Introduction and guest background

Hello and welcome to the Cancer Breakthrough Summit. Today my guest is Doctor Roseann Capanna-Hodge. Doctor RRoseann Capanna-Hodge is a leader in system regulation and its impact on children's emotional and behavioral health.

With more than three decades of clinical experience as a licensed therapist and certified school psychologist, she has helped families address emotional dysregulation, anxiety, ADHD, and behavioral challenges using practical, science backed strategies that built lasting self-regulation skills.

As a creator of regulation first parenting and the camps protocol. Doctor Roseanne equips parents, educators, clinicians with tools to identify triggers, reduce reactive cycles, and foster long term regulation in children.

The report focuses on addressing both under stimulated and overstimulated nervous system responses, while helping adults who regulate effectively with children, leading to stronger emotional resilience, improved coping skills, and healthier family dynamics.

Doctor Roseanne is a three time bestselling author, host of the top 1% podcast Dysregulated Kids, with over 2 million downloads and a trusted voice in children's mental health.

Per a book, The Dysregulated Kid expands on a groundbreaking work, and families understand behaviors with the lens of nervous system regulation. Her work has been featured in The New York Times, Forbes, and Parent Magazine, and she is known for delivering compassionate, practical talks that empower audiences to calm the brain first and create lasting change.

Welcome, doctor, and absolutely delighted having you today, the summit. And I mean, I asked you you did not grow up thinking I'm going to become a psychologist in nervous system, specialized in nervous system for kids.

What was your journey? What is the story behind you becoming an expert in such a field? Yeah, well, thank you for the lovely introduction. I sort of did grow up wanting to do this and.

Yeah. And so I remember the moment like it was a moment and it really was a calling when I was five years old. My mom, my parents are immigrants from Italy, which meant all their friends were Italian and would speak.

I mean, my my dad spoke five languages. You know, the Europeans, they speak a lot of languages, but they had friends that spoke in and out of different languages.

And so my mom's friend Angela asked me, what did I want to be when I grew up? And literally out of my mouth popped the word psychiatrist, and I have no idea why.

And I remember her looking at me like, what is this kid been exposed to, right? Because culturally, in a different time in the 70s? Yeah. And as I got older, I realized I don't want to be a psychiatrist.

I want to actually help people with problem solving, not Medicaid them. And so it was just something that I knew that I always wanted to do.

Early calling and clinical journey

And sort of along the way, I was that friend that people came when they needed a fix. I was like a fixer, like, you know, what's what's going on? Okay, here's what we're going to do, right?

And so then I didn't know I wanted to work with kids, but the moment I started working with kids and families, I said, this is what I want because it really had the biggest impact.

Right. We often think adults are are we want to help adults. They want change. But people a lot of times get stuck and they get overwhelmed wouldn't regardless, regardless of what it's going on in their lives.

But kids don't know they can't get better. If you say to a kid, hey, here's what's going to happen, they're going to trust that adult and their brain is going to believe it.

And so what then happened is I was very traditionally trained. We all are in whatever professional field. But I had neurodivergent kids. I had very, very complex cases.

My cases at the end of my career, every one of them had very severe medical problems as well as mental health problems, and they were layered. It wasn't like they had one medical problem.

They had problem after problem after problem. They'd gone to a lot of providers. And so right out of the gate, while I was in graduate school, I said to myself, this traditional things of medication and talk therapy literally don't stick.

They don't work. And so I went to at the time when you looked at research, you had to go in the belly of the basement and look at microfiche. And so I went and looked at microfiche.

And really quickly I learned about things like nutrition and supplements in different ways to reset the nervous system. And thankfully, I was in a graduate program where my professors were were like, of course these things are important.

And I thought to myself, well, why are we not teaching it? We're not really exactly teaching it today either, because I just had my last intern and she didn't get one ounce of this.

And even though every student in her program was hungry for it and was jealous that she was getting it from me. So I believe that regardless of what is going on, the people can improve and they can get better.

And that has been my standard of care, which is very unusual to find a provider of any kind. I have a small group of friends where we believe that and people have to believe it enough, right?

A 1% belief that I can get better changes everything. But where does it start? Starts with the nervous system. So over time I realize, wow, I had people with great medical treatment or psychiatric care, whatever was going on with them, but there was this missing ingredient if they weren't regulated somewhat, I just couldn't get people unstuck.

And so that was where I really started to shift things. And that's where with the thousands of people that I worked with and over 10,000 brain maps, which are essentially brain scans, were we really created change.

I am very fortunate that this started very early in my career because, again, I wasn't accepting the standard of care. I went to the science and and the science tells us exactly what we should do to improve our attention, to help our immune system improve our hormones, but yet we're always going to something else.

So that's where I am. That's how I got there. That's absolutely, absolutely fascinating. And indeed, I mean, we are we are both body and mind. It is completely ridiculous to try to divide into everything and just address locally tumor or disease without trying to understand what is going on it.

Whereas, and I love the titles that you have chosen for the good your nervous system be holding back healing. Because here we are speaking all about healing and and very seldom are we addressed the issue of the of the nervous system.

So why? Why is the body cannot heal when your brain thinks that there is a dangerous somewhere? That is. I know more about some very often a perceived danger than a real one, because we we are not.

I mean, at least in New York City, we are. We are not chased by tigers on a daily basis. These are the dangerous. That's right. But not not the proverbial tigers that induce a flight or fight a reaction.

Yeah. There's so many reasons why today we are living when in a in a place where it feels dangerous and chaotic. And as you beautifully just said, we don't need tigers chasing us.

What has happened in not just America, but across the globe, is that we've accepted chronic stress as part of our life. And not only we hit accepted it, we don't understand how to mitigate it, we don't know how to change it.

And so we we have to go back to the science of the nervous system to understand why is it so important in dealing with tumors and cancer or infectious disease or anything that is happening that is keeping you stuck and not getting better?

Why nervous system regulation matters for healing

So when we talk about the autonomic nervous system and s, it is the part of our body that manages stress responses and we are supposed to have stress responses.

So a tiger chases us or a mugger in New York City our body is like shooting up cortisol. Our dreams kick in our frontal lobes, which is our thinking brain.

Go offline. Your hormones, your immune system, everything activates to support the stress response. So the stress passes, right? And then your nervous system gets out of a sympathetic dominant state, which is fight, flight, freeze, or fawn then goes back into a relaxed parasympathetic state.

If it knows what calm is, that's what the state is. You hear, rest and digest or vagus nerve activation. That's all parasympathetic. But what we're not realizing about the nervous system and and we've simple solutions for this.

So whatever I talk about I make it practical. We always talk about the science. But we have to take action. We can't just have conversations with little elbow grease around it.

And so what is happening is right there not understanding standing. Our nervous system doesn't have unlimited capacity. So I talk about the nervous system as a stress cup.

So we have different things that filter cup right here are people either loving people with cancer or people who have had cancer or have it actively. Maybe they have financial issues, maybe their spouse is not being supportive.

Maybe they have a really rude doctor. Maybe they're having a lot of side effects. All these things are happening, and your nervous system knows no difference between a real stressor like we talked about.

And imagine stressor, right? Worry things that are causing us to feel stuck. And it knows no difference between good and bad stress. It doesn't know if you're excited about a marriage or you're sad about a divorce.

We know the difference. And of course, we want good stressors. And somebody who has. I'm in the middle of a book launch and I'm super excited about it.

I got stressors every day and most of them are good, thankfully, but my nervous system is still activating. So when we keep putting stressors and they drop into the cup, what happens when we put too much stuff in a cup?

It overflows. And so we're not understanding the connection between the chronic little stressors that add up. We think, and this is out in the world, we think a trauma has to happen.

The trauma of cancer, the trauma of a love person, somebody you love having that, the trauma of maybe abuse or having an accident, all these things, these are actually things that do activate your nervous system.

But we're also not understanding being late or having lights or a snarky colleague. These things constantly activate our nervous system and cause our nervous system to be stuck in a threat mode.

And when your body's in a threat mode, it's going to perceive every single thing as a stressor. So your socks are too tight. Stressor. Your wife is tired because she's in perimenopause and now having to manage everything.

She her voice doesn't sound the same stressor. And you don't have to have conscious awareness of these things. Your nervous system starts activating and then starts being in a sympathetic dominant state.

And people say, I don't feel good, I'm not sleeping. You have this cascade of things around it, and at its base is regulation. Because if we don't regulate the nervous system first, your systems aren't going to come back online.

That means your hormones, that means your gut. That means your immune system. That means you're thinking brain, that frontal lobe. And so we're not making this connection.

And this is what I did for 30 years, is I made this connection with people with mental health and medical problems. And what happened? We regulated the nervous system.

We didn't do a lot of other things at first, right. There wasn't a lot of other interventions going on. It was like, let's just take a step back. But everything else in the parking lot and can't we can't do that with cancer.

We're not telling you not to do treatment. And there were many people we had to do things at the same time. But I was like, let's give that body the chance to do its work because it's using all its resources to figure out what this, this tiger is, that we don't know what it is.

And so it wasn't never, wasn't a single event. It was the culmination of constant stress and people not understanding. Wait. Not only do I got to regulate first, I actually have to regulate all the time throughout the day. And how do I do that?

So how do you do that? Yeah, yeah. So there's so many. The great part is there's so many ways, Sylvie, like there's so many simple, easy ways to bring regulation into your life.

And I like to talk about micro, micro moments of regulation in the same way that we brush our teeth. Right. So why do we brush our teeth, right? We brush our teeth to avoid cavities, bad breath, abscesses, gum disease.

And we do it on autopilot, I hope. Right, we're brushing your teeth a couple times a day. Maybe we floss. We? I carry those fosters around, and I'm doing all the right things to prevent something that we don't want to have happen.

And so when we talk about how to reset our nervous system. Yes, I love the idea of big things a bath every night, a massage, a yoga class, a PML device.

I have one on right now. All these big things, you're doing it. God bless. Keep doing it. It's good for you. But what we're not talking about is how do we build capacity in our nervous system all day long so that we can get our body back online to fight the physical fight of cancer, but also the mental exhaustion, the worry, all those pieces that turn on which are which are normal, right?

That's just part of part of what happens. And we can have sadness and worry over this. And we can also do things to support that. And each one is important, but we don't want to be stuck in something where it keeps us down.

So when we regulate in micro moments, what does that look like? And first of all, we have to be very intentional and we have to actually make sure we're doing it multiple times a day.

Micro-moments and breathing practices

So the number one thing I teach and is the most effective and all the things I talk about are free. So and and so this doesn't cost you anything and you can do it anywhere is what we call diaphragmatic or belly breathing.

And if you say to me, doctor row, I hate belly breathing, let me tell you, son, you're just regulating because you don't like that feeling of regulation, because it might feel unsafe, especially if you have a trauma background, a early developmental trauma background.

Don't worry about it. We got alternatives. But why do we do belly breath? Why do we do breathing that puts air deeply in our diaphragm? Because it is the single quickest way to go into a parasympathetic state.

And so we I like a four, seven, eight breath. There's all kinds of breaths. But the key is and most people breathe incorrectly for stress relief. And that is to fill your rally up like a balloon.

Breathe in. So I like to breathe in for four seconds, hold for seven and exhale for eight. Why do we have a longer exhalation? One it's activating our vagus nerve, our parasympathetic state, and we want to do this ideally for three rounds.

You want to do it more go for it. But it's actually the the amount of times and the days that you're doing it. So I tell people do it before your you get up for your feet, touch the floor, do it at night and set your timer for three more times during the day, because the magic of the nervous system and the curse is this the more you regulate, the more your nervous system will automatically regulate.

The more you dysregulated, the more your nervous system will automatically deregulate. And so when people tell me. Oh, I've done these things and they don't work, it's because they're not doing enough repetition to get the nervous system to unlearn that unhealthy response.

And we know the stress stress is connected to everything. And if we stay in that state, it does not serve us in healing, healing mentally, spiritually, emotionally, physically.

This all starts with the nervous system. You have to have capacity to do the harder things. So that's why it's so important to pull yourself into a regulated state.

And there are many other things. Somatic techniques. Hi Kai, there's so many ways to do it. I always start with breath because it's the easiest. And I always see so many people.

There are this cancer. That's the field I am, I am in. The underlying condition is always inflammation or depleted immune function. The city of the nervous system to this space you give to allow the nervous system to heal is absolutely parameter.

I assume you see people at every stage of the disease. I mean people who have not been diagnosed with any cancer or any auto immune disease, but also people who have been already diagnosed with those kind of disease.

Is there a difference in the approach that you have, depending on the stage of the dysphagia, and how long they have been in that stage? Yeah. So when it comes to how we approach dysregulation, your nervous system doesn't know your history, right?

But what it does experience is that the longer you've had an issue, the more intense it is, the more elbow grease you're going to need around it. So the same techniques work regardless of what you brought to the table.

So you're, you know, you and I are you're I'm outside New York City, you're in New York City. I've been working so long that I worked with nine, 11 survivors.

I was one of the nine approved providers for the Sandy hook tragedy. I've worked with people for three decades with unbelievably sad trauma, and I and I always apologize to those people who experienced horrible trauma because it should never be.

We all deserve safety in our nervous system. So when the nervous system is in an extreme threat mode, it is going to take more work. And I think people don't realize that.

You just have to keep going. Instead, they reach for something, a psychiatric medication, something that they believe because of what it's been told to them is a solution.

Not to say that that isn't always necessary, but at the same time, we're not teaching people those simple techniques that actually have a way bigger bang for your buck.

So given that I worked with people in extreme distress, extreme situations, this always worked as long as there was sort of a minimal level of effort.

Obviously it's not going to work if you're not doing the things right, and it's really easy. And like, I understand it so much in that, you know, both my parents had cancer three times.

My sisters are breast cancer survivor. I've had a lot. We all have people who have been touched by cancer. My oldest friend in the whole world has a brain tumor, and I understand what happens on that family level, on that heart level.

And it's heavy and it's a lot. But when people have a sense that this is what I can do, I can reset myself. Why is it that one person can get through something very different in a different way, in the same issue, like, how is that?

And we don't always understand that when we look at trauma survivors, but they have a belief, number one, that they can get better, but two, they actually do things, whether it's knowingly because I'm asking you to make an intentional decision or unknowingly they regulate more.

And when you regulate more, you have that capacity to do harder things. We're not talking about avoiding stress. We're talking about becoming stress slayers in a way where your nervous system isn't activating because we need every ounce of you to fight this.

And the science tells us that stress is behind a lot of diseases.

Regulation across trauma and illness

I mean, you mentioned inflammation, and because I did brain maps, 100% of the people who came to me had amounts of brain inflammation and disruption in their microbiome, which all these systems are connected.

You start off by saying, I'm so glad that you're talking about we can't look at things in isolation. And that's what functional practitioners do. They don't look in isolation.

They realize what's the web here? And for me, it's not to say we're not doing these other interventions. What I'm saying is the order matters. We must regulate our nervous system before we do these other things.

It doesn't need to be perfectly. We just need to create capacity. So it's not going into sympathetic dominance. Yeah. Now when I give a, you know, lectures about the research that we are doing as the key foundation and the plant extracts we are working with, I keep saying those, those plant extracts are going to give you support at the cellular level, and that will give you time.

Now the big question is what do you do with this time? Because that's where the real healing is happening. It is with the time and the conscious will to heal, and to take a number of steps to put yourself in a place where your body and your mind can heal.

This is absolutely I see that all the time. And the people who are holding on the garage, and we will absolutely love actually being in that state of of sentiment, of sadness, because that has become entity.

They cannot heal, they just cannot know. And and we put so much on willpower. Right? Just like you said. And people don't realize fight, flight, freeze, freeze is what happens when people are overwhelmed.

And we live in such a culture, particularly in America, where if it's not 100%, it's nothing. Especially in the age of like everything being out in social media and it looks like everybody's living a perfect life.

I'm a mental health provider. I'm telling you, people aren't living perfect lives. They may look like it and just puts another level of stress, but we have to just take one little micro step.

So maybe today you're like, frozen. I'm not doing five breaths today. Okay, well, what can you do? But let's also make sure your expectations are real.

Because if we're not putting we're not doing some repetition. You're actually not going to create capacity in your nervous system. So I'm saying take a couple minutes here and there throughout the day.

What I do all day, I didn't even realize how much I'm actually doing diaphragmatic breathing. I did my audiobook and they said to me, why are you doing these double breaths?

I'm like, what are you talking about? And they were like, every time you get to an end of a paragraph, you actually go into a double breath. Are you anxious?

And I was like, do I look anxious? And they were like, no, not that you can always see it. And I said, it's just the way I do it. I'm constantly regulating myself in such an automatic level, which honestly makes me, I am so great, stressful situations.

I'm not saying I like it, but I am literally like, you want me there when the ship's going down because I am like, go into the zone. And I've been like that my whole life.

I've been in so many situations because we're greater New York City that have been unsafe for me or others, and I literally was the only person who sprung into action.

And it's just because I am so regulated. I was also raised by very, very loving set of parents who were very empowering for me. So I didn't know that I couldn't do everything.

My parents were like, yeah, and and they weren't those people that were fluffy. They were like, okay, you want to be president of United States? How's that going to happen? What are you going to do? Okay, I got it.

They didn't say, no, you can't do it. They were like, all right, let's make a plan. So it was it was great. So I know my nervous system, new safety and and if yours didn't, that's okay.

It's not okay, but it doesn't mean it can't find it. You just have to put a little more work. Around now to learn how to get to that. And that's going to make a night and that difference in your life.

Absolutely. Yeah. So if someone listening want to start supporting their immune system today, what are the first three things that they should do in your view?

Yeah. So I think the first thing is to honestly believe in that. It's possible. Okay. And and also believe that it doesn't have to be perfect for it. This to work for you, right.

And just 1% believe. Right? I knew if I had somebody when I was treating them that if they said it's just not possible at all, this is 100% not going to work.

I would be like, why are you here? So if I had somebody who said that and I said, could 1% of you believe that? And they said, yes. I said, well, it's going to work.

And it did. It always did. So let's activate that belief system, even if it's hard for you. And I know that we're talking very serious stuff, right? We're talking about cancer, which feels very scary for people.

And and so many people in my life are survivors of of this. And the road is not very fun, but we have to actually believe. Right. So then the next thing we do is we have to actually do the things.

So what what are you going to do now? I often one of the things I love to do is something called the love pause. And the love pause is about it's a three step process.

Belief, gratitude, and daily self-regulation

It's really simple is that you pause, you breathe or regulate, and then you respond to whatever stressful situation you have. And it sounds so silly. Simple.

But when you pause before you respond, either on behalf of a child or to a difficult practitioner or bad news, you're actually giving yourself that few moments needed.

It's not going to fix it, but it's a way of getting your nervous system to regulate before you destabilize. So that is critical in that. And then within the larger scope of things, what are you doing in those five times a day or more?

Like me, I don't even know how many times I do it. It's got to be 20 or 30 or 40 times a day. I'm not thinking about it anymore. We have to practice regulating ourselves outside of dysregulated moments so that our nervous system just snaps in, right?

The same way, when you drive home every day, you're not thinking about it. Somehow you get home. When we do that with a nervous system, it just starts operating and purring in that nice parasympathetic state.

It also can handle stress. It can serve you. And you're also much clearer about threats in whatever situation. You are right to me. I have lights on right now.

It's a threat to my nervous system. I know these lights will dysregulated me, and I actually have to do other things later to get myself back online. And then lastly, write what you know.

So are you picking the breathwork? Are you doing a somatic technique like a heart hug or a butterfly tap or humming? Are you praying for ten minutes or more a day?

But you're also praying in a way where it's very positive, right? Are you using internal mantras? Are you reading a book that's a real book and not an online book?

Because ten minutes of reading and a real book resets your nervous system. How cool is that, right? So what are you picking? I suggest picking one thing.

And then lastly, what are you actually, how many times a day? Are you committing? So can you do that five times a day? What can you do to actually reset yourself?

And that's why I love breathwork or things like a heart hug, because you can do it at your desk. I do it in the airport bathroom. I do things all the time and just stick with it.

Stick with it for seven day minimum 30 day ideally and have grace for yourself. Look at what are the changes you're seeing in intensity, frequency, duration.

Wouldn't it be great if something got eliminated after 30 days? But don't expect that, because when we expect that, that's another threat to our system.

That's another reason to pull back in on that willpower as you. So as we call often call it. But your nervous system

is shutting down. So believe it, right?

Pick what you're going to do to regulate and actually do it multiple times a day in micro moments, and do it for at least 30 days before you say that didn't work.

Yeah, yeah. Now, one thing I like a lot is take a few minutes to just talk to it. For what? What what is it? And I think it's a way to to shift totally the energy very fast.

And you can do that again and again, quietly, without alerting everybody around you that you are doing it. And the benefit also is people are sending you benefit of your renewed approach of and look on life when you are full of gratitude and love.

Yeah, I think it makes such a difference to have gratitude, and it may feel really hard to have gratitude when you are dysregulated and know you're not a bad person.

Give yourself some slack. It's just your nervous system is in threat mode. So you're a warrior right now and you're just not seeing the positive, right?

Our brain can see a negative within a quarter of a second, but it takes upwards of 20s to see a positive. Yeah. That's right. Yeah. And so we're wired for the threat.

But we can see the positive two if we just put a little I mean it's like anything else. Like you have a terrible night of sleep. Your hormones are a mock.

You got in a fight with your partner. What kind of. You're not going to wake up in sunny way, right. And the reverse.

The Dysregulated Kid book and resources

You have a great night of sleep. Somebody told you something lovely. Your kitty cat sits on your lap. You have much more capacity for everything. So every day doesn't have to be sunny.

But when you look at people who can really handle hard things, it's an inside job. They're doing something in the inside, and it really starts with the nervous system.

It becomes the pathway for so many other things. And that's what I saw with thousands of people over all these years, regardless of whatever medical or clinical issue they had.

And that's really important for people to hear that because they'll say, not me. My problem is too big. No, that's a belief. Don't believe that. Yeah, absolutely.

So tell us a little bit more about your book and also where people can find you if they want to, to work. Yeah. Well, you can find me anywhere as Doctor Roseanne ROSEANN spelled right here.

And you can just google that. But I have this beautiful resource called the Dysregulated Kid. This isn't just a book for parents, and it's not just a book about kids, right?

It's really my kid was a dysregulated kid, and that's really my story. It's about how to do exactly what we talk about in the easiest way possible, and understanding the science behind it is one part of it, and I certainly give you that, but it's really your playbook on how to reset yourself.

So there's action plan for adults. There's action plan for an adult who's trying to help a kid find calm. There's even a bonus chapter for schools. And this book is really leading to a very simple certification.

That is, I have personal level, I've professional level. And then I have this dream, Sylvie, where this is going to be brought into the schools. This is brought into companies because we have a dysregulation crisis.

And I needed to bring and what worked for all these people to everybody else in the easiest possible way, because we are drowning in stress. And it is it is harming us more than people realize.

And I hate to see that, because it's much more simple than the solution is much more simple. And I've laid it out really easily and also in a fun, charming way too.

And it's not. It's not expensive. It's not expensive treatment and other expensive treatments. It's not about taking more medication. It's just by being empowering yourself and your your life.

And that's why. Yeah, yeah. You know, for 2195 you get the keys to to what I did for 30 years and the quickest, easiest way possible. And and I don't mean to understate that people came with the hardest problems you possibly could imagine seeing dozens of provider, dozens of providers.

And I was able to for those people that believed and actually did the work, they got better. And so that's a really powerful message because it's hard.

And I've been stuck. Right. My kid is the dysregulated kid. I know what that's like to be afraid and what fear does to the nervous system so we can experience fear or we can let it keep us stuck.

And so let's pull that out and change that narrative. So that's the power and resetting your nervous system. I love it. Thank you so much. Thank you. That was absolutely empowering.

I'm sure for all our listeners. My pleasure. Thank you.