

Stepping In During Times of Dysregulation

There will be times when it is necessary to intervene to try to help a participant who has become dysregulated, and unable to continue, to participate successfully in the program. When these situations happen, they represent crucial opportunities to help that participant develop their self-regulation skills.

What They Need

First, we need to better understand what a person who is dysregulated needs in order to learn and grow in this type of intense experience. Our end goal is to develop strategies and skills that will help them self-regulate more effectively in the future.

However, to have that conversation, we must partner with them to regulate. This means we need to help them stabilize their emotional and physical state. Once that happens, there will be a better opportunity to explore what happened and make a plan.

Connecting With The Dysregulated Participant

Stage	If They Could tell You Their Story	What Is Going On And What They Need
Stabilize Working first to help the participant re-regulate and arrive at an emotional state in which they can engage in conversation	<i>“Safety is everything. If I can’t feel safe, physically, and emotionally, I can’t move through the rest of the stages.”</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. I am triggered. My amygdala is in charge and this means that I am operating in fight-flight-freeze modes.2. This means that my executive functioning, including my ability to use language and participate in conversation is diminished.3. What I need, first and foremost, is to reduce this hyper-arousal state and the overall distress I am feeling. I need help regulating.4. HOW YOU CAN HELP: Coach me to take 3 to 4 deep breaths. Invite me to take my pulse and then try to slow it down. Encourage me to walk with you. Play catch.
Explore A discussion in which you facilitate a judgment-free inquiry about what happened and what is going on for the participant.	<i>“My behavior tells a story. Ask me gentle questions and help me understand what’s going on, because I am not sure</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. I need help seeing this problem I am dealing with is not reflective of who I am as a person. I may be in a bad state, but that does not mean I am a bad person.2. There are probably underlying reasons that help explain my behaviors. It would help me to understand how my current actions are connected to past experiences.

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	<p><i>why I'm doing what I'm doing."</i></p>	<p>3. I may not want to talk about my entire history, but even so, there is still a lot you can do to help me learn about my brain, body, thoughts, feelings, and actions.</p> <p>4. HOW YOU CAN HELP:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. ASK: Can you walk me through what happened? b. ASK: What kinds of feelings do you have right now? c. ASK: On a scale from 1 to 10, how upset are you right now? d. ASK: Has anything like this happened before? Where/When?
<p>Plan</p> <p>Co-creating one or more options to help resolve what has happened, and/or for the participant to better regulate themselves in the future</p>	<p><i>"I need your help coming up with a plan to better handle these kinds of situations and feelings next time."</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Because of the work we did together in the previous two stages I should be able to use more of my "thinking brain" to collaborate on a problem-solving conversation with you. 2. Remember, the work I need to do with my plan is about skill-building, I probably won't be able to go out and succeed with this plan immediately or on the first try. 3. I need help coming up with various solutions and knowing how to make progress. 4. Once we have a plan, I can still end up re-triggered and that derails my overall ability to heal. 5. I need help putting this experience back into the bigger picture of my healing journey. 6. I need to know from you that you still want to work with me. And I need the chance to talk about how to fix any relationships I may have damaged with my words and/or actions. 7. HOW YOU CAN HELP: Encourage me to think of several options for a plan. Share with me how you would handle this situation. Help me identify specific techniques I can use in the future. Tell me you believe I can handle this situation better next time.
<p>Return</p> <p>Deciding together which</p>	<p><i>"Help me get back into the program</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It's not always easy to rejoin activities with my peers. I may feel embarrassed about my behavior or anxious about what I missed.

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<p>steps will be taken for the participant to transition back into the program activities in a way that respects their emotional safety and works for staff</p>	<p><i>without additional embarrassment so I can enjoy all the great things you planned.”</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">2. Don't assume because we have a plan that I am feeling completely calm, or that I can handle rejoining.3. Sometimes it's not a big deal, but if you can work with me to find the best time and way back in, it will help me.4. HOW YOU CAN HELP: Don't pressure me to return immediately. Check in with me about how I'm currently feeling. Offer to spend more time with me before I return. Put yourself in my shoes and think when you would want to return.
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