

# **Developmental Disability WA, Online Course:**

## **Foundations to Understanding Behaviour**

### **Module Four: Supporting Processing**

#### **Video Transcript**

How do we support processing to help people remain regulated? Like we talked about in module one, there are three main areas of our brain that help us manage stress and our behaviour. Survival brain, which helps us immediately respond to threats, the emotional brain, which helps us process stress and emotions, the smart brain or thinking brain, which helps us problem solve, socialize and think about our actions.

It is important to know that the brain works from the bottom up, most of the time. This means that we need to feel safe before we can think and change our behaviour. In fact, a brain processes the information we receive from our senses and memories first before we are even aware of our sense of safety. In this way, a body experiences stress and reacts without us being able to control it.

We need to help calm the survival brain first, followed by connecting with the emotional brain. Then, we need to support the thinking brain. We need to help all of these areas of processing. But mostly, we need to make sure the person feels safe and connected.

There are some common processing needs of these areas of the brain. These needs are related to sensory processing coregulation and information processing. Firstly, when we think about sensory processing, we can realize that all of us have different ways our senses impact on our stress levels. For some people sensory experiences can be painful overwhelming, or confusing. We need to help people process their sensory experiences, so that their internal regulation and stress levels are supported and balanced. Being able to process sensory experiences, helps calm the survival brain.

People may need sensory balancing activities built into their daily routine to help balance their internal regulation. They may benefit from calming strategies like breathing, taking a break, or moving to a quiet area. Or they might need sensory balancing strategies like chewing crunchy food or doing exercises which give deep pressure to the regulation system.

It is important to know that not all people respond in the same way to sensory processing supports. We first need to understand how they might be experiencing stress due to sensations, and then look for ways to help them balance these internal experiences. You might be able to help by noticing the ways that people respond to or seek sensory input. It is useful to seek the help of an Occupational Therapist to better understand sensory processing strategies.

As well as being supported to meet any sensory needs, before a child can manage their emotions, they first need to be able to know what it feels like to be calm and to

recognize the signs of stress. Children learn to do this by something called coregulation. This is where a caregiver responds to the person with empathy and a calm approach, helping the child or the person, activate their own calming responses.

Often people do this by using gentle touch, a caring facial expression, a calm soft voice, and by modelling calm deep breathing. It might also mean walking with a person or doing other calming or regulating strategies that helps bring their regulation system back into balance. It is also helpful to use words to help the person learn to recognize their signs of stress by saying things like, oh you're shaking, you must be very upset right now. Like Dan Siegel says, we need to name it to tame it.

Sometimes we can respond to behaviour by thinking we need an expert, and that we don't have the tools or knowledge to know what to do. But just by being yourself, being calm and present and empathetic, you can help somebody who is dysregulated to feel better.

Lastly, people also need support with information processing to self-regulate. Our thinking brain needs help to process all the information we are surrounded with every day.

Remember, the more stressed we are, the less our brain is able to problem solve, remember plan, etc. Difficulties processing information can then place more stress on our regulation, causing even more difficulties with processing information. We need to help people process information.

The cognitive skills that need our support can include transitions, like: knowing what will happen and what it will look like; predictability, knowing the detail of what will happen; our memory, retaining and recalling information; processing verbal language; planning and problem solving; word finding; and maintaining our attention and focus. Every day we use supports to help these cognitive processing needs. We do this by making information easier to process and accessible. We do this by making information visual, like following lists calendars, recipes, diaries. These all help us feel safe in knowing what is happening, and what it will look like. Think about it. It's not just for memory. Knowing what will happen, and having cognitive support helps us feel less stressed and calm.

Visual processing support helps reduce the stress on our memory and predictability needs. Visual supports can be anything, like photos, schedules, diaries, lists and steps. Next time you're thinking about the stress experiences of the person you're supporting, think about what's in their environment, to help them understand what is happening, as well as to process their sensations. Any small steps we take to help people with sensory processing coregulation, and information processing can help.

End of transcript for module four.