
- What is felt-safety, connection and regulation?
- Understand the brain's two modes: Connection or Protection
- The impact of trauma and toxic stress
- And finally....How do we change behavior?

## *what to focus on*

- Regulated, Connected Children who Feel Safe (and know what to do) Behave Well
- Changing How We See People, Changes People



*why a paradigm shift*

## RELATIONAL NEUROBIOLOGY

The first reason for us to consider why we want to spend time and energy changing the way we see behavior is because of the emerging field of the Relational Neurosciences. I've been studying the neurobiology of being relationally, socially, and behaviorally human for well over 13 years. In 2019, I was given the great honor of being invited to teach the Science of interpersonal Neurobiology in the certificate program that's offered at Portland Community College.

The Relational Neurosciences is a field that includes Interpersonal Neurobiology, Affect Regulation Theory, Polyvagal Theory, Dr. Bruce Perry's Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics, and more. Those are just a few examples of some of the theories that make up this emerging field of the Relational Neurosciences.

This fast growing field is teaching us every day, more and more and more about the brain, the body, the mind, the nervous system, and their impact on behaviors. We now know so much more about the origins of behavior than we did when I was in graduate school around 20 years ago . We also know more about what to do to change or support those behaviors.



## why a paradigm shift SOLVE THE PROBLEM

**This paradigm shift allows us to finally solve the real problem**, which really isn't the behavior-- it's *what's causing the behavior*.

If we don't get to the root cause, we'll have a much harder time changing behavior, and then an even harder time getting any kind of behavior change to stick, right?

Worse, though, is that we run the risk of using behavior management techniques that really aren't respectful and end up teaching our kids things like: they have no voice, they have no power, or that they can't trust adults.





*why a paradigm shift*  
**CHANGING HOW WE SEE  
PEOPLE, CHANGES PEOPLE**

The third reason for this big paradigm shift is that **the paradigm shift, alone, is a strategy.**

**It's an intervention.**

Sure, the paradigm shift is going to inform strategies and interventions.

**But changing the way we see people is an intervention.** And honestly, when it comes right down to it, it's actually the most important one.

We can turn back to the Relational Neurosciences to understand why this is true. Specifically, what we know about mirror neurons, the resonance circuitry, and even memory science, tells us that we come to know who we are through the eyes of the other.

So if I want my child to show me the precious, amazing human that he is, I have to first show him through my eyes that I already know he is that person.





*why a paradigm shift*

## CLARITY, CONFIDENCE, CONNECTION

And the fourth reason for making this huge paradigm shift is because **if it finally solves a real problem, then it makes intuitive sense to parents and adults**--when the adults are regulated, themselves, of course.

*And if it makes sense,*

*and it works*

(even though sometimes we need to redefine what we mean by "works"),

**it leads to clarity, confidence, and increased connection in our relationship with this child.**







## THE BRAIN IS BEHIND EVERYTHING WE DO *including behaviors*

This paradigm shift is hinged on the truth that the brain is behind everything we do, including behaviors.

Of course, that may seem obvious. You know nothing happens without the brain! And that definitely seems really clear when we're thinking about things like math facts, remembering how to do something, or our autonomic functions like breathing, heart rate, and respiration. Yes, of course. Of course, our brain is behind all of those things.

But it is easy to lose sight, especially when we're faced with really challenging behaviors. Behaviors that feel personal. Behaviors that we end up labeling as manipulation, control or opposition, because those behaviors can feel so personal. It's easy to lose sight of the fact that the brain is behind everything.

## BEHAVIORS REFLECT *what is happening inside*

We can actually use behaviors as clues to give us information about what's really going on inside. Behavior is just what we see on the outside that gives us information about what is happening inside.

When we understand what behavior really is, it becomes so much easier to stay anchored in the truth that:

**Regulated, connected kids who feel safe, and of course, know what to do, behave well.**

This is my mantra.

And if you've followed me on social media at all, you've probably seen me make a quote out of this or heard me say this before.

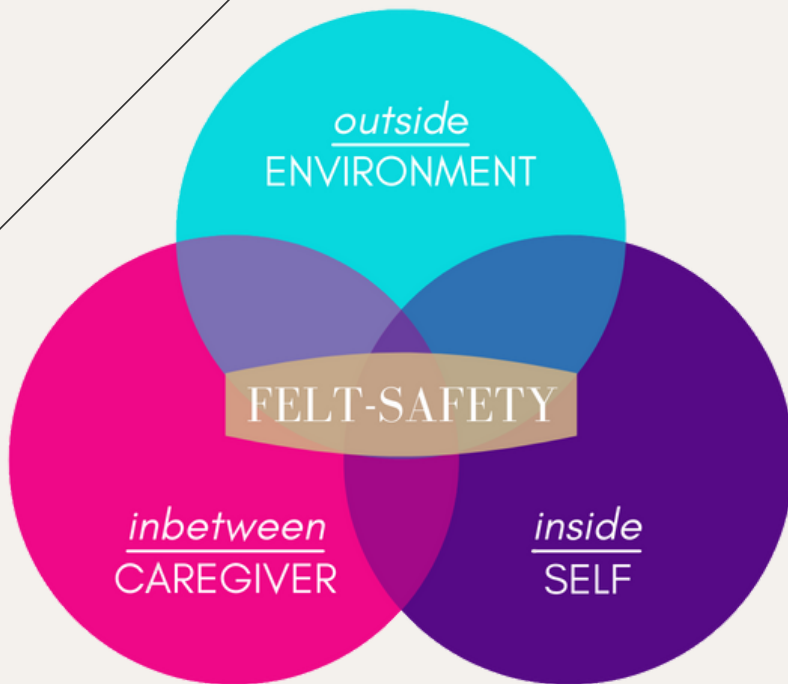
Regulated, connected kids who feel safe, behave well.

We're gonna look at each of these three concepts: regulation, connection, and felt safety, one by one, starting with felt safety.

”

**REGULATED,  
CONNECTED  
CHILDREN WHO  
FEEL SAFE,  
BEHAVE WELL.**

*a subjective experience*  
**FELT-SAFETY**



Felt-safety is a term that was first identified and defined by Dr. Alan Sroufe, who is an international leader in Attachment science and Attachment research.

Dr. Sroufe defines felt-safety as a subjective experience, meaning, what is felt-safety for me is not going to be felt safety for somebody else.

I can't look at a situation that somebody else is in and say, "Well, that's safe," because it's subjective. How that person is experiencing the situation and how I'm experiencing it aren't the same. So it's a subjective experience of safety, based on information that the brain is taking from three places: **the environment, the caregiver** (or the relationship that the child is in), **and the child's internal experience** (what's happening inside their bodies).

Dr. Steve Porges, the scientist who developed Polyvagal Theory, later introduced to us the concept of **neuroception**, which is the phenomenon that allows us to unconsciously make an assessment of our safety based on information we're getting from these three places (the environment, the caregiver, and our inner world).

Dr. Porges and his colleague, Dr. Deb Dana, have said that neuroception is unconsciously assessing information from inside, outside and in between, and that's exactly what Dr. Sroufe is saying: Inside, meaning our inner world; outside, meaning our environment; and in-between, meaning the relational environment. When we are talking about kids, we are typically talking about the relationship with their caregiver.

*a biological imperative*  
**CONNECTION**

Connection is defined by Dr. Porges through the lens of his clinical research as *a biological imperative*. **We're born with it. We can't lose it. We need it to survive.**

By looking at the science of physiology, Dr. Porges came to the same conclusion that those of us in the mental health and the psychotherapy fields have intuitively known forever-- that we need connection to be okay at our core.

We are designed and created to be in connection with one another. Our brain literally develops inside connection. When an infant is born, their brain is primed for this. They are ready for neurons to fire up and create all sorts of wonderful, beautiful connections.

The infant's brain is ready to bloom, but it needs the connection of a co-regulated adult to truly blossom. So we need connection in order to develop. *We're always, always seeking connection.*

**And when we don't receive it, our brain experiences that as a threat.**

”

**CONNECTION  
IS A  
BIOLOGICAL  
IMPERATIVE**

-DR. STEPHEN PORGES



Remember, neuroception is the unconscious assessment of safety inside, outside, and in between?

When we don't receive connection, our brain shifts into neuroceiving danger. Looking at the relational space for connection and not finding it makes the brain go, "oh, no, oh, no danger, danger! I need more information here! I think this is dangerous, or I know this is very dangerous!"

It's experienced as a threat to the brain because we, quite literally, need connection to survive.

*balance*

## REGULATION

Regulation is the third concept that we're talking about here. I said *regulated*, connected kids who feel safe, behave well.

So what is regulation? What does regulation mean? Simply put, regulation is about balance. The word regulation applies to all sorts of things. For example, the thermostat in your home helps regulate the temperature in the house, right?







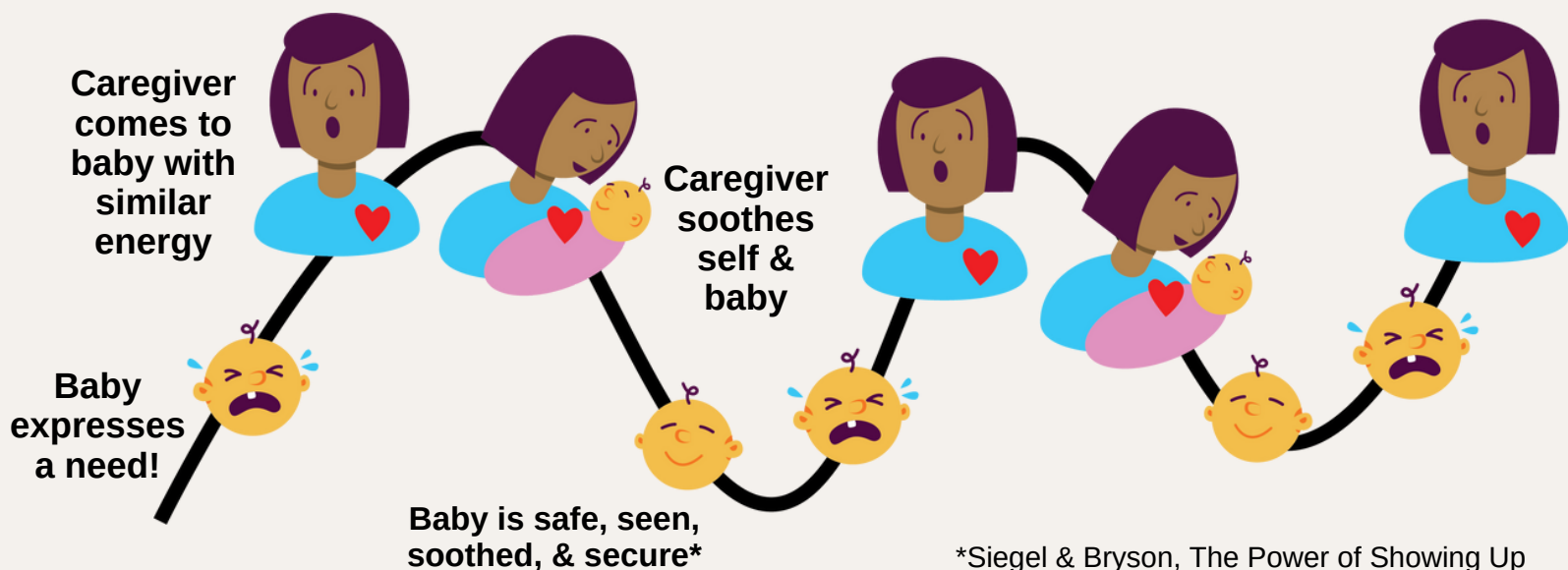
In the context of exploring the brain and behavior, regulation is about balance of the energy and arousal in our nervous systems. Our nervous systems have an accelerator and a brake.

The energy and arousal of our nervous systems has an accelerator: go, go go energy, or brakes: slow down, slow down energy. When we step on the accelerator of the nervous system, our energy and arousal increases. And when we step on the brake, it decreases.

The regulation of the nervous system has actually developed inside the attachment relationship and those earliest days and months and years of a child's life.

This experience happens over and over hundreds, thousands, maybe millions of times in that child's first year of life, which lays the foundation for attachment.

**We also now understand that this lays the foundation for regulation.**



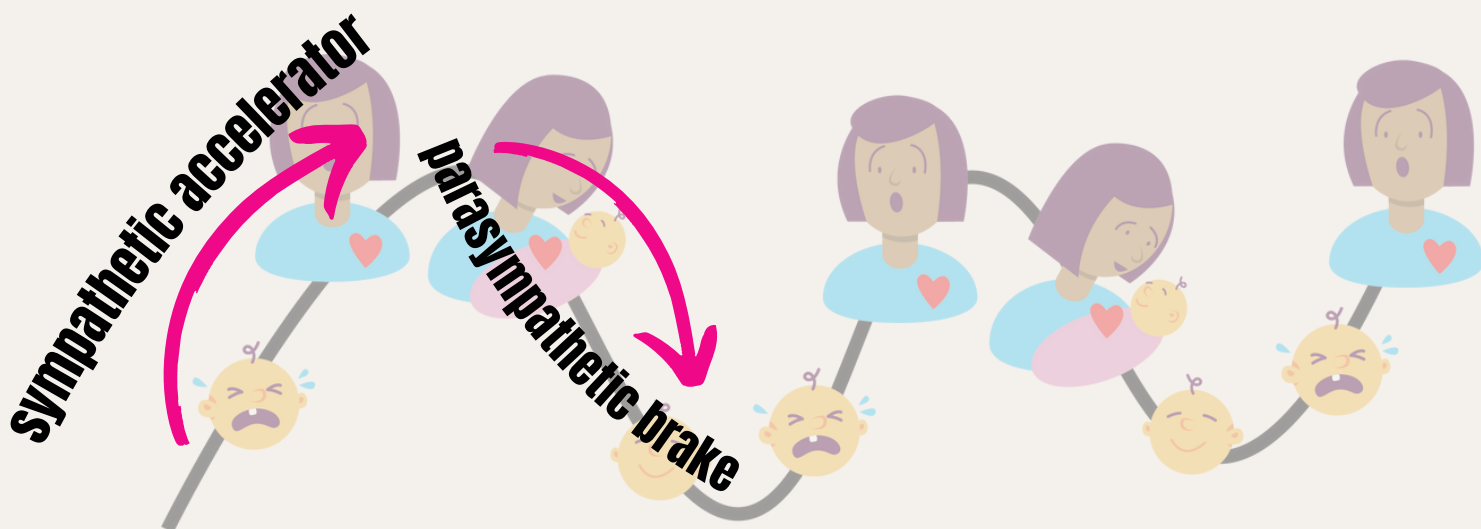


If you think about the accelerator of the nervous system, that increase in energy is what's happening when the infant has a need. Infants burst into the world ready to tell us that they have a need. The sympathetic side of their nervous system is ready and raring to go, and they cry. And *there's energy there*. Thankfully, we can feel that energy in our own bodies, because feeling that energy in our bodies prompts us to do something to help and soothe the infant.

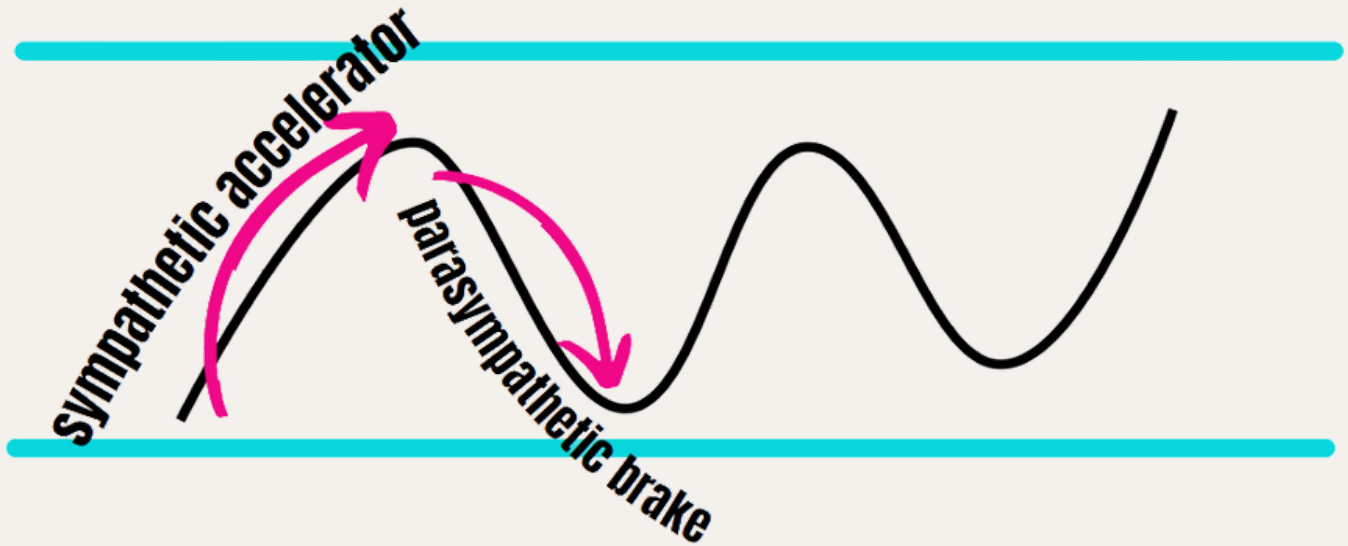
The caregiver comes in and soothes the infant and meets her need which presses the brakes for her. Infants come into the world with a really strong accelerator, but the brake side of the nervous system still needs to be developed.

Infants need help soothing, and so it's inside this attachment relationship that the brake gets exercised.

With repeated experience of soothing, infants eventually develop what we call regulation. So the regulation of the nervous system, the balance of the energy and the brakes of the nervous system are developed inside the connected, co-regulated relationship that an infant has with a caregiver.



# WINDOW OF TOLERANCE



This represents the energy of our nervous system **inside our window of tolerance**, which is our **ability to tolerate stress *without freaking out***--that's my very *scientific definition of regulation* :)

The behaviors that happen in response to or in cooperation with a regulated nervous system could be based on a wide variety of feelings: anger, sadness, frustration, etc., and the subsequent behaviors that accompany those feelings continue to be inside our regulated window of tolerance.

**The key is that that person isn't freaking out, and the reaction, for the most part, seems to match the stressor.**





*seeing behaviors through a lens of*

## REGULATION, CONNECTION, AND FELT-SAFETY

OPPOSITION	DEFIANCE
VERBAL AGGRESSION	PHYSICAL AGGRESSION
MOOD INSTABILITY	INATTENTION
HYPERACTIVITY	HYPERVIGILANCE
ANXIETY/WORRY	EXPLOSIVE BEHAVIOR
CONTROLLING BEHAVIOR	DISSOCIATION
DEPRESSION	WITHDRAWAL
SHUTDOWN	SUBSTANCE ABUSE
SELF INJURY	MANIPULATION

The Relational Neurosciences offer us the ability to see behaviors through the lens of regulation, connection, and felt safety. I could take every behavior or psychiatric diagnosis listed on the chart above and explain them through the lens of regulation, connection and felt safety.

So then, in my work as a therapist and with families, I'm working towards that: the regulation, the connection and the felt safety of the child. I'm not focusing on the behavioral symptoms that are accompanying those diagnoses. I'm focusing on cultivating, in this child's nervous system, regulation, connection, and felt safety, knowing that a regulated connected child who's feeling safe is doing well.



# connection or PROTECTION?

To get a little bit of a clearer picture on how to support our kids with challenging behaviors, it's helpful to understand **the brain has essentially two modes: connection or protection.** So this is about felt-safety, which we've talked about in the process of neuroception.

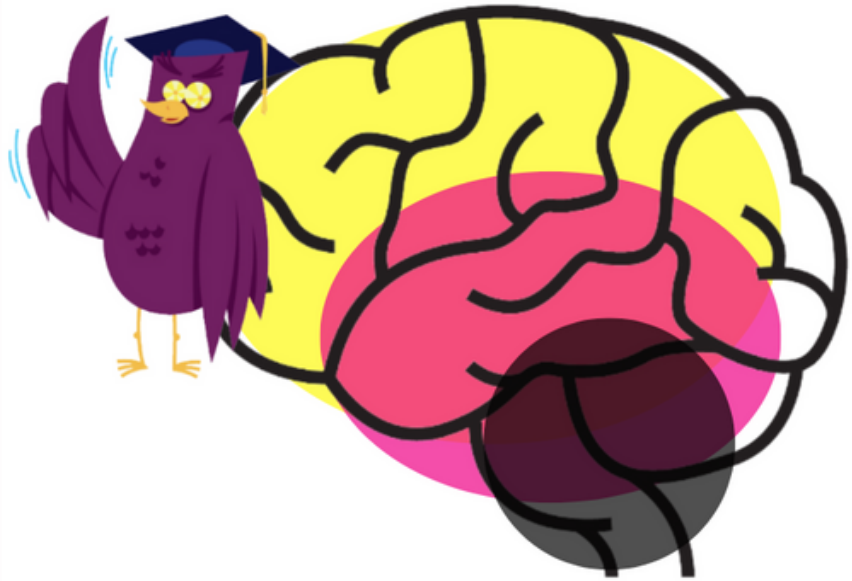
It helps to think of these two modes as an on or an off switch. Either the brain is experiencing felt-safety and it's in Connection Mode; or the brain is not experiencing felt-safety, and it's in Protection Mode.

The brain is doing this assessment of safety (inside, outside, and in between) at a remarkably fast pace, faster than we can even wrap our brains around. Four times every second, every quarter of a second, the brain is looking to those three places: inside, outside and in between. So we could do the math: 4 x every second multiplied by 3 places the brain is looking (inside, outside, in between) equals 12 places per second that the brain is taking in immense amounts of data to decide whether it is safe or not safe. And this is an either/or, on or off, switch: either safe or not.

Now, in Protection Mode brain, that switch is like a dimmer switch, similar to the dimmer switch in a kitchen. The level of "not safe", or the level of arousal inside Protection Brain can increase and decrease. We'll look at that in just a moment. But first, let's look at being in Connection Mode.

## Connection Brain

owl  
Socially Engaged  
Thinking Brain



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When we're in Connection Mode, when our brain is experiencing felt-safety, we're receiving cues of safety from inside, outside and in between.

Our social engagement system is engaged. We're open and available for being in connection and relationship, and we prefer connected relationships with one another.

### **Our Owl Brain is in charge.**

When I work with kids, I talk about our thinking brain. When our thinking brain is in charge we make thoughtful decisions; we have impulse control; we understand cause and effect. We have the understanding that the consequences of our actions matter.

We can think ahead, as opposed to having behaviors that are just a reaction to whatever is happening in the moment. And when our Owl Brain is in charge, we can typically make choices that nurture cooperation and connection.

Now remember, I talked about the accelerator and the brake. So when we are in Connection Mode, or our Owl Brain is in charge, we can get some energy and arousal going when we step on that accelerator. That brings us into the nervous system state of playfulness. Playfulness is the Owl Brain (Connection Mode) plus energy and arousal.

We can also be in our Owl Brain and have the deep breaks of the nervous system pressed. When the the deep breaks of the nervous system are pressed, our brain is able to be in a state of deep rest while still connected.

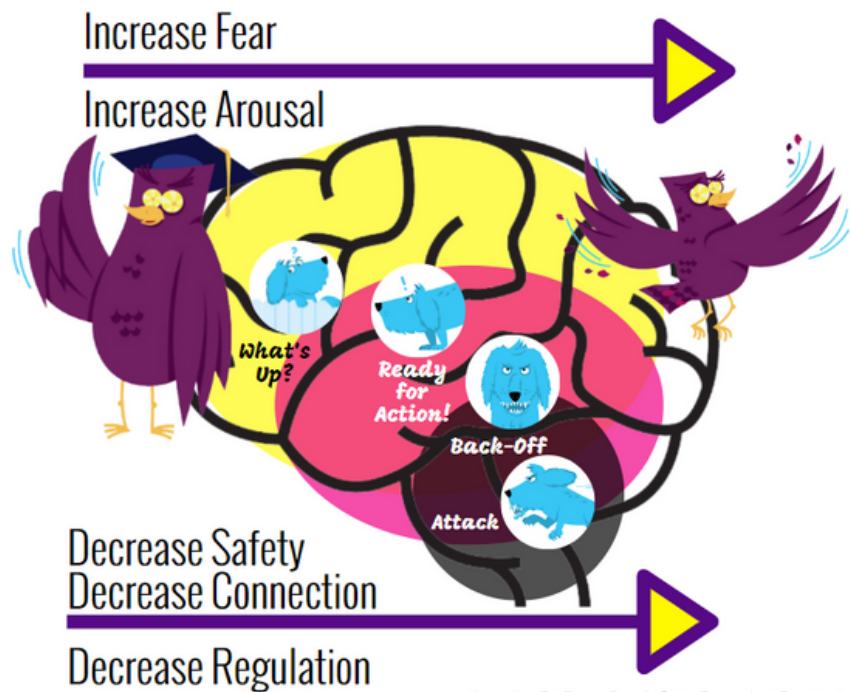
Deep rest might look like snuggling on the couch and watching a movie or reading a book together. If you are familiar with the Polyvagal Theory, we would associate this deep rest with the dorsal vagal branch of the nervous system which is typically known for shutting the body down in times of danger or threat. Deep rest is available, while in Connection Brain, because we are still experiencing felt-safety.

**Owl brain is considered the socially engaged brain because it has the capacity for both playfulness and deep rest and is a nervous system state that is open and available for connection.**



## Protection Brain

*watch dog*  
Not safe!!!  
Fight/Flight  
Sympathetic Arousal



Copyright © 2022 Robyn Gobbel \*based on Dr. Bruce Perry's State Dependent Functioning

When the brain is experiencing cues of danger, the brain flips into Protection Mode and protective behaviors emerge.

**When I'm working with kids, I say our Watch Dog Brain is in charge.**

When there is energy and arousal, while experiencing cues of danger, we will exhibit fight/flight behavior.

The more fear we experience, the more energy and arousal increases. The less felt-safety we perceive, the less connection and regulation we can experience.

You can see in the graphic above that there are four stages of Watchdog Brain. Because Protection Mode has these levels of arousal that increase or decrease based on what we are experiencing, I like to say that Protection Mode has a dimmer switch. These are the four levels of activation based on Dr. Bruce Perry's arousal continuum.

# Watch Dog Brain (Fight/Flight Continuum\*)

Based on Dr. Bruce Perry's Arousal Continuum



Watchdog Images Copyright © 2022 Robyn Gobbel

So if we look at the first level of arousal, the What's Up? watchdog, there's some danger being experienced, or just the possibility of danger. In the What's Up? level of arousal, our Owl Brain is still engaged and able to get more information and check things out to assess "Hmm, is this really dangerous or not? Let me investigate further."

In the What's Up? level of arousal, what we see are behaviors that Dr. Perry calls vigilance. This might look like a child who feels really hyper vigilant or even hyper active. Their eyes look around everywhere in order to take in *everything*. They have a difficult time staying focused on what you want them to be focused on because they're vigilantly assessing "Is this really dangerous or not?"

As we move up the arousal continuum, we move into the Ready-for-Action watchdog. These are behaviors of resistance. Here we start to see behaviors that can be a little bit trickier to navigate: defiance, crying, and a reluctance to be in cooperation or in connection. Behaviors of opposition only emerge when we are in Protection Mode. If the brain is in Connection Mode, the brain is ready for connection and cooperation, not opposition.

# Watch Dog Brain (Fight/Flight Continuum\*)

Based on Dr. Bruce Perry's Arousal Continuum



\*based on Dr. Bruce Perry's Arousal Continuum

Watchdog Images Copyright © 2022 Robyn Gobbel

As we go up to the next level in the arousal continuum, we move into the Back-Off watchdog. This is where we find behaviors of defiance, such as more significant refusal, verbal aggression, taking off/fleeing, and tantrums.

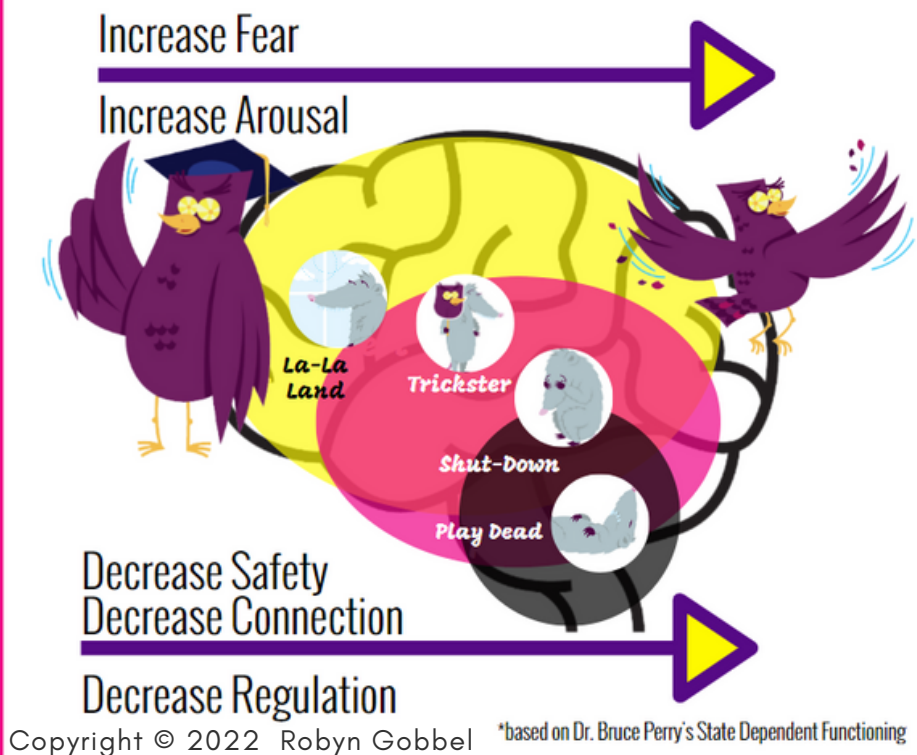
The final stage is the ATTACK! watchdog where we see behaviors of physical aggression. So again, I want to reiterate that physical aggression emerges from the Protection Mode brain that is experiencing a terror level of arousal. This might feel confusing to us because we may not perceive a situation as something that would cause a terror level of arousal. But what we can know is that the child's neuroception, the way they're experiencing the subjective experience of safety, has thrown their brain into the terror level of arousal. That is the only reason aggressive behaviors would emerge.

So what we want to stay focused on is: "How do I bring increased regulation? How do I increase connection? How do I increase felt-safety?" Then those behaviors will decrease down the arousal continuum and eventually move back into Connection Brain where we don't see opposition, defiance or aggression.



# Protection Brain

possum  
Collapse  
Dorsal Vagal



There is another pathway in Protection Brain. You might have a child whose behavior is not Watch Dog Brain behaviors of opposition, defiance or aggression, but behaviors that I call the **Possum Brain**. This is when there's a significant decrease in energy--that emergency brake is *really* pushed. And so again, if you're familiar with Polyvagal Theory, this is that dorsal vagal pathway, while neuroceiving danger. Remember, we are still talking about Protection Mode brain. Protection Mode brain is about lacking cues of safety from inside, outside or in between. So just like the Watchdog side in the fight flight pathway, Dr. Perry's theory of State Dependent Functioning helps us see that the Possum side also has four stages.

In the La-La Land stage, we will often see behaviors of avoidance, such as staying away from potential stressors or triggers, keeping away or keeping to themselves.

When we move into the Trickster level, these behaviors can actually feel really confusing because the behaviors that emerge from the alarm level on the Possum side look like over-cooperation over-compliance. These possum behaviors can trick us into thinking the owl brain is in charge.



# Possum Brain (Dissociation Continuum\*)

Based on Dr. Bruce Perry's State Dependent Functioning

*Alert*  
La La Land



Avoidance

*Alarm*  
Trickster



Compliance Robotic

*Fear*  
Shut Down



Shut-Down

*Terror*  
Play Dead



Non-Responsive Fainting

Based on Dr. Bruce Perry's State Dependent Functioning

Possum Images Copyright © 2022 Robyn Gobbel

These are kids who are saying "yes, yes, yes." If you have other kids who have more Watchdog behaviors in the home, it can be easy to not notice that this behavior is actually pretty dangerous behavior for our kids out in the world. Using a coping mechanism of over-compliance leaves kids at risk of negative or dangerous things happening to them. This over-compliance can sometimes feel robotic, like people pleasing behavior.

At the shut-down level of arousal in the Possum pathway, we begin to see behaviors that look really shut down. This may look like bodies that look pretty shut down and in a collapsed posture. These are the kids who come into my office and just flop onto the couch or lay out on the ground. It can be very hard to mobilize these kids or get them into action because they are moving very, very slow.

Finally, if we reach into the Play Dead level of dissociation, we may see behaviors that would be considered non-responsive, such as fainting. Sometimes what we see is a child randomly falling asleep when there is a certain level of stress in the environment which can indicate they have entered the terror level of arousal.

# TRAUMA & TOXIC STRESS

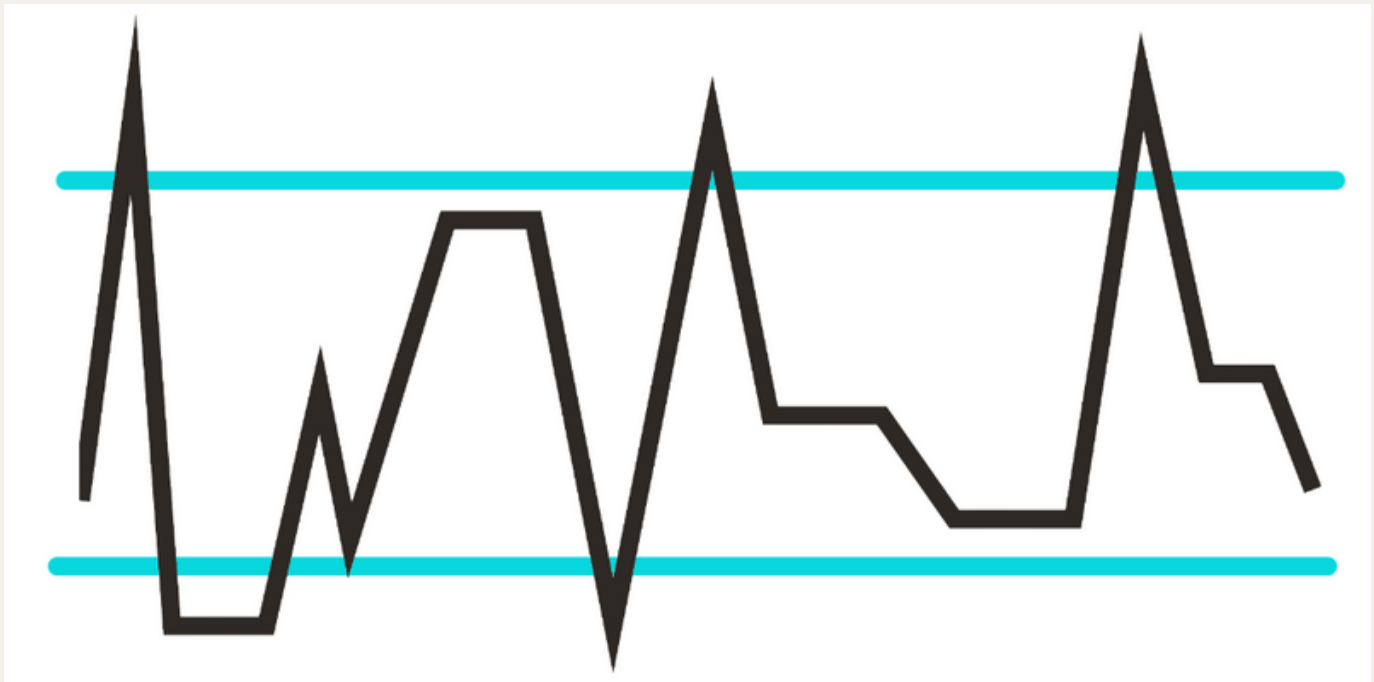
*impairs regulation*

So everything I've talked about so far: the Owl Brain, Watch Dog Brain, the Possum Brain, connection vs. protection, regulation, felt-safety, etc. are true about all brains. It's true about me. It's true about you. It's true about everyone. Those are all things that we now understand about the relational brain.

Trauma and toxic stress, however, have a significant impact on the brain. And that is, in particular, my area of expertise. I have voraciously studied and learned about the impact of trauma and toxic stress on the developing brain because if we understand that, maybe we can get some better ideas about how to help these kids.

**What we know for sure, is that trauma and toxic stress impairs regulation.**





Remember the graphic on page 17 of this sine wave representing the nice up and down accelerator and brake that happens inside the window of tolerance? When trauma and toxic stress impacts the developing brain, you end up with a nervous system that doesn't look like this nice up and down regulated, balanced energy and arousal. It looks more like the above graphic. Here, the accelerator and brake may go from zero to 60. Sometimes, both the accelerator and brake are slammed at the same time, and then they are released at the same time. This pattern is unpredictable, and it feels really scary that trauma and toxic stress can impact regulation in this way.

This leads to pretty unpredictable behavior, as well as the mountain out of a molehill phenomenon. This can feel very confusing for parents. You may be thinking, "okay, I learned earlier that aggression is a terror response, but my kid is hitting and kicking and spitting and there's nothing that I can tell is happening that would cause my child to be experiencing terror." That's completely true from *your* subjective experience of felt-safety--that level of arousal is confusing. **But when regulation has been impacted by trauma and toxic stress, one of the things that happens is that even the slightest stressor can cause an enormous arousal response.**

**When kids experience trauma and toxic stress while their brain is developing, they are flooded with stress.**

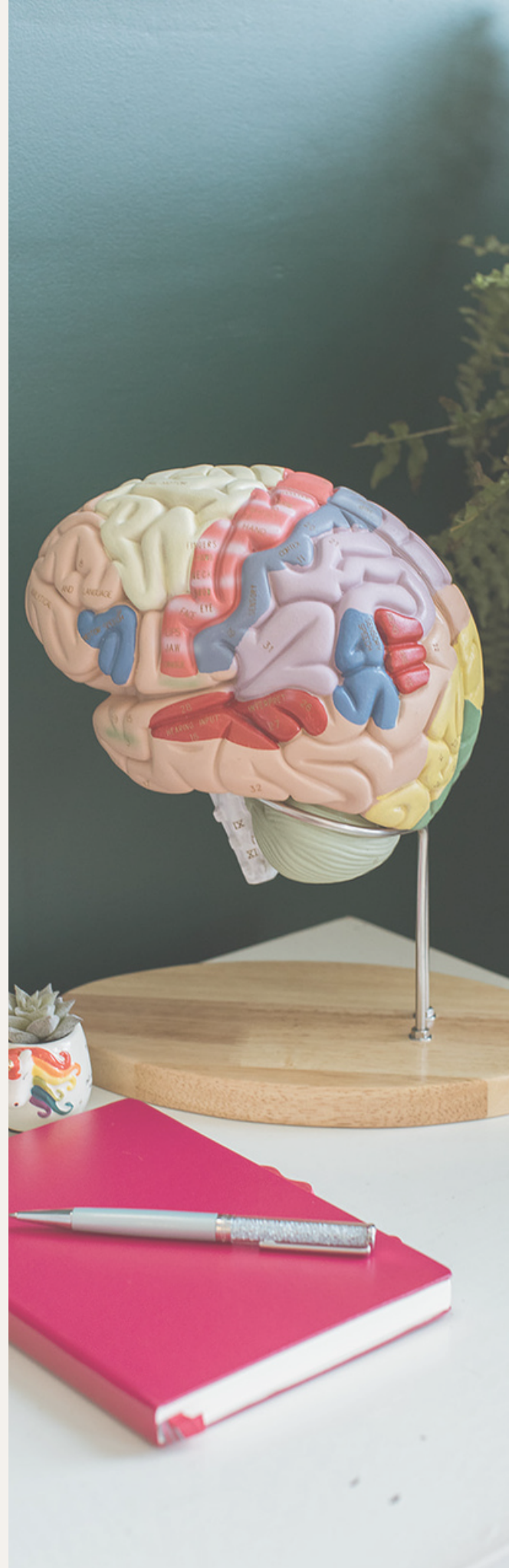
So, instead of having experiences that would allow them to build and nurture the stress-resilience part of their system, they don't get that opportunity.

What emerges as a result is a very, very, very over-reactive stress response system. So when we see that mountain out of a molehill response, that huge reaction to what we would call a small stressor, we have to remember that felt-safety is totally subjective.

**If a child is reacting with terror-level behaviors, we have to trust that their nervous system is experiencing that level of danger.**

They match. The behavior matches the level of lack of felt-safety that they're experiencing, even if we're baffled by it. Even if we don't understand the behavior at all.

**We have to trust that they match.**





## BRAIN PRIMED TO NEUROCEIVE DANGER

Trauma and toxic stress also impact the brain in a way that leaves it primed to neuroceive danger.

Remember that all brains are asking *safe or not safe, safe or not safe* four times every second, but the brain that has experienced significant levels of trauma and toxic stress perceives that everything is always dangerous.

It's as if the brain saying, "I'm always landing on danger, danger, so what's the point of asking? How about I just stay on danger, danger mode."

Metaphorically, that's what's happening inside the brain.

Research validates that people with histories of trauma and toxic stress, interpret neutral and even positive stimuli as threats. Their brains are primed to experience threat.

## CONNECTION IS THREATENING

Trauma and toxic stress also impacts our connection system. This might be the most tragic part of this. Remember, connection is a biological imperative. We're born with it. We don't lose it. We need connection to survive.

Yet, if a child is experiencing trauma and toxic stress inside an attachment relationship, they're also learning that connection isn't safe. So then they're left with these two pieces that create this paradox: an unsolvable dilemma of always looking for and being driven towards connection while experiencing that connection as dangerous.

When feeling afraid, all humans look for connection in order to regulate. So a child who feels afraid is still biologically driven to look for connection, but what if connection is what has made this child feel afraid in the first place?

When this child looks for connection, they continue to be afraid. And when they feel afraid they look for connection. It is a vicious cycle with no way out. **This way that trauma and toxic stress pairs connection with "danger, danger" is actually underneath many of your kid's most baffling behaviors.**

So, if I'm with a child and scratching my head because a behavior seems so bizarre and makes absolutely no sense at all, what I often wonder next is "Is this behavior emerging from that place in the nervous system where connection is experienced as dangerous or threatening?"







# neurodivergence

## OTHER REASONS FOR IMPAIRED REGULATION:

Now, trauma and toxic stress aren't the only reasons that we can have sensitive or impaired regulation, connection and felt-safety. Some of the other reasons (in which I'm not an expert) are different forms of neurodivergence, such as the autism spectrum, sensory processing disorder, the gifted brain, and other brain-based differences. The way those different neurotypes are pulling in and processing information, not only from the environment, but also from their inner worlds, could be contributing to impairments in regulation, connection and felt-safety.

While I'm not an expert on the experience of the nervous system within a neurodivergent brain and body, I want to make sure that we acknowledge the truth that toxic stress and trauma are not the only reasons that we can be experiencing impaired regulation, impaired connection or impaired felt-safety.



REGULATED,  
CONNECTED  
CHILDREN WHO  
FEEL SAFE

(AND KNOW WHAT TO DO)

*behave well*

ROBYN GOBBEL







So then...HOW DO WE CHANGE  
behavior?

**We increase regulation. We increase connection. We increase felt safety.**

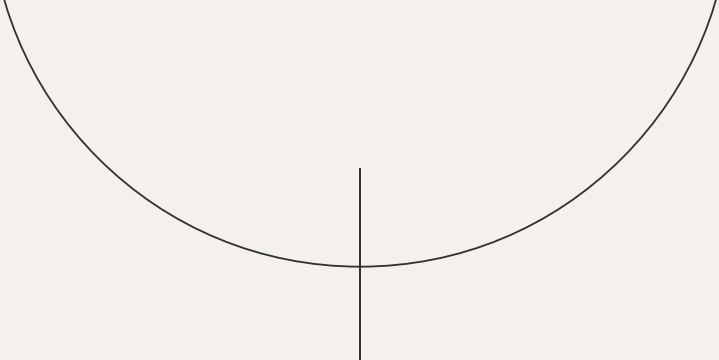
And we teach if we need to. Some kids, especially kids with trauma and toxic stress histories, actually really do need to be taught the appropriate behavior for a certain experience or environment. They just never had the opportunity to learn. So, I like to leave that open as an option. Yes, truly, some kids do need to learn appropriate behavior in a certain situation. However, in almost all circumstances, kids aren't struggling to behave because they don't know how they're supposed to behave. Kids know, in general, how they're supposed to behave. That's not the problem. The problem is that they're not regulated enough; they're not feeling connected enough; and they're not experiencing enough felt-safety for the behaviors that they know are appropriate and that invite connection to emerge.

So this is why consequences and punishments are almost never the pathway to increasing socially appropriate behavior. We certainly want to set boundaries. This paradigm shift includes very high boundaries, but having high boundaries isn't synonymous with punishment or consequences. And when we understand where the behavior is emerging from, that it's *not* emerging from the Owl brain (which can learn through consequences), but instead is emerging from Protection Mode brain (Watchdog or Possum), strategies like rewards, consequences, punishments and behavior modification aren't the path back. The path back is through regulation, connection and felt-safety. It's through trusting that for regulated, connected kids, who feel safe, prosocial behaviors will emerge.



CHANGING  
HOW WE SEE  
PEOPLE,  
*changes people*

ROBYN GOBBEL



We can ask ourselves these three questions when we're facing challenging behavior with our kids:

- **Is this child regulated?**
- **Is the child feeling connected to me or to themselves?**
- **Is this child neuroceiving safety?**

And then we want to offer-up experiences to the children that could increase regulation, increase connection, and increase felt-safety--trusting that prosocial behaviors will emerge.

**This paradigm shift--really thinking about where behaviors are emerging from--*becomes an intervention.*** The Relational Neurosciences support this truth, allowing us to change how we see behaviors and ultimately change how we see our kids. Changing how we see people, changes people. So even if we do nothing else (and there is so much else that we can do, so much we can do to help kids gain increased regulation, connection, felt-safety, all while having really strong boundaries about behavior), simply making this paradigm shift, simply shifting over to changing how we see people is an intervention that, in and of itself, changes people.



# Luckily, you are in the right place.

This is a place where you will discover how changing how we see people, changes people. Visit my podcast you'll see that quickly!

This is a place where you will learn about what's underneath your child's challenging behaviors so you can put on those x-ray vision goggles and meet their real need.

**This is a place where you can go deeper if you want.**

Children with a history of trauma or big, baffling behavior are so overwhelming to parent! It's lonely, isolating, and just plain hard.

.....

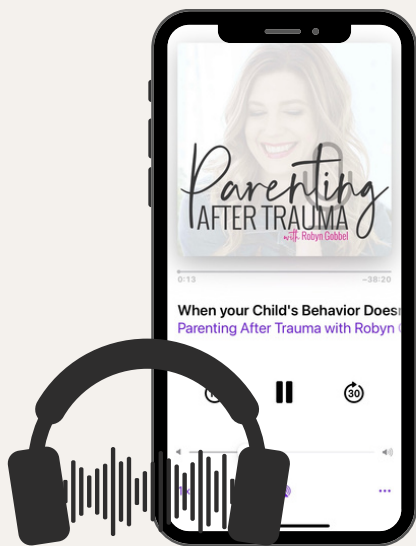
**The Club**, a unique virtual community with people who know what it's like to be you. You'll receive the connection and co-regulation you deserve so you can parent with connection and co-regulation. Inside The Club you'll become the connected parent you want to be.

**Being With**- a 12-month immersive and holistic training program for parenting professionals. Upon completion, students receive licensing rights to teach my parenting curriculum in their community or practice.



# want even more?

## PODCAST



*As a parent (and a professional who works with youth), this podcast completely changed my perspective on behavior and my role as an adult. Before, I was just trying everything I knew, reading everything I could, and hoping for the best. Robyn's research-based (but in layman's terms) podcasts are giving me: (1) a better understanding of the brain and (2) the tools I need to "see" and respond with intention and empathy. So grateful for this resource.*

~ Listener Review

[LISTEN](https://robbygobbel.com/podcast/)

<https://robbygobbel.com/podcast/>

## EBOOK

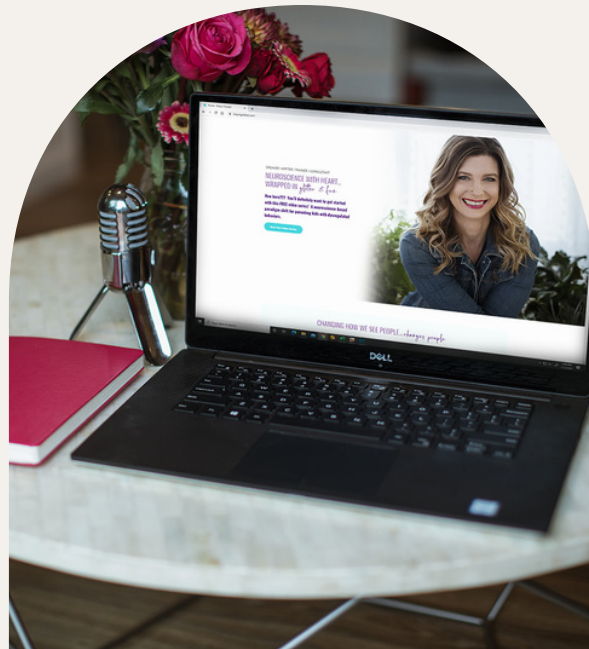


Love this ebook? I also wrote a free 6-part ebook on The Brilliance of Attachment that reframes attachment behaviors + offers hope for healing. Attachment is a complex and layered theory that has changed everything we thought we knew about human relationships and behavior.

[FREE DOWNLOAD](https://robbygobbel.com/course/attachmentebook/)

<https://robbygobbel.com/course/attachmentebook/>

a community who gets it... *and you*  
**JOIN THE CLUB!**



In The Club, you'll get what you need so that you can give your child what they need—more connection and more co-regulation. The Club is a virtual community just for parents of kids with a history of trauma (and the professionals who support them).

Children with a history of trauma or big, baffling behavior are so overwhelming to parent! It's lonely, isolating, and just plain hard. The Club is a place to be seen and known. It's a place to undo the aloneness. It's a place to give and receive the connection and co-regulation you need so that you can parent the way you want to.

**DOES THIS SOUND LIKE**  
*exactly* **WHAT YOU NEED?**

<https://robyngobbel.com/theclub/>



# Being With

An **immersive and holistic** 12-month program where you'll become **solidly anchored into the science of relationship** and a robust set of **tools that help even the families with kids with the biggest behaviors**, all while **safely exploring your inner world**.



**The end result?** *Being as present for the parents you work with as they want to be with their kids. ....and you'll be way less burned out, too.*

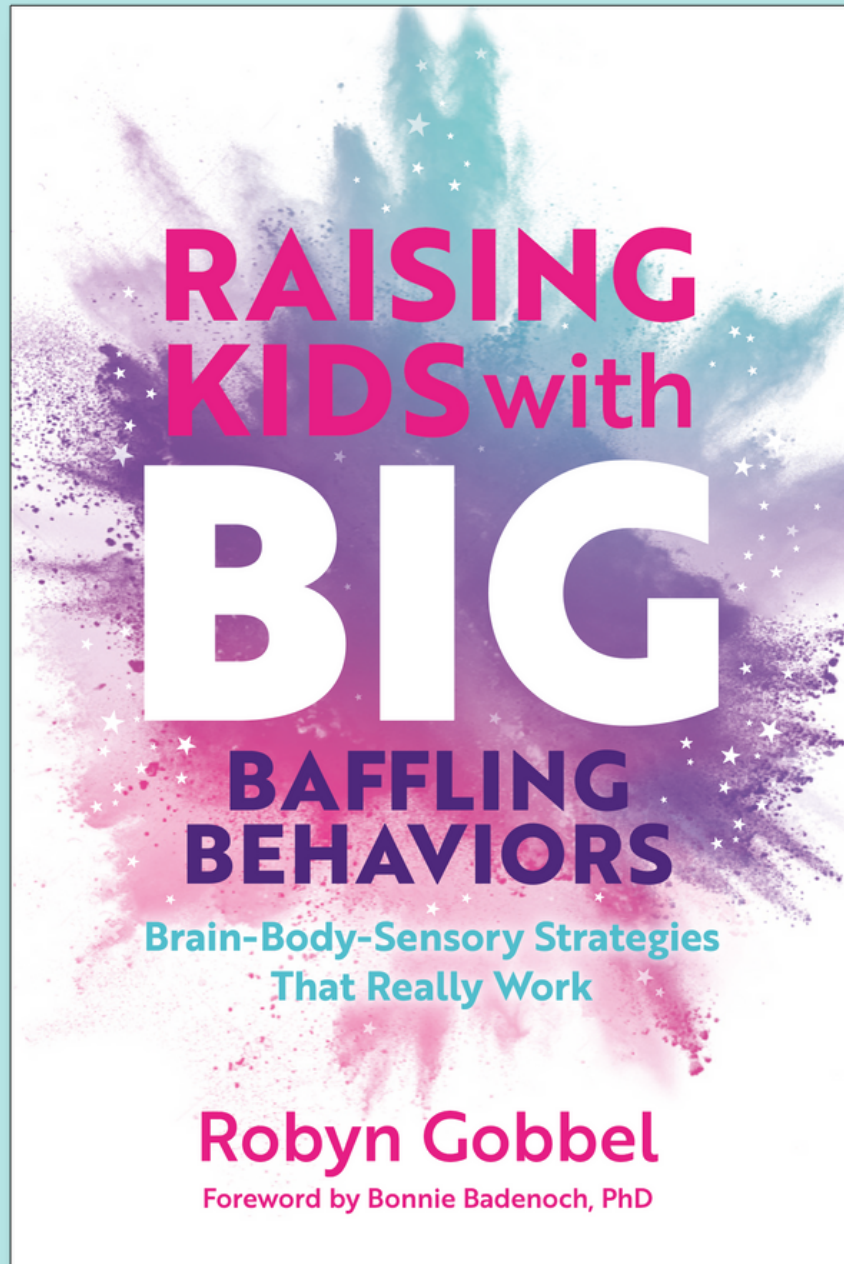
**What would shift** in your work with families if you had the **confidence** to offer your resonant presence - *even in the midst of chaos*- while **teaching** parents tools that actually work? If you **understood the science of behavior** so deeply that no behavior -- from the children or their parents -- would **ever leave you dazed and confused again?**

Upon completion, students receive licensing rights to teach my parenting curriculum in their community or practice.

ARE YOU READY TO JOIN A COMMUNITY  
OF *radical change makers?*

<https://robyngobbel.com/beingwith/>

preorder my new *book*  
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## THANK YOU, LOVELY

However you stumbled upon this ebook, thank you. Thank you for being curious and brave. If your interest in behavior is driven by how much you love a child in your care, thank you. If your interest in behavior is driven by how much you love and care for your clients, thank you. If your interest in behavior is driven by curious self-exploration, thank you.

We are changing the world by changing how we see people. Me and you. Together.

*xo, Robyn Gobbel*

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