

# Responding Rather than Reacting

---

**a body-mind-emotion approach for helping professionals to understand triggers and stress responses, and increase self-regulation**

JESS BERNAL, LMFT

# How To Participate On ZOOM

---



**CHAT**



**EMOJI**

# How Do You Feel Right Now?

---



Physically



Mentally



Emotionally



Spiritually

---

1

Awful, empty,  
the worst I have  
ever felt

3

5

Neutral

7

10

Extremely happy,  
healthy, satisfied, the  
best I have ever felt

# Introductions!

- In the chat, please write:
  - Your role
  - In 5 words or less, describe why you do what you do



The Ripple  
Effect of this  
Work





**Children**



**Parents, Caregivers,  
Families**

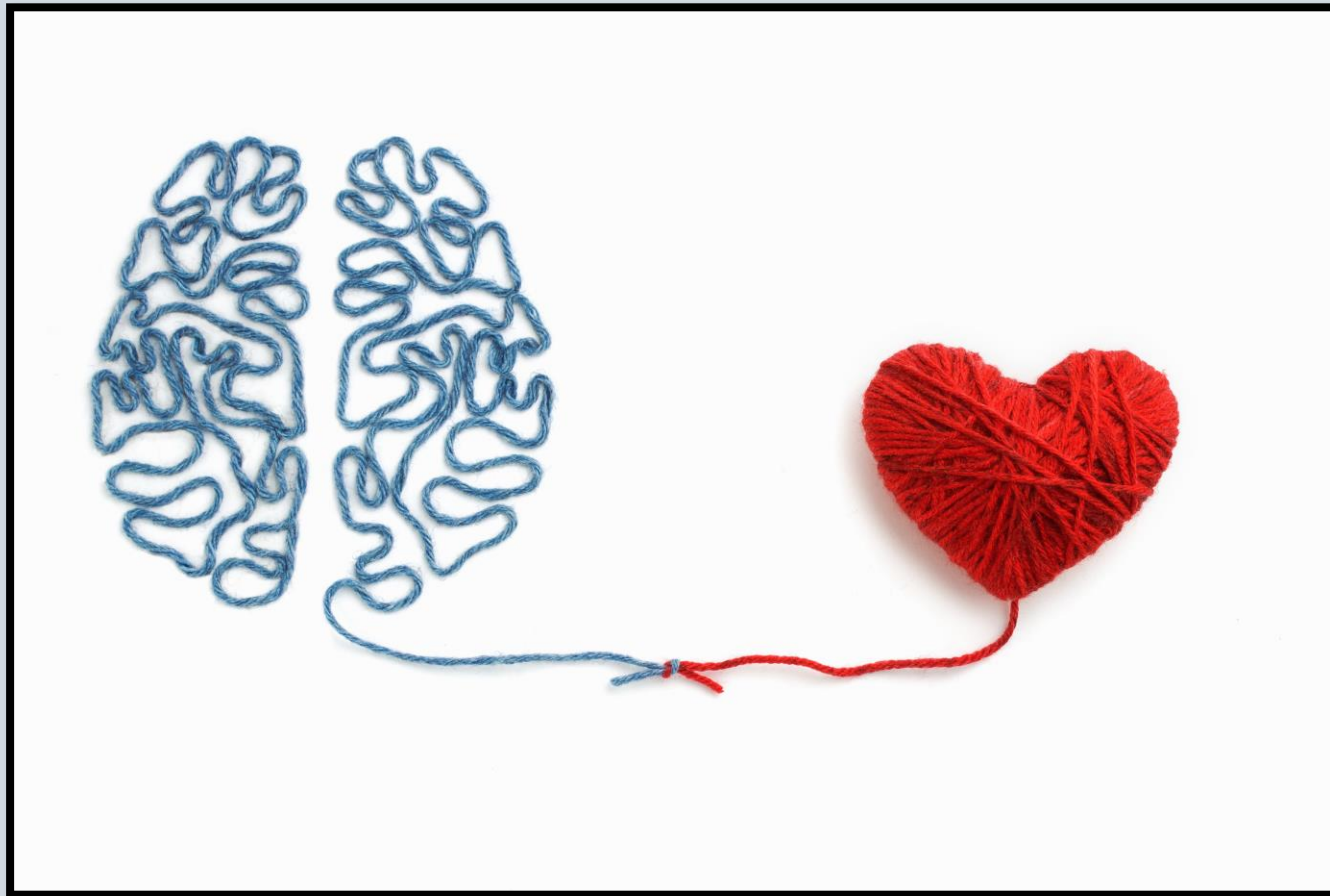


**Home Visitors and  
Direct Service Staff**



**Supervisors, Managers,  
and Directors**





This Work is  
Personal

# How Many of These Do You Bring to Your Work

---



EMPATHY



COMPASSION



RELATIONSHIP  
BUILDING



SUPPORT



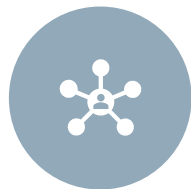
EMOTIONAL  
INVESTMENT



EMOTIONAL  
CONNECTION



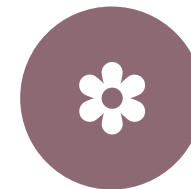
PASSION



PERSONALIZATION



FEELING FELT



AUTHENTICITY



This Work is  
Vulnerable



“In order to connect with you, I have to connect with something in myself that knows that feeling” *Brené Brown*

In order to connect with the feelings of others, you need to connect with your own similar feelings.

Connecting with our own feelings, especially in relation to another person, can trigger our personal thoughts, feelings, beliefs, memories, emotions, and countertransference

Empathy, caring, connecting, countertransference, can ALL trigger dysregulation



# Taking it a Little Deeper

---

## Dysregulation:

- Intense emotional response, and/or difficulty managing emotional responses to a provocative stimuli; activation of the central nervous system

## Trigger:

- A provocative stimuli (people, places, smells, events) that elicit a strong emotional response

## Countertransference:

- Term usually used in the therapeutic setting, a professional's personal feelings or emotions in relation to a client, child, caregiver, etc.



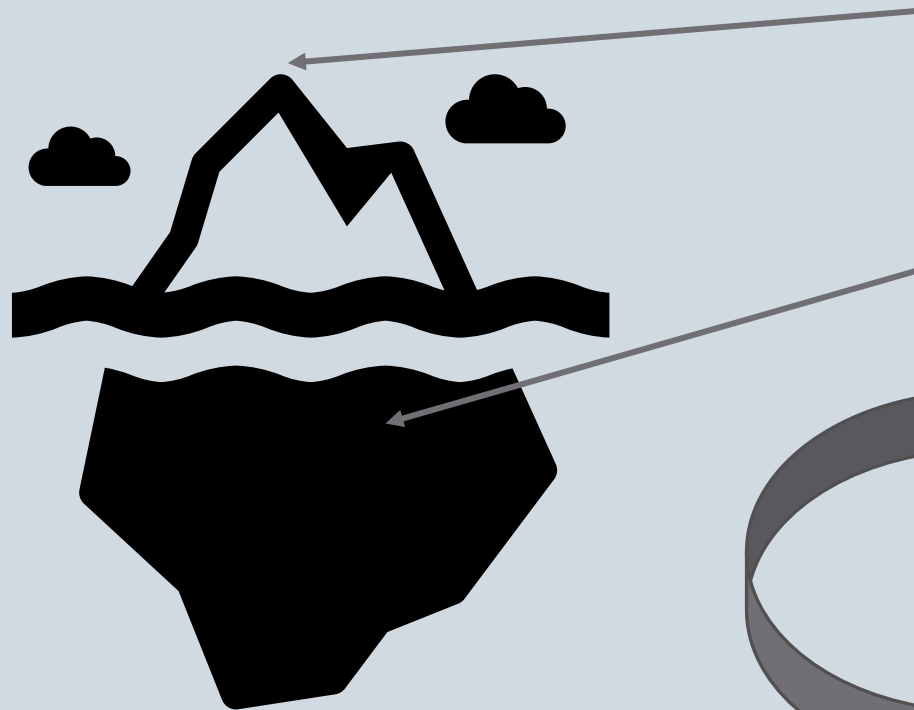


# How Challenging and Stressful Situations Impact Us

OUR BODIES, EMOTIONS, THOUGHTS, AND BEHAVIORS

# The Challenging Situation Iceberg

---



## **Challenging Work Situation:**

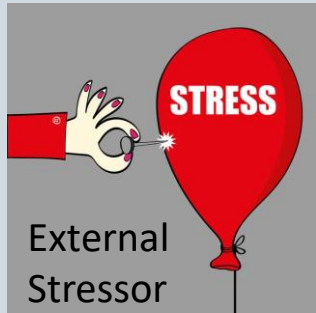
Not finding parking, visit doesn't go as planned, risk assessments, crisis management challenges with CPS/DCFS, trauma, boundaries, paperwork, no AC, etc.

- **Can Trigger: "Feels Like and Thinks Like":**
  - I am more invested than my client
  - I am not equip to handle this conversation
  - This is too much for my to manage
  - I am not good at my job
- Triggers of personal past challenging experiences, trauma

## **INCREASE in STRESS and the Body's Stress Response:**

- Decrease in self care
- Increase trigger sensitivity and dysregulation
- Perpetuation of these thoughts feelings

# How Stressful Situations Impact Our Bodies, Emotions, Thoughts, and Behavior | What is In and Out of Our Control



- Difficult session
- Other people
- Environmental challenges
- Difficult parent/caregiver

Out of our control



- Increased heartbeat
- Changes in breathing
- Tightened muscles
- Feeling flushed
- Fight, flight, freeze, fawn

Out of our control, but we can reduce intensity



- Anger
- Frustration
- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Shame

Difficult to control, but we can redirect



- I am not valued
- I am not good enough
- I am not cared for
- I am not respected

Difficult to control, but we can redirect



- Shut down
- Get defensive
- Give up
- Internalize
- Somatic
- Change course of family interactions

In our control, but can be difficult

## How Stressful Situations Impact Our Bodies, Emotions, Thoughts, and Behavior



- Children challenging behaviors
- Difficult parent
- Challenges with admin

External Stressor



- Increased heartbeat
- Changes in breathing
- Tightened muscles
- Feeling Flushed

Physiological Response



- Anger
- Frustration
- Sadness
- Anxiety

Emotional Response



- I am not valued
- I am not good enough
- I am not cared for
- I am not respected

Mental Response  
(Thoughts and beliefs)



- I am not valued
- I am not good enough
- I am not cared for
- I am not respected

Behavioral Response

## All This is Impacted By Our Past Experiences:

- Traumatic events and frightening situations
- Emotionally challenging situations
- Beliefs we have developed about ourselves
- Beliefs we have developed about the world
- Beliefs we have developed about others
- Cultural and intergenerational beliefs and experiences

Be Gentle With Yourself, Be Gentle With Others

# Responding Vs. Reacting: Slowing Down the Process



## Mindful Awareness



## To Reduce the Intensity

- Children challenging behaviors
- Difficult parent
- Challenges with admin
- Short staffed
- Overworked

- Increased heartbeat
- Changes in breathing
- Tightened muscles
- Feeling Flushed

- Anger
- Frustration
- Sadness
- Anxiety

- I am not valued
- I am not good enough
- I am not cared for
- I am not respected

- Shut down
- Get defensive
- Give up
- Become argumentative

Out of our control

Out of our control,  
but we can reduce

Difficult to control,  
but we can redirect

Difficult to control,  
but we can redirect

In our control, but  
can be difficult



# Responding vs. Reacting

---



*Responding*



# Mindfulness Awareness

---

TO IMPROVE SELF REGULATION AND CO-  
REGULATION

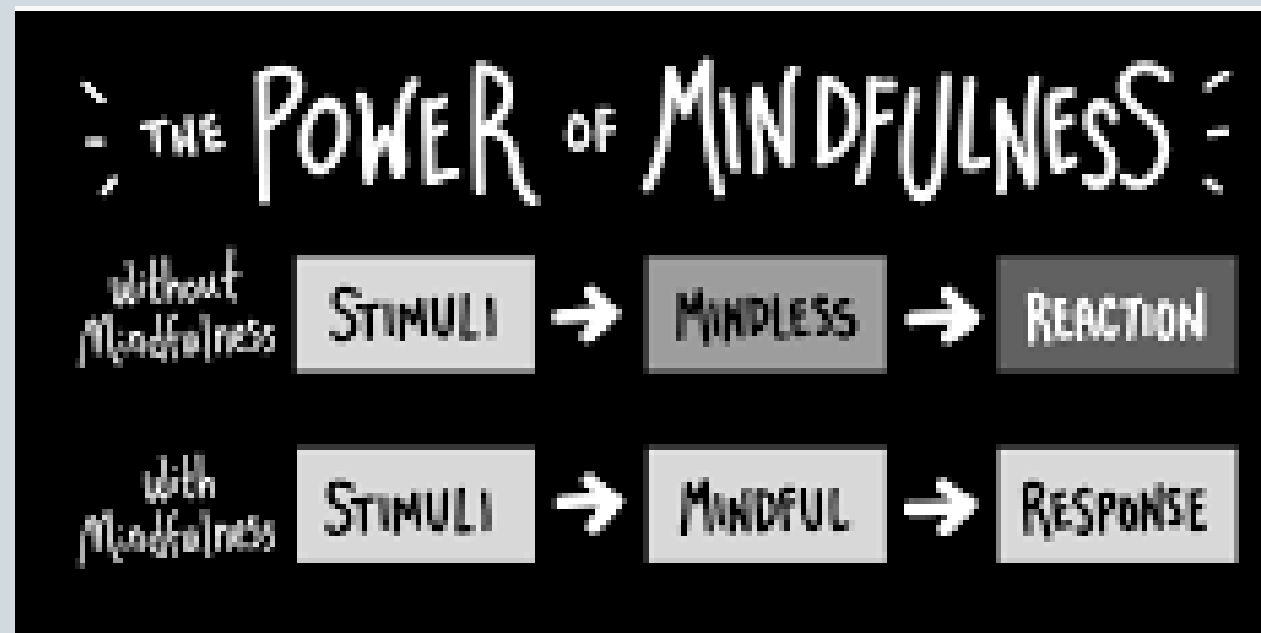
# What is Mindful Awareness?

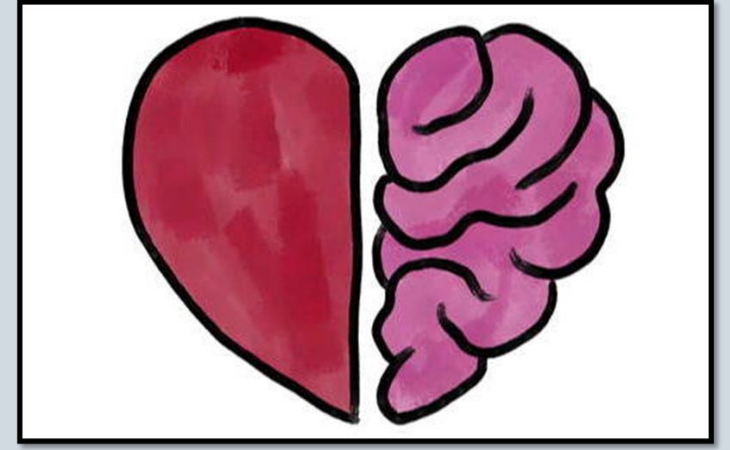
---

**Mindfulness** is the non-judgmental awareness and acceptance of your thoughts, feelings, and physical sensation as they are happening

**Awareness:** Paying attention to what is happening in the moment and become attuned to thoughts, feelings, and physical sensation

Mindful Awareness allows us to **pause**, to respond *rather than* react





# Body, Breath, and Mind

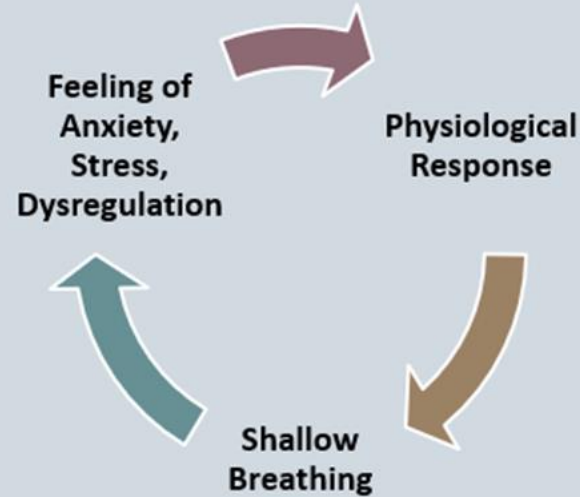
# Somatic Awareness

Think of a situation that felt stressful. It can be related to anything! Focus in on that situation and try to connect with that moment as best as you can.

- Pause
- Scan
- Notice in your body
  - Heartrate
  - Breathing
  - Muscle tightness



# Focusing on Breath

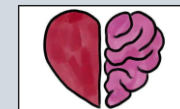


- Step One: Awareness of breath
  - Am I holding my breath?
  - Am I breathing quickly?
- Step Two: Controlling breath



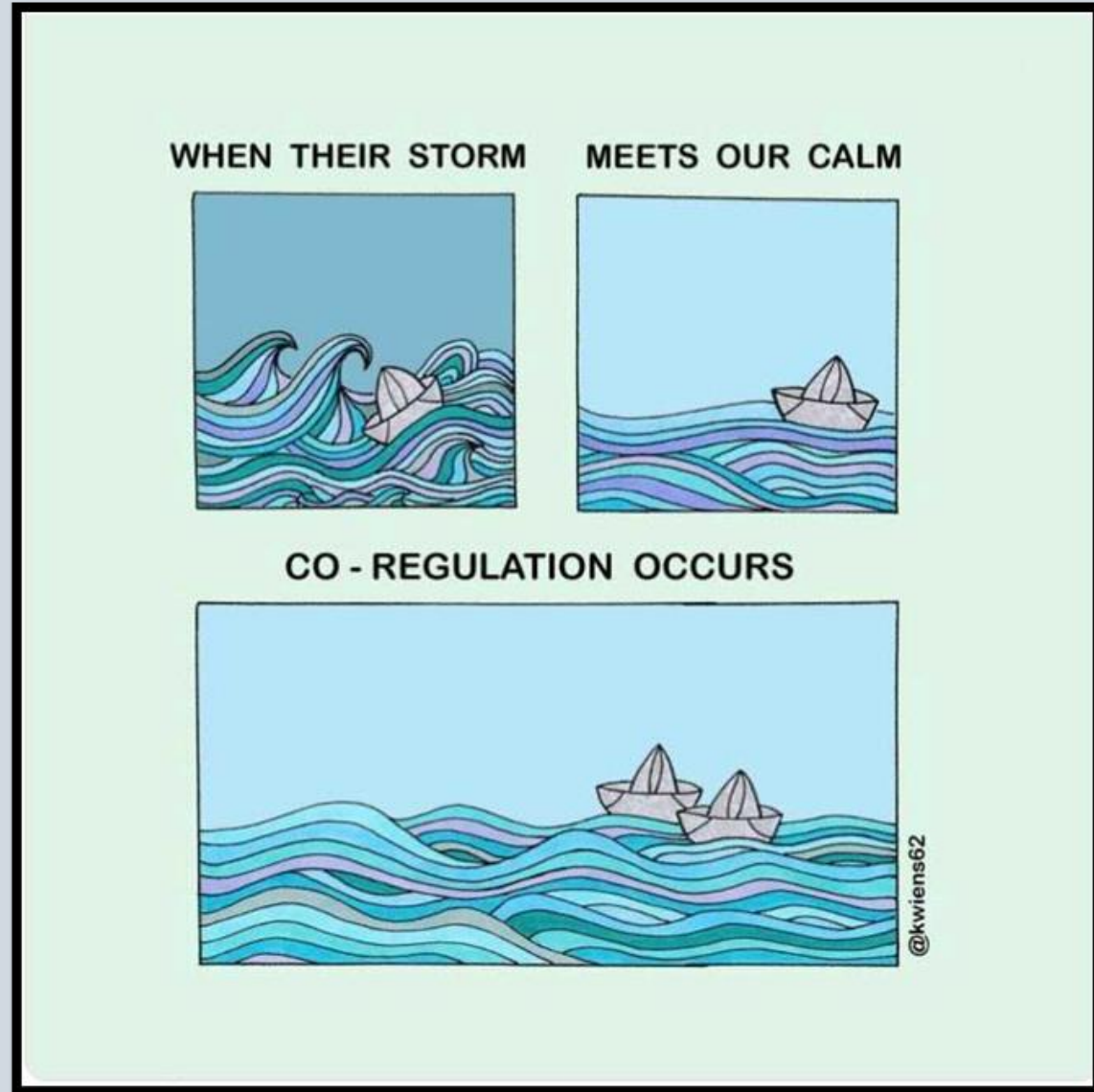
# Pause and S.T.O.P

- **S**low: If you are moving, stop moving. If your mind is racing, take awareness and slow it down
- **T**ake a breath: Before further action, pause and take a breath
- **O**bserve: Your experience in the moment. Notice emotions, thoughts, physical sensations
- **P**roceed: Once you have fully paused and checked-in with yourself, proceed from a place of regulation



# The Key to Co-Regulation

- It starts with YOU: Self Regulation
- You are either co-regulating or co-dysregulating
- Self Care and Co-regulation
- You are the model, you are the anchor, you regulate yourself first and move from there!





REMEMBER:  
RESILIENCE  
BEGINS  
WITH YOU!

# Thank you!!!

## Contact

Jess Bernal, LMFT

Phone: (323)326-8291

Website: [JbernalMft.com](http://JbernalMft.com)

Email: [Jbernal.mft@gmail.com](mailto:Jbernal.mft@gmail.com)

Social Media: @jbernal.mft