



Episode 15: Rhythm, Routine and Predictability

Hosts: Tracy Stackhouse · Cory Dundon · Michelle Maunder

LISTENER NAME

DATE LISTENED

TOTAL LISTENING + REFLECTION TIME (MINS)

CPD HOURS CLAIMED



Episode Summary

Cory had a baby since the last episode, and four months in she is living the topic: the sheer disorientation of losing predictability, a newborn who does not arrive with a circadian rhythm, and the discovery that a simple bedtime routine, bath, feed, massage, book, bed, regulated her before it regulated her daughter. The three of us slow down to open up rhythm, routine and predictability as a clinical cornerstone, the thing OTs know inherently and then forget, in their lives and in their treatment planning, until it is disrupted and suddenly obvious.

Tracy grounds it in the nervous system: the body builds every function off rhythm, the craniosacral pulse, breath, circadian, diurnal and ultradian cycles, and the vestibular system catches and entrains those rhythms, with auditory and even light playing their part. Out of sync, the polyvagal system can override everything and pull you toward protection. They get practical about how to read when a child loses rhythm, in speech, in interaction, on the trampoline, and how to reinsert predictability, the same entry every time, the same words, even level blinds and a tidy clinic so the therapist is free to be present. The through-line is a lovely paradox: you give rhythm in order to allow arrhythm, because flexibility, humour and high-level connection are built on a base of predictability. And it is a kind, jargon-free way to talk to families, no one's rhythm is wrong, you are just helping everyone sync up.



Resources & Mentions

- The STEPPSI tool (Stackhouse, Wilbarger and colleagues), where predictability is one of the dimensions, alongside the attain, maintain and challenge regulation dimension of the Spirit model.
- Polyvagal theory (Stephen Porges), on how safety versus activation can override the body's basic rhythms.
- On vestibular and vestibular-auditory entrainment, and the role of light in establishing circadian rhythms.
- Sensory diets, as a predictable, rhythmic support layered on once firm foundations (sleep, routines) are in place.
- Check out DFX's Learning Journeys to build your clinical reasoning skills: 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 You only feel predictability once it is gone. Where in your own life or practice has losing rhythm shown you how much regulating work it was quietly doing?

- 2 We argue the body builds every function off rhythm, and the vestibular system catches and entrains it. For a dysregulated child, where might a loss of rhythm, not the surface behaviour, be the real signal?

- 3 Cory's bedtime routine regulated her before it regulated her daughter. Where could building predictability into your own entries, the same start, the same words, free you to be more present with a child?

- 4 The paradox is that you give rhythm in order to allow arrhythm, flexibility and humour are built on a base of predictability. For a child who struggles with change, how solid is the predictable base you are building from?

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"No one's rhythm is wrong, we are just helping everyone sync up" is a kind, jargon-free way to talk to families. How could you use that framing with a family you are working with right now?
