

 **Top 10 TIPS to Support Children During Times of Uncertainty and Stress**

Presented by:
Julie Kurtz, Founder and CEO
Center for Optimal Brain Integration™


 

Definition of “Big Life Change or Transition”

The process of changing from one familiar event, person, object, activity or routine and moving to a new one.

A child leaves the familiar and is placed into a new situation that has uncertainty, unexpected routines, changing roles and expectations.

An unexpected and unplanned life change.

 **Impact and the Child's Perspective**

- Given their immature sensory system and inability to draw on past experiences, they then experience fear of the unknown, big emotions and they perceive the change as unsafe or threatening.
- Younger children think in concrete terms and not abstract terms and may not understand “why”, they only focus on their fears. Transitions big or small can create a sense of “loss” or a feeling of “losing control”.



T.I.P.S
(Trauma Informed Practice Strategies)

for Helping Children Navigate Big Life Changes

Tip	Tip #1 Routines and Predictability
Tip	Tip #2 Listen to a Child's Feelings
Tip	Tip #3 Play and Spend Quality Time with a Child (Connection)
Tip	Tip #4 Prepare in Advance, Visit or Preview a New Situation, Environment or Routine
Tip	Tip #5 Give Children Choice and Voice
Tip	Tip #6 Take Care of Yourself
Tip	Tip #7 Stay Calm to Co-Regulate
Tip	Tip #8 Read Books about Change and Transition
Tip	Tip #9 Promote Activities that Support Regulation
Tip	TIP #10 Use the Environment to Calm the Stress Response System

PSA is in English and Spanish Found on our Your Tube Channel at Center for Optimal Brain Integration

Supporting Children to Feel Safe During Stressful and Uncertain Times

THE 4 PARTS OF THE BRAIN

<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 0.8em;">PREFRONTAL CORTEX</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.7em;">"Executive Center"</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.7em;">"Air Traffic Control"</p>	<p>PREFRONTAL CORTEX</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract thought • Reasoning • Impulse control • Empathy • Perspective taking • Logical reasoning • Sustained focal attention
<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 0.8em;">LIMBIC BRAIN</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.7em;">"Emotional Center"</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.7em;">"Relationships"</p>	<p>LIMBIC BRAIN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attachment • Emotions (small, medium, large) • Significance and belonging • Inclusion
<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 0.8em;">HINDBRAIN</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.7em;">"Survival Brain"</p>	<p>HINDBRAIN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heart rate • Breathing • Blood Pressure • Body temperature • Sensations • Fight, Flight or Freeze

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TIP #1 Routines and Predictability

Keep a routine as much as possible

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Maintaining a routine helps children feel safe and reduces anxiety and helps children feel in control

↓

Bring as much predictability as possible

↓

Routines let children know "what to expect"

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Predictable Transitions

- Minimize the **number** of transitions
- Provide a verbal and/or audio **signal**
- Need **something to do** while waiting
- Create **rituals** for each transition so it becomes a familiar and predictable routine and habit.

Predictable Routines and Visual Schedules

Consistent and predictable routines and schedules promote children's sense of safety as children feel less anxious when they know what to expect.

Using photos of the children and including them in developing the visual schedule will increase their interest, involvement and responsiveness to the schedule.



TIP #2
Listen to a Child's Feelings

- It is important to listen and acknowledge how a child is feeling
- The research shows verbally or nonverbally talking or drawing about how you feel with someone who cares about you can buffer stress and calm the activated sensory response system
- Don't ignore it or say, "that is silly" or "get over it"
- Say, "change can be difficult, and all of your feelings are okay to have. It is okay to feel sad, mad, worried, happy or scared"

WHAT COLOR ARE MY FEELINGS? WORKBOOK
Middle School Edition
Daria O'Brien MS, CCC-SLP
Speech Paths

Help Children Communicate Using Trigger Stop: Sensory and Emotional Check-In APP

Free User Guide, Video and APP at www.optimalbrainintegration.com

Trigger Stop: Sensory and Emotional Check in Application
Created by Julie Kurtz
Center for Optimal Brain Integration

Green Zone

Don't forget that with the camera, a child can practice snapping a photo of what their face looks like when they are happy. They can immediately add it to the body of the figure.

Emotions or Sensory Language

- Calm
- Happy
- Flexible
- Easy-going
- Cool
- Sunny
- Rainbows

Blue Zone

Don't forget that with the camera, a child can practice snapping a photo of what their face looks like when they are scared. They can immediately add it to the body of the figure.

Emotion or Sensory Language

- Frozen
- Nothing
- Stuck
- Scared
- Frightened
- Iceberg
- Slow
- Snail

Orange Zone

Don't forget that with the camera, a child can practice snapping a photo of what their face looks like when they are frightened. They can immediately add it to the body of the figure.

Emotion or Sensory Language

- Scared
- Frightened
- Unsafe
- Running Away
- Roller Coaster
- Jumpy
- Rocket Ship

Red Zone

Don't forget that with the camera, a child can practice snapping a photo of what their face looks like when they are angry or frustrated. They can immediately add it to the body of the figure.

Emotion or Sensory Language

Scared
Frightened
Unsafe
Angry
Upset
Volcano
Flames
Lightening

A gift to you from Texas Region 4 Head Start and Center for Optimal Brain Integration
Free Downloadable at www.optimalbrainintegration.com

TIP #3

Play and Spend Quality Time with Your Child

Intentionally provide personal connection daily with children	Put down distractions/tasks <i>(work, planning, virtual devices)</i>	Take the child's lead
Have fun and play	Relational connection with primary caregivers creates safety and promotes regulation	Connection provides co-regulation

TIP #4
Prepare in Advance, Visit or Preview a New Situation, Environment or Routine

Walk	Walk children through a new change before abruptly jumping into it
Prepare	Prepare children to become familiar with new routine
Create	Create a social story with photos of the child walking through the new routine
Use	Use photos or visual schedules to describe the story of the new change

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TIP #5
Give Your Child Choice and Voice

- Acknowledge that big life changes may cause grief or loss (*sadness, anger, emotional reactivity*)
- Understand big life changes may make children feel a loss of control and difficulty finding a voice to communicate
- You can help children by giving them choices (*ex.: would you like to wear this outfit or the other, would you like to read this book or this one*)
- You can help children by helping them communicate their fears non-verbally or verbally

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TIP #6
Take Care of Yourself

- Be aware of your own triggers and emotional state
- Self-care strategies will be unique to you

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Health & Wellness Toolkit
Nicholson, Shimpi Driscoll, Kurtz, Márquez and Wesley (2020) Culturally Responsive Self-Care for Early Childhood Educators

Play and Fun
Self-Reflection Time
Daydream & Mind-wandering (Zooey Time)
Sleep Time and Sleep Hygiene
Relationship/Community Time
SELF
Environment
Intellectual Time
Work Time
Physical Time/Activity
Spiritual/Religious Time

Free to download:
www.optimalbrainintegration.com

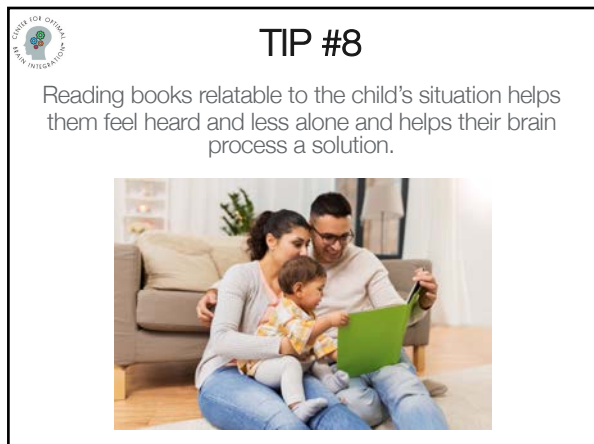
TIP #7
Stay Calm to Co-Regulate

Mirror Neurons – children absorb your internal emotional state
You are the external wi-fi to the internal world of a child
Children look to your face to decide if they are safe
Children listen for your voice to determine if there is danger

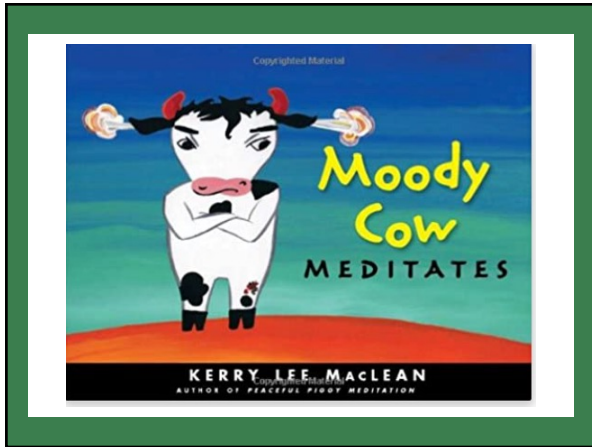
"Children mirror your internal state of emotions." - Julie Kurtz

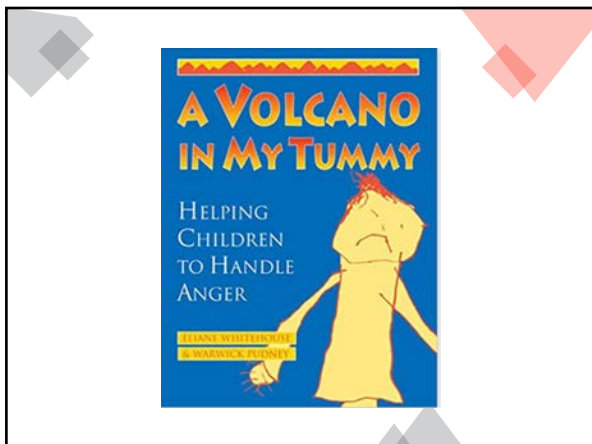


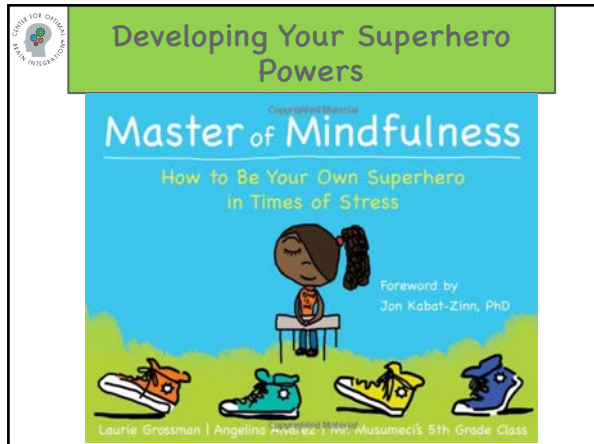
















Calming Objects or Bins

Objects that may help children regulate their sensory and emotional state when dysregulated:

Ideas:

- Fidget toys
- Calm down toolbox
- Emotional thermometer
- Feeling chart
- Sensory Chart
- Art materials
- Breathing strategies
- Coping skills toolbox
- Journal for each child

<https://cozoneskillsforkids.com/blog/2016/06/06/how-to-make-a-coping-skills-toolbox-for-your-child/>

Bins and Objects to Promote Regulation

Columbia State
Preschool, Tehama COE

Calming Down Areas/Safe Zones

SAFE SPACE

A time to pause, CALM and get away

- Space is quiet, regulating and comforting.
- **NEVER** a punishment, time-out or place a child is sent. The child is always in control of choosing to go there.
- Sensory objects to calm and comfort:
 - Art supplies
 - Books
 - Photos of nature
 - Emotion and Sensory check in chart
 - Emotional thermometer
 - Solution kits
 - Chairs and blankets
 - Sand
 - Paper to crumple and throw in trash
 - Sun glasses or hats
 - Music choices w headphones
 - Bean bag chair
 - Glitter jar
 - Regulating apps (stop, breath, think)

<https://www.facebook.com/centerforoptimalbrainintegration/>

Safe Place

Calming Areas or “Safety Zone”

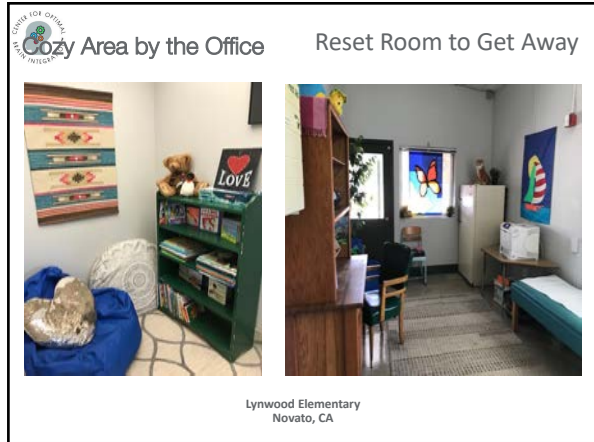
- Sensory material to help regulate
- A time to pause, CALMING and get away
- Space is enjoyable, comforting, safe and soft
- Have sensory and/or feeling words, thermometers
- One child at a time/private

Robin Pence, Lynwood Elementary

Calming Areas

Eden Thibeault, Lynwood Elementary
Novato, CA

Lynwood Elementary
Novato, CA



Breathe!

“When we inhale, we stimulate the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) which makes the heart increase (accelerator). Exhaling stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS), which decrease how fast the heart beats (brakes). In calm individuals, the inhale and exhale are steady and a good heart rate measures well-being.”

-Adapted from: The Body Keeps the Score Page 269 Dr. Bessel Van Der Kolk, M.D.

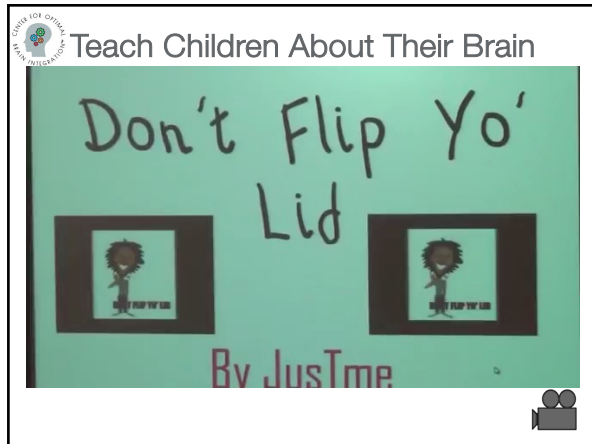
S.T.O.P.

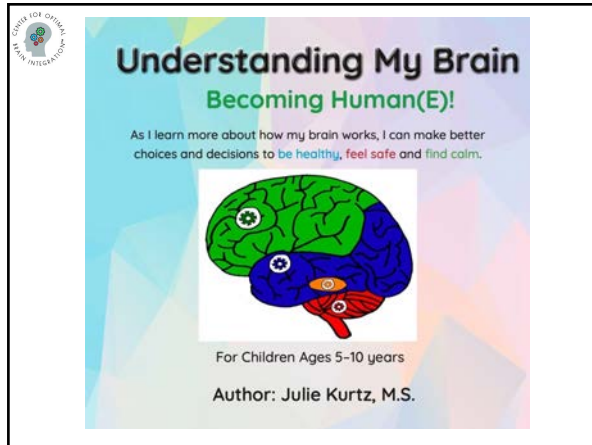
S.T.O.P.
A Practice of the Pause

STOP brings us to present moment awareness. When you feel distress, use STOP to help you tame big emotions and calm your activated stress response system.

S.	Pause or literally just stop
T.	Take a deep breath (breath is the strongest anchor)
O.	Observe what is arising inside of you including thoughts, emotions and sensations
P.	Proceed with intentionality.

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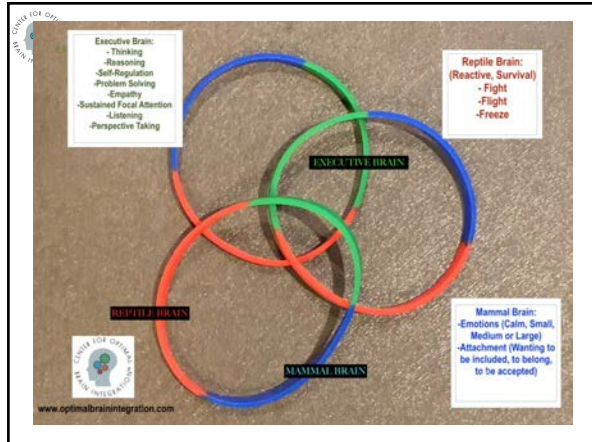
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**BEST HUMAN
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WINNER

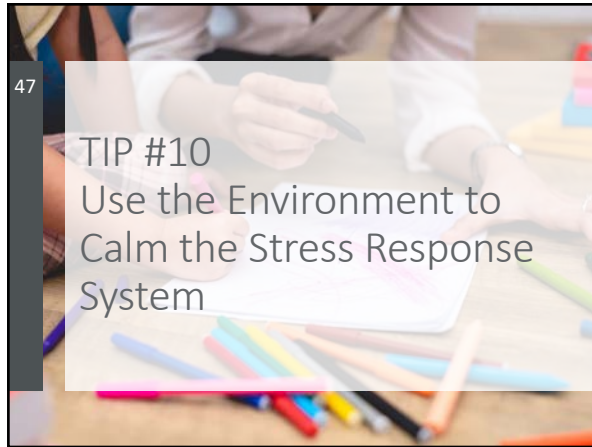
Understanding My Brain
Becoming Human(E)!
As I learn more about how my brain works, I can make better
choices and decisions to be healthy, feel safe and find calm.
For Children Ages 5-10 years
Author: Julie Kurtz, M.S.

When children learn about how their brain works, it enables better decision making and choices to help them feel safe, find calm and to build social-emotional skills.

Tips for Adults Using This Book with Their Children: Think of this as a science book for children ages 5-10, made fun through the lens of four animals. Lizzie the Lizard Plays the Hindbrain, Malcolm the Meerkat Plays the Amygdala, Elsie the Elephant Plays the Limbic Brain and Ozzie the Owl Plays the Prefrontal Cortex! Complex topics are broken down to help your child understand the science behind their brain and their behavior. Through learning and exploring, they will have increased self-awareness and the tools to stay healthy, safe and calm – socially and emotionally. What better way to help children learn to identify their emotions and sensations, the size of their emotions/sensations and to promote practices for self-regulation.

This book is designed to be read with your child/children over time. Depending on your child's developmental age, some may grasp the concepts faster while others may need more time. The most important thing is to create an enjoyable learning experience for you and your child together. Take their lead! If they continue to be interested, then keep reading. If they show signs they are finished for now, listen to those cues and transition to another activity.





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Strategies for Calming Young Children Sensory Response Systems

<p>Visual</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dimming the lights Reducing clutter on walls Safe Places/Zones Visual schedules/cues Fish Tanks Transition cues Visuals that guide Timers Nature Animals Family photos 	<p>Auditory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminate low frequency sounds Humming or singing Increase vocals/calm voices Playing instrumental music Playing white noise Playing nature sounds Go to quiet area Go to noisy area Listen to music/choices Repeating instructions Calming voices 	<p>Tactile</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patting or rubbing the back Providing textured materials Calming lotion Textured objects Play dough Art supplies Fidget toys Writing materials Squeeze balls
<p>Vestibular</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rocking Swinging Bouncing Swaying Swivel chairs Movement chairs Taking a walk with adult Movement- walking 	<p>Proprioceptive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jumping Climbing Yoga Pushing heavy objects Stress balls Squeeze objects Pushing walls Lifting weighted objects 	<p>Oral</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take a drink Chew pens Eat food Take deep breaths Suck or bite on lips Eat a snack Gum or hard candy



Thank You!

Website: www.optimalbrainintegration.com

Facebook: Center for Optimal Brain Integration

Instagram: COBI or Center4OptimalBrainIntegration

Email: optimalbrainintegration@gmail.com

Julie Kurtz
 Co-Author of *Trauma Informed Practices for Early Childhood Educators: Relationship-Based Approaches that Support Healing and Build Resilience in Young Children*
 and
Nicholson, Shimpi Driscoll, Kurtz, Márquez and Wesley (2020) Culturally Responsive Self-Care for Early Childhood Educators



Resources

Books:
Trauma Informed Practices for Early Childhood Educators: Relationship-Based Approaches that Support Healing and Build Resilience in Young Children by Nicholson, Perez and Kurtz

Websites:

- www.optimalbrainintegration.com
- <https://momentousinstitute.org/blog/helping-children-transition-through-big-change>
- <https://www.ourfamilywizard.com/blog/helping-kids-cope-big-transitions>
- <https://wonderscounseling.com/helping-young-children-major-life-changes/>
- https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqXcIKMoPiKQITxrFMXyHA?view_as=subscriber

Phone and Tablet APPs:

- Trigger Stop: Sensory and Emotional Check-In (Julie Kurtz)
- Stop, Breath and Think

Books

- Not This Bear: A First Day of School Story*, by Alyssa Satin Capucilli
- It's Not Your Fault, Koko Bear* by Vicki Lansky: The story of a lovable bear who doesn't want to have two homes.
- Two Homes* by Claire Masuro: Alex has two favorite chairs: a rocking chair at Daddy's and a soft chair at Mommy's. Through small details like these, "Two Homes" focuses on what is gained rather than what is lost. It conveys that no matter which parent he's with, Alex knows that he is safe and loved. Even the illustrations are comforting and warm.
- The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst: Applicable to any type of separation or loss, this heartwarming picture book is about the invisible and unbreakable bonds that connect us to our loved ones, no matter where they are.
- Dinosaur Diverge* by Marc Brown
- You Were the First* by Patricia McLachlan
- Babies Don't Eat Pizza: A Big Kid's Book About Baby Brothers and Sisters* by Dianne Danzig: This book blends matter-of-fact information with kid-friendly humor to answer all the questions new big siblings have. The book refers to the new sibling as "your baby" and frequently references readers' own babyhood. Practical tips for parents are included, too.
- One Special Day: A Story for Big Brothers and Sisters* by Lola M. Schaefer
- Neighborhood* by Jason Fruchter: In this sweet board book, Daniel Tiger gets a new neighbor. Moving is scary at first, but the new neighbor soon feels right at home.
- A Kiss Goodbye* by Audrey Penn: Chester the raccoon, of the beloved story "The Kissing Hand," is moving.
- My Very Exciting, Sorta Scary Big Move* by Lori Attanasio Woodring
