

# Navigating Life Transitions with Resilience

Through Neuroscience and Emotional  
Regulation

Peter Craig, MA, LPC  
AustinProfessionalCounseling.com

# Introduction

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- How to cope and be resilient during these chaotic and uncertain times
- Learn about how the brain works under stress
- Learn how to regulate you and your family's emotions with more skill
- Improve communication and connection through Attachment theory
- Additional information on intimacy and development
- Reference page with resources

# These are unprecedented times

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- Uncertainty breeds fear and stress.
- We are grieving on multiple levels - what could have been, what's cancelled, what may not ever be (i.e. no in-person graduation)
- Transitioning from one grade to the next or from HS to college is stressful on its own, now there's an added element of uncertainty in the present moment as well as projecting into the long term future
- We never have certainty but we can have a **willingness to embrace complexity**

# Navigating Transitions with Resilience

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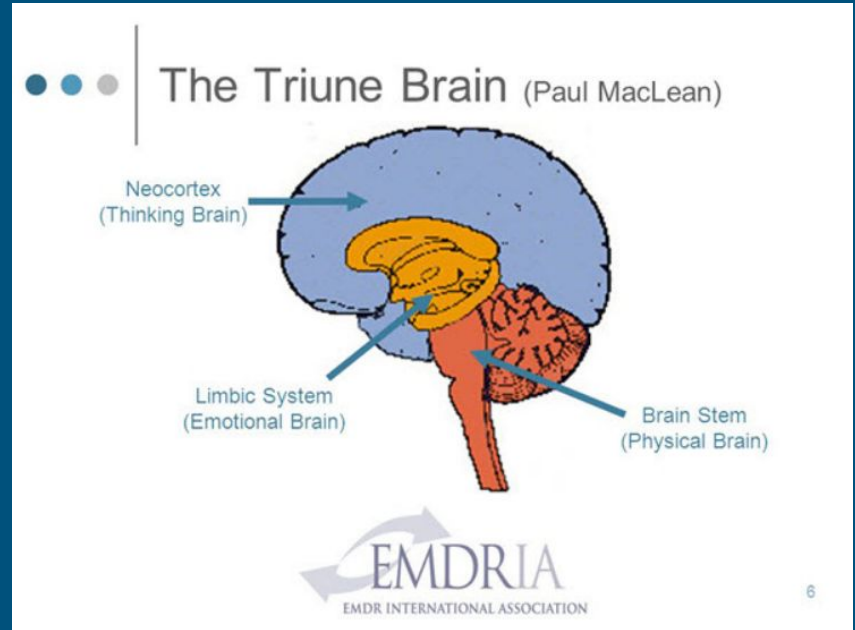
- Moving from one grade to another, from HS to college, moving homes, going through divorce, all can spark stress which may overwhelm you or your teen.
- Stress leads us to find coping strategies that may be healthy or unhealthy depending on how resilient we are. Resilience is the ability to adapt positively to difficult or uncertain circumstances.
- *Cultivate resilience by instilling positive habits and a positive mental attitude that fosters an 'internal locus of control' vs 'external' (i.e. one has agency in how life happens vs. where one attributes circumstances to the outside)\**

# Our brains have evolved in complexity

We have evolved to have access to higher order thinking, reasoning, and empathy with the Neocortex (pre-frontal cortex)

It takes more energy (oxygen, glucose, etc) to fuel the higher centers of the brain

Under stress or overwhelming complexity, we revert to more primitive ways of being (limbic system “emotional brain”) where the fight/flight/freeze instincts kick in

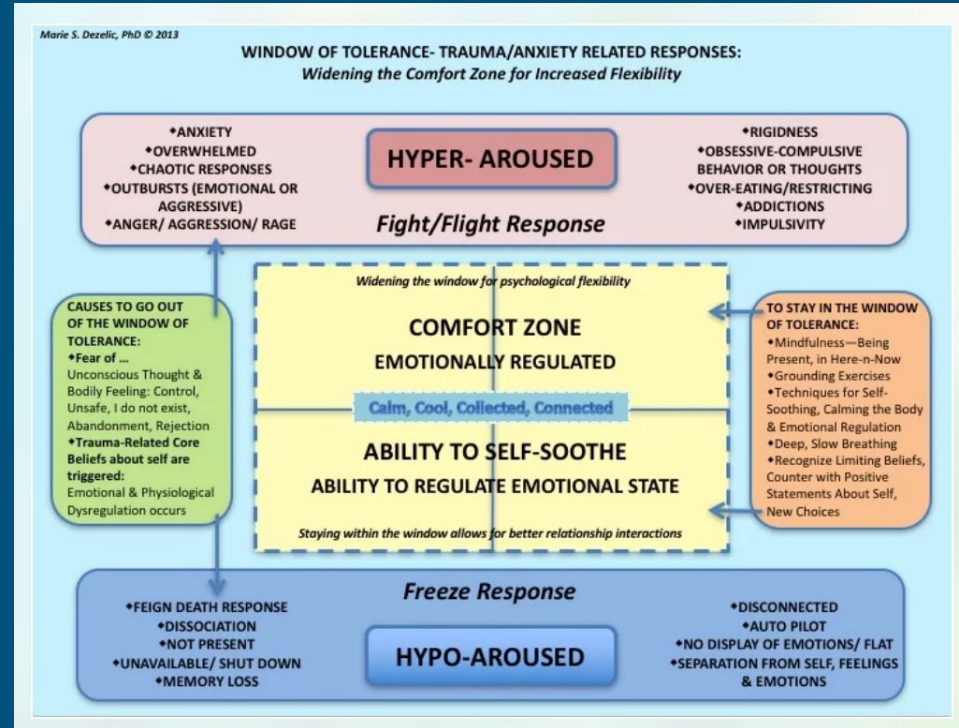


# Staying in the 'Windows of Tolerance'

Learning how to 'regulate' your emotions and help your teens regulate theirs is a crucial skill that society does not teach us very well.

When we have a strong emotional response to something or are under a lot of stress, we lose access to our higher thinking when we go above or below the windows of tolerance.

The goal is to notice when we are at the edges of our tolerance and practice skills to keep us from 'flipping our lid' and going outside our ideal windows



# Regulating Emotions

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Your teens learn to regulate their emotional states based on how you regulate your own- they learn by watching and feeling more than words.

Teens develop responsibility as they grow for managing their states. You can commit to helping them do so instead of leaving them to learn on their own. They need to feel like they are **significant** to you and that they **belong**.

Practice mindfulness- What are your triggers? Can you notice what happens in your body when they annoy you or disrespect you? What thoughts, feelings, and impulses come rushing in? The first step is just noticing automatic patterns with more awareness.

# Emotional Regulation Strategies

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1. Take several slow, deep breaths into the belly
2. Straighten the spine and adjust your posture
3. Tense muscles in your body for a few seconds then release, and repeat
4. Go walk to another room or outside in nature
5. Physical touch from a person who feels comforting in the moment
6. Engage in a long exhale at the end of the breath
7. Self-soothing touch - hand on your heart or neck/shoulder massage
8. Lift up your shoulders, roll them back, drop them
9. Cardio exercise for 30 minutes
10. Connecting with friends or loved ones
11. Laughter

\*\*\* See 'Wise Heart Emotional Regulation' in References



That's well and good, but...

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TEENS?!?!

# D. Siegel on the 4 dimensions of adolescence:

— ...which \*surprise!\* doesn't end until about 25 years old (when the pre-frontal cortex is fully developed)

1. ES: An **Emotional Spark** is revealed in the enhanced way emotion generated from sub-cortical areas washes over the cortical circuits of reasoning. Downside- emotional storms and moodiness. Upside- powerful passion to live life fully.
2. SE: **Social Engagement** emerges as teens turn more toward peers than parents, the downside being falling prey to peer pressure simply to gain membership in a group, the upside being the central importance of supportive relationships in our lives.
3. N: **Novelty-seeking** emerges from shifts in the brain's dopamine system with the downside of risk-taking behavior and injury, and the upside of having the courage to leave the familiar, certain, and safe home nest for the unfamiliar, uncertain, potentially unsafe world beyond.
4. CE: **Creative Exploration** of adolescence is found as we push against the status quo, imagining how things could be, not simply accepting them for what they are. Downside- Not just conforming to life as usual can be disorienting and stressful. Upside- The thrill and passion of discovery and innovation!

# Understanding Attachment (styles)

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Research done in the 50's by John Bowlby, Mary Mainsworth and others showed that infants form one of 4 attachment styles to caregivers over the first 5 years of life in a process of Attunement - Disruption - Repair - and these styles tend to play out over the lifespan, especially in intimate relationships.

- Secure
- Island
- Wave
- Disorganized

# Non-verbal communication

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Use these elements to create connection or de-escalate conflict:

- Touch
- Tone of voice
- Body orientation
- Proximity
- Eye contact

Neuroscience research suggests people **take 20+ minute timeouts after 'flipping their lids' to let the nervous system cool down** before engaging further.

# Understand 'Bids for Connection'

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A bid for connection is any meaningful attempt to connect. You can

- 1) Turn towards a bid (respond with interest and care)
- 2) Turn away from a bid (ignore, mumble, minimize, etc)
- 3) Turn against a bid (respond with disagreement, disgust, etc)

Each bid gives your partner or teen the opportunity to respond in a way that says *I'm listening, I care, and I'm interested in understanding you*. Ideally you want a 5:1 ratio of towards vs. away or against for your partner, and with your teen you may aspire to something similar.

# Understanding Attachment: How to Foster a 'secure process'

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Islands: Interaction to non-interaction: **Easy**

Non-interaction to interaction: **HARD**

Waves: Interaction to non-interaction: **HARD**

Non-interaction to interaction: **Easy**

\*\*\*\*In Stan Tatkin's book '**We Do**', also link to Stan's work on Reference page

# How to Repair

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It's important to make up after a fight as soon as possible. The longer unresolved issues go, the more a lack of safety gets imprinted into long term memory.

A repair is where the sense of emotional safety or emotional distress is dealt with in way that increases emotional safety and reduces distress.

**Ideas** - Don't say but. Focus on your behavior. Make an offer of restitution. Don't get caught up in who started it. Do your best to avoid repeating old conflict cycle. Find a way to move forward together.

# Compassionate Communication

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1) Observations 2) Feelings 3) Needs 4) Request

Practice observing (as objectively as possible) what happens when a certain feeling comes up can lead to more clarity and connection in your relationship.

**When you learn to connect how you feel with specific actions, and then are able to express what you're needing, you can verbalize a 'positive, doable request' in the present moment. Those requests can help repair conflicts quickly and meaningfully.\*\***



# 6 Kinds of Intimacy to Explore and Foster

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Being seen, feeling understood, connecting, being yourself with another

- Recreational intimacy - Doing things together
- Conversational/Intellectual intimacy - Talking together
- Emotional intimacy - Exploring emotions
- Physical intimacy - Being close, touching, hugging
- Spiritual intimacy - Sharing existentially
- (Sexual intimacy with your partner)

# References

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\* [Resilience \(Psychology Today\)](#)

[The ESSENCE of Adolescence](#) (4 elements of adolescence)

[HOW IS POSITIVE DISCIPLINE DIFFERENT?](#)

[How to Feel Closer to Your Partner - Peter Craig - Couples Counseling & Therapy](#)

[How to Practice Mindfulness in your Relationship Right Now | Peter Craig](#)

\*\*[NonViolent Communication \(Compassionate Communication\) Instruction Self-Guide](#)

\*\*\*[Handouts – Wise Heart](#) (Emotional Regulation strategies and others)

\*\*\*\*[The PACT Institute Stan - Tatkin](#)

# Thanks for having me!

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I am inspired to offer individual, couples, and group therapy informed by neuroscience and wisdom across the field.

Please reach out to schedule a session at (512) 469-0535 or go to

[AustinProfessionalCounseling.com](http://AustinProfessionalCounseling.com)

Have a good day!

Peter

