



Episode 06: Sensory Modulation: Part 2

Hosts: Tracy Stackhouse · Cory Dundon · Michelle Maunder

LISTENER NAME

DATE LISTENED

TOTAL LISTENING + REFLECTION TIME (MINS)

CPD HOURS CLAIMED



Episode Summary

We pick up sensory modulation from the sensory base this time. Tracy frames it as the nervous system's constant dialling up of what is salient and dialling down of what is competing, and follows that through inhibition and facilitation from the cellular level all the way up to behaviour. The key idea is that modulation never works in a vacuum: it is organised top-down by state and by the safety question, which is why the same sound can feel comforting after coffee and unbearable straight after a nap. From there we get into why modulation breaks down. For some kids the habituation does not stick, so the fifteenth passing car lands like the first, and the circuit never learns to organise an adaptive response. We move into the clinical work: reading ever-subtler cues of state change, co-regulating, and being masterfully in control of our own reactions so we do not flood the child. Tracy walks the R's of regulation across the major models, recover, relate and reason, and the work of Perry, Siegel, Deb Dana, Dan Hughes and Jane Koomar, then the power of re-storying a child's experience. We finish on STEPPSI, the planning tool Tracy co-developed, for tying sensation, task, environment, predictability, self-regulation and interaction into one clear plan.



Resources & Mentions

- The STEPPSI model (Tracy Stackhouse, Julie Wilbarger and colleagues), the sensory modulation planning framework shown on the handout.
- Bruce Perry, the Neurosequential Model.
- Dan Siegel, the Flip Your Lid hand model of the brain.
- Deb Dana, Dan Hughes and Jane Koomar, on relationship- and trauma-informed regulation, including the Safe Base model.
- Stuart Shanker, Self-Reg, on the broader domains of dysregulation.
- The Spirit framework (Stackhouse), for thinking about sensory modulation.
- Check out DFX's Learning Journeys to build your clinical reasoning skills: <https://dfxlearningjourneys.thinkific.com/>



Reflection Prompts

Take a few quiet minutes to consider each prompt and write freely. Add or remove a prompt block to suit the episode.

- 1 Modulation is the simultaneous turning up of the salient and turning down of the competing, organised top-down by what state the system wants. How does that reframe what you are actually working on when you “regulate” a child?

- 2 For some kids habituation does not stick, so the fifteenth passing car lands like the first. Think of a child like this: how might their difficulty be a circuit that never learns the adaptive response, rather than wilful sensitivity?

- 3 We stress being masterfully in control of our own reactions so we do not flood the child. Where in your practice does your own regulation most shape a child’s, and how do you tend it?

- 4 The R’s, recover, relate, reason, are never met in the absence of relationship and must come in that order. For a dysregulated child, where do you tend to start, and what would change if you began with recover and relate?

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STEPPSI ties sensation, task, environment, predictability, self-regulation and interaction into one plan. Pick a child and map one element from each: what becomes clearer when you plan across all six rather than chasing the behaviour?
