Your Child’s Dysregulation, Meltdowns and Mood Swings Are a Nervous System Cry for Help Transcript

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Early Warning Signs of Dysregulation

Before the school calls, before the diagnosis, Before things fall apart, the brain leaves clues. Over the last three decades, I've done more than 10,000 brain maps and worked one-on-one with thousands of kids struggling with attention, anxiety, mood, behavior, and again and Five simple questions reveal which kids are at risk.

for long-term mental health struggles. And really, there's a difference between kids that are occasionally dysregulated or really stuck there, and we're gonna go into which are these kept questions that I always wind up doing in these intakes, which you all know I'm not gonna be doing anymore, but I wanna share them with you so that you can feel better about the path that your taking.

These questions reveal difficulties. years before anybody labels your kid ADHD or has anxiety or some kind of behavioral disorder. These are personality traits.

They're nervous system signals. Most parents are told things like they'll grow out of it or it's just a phase or that's normal kid behavior. or sometimes the opposite.

But what parents are actually seeing are early dysregulation or regulation patterns. And when the nervous system stays stuck in a stress mode, you know what happens.

Flexibility drops. Recovery slows. These are kids that really struggle to recover from upset, disappointment, being being really reactive because all kids have temper tantrums.

That's normal. But it's that recovery. develop in those areas. You're always going in and giving that scaffolding that help, but it never seems to be internalized.

Five Predictive Nervous System Signals

And that's when struggles compound over time. Let's talk about the brain science behind regulation and some of these issues that I'm seeing that. I really trying to share with you to prevent these.

Issues from being long-term issues. A regulated nervous system, what can it do? It can pause, recover, it adapts. Disregulated nervous systems overreacts, gets stuck a lot, they can't reset.

And mental health struggles don't appear overnight. If they do appear over night, go and see somebody immediately. It could be pans, it could a psychotic break.

Something could have happened to your kid, a victimization of some kind, but they develop over time. They build quietly when stress stays high and recovery stays low.

Let's talk about that early warning system. These behaviors aren't problems to eliminate They are dashboard lights like, hello, I need some help. And that's what the brain and nervous system is showing us.

When we ignore them, the system strains. We support them. The brain rewires. But we've always got to regulate first. You know that. Let's talk about these five predictive nervous system signals.

Number one, low frustration tolerance. It's a biggie. And what do parents see? Parents see explosive reaction, giving up quickly, intense emotional responses to often things that are tiny.

They could be every time they face a larger challenge, but why is it so predictive? So low frustration tells us about the emotional brain. Is it over reactive and the thinking brain?

Is It working? is a connected? Do we have problem solving executive functioning skills or not? Of course this is predictive, But it really these questions all give us a clue on where we need to put our elbow grease.

Things aren't well connected yet. What it's going to be hard to do for them is pause, reflect, use coping skills. These kids often grow into teens who struggle with anxiety, impulse control, emotional volatility.

In the brain, what do we see? We see overactive areas in the emotional centers, we see underactive regulation networks. Those are the neural networks of the brain that are essentially the superhighway that connect everything.

And these kids can run, have both overactivity and underactivty, but they just don't have that breaking system that gets them to pause and deal with whatever that stressor is.

Number two, this is a really predictive behavior that I see kids struggle and it's a hard one because a lot of kids are facing this. It's restrictive eating.

What parents see isn't just eating a few safe foods, right? It is strong reactions to textures, smells, change. These are the kind of kid that no matter what you're doing, they just don't want to try those foods.

Why is it so predictive? Restrictive eating often signals a nervous system that experiences the world as unsafe. These kids frequently have sensory sensitivity, heightened stress responses, rigid coping pattern, and then there's a nutritional layer as well, of course.

So, limited diets deprive the brain of nutrients. And those are needed for calm focus and emotional balance. Nobody wants to talk about food and they think, you know, just getting something in powers up that engine, but it's not the case.

Recovery, Problem Solving, and Regulation

And so I will often see this in the history of the kids that I work with who later develop mental health issues. Now, these are not black and white. These are things that I've seen in working with over thousands of kids.

What's underneath a kid who's a restrictive eater? It's the kid whose stuck in sympathetic dominance, always ready to fight, flight or freeze. And in their brain, you're seeing heightened sensory areas in the brain that are just more reactive to things.

That's why they often respond to occupational therapy and sensory work, which is very surprising for a lot of parents. All my OTs that listen, you know I love you.

You do a great job. We certainly see it more in clinical conditions like autism, ADHD, area of neurodivergence. But that doesn't always mean you're going to have problems.

It's just much more common. The third area that I often see problems with is difficulty transitioning, especially between activities. it's an increasing challenge to transition in our digital world and so reliant on devices both at home and in school.

But it is more than that. And what we're seeing is that these kids will have meltdowns, They will switching between tasks much more than you would expect.

And for longer, you see resistance to change, see getting stuck. You see difficulty actually learning the transitions, missing the cues and knowing what to do.

So why is it so predictive? Transitions require executive functioning skills and cognitive flexibility. We need those in

everyday life. not just your job, not your school, but in relationships, in going to the store, you name it, with executive functioning you need to be able to see what's coming and plan for it.

And cognitive flexibility is that ability that you can do things differently. You can switch gears, change a plan. We need that. For those of us that are mothers, what would we do without cognitive flexibility?

We would stress out. And that's why it's such a predictive component for kids that could be struggling with mental health in the future. Kids who struggle here often grow into teens.

who resist change struggle with uncertainty these are those kind of kids that ask you a lot of repeated questions because I hate uncertainty they have rigid emotional patterns they in their brain dysregulation is in the frontal networks tied to planning organization and adaptability right those executive functioning centers aren't working as well.

Remember, executive functioning is a learned skill. You are not born with it. So I want to give you hope for it And you go back and listen to the other episodes on executive functioning.

I love to talk about it. And I wish everybody would integrate that into their parity. The next predictive area or question is, do they have poor recovery from upset?

So after being upset, what parents will see is big reactions that last. a long time, trouble calming, even after the trigger is long gone. And why is it so predictive?

Recovery speed is one of the clearest indicators of nervous system health because slow recovery means the parasympathetic nervous or the break. That's that calm hot tub state.

The break is not engaging. And we need to be able to go into a parasympathetic state. Otherwise, life is going to chew us up and spit us out. It's a strong predictor of anxiety, depression, stress and tolerance.

Could be a list of other clinical issues. And later on, what you what, you see in these teens is a lot of clinical. So in the brain, you're seeing high beta, which is worry, hyper arousal, being overstimulated and low alpha, just a really nice feel good brainwave that helps you to calm and reset, helps it asleep, it helps to not be so irritated.

It's a very nice brain wave. One of my favorite. I do it a lot. And actually the PEMF puts you into an alpha state, so cool. So number five, the number 5 question is, is your kid a poor problem solver?

And skills under stress, what are we seeing? What are you actually seeing when you have to problem solve? Because it's so critical. I think one of the things that I see that parents get so irritated with their kids is they're not good problem solvers.

So what they are seeing is, I can't. They're seeing shutting down.

What to Do Next: Support and Early Intervention

You're saying oppositional behavior when challenged, especially when they feel Incompetent in any way they feel criticized in anyway, you're seeing this in your reactive attachment disorder kids.

So it's very predictive because problem solving only works when the brain feels safe and it is regulated. You're not going to have good problem-solving skills when frontal lobes go offline.

which they do in a sympathetic dominant state. Kids who can't think through challenges under stress often develop chronic frustration, learn to helplessness.

These are our kids that you might say have low motivation, but if they just have learned helpless, they've shut down. You have more power struggles with these kinds of kids and in their brain, you're seeing disrupted frontal

connectivity doesn't work as well.

That's that thinking brain and it can coordinate under What do we have to think here? When we see you're hearing me, you are watching and you think, wow, I got a lot of yeses here.

It's not a face, it's a signal that the brain and body are under chronic stress and at a minimum, your kid or maybe you're saying yes to this for yourself, you are running on empty.

And what we have to think about is they are struggling not just with everyday life, their actual electrical circuits of the brain, nutrition, all those things aren't working.

But here's the biggest part. When we calm the nervous system, improve nutrition support, co-regulation, strengthen executive functioning, we don't just reduce meltdowns.

We change the trajectory of mental health. That is huge. Instead of believing that a pill is going to fix it, this is not the way it works. It's not what I've seen in these three decades.

You have to regulate first and then come in with those skills. And they stick when you're regulated, not when are on some type of ADD medication or something else.

Now, listen, this isn't about shame. You know how I feel about medication. It should never be the first line of defense. We have a developing brain. Why wouldn't we do simple things to regulate the nervous system?

Which is what, oh, it's on this side, which is my book, The Disregulated Kid, is all about. Its gonna be easy, accessible, and anybody can do it. And 90% of the things in there are free, meaning every single person has access to the tools that are in that book.

And why is that important? Because we need to break this cycle of overwhelm. And that's only going to happen when we what kids? regulate first. You got to think my kid's behavior is not defiance.

It's data from the nervous system asking for support. Because remember the A in comms is avoiding personalizing. So what are you going to do? You know I'm all about the action step.

Number one, ask yourself these five questions. Go back, listen, look at the notes, and honestly answer. Don't panic. But this is really about giving you this knowledge so that you can take early intervention because you know how many people come to me and say coulda, woulda shoulda or I didn't push hard enough, I asked for help.

And many of you do. When we intervene early, It's just a lot easier to change, and it's faster. Now, if your kid's 27, it is never too late, or this is about you.

It is just, we have shame, bad habits, stress compounded. And remember, healing is that trajectory is a trending up stock market. But you have to do the work.

You can't just magic wand it. And you know that. That's why you're here. I want you to pick one area to support regulation this week. So go back to the five questions.

Really think, okay, my kid is a picky eater and I really feel like we got hangry behaviors. Don't try to tackle all five. If your kid has all 5, please find a licensed mental health provider.

Yes, you can still buy the book. You can sign up for my dysregulation insider newsletter. Go back and binge listen to all the episodes. There's a lot of gems in there.

because I have had the privilege of helping thousands of people and you get the benefit of that. And that's important. But when we start to regulate, we're going to look for differences in recovery time, so intensity, frequency, and duration.

Not a miracle. So is that for recovering time a little better? Maybe they only needed three reminders. Maybe they only slam their door one time. Look for the micro, because that's where parents give up.

When we work with people one-on-one, it's a lot of holding through that. Because changing the nervous system is like a piece of cake when you actually do it.

It's those behaviors attached to it, and us as parents letting go of stuff. Letting go the idea that kids must be obedient. And they must listen the first time I tell them.

And I'm so mad. I was having this great conversation the other day. It's an Italian podcast, and they're like, can you imagine if we said these things to our parents?

And, I said, well, that's pretty saucy. I knew my limits, but I'm sure you're shocked that I wasn't the easiest kid in the world. We're not looking for perfection here.

What we're looking is gradual change. So mental health struggles don't just start in adolescence. They start when a stressed nervous system never learns how to recover.

Let that sink in. So, for more science-backed tools like Calm the Nervous System, Regulating First, right before you address those behaviors, go to our newsletter, The Disregulation Insider.

It's free. Shows up in your inbox every week. And if you're so inspired by this podcast, Please leave a review because one review, especially on Apple, makes a huge difference and they will actually share this podcast with other parents.

And you know what? We need the world a calmer place. And this show and the book, The Dysregulated Kid, all of these things are going to help our world be more regulated.

And we need that for ourselves and our kids. You got this, people. Pick one thing and focus on regulating. Want more insights and solutions? Well, subscribe to our dysregulation insider and it will show up in your inbox every week.