



CPD REFLECTIVE PRACTICE WORKSHEET

Episode 18: Polyvagal Theory and Co-regulation

Hosts: Tracy Stackhouse · Cory Dundon · Michelle Maunder

LISTENER NAME

DATE LISTENED

TOTAL LISTENING + REFLECTION TIME (MINS)

CPD HOURS CLAIMED



Episode Summary

Tracy has just spent four days immersed in polyvagal theory at the Polyvagal Institute's gathering, rubbing shoulders with the field's leading thinkers, Kim Barthel among the OTs, and was invited by Stephen Porges himself to present on the interface between sensation and neuroception. She brings back the felt sense of a room manifesting safety, and a reminder of the theory's three pillars, the autonomic hierarchy (ventral, sympathetic, dorsal), neuroception, and co-regulation, all resting on one deceptively simple word: safety. If your nervous system does not feel safe, inside, outside and in between, you struggle, and it can shape your development.

The heart of it is a revelation about co-regulation. Watching Deb Dana co-regulate a colleague live, Tracy realised how often therapists treat co-regulation as a rescue, something you do when a child is dysregulated, rather than a continual presence of connectedness that never goes away. Cory and Michelle pull the concept apart: it is co-constructed (a child can co-regulate you, sometimes into dysregulation), and the place you anchor a child is not a lower state but safety, whatever state they are in. Then Michelle shares, live and unscripted, a hard case: a little boy with attachment themes who slapped a pool noodle near her, how she neurocepted a threat that the video later showed was never there, and how her own wobble rippled back to him. Tracy reframes the mismatch as part of the repair, a chance for a boy whose intensity has always been misread to experience being met. It lands on a truth this work keeps teaching: knowing yourself never stops.



Resources & Mentions

- Stephen Porges' polyvagal theory: the autonomic hierarchy (ventral, sympathetic, dorsal), neuroception, and co-regulation; the Polyvagal Institute.
- Deb Dana, on co-regulation as a continual presence (and the Polyvagal Ladder).
- Somatic experiencing, a polyvagal-informed, trauma-based approach, and the idea of pendulation in repair.
- Kim Barthel, among the OTs presenting; Tracy's own talk on the interface of sensation and neuroception.
- The value of video review, for seeing your own co-regulation and a child's neuroception more clearly.
- Check out DFX's Learning Journeys to build your clinical <https://dfxlearningjourneys.thinkific.com/> reasoning skills:



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 Tracy reframes co-regulation as a continual presence rather than a rescue when a child is dysregulated. How would that shift change what you do in the calm parts of a session?

- 2 Michelle only saw her own wobble on video, away from the intensity. What might you learn about your triggers if you recorded and watched back one of your hardest sessions?

- 3 A child tips into sympathetic activation on the playground. Practise the move: instead of down-regulating them, how would you offer safety, in their body, the space, and your relationship, whatever state they are in?

- 4 A boy's intensity gets read as naughty and met with limits that trigger shame. How would you help a parent or teacher offer safety and ride the mismatch as repair?

- 5** Notice one moment this week where a child co-regulates you, toward playfulness or toward tension. What does catching that tell you about the shared, two-way nature of regulation?
