



POST-ADOPTION RESOURCE CENTER NEWSLETTER

* VOLUME 7 ISSUE 1 *

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UP KIDS.COM

Contact a PARC specialist

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“Not Your Average Parenting” Book Club and Parent Chat

Adoptive, foster, kinship, guardianships parents and respite caregivers, please join us for a book club to explore books that offer insight, support and a sense of community. Child welfare professionals are also welcome to attend.

SUPPORT GROUPS AND EVENTS ARE HELD IN COLLABORATION WITH MDHHS.

March 10

Noon or 7 p.m. EST

Virtually on Teams

Meeting ID: 210 005 769 282

Passcode: f43cY9AC

or Scan the QR code to join



For more information and/or to RSVP, contact:

Alysa Sutinen at alysa@upkids.com or 906-250-0393.

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Beth Mulligan at bethm@upkids.com or 906-523-8927.

Check out upcoming events, webinars and resources on our Facebook page:
U.P. Post Adoption Resource Center
<https://www.facebook.com/906PARC>

Regulation Through Physical Activity

Beth Mulligan, post-adoption specialist

As we eagerly wait for the warmer days of spring, you may notice behaviors changing all around us due to the lack of time outside and beautiful sunny days. There are many ways movement can help us regulate and lift our spirits on dreary days. As parents, we can provide support and safety during these mood shifts and help de-escalate with co-regulation. We may even need to adjust our expectations and approach with more empathy to help those struggling with their sense of felt safety.

Exercise has been proven to reduce cortisol and adrenaline levels, which helps improve emotional regulation. Exercise also reduces anxiety because it causes the brain to produce more dopamine and endorphins which are the brain's natural mood lifters. When our brains have lower cortisol levels and more dopamine, self-regulation becomes much easier.

Self-Regulation Through Heavy Work

Heavy work is activity that requires activation of our muscles and joints. Movements such as pushing, pulling or lifting create resistance input to the muscles, and this feedback ultimately calms and regulates the sensory system. Try these heavy work interventions before or after school. They can also be included in your bedtime routine:

- Wall or chair push-ups.
- Pushing or carrying a full laundry basket (or any heavy object).
- Carrying in heavy groceries, a backpack or luggage.
- Wheelbarrow walks, bear walks, crab walks, crawling like a snake.
- Pulling or stretching a piece of stretch material.
- Pulling on a rope or pull-up bar.
- Jumping – trampoline, jumping jacks, jumping rope, therapy ball bouncing, indoor hopscotch.
- Yoga for core strength and balance or calming poses like child's pose.
- Blanket burrito rolls – roll the child up like a burrito and wrap the blanket tightly.
- Chewing gum, dried mango, or fruit leather.
- Drinking thick liquid through a straw or water using a sports bottle.
- Creating bubbles by blowing through a straw into essential oil water.
- Squeezing stress balls, therapy putty, hand squeezers or play dough.

Reference: Beck, Colleen. 'Heavy Work Activities – The OT Toolbox.' The OT Toolbox, 7 July 2025.
www.theotttoolbox.com/heavy-work-activities/



Regulation Through Physical Activity

Beth Mulligan, post-adoption specialist

7-Minute HIIT Workout for Kids – Improve Emotional Regulation in Just 7 Minutes Per Day

Set yourself up for success with these fun activities to do together! Set the interval timer on your phone for seven rounds of 45 seconds of work and 15 seconds of rest. Find some fun, upbeat music your child will enjoy and get ready to move!

- Frog Jumps – Hop back and forth like a frog.
- Bear Walk – Hands and feet on the floor, hips high; walk left and right.
- Gorilla Shuffle – Sink into a low squat with hands on the floor; shuffle around the room.
- Starfish Jumps – Jumping jacks as fast as you can, with arms and legs spread wide.
- Cheetah Run – Run in place as fast as you can, just like the fastest animal in the Sahara.
- Crab Crawl – Sit and place your palms flat on the floor behind you near your hips; lift up off the ground and crawl.
- Elephant Stomps – March in place, lifting your knees as high as you can and stomping the ground as hard as you can.

Reference: ‘HIIT for Kids – Improve Emotional Regulation In Just 7 Minutes Per Day (Animal HIIT Workout for Kids).’

Raising An Extraordinary Person, 5 Dec. 2017

<https://learn.hes-extraordinary.com/7-minute-hiit-workout-for-kids>

7 MINUTE HIIT Workout for Kids

Set an interval timer and complete each animal movement for 45 seconds, with 15 seconds of rest in between. Do as many as you can!



FROG JUMPS

Hop, hop, back and forth like a frog



BEAR WALK

Hands & feet on the floor, hips high – walk left and right



GORILLA SHUFFLE

Sink into a low sumo squat, with hands on the floor, shuffle around the room.



STARFISH JUMPS

Jumping jacks as fast as you can, with arms and legs spread wide.



CHEETAH RUN

Run in place, as FAST as you can! Just like the fastest animal in the Sahara.



CRAB CRAWL

Sit and place your palms flat on the floor behind you near your hips. Lift up off the ground and crawl.



ELEPHANT STOMPS

March in place lifting your knees as high as you can and stomping the ground as hard as you can!



Progressive Muscle Relaxation, a simple tool for busy parents

Tylor Kistler, post-adoption resource specialist

Parenting can be joyful, exhausting, overwhelming and everything in between. Finding time to relax can feel impossible, but even a few minutes can make a difference. Everyone needs the ability to relax and decompress. Progressive Muscle Relaxation is a quick, easy and powerful skill that can be used at any time during the day to assist in de-stressing, relaxing and centering the mind.



Progressive Muscle Relaxation, a simple tool for busy parents, continued

Tylor Kistler, post-adoption resource specialist

When our mind and bodies react to stress and anxiety, these emotions can result in feelings of tension, aches, pains and general exhaustion. Think about times in your life where you have felt anxious or stressed. Do you “tense up?” Muscle tension is our bodies’ response to stress to prepare for potentially dangerous situations. Progressive Muscle Relaxation can help our bodies relax and return to a state of calm by reducing muscle tension, one muscle at a time.

Reference the diagram and focus on each muscle independently. Start with the muscles in your face (forehead, cheeks, mouth, neck, etc.) and tense each muscle with intention. Make sure you can feel the tension, without causing pain or discomfort. Keep the muscle tense for at least five seconds, then relax the muscle for at least 10 seconds. Take a deep

breath and allow the muscle to fully relax. Keep focus on each muscle individually as you move throughout your body. It can be helpful to take deep breaths as you allow the muscle to relax after tension. Once you can fully tense and relax each muscle, move onto the next in sequence, from your head to your toes!

Like most things in life, practice makes perfect! It takes time and intention to fully understand how your body reacts to stress. When you are feeling overwhelmed or anxious, take a few minutes to tune into your body and relax, one muscle at a time. This exercise can be done while watching television, scrolling your phone, sitting at your desk, laying in bed or any other time you have a couple minutes to spare. With practice, Progressive Muscle Relaxation can be a great tool to add to your de-stressing toolkit. When feeling overwhelmed, give it a try!

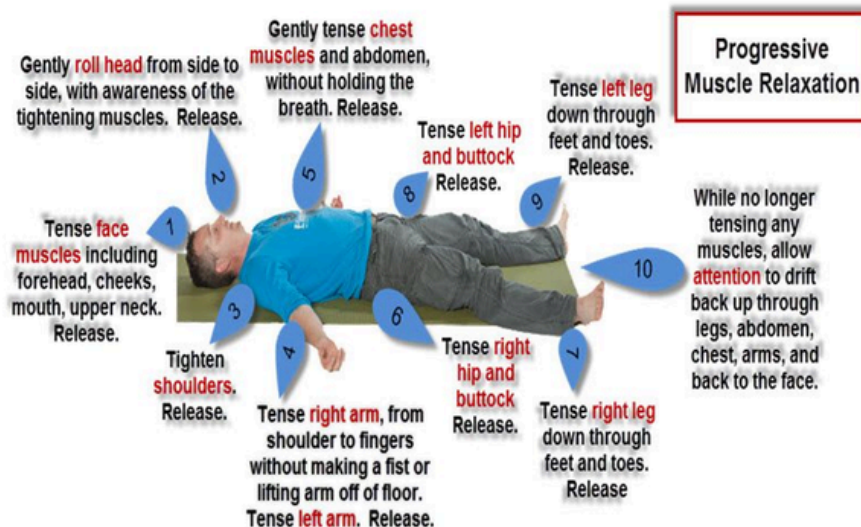
Additional Resources:

Progressive Muscle Relaxation- for kids and adults!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aaTDNYjk-Gw>

Progressive Muscle Relaxation: An Essential Anxiety Skill #27

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNqYG95j_UQ



Co-Regulation and The Science Behind it

Lauren Meadors, post-adoption resource specialist

Humans are a social species at heart. Psychologist Stephen Porges has highlighted some of the science behind this with the Polyvagal Theory. This theory explores ways that our nervous system responds to distressing situations as well as the impact that trauma and social connection have on these responses.

There are three states our nervous system can be found in that Porges identifies: the ventral vagal state, the sympathetic state and the dorsal vagal state. A good way to visualize these different states can be along the steps on a ladder. At the top of the ladder, the ventral vagal state can be described as an emotionally safe place where we feel comfortable engaging and connecting with those around us. Functioning in this state looks like being out of survival mode and being able to approach situations calmly and mindfully.

Below this we have the sympathetic state, or the middle of the ladder. This state is best understood as our “fight or flight system.” It is a quick response to a perceived threat where we can experience things such as a higher heart rate, quick breathing, tension and an increase of stress hormones.

Lastly, at the bottom of the ladder we have the dorsal vagal state. This is our freeze state. If we exist in fight or flight mode for too long and cannot resolve a perceived threat, our bodies can become numb or disassociated.



Where we are on the ladder can fluctuate. However, where one finds themselves can be influenced by those around you and the ability to co-regulate. Being able to co-regulate means individual nervous systems working alongside each other to come back to a calm place after an event of heightened emotion. It is a very important tool and something that we begin learning how to do as early as in the womb. Babies will co-regulate themselves based on the state of the mother. Then, as they age, co-regulation continues to evolve in different ways that line up with developmental needs. A child will look to their caregivers to set the tone when they are dysregulated throughout childhood & adolescence, even into adulthood.

Many children who were adopted have trauma histories that have impacted how they have learned to co-regulate. They may not have had a caregiver they could rely on to help them cope with stress or a caregiver that didn't know how to regulate themselves. Without guidance in this area and experiences of unresolved fight, flight or freeze, children can find their nervous systems in a protective state that makes it difficult to connect with others and feel safe.

Co-Regulation and The Science Behind it

Lauren Meadors, post-adoption resource specialist, continued

Our bodies also engage in neuroception. This is a natural process that happens where our nervous systems unconsciously scan the environment in order to respond to things as quickly as possible. In somebody who hasn't experienced a lot of trauma or chronic stress, this system typically works well and reasonably. However, for those who do have a trauma history or long periods of chronic stress, like many children who have been adopted, this neuroception process can become faulty. The nervous system becomes biased in its assessment of potential threats. This can make it hard for individuals to assess levels of threat at any given point and can extend how long it typically takes to return to a regulated state after stressors. They can struggle to feel safe and comfortable connecting with those around them, and it becomes harder to climb to the top of that ladder.

A nervous system does not have to be stuck in fight, flight, or freeze mode forever. Co-regulation is a skill that can be built overtime, despite the effects that past experiences may have had. For children, the best first step is having a safe and therapeutic relationship with a caregiver. Whether they are scared, lonely or upset, the presence of a safe caregiver there to help soothe or model regulation skills can make a world of difference.

Co-regulation during periods of distress calms the nervous system quicker and more efficiently; it is a good skill to build upon. Repeated successful co-regulation can set the stage for better regulation skills in the future. There are many other activities that can help build regulation skills alongside having a safe person. Things such as singing, breathing exercises, exposure to something cold, physical activity, meditation and even laughing all help rewire the nervous system towards calm. Engaging in these activities listed can help activate the vagus nerve, which plays a large part in the calming zone of the nervous system.

The practice of these activities, no matter what point of the ladder you or your child is at, can be helpful. If you need to hunker down and ride a high stress moment out without introducing any new strategies, don't worry! You can always start by slowly adding it into your routine even when things are calm. This will still work to strengthen the body's ability to co-regulate in the future. Small changes and consistency can build both co-regulation and connection skills overtime for not only you but your children as well. This can lead to big changes down the road in how triggering events are responded to and how often we are able to stay at the top of the ladder.

Mind Known. (2024, June 18). Polyvagal Theory Made Simple. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zrIKLgnov4>



DIY Coping Skills Craft:**Materials and instructions:**

1. Paper plate cut in half.
2. Crepe paper - cut into 6" - 8" strips, cut in half.
3. Yarn or string.
4. Any other embellishments to make the creature (use what you have on hand).

Suggested embellishments:

stickers
ribbon
paint
markers, crayons or colored pencils
tissue paper
googly eyes

Instructions:

Attach the crepe paper to the flat bottom of the paper plate. Attach yarn/string to the top center of the curved part of the paper plate as a hanger. Have kids decorate the paper plate any way they want, as a monster, or a creature, or with stickers.



To Use: hang up the creature and have kids blow on the crepe paper to get it to move.

<https://copingskillsforkids.com/deep-breathing-exercises-for-kids>

<https://copingskillsforkids.com/deep-breathing-exercises-for-kids>

We are here for you!
Let us know how we can help.

What training topics interest you?

What activities would you like us to host for your family?

How can we help you through our support groups?

Do you have ideas or suggestions?

Contact us through email, phone or our Facebook page.

