

It is natural and, in some circumstances, desirable for a child to go into a Red Brain state; for example, if a child is playing sports. We only become concerned when the child goes into this state far too frequently and too readily or has a great deal of trouble coming out of it and returning to Blue Brain/Red Brain balance. We cannot hope to reason with or teach a child in Red Brain how to think or act in a different manner. Punishing a child in such a state for a perceived lack of self-control is the one response guaranteed to impede that child's emotional, cognitive, social, and prosocial development.

“There is no such thing as a bad child.”

For a child who is chronically slipping into a Red Brain state, it is imperative that we learn to read not just the signs of when this has happened but also the signs that it is impending and, of course, the stressors that are triggering this shift. The ultimate Self-Reg goal is to help children acquire the necessary understanding of when and how to manage their own energy and tension, so they can adapt to the ever-changing and increasing stresses that define growing up. Learning how to self-regulate in a growth-promoting manner is a lifelong process, characterized by endless setbacks and moments of stunning clarity. The better we can set a child on this path, the more that child will thrive.

In Chapter 2, we will take a detailed look at the five-domain model of Self-Reg first explored in *Calm, Alert, and Learning* (Shanker, 2013), examine closely the five-practice method of Self-Reg, and begin a Self-Reg journey together.

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The Self-Reg Framework

Key Takeaways from This Chapter

- Self-Reg involves the management of stress and tension across five domains: biological, emotion, cognitive, social, and prosocial.
- The five-practice method comprises the following processes:
 - » 1. Reframe the behaviour.
 - » 2. Recognize the stressors across the five domains.
 - » 3. Reduce the stress.
 - » 4. Reflect and enhance stress awareness.
 - » 5. Respond with personalized ways to support restoration and resilience.
- Within Practice 5, we also realize how to maintain balance as part of a healthy lifestyle across all five domains and establish Self-Reg thinking, including restoring balance and self-nurturing, as second nature.
- Tools such as the Examples of Self-Reg Stressors Across the Five Domains and the Self-Reg Rubric can help you recognize stress behaviour in your students and in yourself.
- Self-Reg is always personal and begins with you.

About the Self-Reg Framework

Before we begin to delve into the *how* of Self-Reg, we need to look first at the framework. As we outlined in the Introduction, the framework comprises the five-domain model of self-regulation and the five-practice method. The exploration of the five domains served as the core for *Calm, Alert, and Learning* (Shanker, 2013), so we will start with a review of the domains here.



Put It into Practice
See the companion website for the Chapter 2 videos.

My Notes

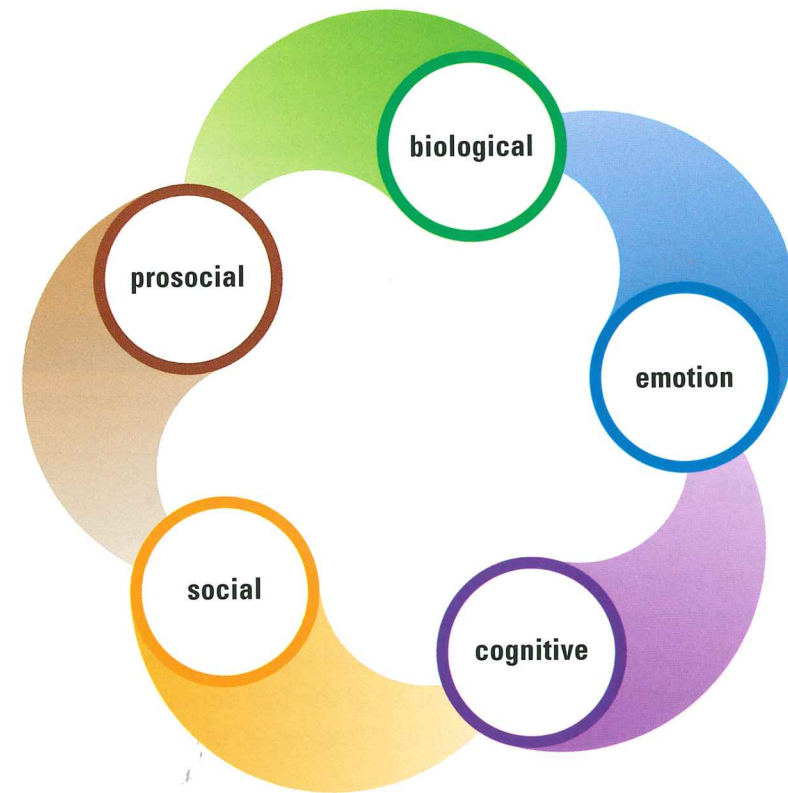
The Five Domains of Self-Reg

In Self-Reg, we look at self-regulation through an exploration of five domains (Figure 2.1):

1. The Biological Domain
2. The Emotion Domain
3. The Cognitive Domain
4. The Social Domain
5. The Prosocial Domain

The five domains are represented in a circular diagram because the domains are linked and there are connections between and among them. We will take a look at each of these domains in the pages that follow.

Figure 2.1 The Five Domains of Self-Reg

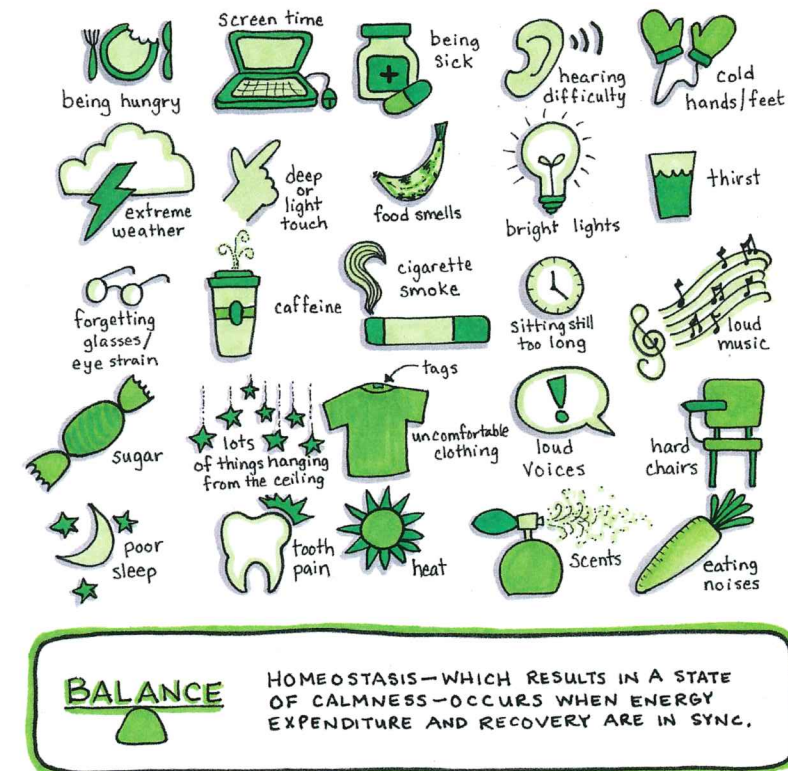


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Biological domain: This domain involves physical health, sleep, nutrition, exercise, and various aspects of maintaining energy, including the role the nervous system plays in regulating energy levels. There are some biological stressors we recognize as contributing to our condition or the quality of our day. For example, if you are sick (or you did not sleep well), you assume that is why you are not able to focus on a report you have to write. You may not be thinking about it in terms of stressors that the brain-body has to respond to and recover from that in turn may be depleting energy. The biological domain also includes energy zappers that we might not think of as stressors or in terms of balancing energy. Some examples of hidden stressors impacting this domain include strong smells, sudden weather changes, daylight-savings time changes, dense text and not enough white space in presentations or books, and smog in the air.

Examples of stressors in the biological domain are shown in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 Example Stressors in the Biological Domain



Source: Wiens (2019)

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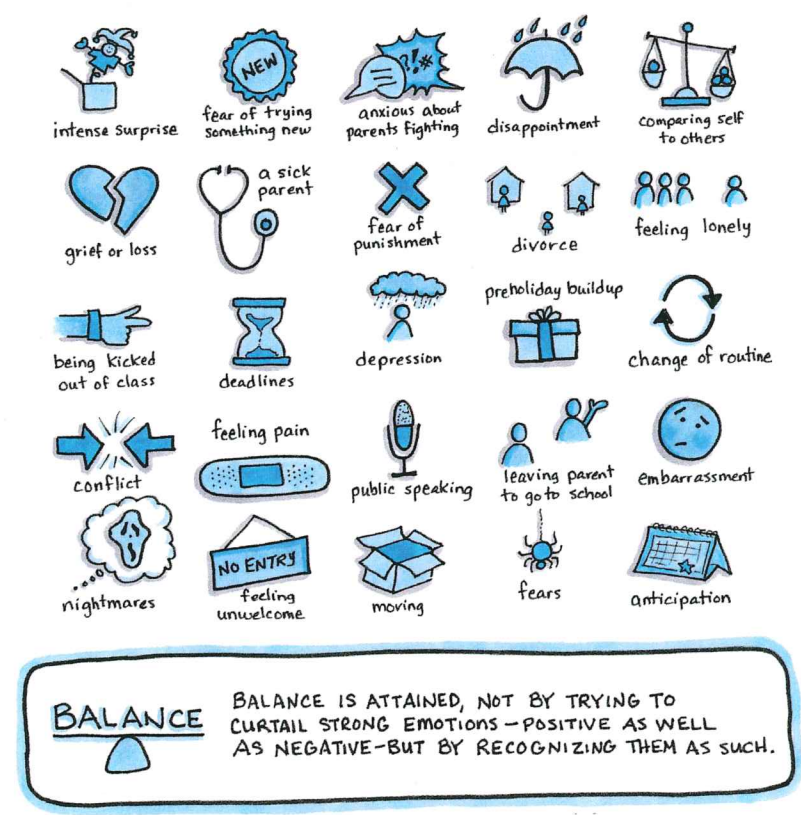
Put It into Practice

See the companion website for reproducible versions of the five-domain Example Stressors charts provided in this chapter.

Emotion domain: This domain involves the ability to deal with the stress of strong emotions, both those we may consider positive and those that may be thought of as negative. We consider the energy and tension related to the strong emotion, not the emotion itself or the event that might have triggered it. Remember that our energy is, in some ways, like the battery on an electronic device. It can dip too low quickly and then need to be restored (*plugged in*, for the electronics). In the same way that a device cannot work with a drained battery, we cannot deal with emotional stress when our internal battery is drained.

Examples of stressors in the emotion domain are shown in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3 Example Stressors in the Emotion Domain



Source: Wiens (2019)

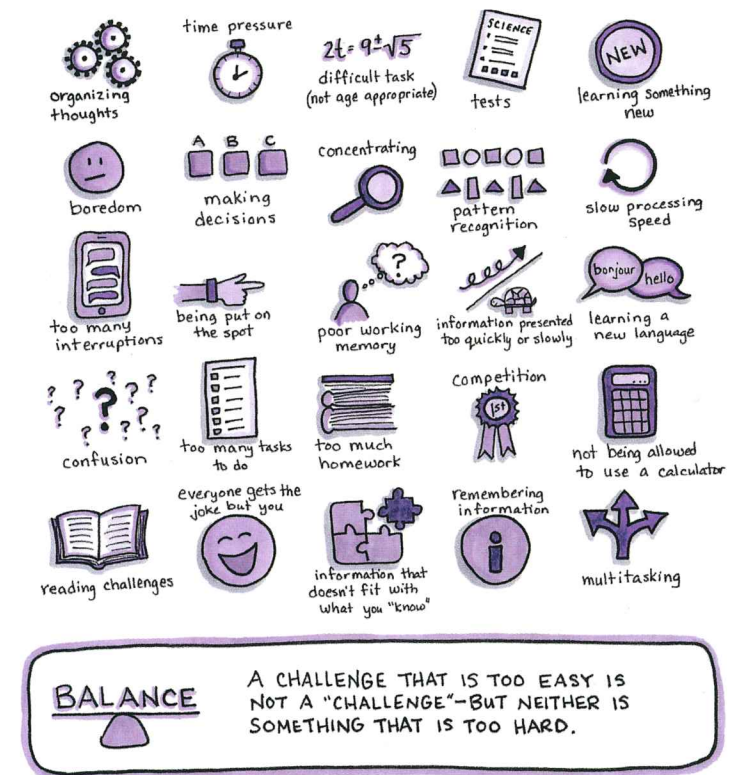
Cognitive domain: This domain includes the stress of processing various kinds of information, maintaining attention, dealing with time

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pressures, and the demands on working memory. Stress detecting in the cognitive domain helps educators navigate challenging problems such as students who have difficulties with certain subjects (e.g., math), students who are not meeting learning outcomes and/or achieving academic expectations, and students who adopt avoidance as a maladaptive mode of self-regulation.

Examples of stressors in the cognitive domain are shown in Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4 Example Stressors in the Cognitive Domain



Source: Wiens (2019)

Social domain: This domain encompasses recognizing social cues and the effect of behaviour on others, understanding and responding to the feelings and intentions of others, communication skills, and the ability to repair and restore relationships. Stress detecting in the social domain helps us deepen our understanding of a child's self-regulation in relation to others. We may find, for example, a student who sometimes appears very disconnected from their classmates

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and teachers, and at other times seems very linked in. Remember that stressors across all five domains are involved with any behaviour that you are reframing, including those in the social domain. But the reflective questions are always “Why?” and “Why now?”

Examples of stressors in the social domain are shown in Figure 2.5.

Figure 2.5 Example Stressors in the Social Domain



Source: Wiens (2019)

Prosocial domain: This domain includes coping with other people’s distress, a sense of justice/injustice, and the ability to co-regulate with others and put their needs and interests ahead of one’s own. In the prosocial domain, the stressors are experienced in relation to others, but in a different way than in the social domain, which focuses on connecting. We can take on the stress of others almost as if it were

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our own—for example, while watching a child crying or upon learning that someone in our community is suffering. When we slip into the “shoulda, coulda, woulda” self-talk, we are often experiencing pro-social stress—whether we are reflecting on something we feel guilty about not handling differently or whether we have slipped into judging another’s actions.

Examples of stressors in the prosocial domain are shown in Figure 2.6.

Figure 2.6 Example Stressors in the Prosocial Domain



Source: Wiens (2019)

Stressors Across the Five Domains

In Self-Reg, there is no script or lesson and no program to follow. However, there are tools that can help with the process. Figure 2.7 provides additional examples of stressors in each of the five domains. The lists of stressors were developed by a group of adults studying Self-Reg with The MEHRIT Centre. The lists are intended to stimulate thought and discussion, not to be used as definitive lists.

My Notes



Put It into Practice

See the companion website for a reproducible copy of Figure 2.7. You can also use the template version on the website to list your personal, classroom, or school stressors.

Figure 2.7 Examples of Self-Reg Stressors Across the Five Domains

- 1. Biological Domain:** Consider energy expenditure from the following sources of brain-body stress.

 - asthma
 - extreme weather conditions
 - hunger or thirst
 - traffic
 - bright lights or fluorescent lighting
 - food intolerance or sensitivities
 - insomnia
 - travel
 - caffeine
 - loud voices
 - visual noise (busy walls)
 - chronic pain
 - hormonal changes
 - smells or scents
- 2. Emotion Domain:** Consider energy expenditure from the following sources of brain-body stress.

 - anticipation or overexcitement
 - depression
 - embarrassment
 - loneliness
 - anxiety or fear
 - disappointment
 - grief or loss
 - moving or relocating
 - confrontation
 - divorce or separation
 - helplessness
 - doubtfulness
- 3. Cognitive Domain:** Consider energy expenditure from the following sources of brain-body stress.

 - ability to organize thoughts
 - deadlines
 - making decisions
 - reading challenges
 - being put on the spot
 - information overload
 - memory lapses or issues
 - understimulation
 - competition
 - interruptions
 - pattern recognition
 - visual problems
 - confusion
 - learning something new, such as a language
- 4. Social Domain:** Consider energy expenditure from the following sources of brain-body stress.

 - adjusting to retirement
 - confusing social situations
 - disagreements with a partner
 - learning the norms of a new group
 - being bullied
 - crowds
 - hostility
 - peer pressure
 - being in a social setting alone
 - difficulty reading others' cues
 - lack of friends
 - small talk at social events
 - confrontation
 - large family gatherings
- 5. Prosocial Domain:** Consider energy expenditure from the following sources of brain-body stress.

 - being exploited by people or organizations
 - dealing with others' strong emotions
 - feeling responsible for other people's happiness
 - giving a gift
 - compromising your needs to help out another person
 - expectations of others
 - feeling unprepared
 - jealousy
 - feeling empathy or sympathy
 - sick child

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The Five Practices of Self-Reg

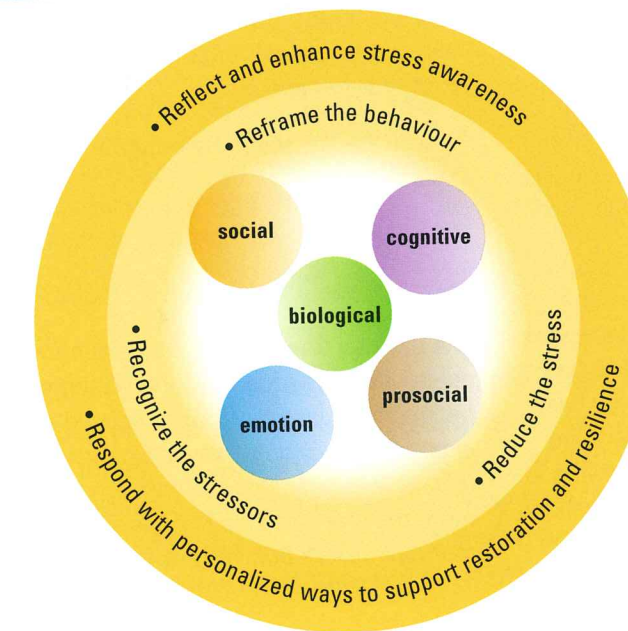
Self-Reg is a five-practice process for understanding stress and managing tension and energy (see Figure 2.8).

1. **Reframe** the behaviour.
2. **Recognize** the stressors across the five domains.
3. **Reduce** the stress.
4. **Reflect** and enhance stress awareness.
5. **Respond** with personalized ways to support restoration and resilience.

These practices help the individual replace impulsive, maladaptive modes of self-regulation with "mindful," beneficial modes.

Over the next several pages, we will describe each Self-Reg practice and break each one down to show you what it looks like in action. It is important to note that the first three practices are immediate and occur in the "now," while the latter two are ongoing and in a constant state of refinement (see Figure 2.8). As well, although we sometimes might refer to them as "steps," any one of the practices can occur at any time.

Figure 2.8 The Five Domains and Five Practices of Self-Reg



Source: The MEHRIT Centre

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Put It into Practice
See the companion website for background information on the five domains and a reproducible version of Figure 2.8.

Practice 1: Reframe the Behaviour

“See a child differently, you see a different child.”

Practice 1 involves reframing how we see a child who is stressed or how we see ourselves when we are stressed. Self-Reg presents us with different ways of seeing a child, all of them based on the Blue Brain/Red Brain distinction (e.g., between *self-control* and *self-regulation, misbehaviour* and *stress behaviour*). Reframing is the game changer. Once we start reframing, we see everything differently and we ask different questions. Learning to reframe misbehaviour as stress behaviour is foundational to being a Self-Reg educator and to any student support team. Let’s reflect back on our scenario from Chapter 1 and consider how Ewan “saw” Jake after Jake had punched Connor.

SELF-REG SCENARIO

Part 3: Kindergarten Teacher Ewan Sees Jake Differently

That afternoon in class, with five-year-old Jake having hit Connor, Ewan thought about how he viewed his students’ “misbehaviours.”

Jake was unusually quiet during that afternoon’s centre time. He pulled himself away from the other students to go to the painting centre. He seemed more serious than usual and subdued.

Ewan checked in regularly with Jake, commenting on the huge tree trunk that Jake was painting and the interesting perspective he was showing, which seemed to be from the base of a tree looking up. It was an unusual painting and Ewan kept coming back to it, trying to make Jake’s thinking visible through questions, but he got very little back from Jake.

The school’s music teacher dropped in to see what the children were working on. She told Jake that she loved his painting and asked him to tell her about it.

“It was the last thing the butterfly saw,” explained Jake.

“The butterfly?” she asked.

“Before Connor stepped on it,” replied Jake.

The unusual tree trunk in the painting was actually Connor’s leg from the butterfly’s perspective. Jake had looked so cold and intentional swinging away at Connor, but, in fact, he had been flooded with emotions—more than he was able to cope with in that moment. Jake’s punching of Connor looked

from the outside like misbehaviour, but it was actually stress behaviour.

Ewan considered potential hidden stressors beyond just what had happened to the butterfly that might be contributing to Jake’s dysregulated state. Some “why?” and “why now?” reflecting on Ewan’s part uncovered the following:

- Ewan knew that Jake suffered with spring-time allergies. He had been sniffing and sneezing a lot in class.
- Jake’s mom had mentioned to Ewan a month ago that Jake had not been sleeping as well as usual.
- There was a class field trip and a bus ride the next day. Like his peers, Jake was excited and the class energy level felt very high (yes, excitement—although positive—is still a stressor).
- Routines were different in class that week because the class was preparing for the field trip.
- Jake loved nature and butterflies. He had talked about butterflies more than once in class.

Ewan noticed that putting himself in this little boy’s shoes and imagining some of the stressors he might be dealing with melted away

any thinking that this was a bad kid. Ewan got down on one knee alongside Jake and asked him if he was okay. Tears welled up in Jake’s eyes and his arms wrapped around Ewan. Ewan hugged Jake back, feeling the quiet sobs subside.

Before Ewan knew it, Jake went over to Connor and told him that he really was sorry that he had hurt him. The words Jake had not been able to find earlier were now available to him and he used them on his own and sincerely. Connor responded to Jake that he too was sorry. He hadn’t meant to hurt the butterfly; “It just kind of happened.”

Reflect and Connect

- Do you find it more challenging to reframe as stress behaviour (a) Connor hurting the butterfly or (b) Jake punching Connor?
- Consider a time when you thought you were dealing with a misbehaving child and then you realized there was something more going on. What are some ways that reframing misbehaviour as stress behaviour helps us in our teaching?
- Reframing applies to adult behaviour too! Think of some examples of stress behaviour that you notice in adults at one of the following high-tension times: (a) report cards; (b) before holidays; (c) testing time.

When we learn to read the signs of stress behaviour, we consider the behaviour as a form of communication telling us a child needs our help, not our judgment. Jake was in distress not just during and after he punched Connor, but before as well. It is easy to focus on the incident that happened as the source of that distress, but in Self-Reg we go deeper. What Jake saw happen to the butterfly was the proverbial

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straw that broke the camel's back. The butterfly story is moving, but we need to recognize that under other circumstances—on another day, in another place, or with another peer—Jake would have been able to deal with his distress in seeing the butterfly hurt in a healthier way. He did not make a conscious choice to punch Connor; he just did it. His ability to exercise self-control was not there in that moment and, in all likelihood, he had been dysregulated that day and so the incident tipped him into a full-on Red Brain state. As adult stress detectives, we consider the short-term problem of dysregulated students fighting in the playground, but, more importantly, we also look at the situation through a long-term preventative Self-Reg lens.

Looking at our scenario, did Ewan

- assume Jake set out to hurt Connor intentionally?
- tell Jake through any combination of words or actions that he was a “bad kid”?
- view the behaviour as something to change?

Or, did Ewan

- begin the detective work to try to understand the root of the behaviour (after ensuring Connor was okay, of course)?
- view the behaviour as a learning opportunity?
- tell Jake through any combination of words or actions that although hitting is not how we treat one another or solve problems, he is still cared about and will get the help he needs to work through what happened?
- view the behaviour as a sign the child (Jake) needed his help?

Although Ewan was new to Self-Reg, he already looked at his students' learning in school as connected to their well-being in other areas of their lives, such as relationships. If Ewan had seen Jake as a child willfully contemplating and then deciding to punch Connor, his response would have missed that the incident was actually stress behaviour, not misbehaviour (see Figure 2.9). Jake was not a “bad kid”; he was a kid in a Red Brain state who had lashed out in a fight-or-flight response.

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Figure 2.9 Misbehaviour Versus Stress Behaviour

Misbehaviour	Stress Behaviour
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child chose to act a certain way • Child is aware that they should not act that way • Child could have chosen/acted differently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child did not <i>choose</i> to act a certain way • Child's behaviour caused by limbic and sub-limbic (Brown Brain) processes • Extremely difficult for the child to control this behaviour

Practice 2: Recognize the Stressors Across the Five Domains

“A stressor is anything that requires us to burn energy in order to keep internal systems running smoothly. In Cannon and Selye's classic treatment, the cold temperature that trips a thermostat to turn on the heat is a paradigm example of stress; the furnace has to burn fuel to stay within its set temperature range. Stress can be positive or negative, overt or hidden, physiological or psychological, internal or external, self-imposed or forced upon us.”

Practice 2 involves recognizing the negative and positive stressors in a child's life (or in our lives) and recognizing when a child is caught in a stress cycle (or when we are caught in a stress cycle), and why. In Practice 2, we do our detective work, sleuthing to uncover stressors across all five domains—the obvious ones contributing too much to a child's “backpack” or our own. More importantly, perhaps, is figuring out the hidden stressors in all five domains—biological, emotion, cognitive, social, prosocial— that might be quietly contributing to the overall stress load on a child or on ourselves. Stress is not the problem; stress beyond what a child or adult has the resources to manage is our concern in Self-Reg.

My Notes



Put It into Practice
See the companion website for a reproducible version of Figure 2.9.



Put It into Practice
Review the five domains of Self-Reg using Figure 2.1 (p. 16). This figure is also available on the companion website.

In our scenario of Ewan's student Jake, the butterfly that Connor hurt was not the trigger behind the punch. It was, instead, the reason Jake had experienced

- anger and hurt (emotion domain);
- a sense of the butterfly's suffering (prosocial domain);
- distress at Connor's apparent lack of remorse (prosocial domain);
- a whirlwind of confusion (cognitive domain);
- the bell had rung loudly (biological domain); and
- children and teachers were everywhere (social domain).

When faced with stressors, our brain-body stress response kicks in, directing energy resources to respond to and then recover from that response. What makes the complexity of self-regulation apparent is that on another day and in another context, Jake would have responded differently to Connor hurting the butterfly. Stressors accumulate and draw from the same finite energy resources, and on that day in the recess line, Jake's stress "backpack" was already too full. Let's also not lose sight of the fact that Jake was just five years old, and that what might seem like little things to an adult can be big things for a child.

The brain-body responses to strong emotions alone (even "good" emotions) can easily consume a child's (or adult's) limited resources. When we "lend a child our calm," we support the child to manage their tension and energy as the child moves through the brain-body stress response. In other words, the adult has the Blue Brain "online" and acts as the caring co-regulator whom the child needs in the height of a Red Brain state.

My Notes

STORIES from the Field

Reframe Recognize Reduce

Erika, Special Education Consultant

Bringing that empathy for others to viewing ourselves with "soft eyes," too.

I started my Self-Reg journey to develop a better understanding of the science behind it and the tools that I could use. I hoped the learning would allow me to better support the K-12 students and schools that I work with. What happened along the way was not what I expected. The most powerful learning I had was about my Self-Reg. Looking at myself with soft eyes allowed me to recognize what was contributing to my dysregulation. Due to my increased self-awareness, I was able to recognize my own stress behaviour, recognize the stressors, and reduce them. Self-Reg has given me the ability to reframe my stress behaviour and in turn not feel like I am failing. I now understand that when I want to revert to a self-control mindset, it is because I am stressed and not because I am not working hard enough.

Self-Reg allows us to develop our own stress awareness and teaches us that the most powerful tool we have to support students is ourselves, and it is done through co-regulation. It gives us the understanding and skills needed to sit with a child's dysregulation, look at the child without judgment, and co-regulate them through challenging times.

In Self-Reg stress detecting, we continually reflect on the same two questions: "Why?" and "Why now?" The key is that we must do the detective work across all five domains. A stress response is never about stressors in just one domain for any of us. Teachers can introduce Self-Reg stress detecting to students as a way to begin exploring and learning about identifying and reducing stressors across the five domains.

Practice 3: Reduce the Stress

The third practice in the process of Self-Reg involves reducing the negative stressors and bringing the tension down for a child or for ourselves. It deals with lightening the stress load that all of us—students and teachers alike—carry. Let's take another look at the scenario at Ewan's school that we began exploring in Chapter 1.

My Notes

SELF-REG SCENARIO

Part 4: Jenn, Ewan, and Penny Plan for Reducing Stressors in Their School

Jenn, the special education support teacher at Ewan's school, had a gift for connecting with kids. Jenn and her principal, Penny, often engaged in lively discussions about the possibilities of Self-Reg to support the well-being of students and teachers alike.

After hearing Ewan's story about his Self-Reg "aha" moments while reflecting on five-year-old Jake and the butterfly incident, the three educators decided to work together on a plan to reduce common stressors for their students and staff. They decided the school environment was a good place to start. Building Blue Brain-friendly spaces began with considering visual noise and decluttering.

Jenn talked about how visual noise is not just a stressor for some children but for teachers, too. She challenged Ewan with some reflection questions:

- Where would you rather do your work? Do you like to work in a room with bright colours, posters on the wall, and resources out in the open?
- Or would you prefer a room with natural lighting, muted colours, very little on the walls, and resources stored away where students can access them?
- Or would you prefer something between the two?

Ewan chose the second option (thinking, "of course"). Jenn invited Ewan to consider why he chose the option, explaining that not

everyone shares the same view. The key, Jenn explained, was reflecting on the choice in terms of stressors—what adds to the load and what lightens it for us—connecting it to our energy, tension, and individual variability.

Ewan could not help wondering that if every teacher knows that decluttering classrooms is a good thing (which most do), then why were so many learning spaces still exploding with visual noise? Teachers at his school worked very hard on their classrooms and, although many rooms brimmed with "stuff," most were still organized and tidy. But, Ewan acknowledged to himself, stuff accumulates and change is not easy. And if there is space, people feel the need to use it.

Here is the start of the list that Jenn, Ewan, and Penny developed to reduce stress for teachers and create a Blue Brain space:

- Find ways for teachers to have the time to declutter so they do not have the added pressure of more to do but no time in which to do it.
- Hold a collaborative planning time to initiate the decluttering project to allow the team time to think through the changes, make decisions on where they could start, and feel in control of how the environmental redesign would go in their spaces.
- Provide a structure and a process for the working team and allow staff options of working alone or in partners (without privileging one choice as better than the other).

My Notes

Penny knew this list was only a beginning for her school team, but considering Self-Reg practice through the lens of stress reduction in the school environment was a good start.

Reflect and Connect

- Jenn, Ewan, and Penny chose to begin with the school environment to identify ways they could reduce stress for their staff and students. What are some pros and cons to how and where they chose to begin their Self-Reg project?

- What actions have you and/or your school taken to identify and reduce stressors across any of the five domains—biological, emotion, cognitive, social, prosocial? Which actions have made a difference and in what ways?
- How would the task of whole-school decluttering and reduction of visual noise go over in your context? Why? From a staff member's perspective, what advice would you give Penny as to how she could best approach this with her team?

Figure 2.10 presents some common ways to reduce the stress load. The key is to remember that we are individuals, and what lightens the stress for one person may have the opposite effect on another. We can create our own personal list of in-the-moment ways to reduce our stress.

Figure 2.10 In-the-Moment Ways to Lighten the Stress Load



Put It into Practice

See the companion website for a reproducible version of Figure 2.10 and a template for creating a personal list of strategies to reduce stress.

My Notes

Interoception:

The felt experience or sense of internal physiological states and what is going on inside your body

Practice 4: Reflect and Enhance Stress Awareness

Practice 4 involves reflecting on the signs that a child is approaching the point of being overstressed, or that you are approaching such a point. Although “reflecting” sounds metacognitive—and there is an element of thinking involved in this practice—stress awareness in Self-Reg is an embodied experience. It is not dependent on language or thinking. Instead, it involves noticing or a kind of “knowing” what is going on and recognizing what calm feels like for yourself as well as what it feels like to become overstressed.

SELF-REG SCENARIO**Part 5: Penny Considers Her Own “Stressed” and “Calm” States**

Penny was fascinated to notice that her own learning had deepened considerably thanks to the collaborative reflecting she had been engaging in with Ewan and Jenn. She knew that introducing Self-Reg Practice 4: Reflect to Ewan required a different approach from Practices 1 through 3 (Reframe, Recognize, Reduce). It was so easy to go “metacognitive” on this practice and think of it as a program for children to learn to self-identify where they are in terms of their own behaviour.

The question that Penny considered was how to actually teach or model this reflection to someone else.

Penny knew when she was feeling in Blue Brain and could easily recognize “calm” and “stressed” within her own body (**interoception**). She could also recognize

when stressors from the outside world were negatively impacting her self-regulation (**exteroception**). She also knew that helping children develop enhanced stress awareness was far more successful in real-life contexts and through experiential learning. Penny realized that this would hold true for adults as well.

Reflect and Connect

- How do you know when your students are in a calm, alert, and learning state?
- How is Penny developing her Self-Reg knowledge throughout these scenarios?
- What is your preferred way of experiencing professional learning and growth? Where does/might your Self-Reg learning journey align with this?

Exteroception:

A sensitivity or sense of stimuli outside the body

Using the Thayer Energy-Tension Matrix (see Figure 1.4 on p. 10) to reflect on Jake, Connor, and the butterfly as an example, some new questions emerge:

- Which of the four energy-tension quadrants do you think Connor may have been in when he stepped on the butterfly?

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- In which quadrant would you place Jake before he saw the butterfly hurt and then when he lashed out at Connor?
- What about the states of both boys after they went back to the classroom?

The Thayer Energy-Tension Matrix is only intended to be a reflective tool and, of course, answering any of the above questions definitively would require considerable detective work. But let’s consider, for example, the possibility that Connor had been running at a high-energy, high-tension state—the upper-right quadrant that can make a recess playtime very active and very limbic for a five-year-old child. When Connor saw the butterfly, he just stomped on it without a thought. He felt the urge, and before he knew it, his foot was on top of the butterfly. If you cannot imagine doing this to a butterfly, imagine the reaction you would have if you found a spider on you or even a cobweb. It’s automatic; the rational thinking, if it comes, comes afterwards. There could be other explanations, but let’s give Connor that benefit of the doubt and assume that his behaviour was a reaction, not a choice, and that it was related to being wound up—stuck too long in the upper-right quadrant of full-on tension and energy.

We know a little more about Jake’s state from the scenario. We recognized that Jake’s stress load involved multiple stressors across all five domains, and so we can reframe the punching of Connor as stress behaviour—a reaction rather than a choice. We know that Jake’s brain and body were experiencing excessive stress, more than Jake had the resources to absorb. Reflecting on the implications of this for Jake using the Thayer Energy-Tension Matrix, we can rule out the left side of the matrix, as both quadrants there are low tension. Jake clearly was in a high-tension, overstressed state.

So where was Jake’s energy when he saw the butterfly hurt? A reasonable guess is that Jake was either in the lower-right quadrant of low energy and high tension—so already depleted and just trying to get through the day—or he was dipping into the lower right, a very uncomfortable place for any of us to be. It just does not feel good to not have the energy to meet the stress and tension needs of the moment. And energy (glucose) can deplete very quickly. Jake loved butterflies and the sense of injustice (prosocial domain) and anger or grief (emotion domain) that hit him instantly likely dropped him into the lower-right

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quadrant. He physically lashed out—again, a reaction rather than a rational, thought-through decision. The confrontation would have caused a surge of changes in both boys' brains and bodies.

The above reflection is hypothetical, of course, and yet this sort of wondering—reflecting on the four quadrants of the Thayer Energy-Tension Matrix in a moment—can help us to recognize the conditions within which stress states occur and consider more options for responding. If we think a child's behaviour is connected to a completely depleted energy state and more tension than their brain and body can manage in a moment, instead of working on the behaviour first, we support the child to return to a greater state of balance.

SELF-REG SCENARIO

Part 6: Penny, Ewan, and Jenn Reflect on Energy and Tension States

Principal Penny asked Ewan and Jenn if they were willing to try some Thayer Matrix (see Figure 1.4 on p. 10) energy-tension mapping with her after school one day. Curious to learn more, they both agreed.

Together, under Penny's guidance, the three colleagues closed their eyes for a few minutes to focus on noticing tension in their bodies. Penny walked them through a simple "body scan" process, starting with their toes, moving to the balls of their feet, arches, heels, and so on through the whole body.

Ewan remarked that he noticed how sore his hips felt and how tight his chest was with each breath. Jenn felt tension in her shoulders and neck and noticed the fatigue in each area.

The group went on to map their current energy and tension states on the Thayer Matrix. Jenn suggested that they each map their states multiple times over the next week onto a single

personal matrix. This would give them more to talk about and to continue exploring.

Reflect and Connect

- A high-energy, high-tension (HE/HT) state is a great place for your students to be creative, take risks, and be deeply engaged in work. That said, we all need breaks from the intensity of HE/HT. How do you recognize when your students need a break?
- What strategies can help students who are "stuck" in HE/HT to dial down the tension so they can transition to a state where they can rest and restore?
- You will pass through all four energy-tension states in your teaching, sometimes in a single day. How might you use the Thayer Energy-Tension Matrix as a reflection tool to support your teaching and ongoing professional learning?

My Notes

In our scenario, Penny, Jen, and Ewan spent almost an hour and a half in their discussion. The time had flown for them—a sign of the high-energy, high-tension "flow" state on the Thayer Energy-Tension Matrix. This kind of intensity and full-brain (Red and Blue) active engagement for any of us, adults and children alike, has a saturation point. What is an energizing space for learning, creativity, and collaboration has a window and then our brains and bodies need a break. We often think of this "break" as time to process new learning. That is part of it, but understanding that this "processing" requires us to be in a regulated state brings us full circle to the psychophysiological understanding that self-regulation can make self-control (and all Blue Brain functions) either unnecessary or in the realm of possible.

Practice 5: Respond with Personalized Ways to Support Restoration and Resilience

In Practice 5, we realize how to maintain balance as part of a healthy lifestyle across all five domains and establish Self-Reg thinking, including restoring balance and self-nurturing, as second nature. We all have our own ways of living in healthy balance. With students who are chronically out of balance, this will no doubt require much co-regulation. Each co-regulated experience of being balanced—calm, alert, and well—is one more experience that brings them closer to managing balance for themselves.

Some readers will notice that Practice 5 has new language. As Self-Reg-related science grows, so too does our understanding of the implications of this for our work with children.

While Practice 5 is connected to Practice 3, there are some important distinctions:

- In Practice 3, we work to reduce stress loads and dial down tension when (and only when) we see signs in a child's (or our own) behaviour, mood, or well-being that they (or we) are not able to respond to the stressors, absorb them, and move on.

My Notes

- In Practice 5, we are not trying to get a child (or ourselves) ready for anything in particular. We seek balance as part of a healthy lifestyle. Engaging the neurophysiology for health, growth, and restoration lays the foundation for experiencing a sense of safety, connection, and wellness.

SELF-REG SCENARIO

Part 7: Ewan Remembers His Own Red Brain Moments

A few days later, Ewan realized that another of his students was flooded in a full-fledged stress response. She went “limbic,” or Red Brain. Ewan wondered what it must have felt like to be Olivia in that moment.

Later that evening, Ewan reflected back to a time when he experienced full-on Red Brain. He now realized that Red Brain is not just something that happens to children. It happens to adults too—across our whole life-span. Limbic states can hobble the ability to be rational, to engage Blue Brain capacities, and to exercise that sought-after self-control.

In Ewan’s case, it occurred when he took exams in university: he became cranky and hard to live with. It seemed the harder he tried and the more he studied for an exam, the worse he did. He had a recurring nightmare that he was short a course for his degree because he had failed an exam. Ewan remembered the junk food and coffee at all hours. Most of all, he remembered the time he lashed out at his grandmother during a family dinner on a weekend home. He felt guilty about that for years, even more so because his grandmother had responded, like always, lovingly.

Learning about Self-Reg helped Ewan reframe what had happened and why he had taken

his stress out on someone he loved. He had been in a Red Brain-driven, low-energy, high-tension state, and these conditions prime a person for fight-or-flight responses such as the one his student Olivia had had earlier in the day. Lashing out with words was another version of fight-or-flight.

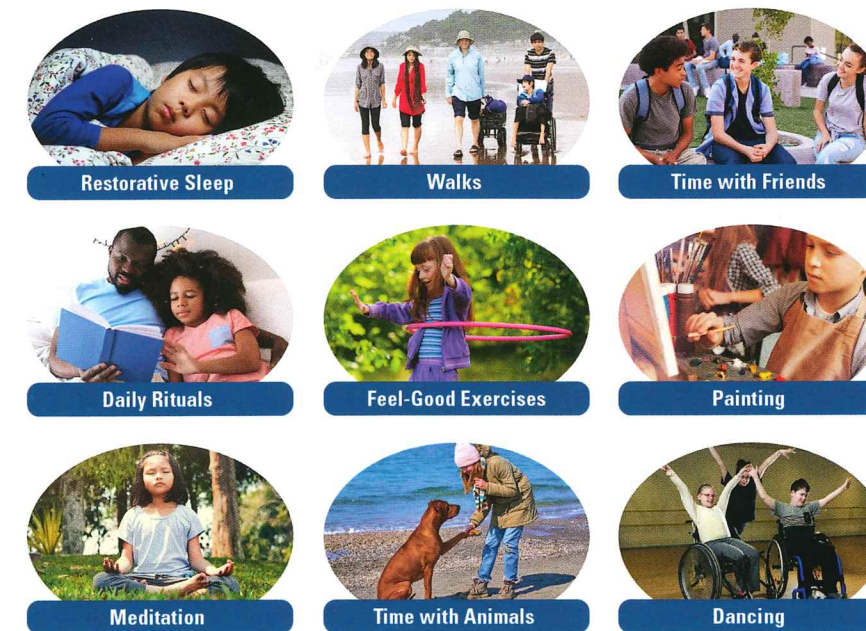
Ewan’s Self-Reg learning journey might have just begun and yet he found himself already looking at his students’ behaviours, and his own, differently. The conversations with his principal, Penny, and fellow educator Jenn were already taking on a life of their own with the scheduled Blue Brain spaces project underway in their school. It was an unexpected but welcome surprise to end the week considering his own self-regulation.

Reflect and Connect

- Have you noticed shifts in how you are “seeing” your students’ behaviour as you learn more about Self-Reg?
- What opportunities are there for all students in your context to restore balance in the five domains across the school day/week?
- What are some of the small ways that educators in your context restore energy and balance during the school day?

Ewan still had much to learn about the five practices of Self-Reg, but it was time for the all-important fifth practice: respond with personalized ways to support restoration and resilience. He could consider some of the many ways to restore energy (Figure 2.11), and he could begin to develop his own list of restorative strategies. Maybe he might opt for one of his favourite daily rituals: spending time with his dog relaxing in the backyard and enjoying a beautiful spring evening. Perhaps Ewan could even keep a special eye out for one of Jake’s butterflies.

Figure 2.11 Examples of Ways to Restore Balance



Put It into Practice

See the companion website for a reproducible version of Figure 2.11 and a template for creating your own list of ways to restore balance.

My Notes

My Notes

STORIES from the Field

Carol, Vice-Principal

Reframe Recognize Respond

Their stress and ours are interconnected.

We knew that what we were doing was wearing us out. We were tired, frustrated, and grumpy too much of the time. Something had to change.

My personal and professional journey into Self-Reg began when I transitioned from a K-8 school counsellor to an elementary vice-principal. Having taught for almost thirty years, with many successes and highlights, there remained a nagging feeling that something was missing.

Dr. Stuart Shanker had recently visited the West Coast and introduced our district to Self-Reg. His message was compelling and timely. We couldn't un-hear what he was saying. There was no going back.

The process of self-regulation fit well into my worldview: kids weren't broken, my job wasn't to fix them. I was ready for a way to reframe challenging behaviours. Little did I anticipate that doing so would shift the overall tone of our school.

Our lofty, yet pressing inquiry question became: How will the intentional practice of Self-Reg change the trajectory of our school and its community?

As a school, we acknowledged that the process had to start with us, a vulnerable place to start. Having a process reflect back on "me" was not like other programs we'd implemented. This was personal. Looking for hidden stressors and reframing our own behaviours was our starting point.

Moving beyond ourselves, we made other changes, which included installing windows in classroom doors, adding alternative seating, and purchasing spin bikes. We set up a body break circuit for students, our school's version of a 6-10-minute workout. Decluttering, as tricky as it was, was as useful for the teacher as it was calming for students. Being a group of verbal processors, we talked a lot. We held each other accountable in the safest way we could. We cared.

Self-Reg works at school and it works at home. I see my grandchildren through a different lens than I saw my own children. It's a kinder lens. More love, less blame. The intended result: learning and living with joy!

One last thing: it doesn't matter who starts Self-Reg (admin, teachers, parents); what matters is that you start!

Personal Self-Reg: An Introduction

"A child responds intuitively to the change that they sense in you."

There is a lot to learn about the stress-response system and its impact on our students' learning, moods, behaviours, and relationships.

Learning Self-Reg is as much a personal learning journey as it is professional—both for our own well-being and because, if we are going to "lend students our calm," we first have to understand our own stress and know how to manage our own energy and tension. In our classrooms, and in our daily lives, it can seem daunting to carve out time to focus on our own self-regulation. We need to remind ourselves that this is a necessity, not a luxury.

Self-Reg is always personal. Together, we will explore the five practices with the option of developing your own personal Self-Reg profiles over the next four chapters through end-of-chapter reflections. (On the pages that follow, we give examples of actions that help us self-regulate.)

Figure 2.12 is a rubric that might be useful as part of your personal journey. It is intended for use with students or those who are new to Self-Reg.



Put It into Practice
See the companion website for a reproducible version of Figure 2.12.

My Notes

My Notes

Figure 2.12 Self-Reg Rubric

	I am learning about...	With help, I can...	On my own, I...	In my everyday life, I...
Practice 1: Reframe the Behaviour	my brain, what stress is, and how it impacts my behaviour, mood, and energy levels	spot some signs of too much stress in myself and others	read and reframe stress behaviour in myself when I look back on a situation	read and reframe stress behaviour in myself and others
Practice 2: Recognize the Stressors	different kinds of stressors in five different domains: biological, emotion, cognitive, social, and prosocial	spot some significant stressors that affect my own and others' behaviour, mood, and energy levels	recognize stressors that impact my behaviour, mood, and energy levels—especially when I experience several stressors at the same time	ask “Why?” and “Why now?” to figure out stressors that I can reduce or remove. I read the signs of stress behaviour in others.
Practice 3: Reduce the Stress	ways that stressors can be reduced	figure out ways to reduce or remove stressors that affect my own or others' behaviour, mood, and energy	have reduced or removed some of the stressors that affect my behaviour, mood, and energy levels	take action to reduce and/or remove personal stressors that affect my behaviour, mood, and energy
Practice 4: Reflect and Enhance Stress Awareness	the difference between being quiet and feeling calm	start to notice when I am calm (and what “calm” feels like in my body), and recognize calm in others	notice the feeling of being calm, focused, and alert when it happens, and notice when I don't feel that way too	am aware of my energy states and stress-response systems, I know what “calm” feels like, and when I am experiencing dysregulation
Practice 5: Respond with Personalized Ways to Support Restoration and Resilience	ways that people fill their energy tanks back up when they are empty and maintain a healthy balance and Self-Reg lifestyle	figure out ways to “fill up” my tank when it's low. I am beginning to realize when I am not balanced and what to do about it.	use personal ways to recharge my energy tank when it's low and I am not balanced. I work towards a healthy Self-Reg-based lifestyle that sustains my well-being.	realize how to maintain balance as part of a healthy Self-Reg lifestyle. I take time to restore as a daily routine and when I notice signs that my energy level is dipping.

My Notes

**Personal Self-Reg Journey:
Practice 1. Reframe the Behaviour**

Think back to a time when you wanted to roll your eyes at something someone said but you managed to suppress that urge. Self-control was available to you to resist the urge in that moment and suppress the physiological response that you felt well up in your body. The reason you could suppress the eye roll was that you were in a regulated state to begin with; the stress the situation was adding to the mix was manageable.

Now, reflect back on a time that you felt deep empathy for one of your students. Empathy is an energy-expensive emotion. That empathy is also a stressor on your brain-body systems. In other words, as wonderful and important as that empathy is, it also is draining on your finite energy reserves and this, in turn, impacts your ability to exercise self-control in a given moment.

What does this mean from a practical standpoint? Imagine that you are experiencing deep empathy for one of your students or colleagues. Now imagine that in this moment you are also overtired. Add to the scenario that you are under pressure to meet a looming deadline to submit report cards. You might not be able to suppress that eye roll that you were easily able to suppress in the example above. Or, you might find yourself snapping impatiently at a loved one at home or even making an excuse to avoid the social event that you know you should go to but just can't right now.

Stressors have a cumulative effect on our brain-body systems, and that cumulative stress can “leak” through in a myriad of ways. Learning to recognize the difference between misbehaviour and stress behaviour applies as much to ourselves as it does to our students. Stress-rooted behaviour is not something you can just think your way out of because it is not a self-control problem. If you did “will” your way through, you would in turn feel even more depleted. Working on brain-body self-regulation means working on the roots of the behaviour by understanding the stress and managing the energy and tension—in other words, by practising Self-Reg.

My Notes

We begin our personal Self-Reg journey with Practice 1: Reframe the Behaviour. In whatever form of journaling that works best for you (pen and paper, on a phone, audio recordings, or videos), start by listing behaviours you notice in yourself that you might be able to reframe as stress behaviours. Good examples for the list are any actions or choices that you regret or wish you could change, or that even just give you pause for reflective thought.

The Authors' Lists

Susan's list of behaviours to reframe as stress behaviour:

- Insatiable craving for salt-and-vinegar potato chips
- Impatience with my daughter when she is trying to show me something in a moment when I don't feel I have time to give her my full attention
- Working way too many hours in one day or feeling almost unable to put my work down. It becomes all-consuming.
- A growing pile of clothes on my closet floor that I "should" put away but keep avoiding
- Overthinking situations and falling into the trap of making assumptions about situations I know very little about
- Anxiety dreams—the types that are some twist on the theme that I forgot something or missed something very important
- A strong urge to be alone
- Worrying what others are thinking about decisions I have made
- A feeling of inadequacy and overfocusing on what I didn't get done while not really seeing realistically just how much I did accomplish

Stuart's list of behaviours. He has taken his list to the next level and reframed each as a stress behaviour:

- Waking up in the middle of the night with a busy mind. For a long time, I thought it was because of the particular issue I

was grappling with and not a sign that I'd gone to sleep in a low-energy, high-tension state (see Figure 1.4 on p. 10).

- Learning that certain cravings, fears, and irritability were signs of being in a low-energy, high-tension state.
- Not wanting to relax! For a long time, I thought this was due to heightened Blue Brain motivation. It took me a long time to realize that it was often more a case of Red Brain "priming" that was driving me.
- Not listening to others, especially my children, carefully and with all my senses
- Interestingly, a craving to check up on the latest political news. I can almost use this as a signal that it is time to take a break.
- Decline in exteroception! I learned that when I do not smell (savour) the air coming off the lake first thing in the morning, it's a sign that I am already in a low-energy, high-tension state.

My Notes

My Notes