

Small changes in support can make a big difference

The Regulation Ladder

Based on Polyvagal Theory (Porges)

The Regulation Ladder helps you understand how a child moves from calm and settled to overwhelmed. Children's behaviour changes depending on how regulated they feel. When they are calm, they can think and listen. When they are overwhelmed, they cannot. This is based on how the brain responds to stress.

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The Levels



Understanding the Brain

The **“thinking brain”** helps with learning, listening and making good choices. The **“emotional brain”** reacts quickly to feelings like frustration or worry. The **“survival brain”** is there to keep a child safe when they feel overwhelmed.

Why Behaviour Can Change Quickly

A child can move down the ladder very quickly. This is not planned behaviour. It is the brain reacting to stress. What looks like “bad behaviour” is often a child struggling to cope.

Your Calm Matters

Children borrow calm from adults. A calm adult helps the child's nervous system settle. A stressed adult can increase the child's stress. You do not have to be perfect, just steady enough.



Children need calm before they can learn.
Support first. Teach later.

THE REGULATION LADDER

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CALM AND REGULATED



ALERT AND ENGAGED



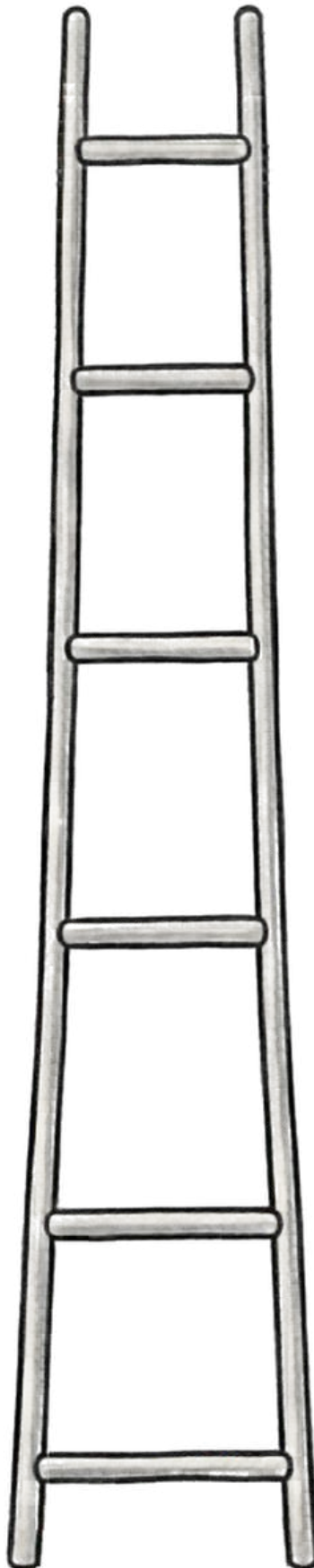
STRESSED OR
DYSREGULATED



ESCALATED









OVERWHELMED



The Regulation Ladder

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1	Calm and Regulated Thinking brain is in control		The child feels safe and settled. They can listen, learn, talk and solve problems.	
2	Alert and Engaged Thinking brain still working, emotions increasing		The child is active and coping, but energy is rising.	
3	Stressed or Dysregulated Emotional brain becoming stronger		The child is starting to feel overwhelmed. Thinking becomes harder.	
4	Escalated Emotional brain in control		The child is overwhelmed and struggling to cope.	
5	Overwhelmed (Meltdown or Shutdown) Survival brain takes over		The brain is in survival mode. Fight, flight, freeze or shutdown. The thinking brain is much less available.	

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