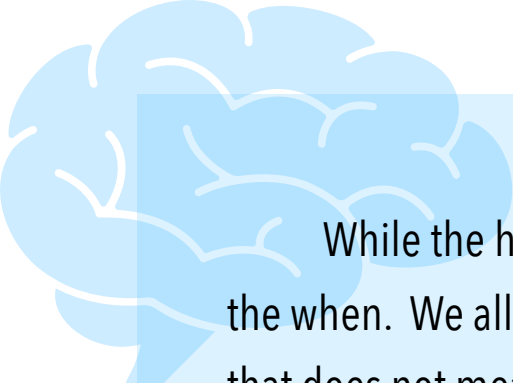




Getting the Most Out of Your Amygdala Reset

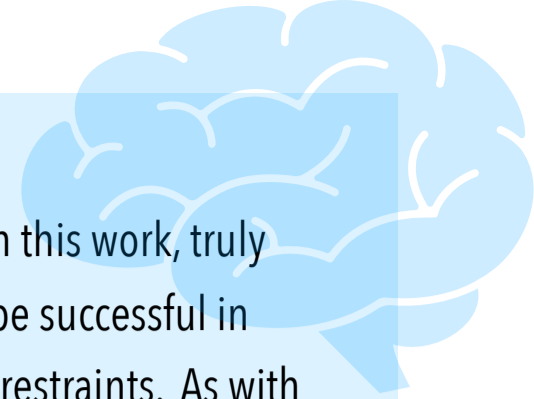
"I know I have taught a successful lesson when my students never use what was taught again!"... Said no teacher... EVER! We all strive and work our fingers to the bone creating lessons and experiences that will impact our students well beyond the classroom. One of our main goals as educators is to set our students up for success, to prepare and equip them with the understanding and the tools needed to reach their greatest potential long after they leave us. We can apply this goal to all areas of our teaching, whether it be math, reading, writing, or even behavior, so it would only make sense that we apply this goal to the amygdala reset station as well. Let's face it, amygdala reset stations take a great deal of time and money, both of which teachers tend to be running low on, so we want to get the best bang for our buck! And we get that bang when we set our students up for success in using that amygdala reset station.

How is this accomplished you might ask? Well, we need to start with a common understanding of the purpose of an amygdala reset station: regulation. Notice the broad use of the term "regulation," this is intentional because these stations can house many different forms of regulation including both co-regulation and self-regulation. Overall, self-regulation is the long term goal here, but this is not where we begin. When we teach a child to read we do not walk them over to our class library, give them a little tour pointing out the different types of books, and options for places to read, and then leave them there expecting the reading to just magically happen. We start at the basics and we sit beside them. The same approach should be taken when teaching our students how to use an amygdala reset station. We start with the basics, controlling our breathing, and we sit beside them, modeling how we control our breath. Horse trainer Monte Roberts once said, "to blame the horse [for their instinctual behavior] is like blaming the night for being dark". When we blame students for not being in control of their emotions, their feelings, and their responses, we are blaming them for their own biology, of which is far beyond their control. Regulating our emotions, feelings, and physiology is something that must be taught, and just like reading or arithmetic, we have to start at the basics and sit beside them. We must recognize that this is going to take a lot of intentional work and support, but the payoff is worth it, trust me.



While the how of introducing and setting up an amygdala reset station is important so is the when. We all know that regulation strategies are to be used when we are dysregulated, but that does not mean they should be taught when we are dysregulated. Quite the contrary, regulation strategies must be introduced and practiced during neutral times, times when our amygdala's are not triggered and we are able to think and function in our cortex. Now when I say "we" I mean it, teacher and student. This is where the beauty of neuroplasticity comes in! We know our brains can create new neural pathways, but if we want these new pathways to stick they have to be created when we are in a state of calm, relaxed alertness. Furthermore, if we want these pathways to be used, especially when they are needed most, then we have to make sure these pathways are well travelled. This occurs through patterned, repetitive experiences, in other words practice, practice, practice! Remember, practice does not make perfect, so be prepared for bumpy roads and setbacks, but just keep on keeping on. This continued practice is no different than a fire drill which contrary to popular belief is not a way to get out of teaching that hard math concept or our principal's way of keeping us on our toes. We perform fire drills so that in case of a real fire we know where to go and what to do. Practicing regulation strategies is exactly the same thing! We practice these strategies at times when we can go slow and get it right, so that when that emergency does arise, and our amygdala fires, we know exactly what to do and where we can go. Setting your students up for success when self-regulating is giving them the tools, instruction, and support they need not at the times they need it the most but for the times they need it the most.

When creating and using amygdala reset stations we spend a great deal of time talking and thinking about what actually regulates the brain, but we often leave out what dysregulates the brain and honestly this is just as important, if not more so. You cannot know right from wrong if you never identify the wrong, thus you cannot know regulation if you never identify what causes dysregulation. Before we set off on an unending journey trying to identify all the things that might set one's brain off we really only need to remember three things: chronic unpredictably, isolation, and restraint. The brain is an amazing adaptable organ but even it has its limits. The brain simply cannot take these three stressors so when creating, introducing, and implementing an amygdala reset station we must keep these three things in mind. So how do we address these three dysregulators? Well, we actually already have. By teaching regulation strategies and how to use the amygdala reset station on the front end, during neutral times, we



have already begun to remove unpredictability. Sitting beside our students in this work, truly co-regulating, takes away isolation therefore giving our students the tools to be successful in understanding and coping with their emotions and feelings, while removing restraints. As with anything though we have to remain vigilant in our noticing of when the amygdala reset station starts to creep towards these three things throughout our use of them, not just in the beginning but always. It is extremely easy for these stations to become places of dysregulation if we do not continually ask: Is the station or how we use it unpredictable? Is it isolating to anyone? What restraints might it place on those who use it? Just as we continually self-reflect on our teaching habits we need to continually reflect on our regulation habits. Below are additional questions we can think about to avoid these three stressors of dysregulation.

Chronic Unpredictability	Isolation	Restraint
Do all of my students know how to use the amygdala reset station?	Is this a place where students can choose to go or am I sending students there?	Who decides when students leave this space or discontinue their use of a tool? Is it always me?
Do they all know what it is for?	Am I actively using this space and its tools to co-regulate with my students?	Do students understand how to tell when they are finished?
What procedures and routines can we put in place to remove any unpredictability?	Do my students know that this does not have to be a solitary space?	Do the tools in our station allow for a variety of ways to regulate or does it cater towards a specific way?
Is the reset station always accessible to those who need it? Even if I am not there?	Who tends to use our station the most? Why is that? Is that a good thing?	
How can I proactively plan for times when my students have a guest teacher?	What can we do to make sure this is a resource utilized by all?	
	How can I use this station to build connections with students?	

As you can hopefully see now, the amygdala reset station involves far more than setting up a yoga mat and a basket of putty and fidgets. These stations take a great deal of planning, require thoughtful and intentional introduction, and need continuous attention and reflection. This is not easy, but neither is teaching a kiddo how to read. Just as we set our students up for success in reading or math we can set them up for success in regulating. At the end of the day we have to remember that we are teachers, tackling the seemingly impossible is in our job description.

Written by Courtney Boyle

