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CAMHS Mental Health Support Team (MHST):

Emotional Dysregulation













What is dysregulation?

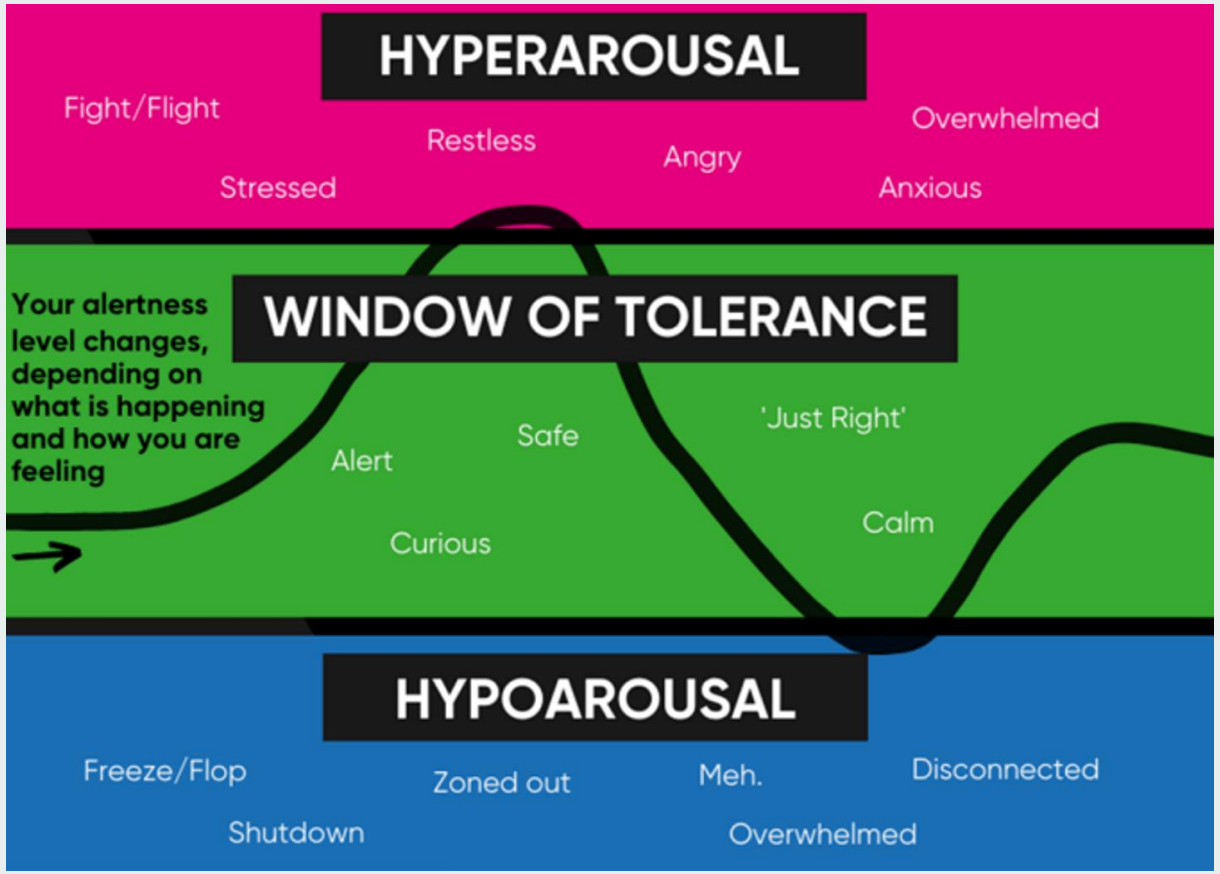
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- Emotional regulation is our ability to **manage** our emotions and **respond** to situations.
- Dysregulation is when **emotions become overwhelming** and **difficult to manage**, affecting how we think, feel or behave.

- Everyone experience's dysregulation.
- However… adults have usually developed more tools to manage it.

Window of Tolerance

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- Inside our window, we can cope, stay connected and learn.
- Outside our window, we may feel overwhelmed or shut down.
- Window isn't fixed:
  - Narrower - illness, tiredness, sensory overload, puberty, and change.
  - Widen - safety, predictability, support, connection.
- **Not all dysregulation is loud**.

What can dysregulation look like in teenagers?

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Slamming doors

Sarcasm / **irritability**

Shutting down / going **silent**

Excessive **reassurance seeking**

“I don’t care”

Becoming **argumentative** over small things

Staying in their room

Doom scrolling / gaming / sleeping to ‘escape’

Refusing school

But why?

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Adolescence is a period of huge change - emotionally, socially and physically.

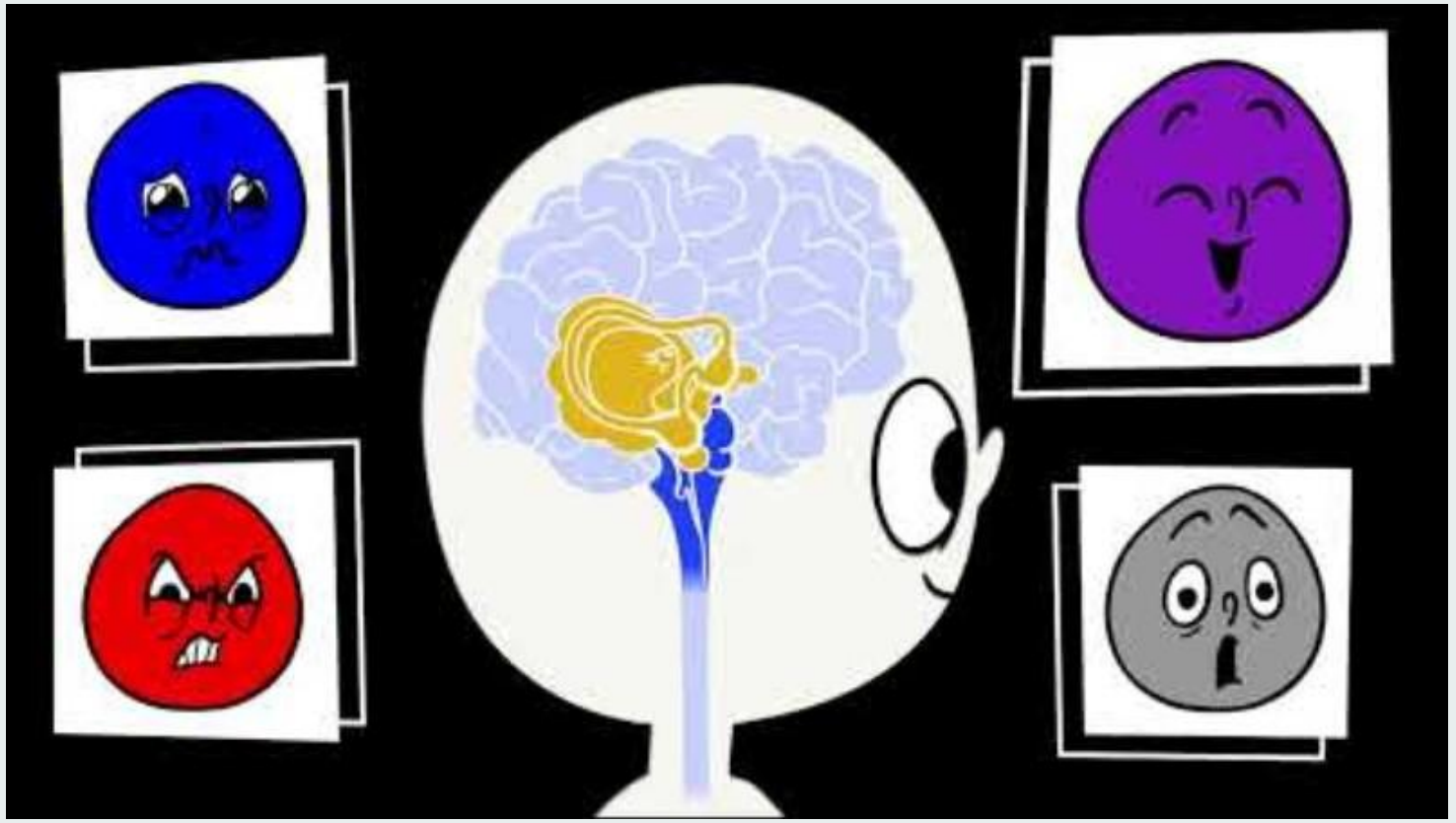
- **Brain development**: Emotion/reward systems develop faster than planning and impulse-control skills.
- **Social sensitivity**: Rejection, embarrassment and feeling judged can feel especially intense.
- **Independence**: Growing need for autonomy can make limits or demands feel more frustrating.
- **Hormones**: Puberty can increase emotional intensity and mood changes.
- **Sleep**: Teenagers often get less sleep than they need, which reduces emotional resilience.
- **Pressure**: School, exams, friendships, identity and future decisions can quickly build up.

Teenagers can seem ***thoughtful and mature one moment***, but ***struggle to access those same skills when overwhelmed***.

Flipping Your Lid

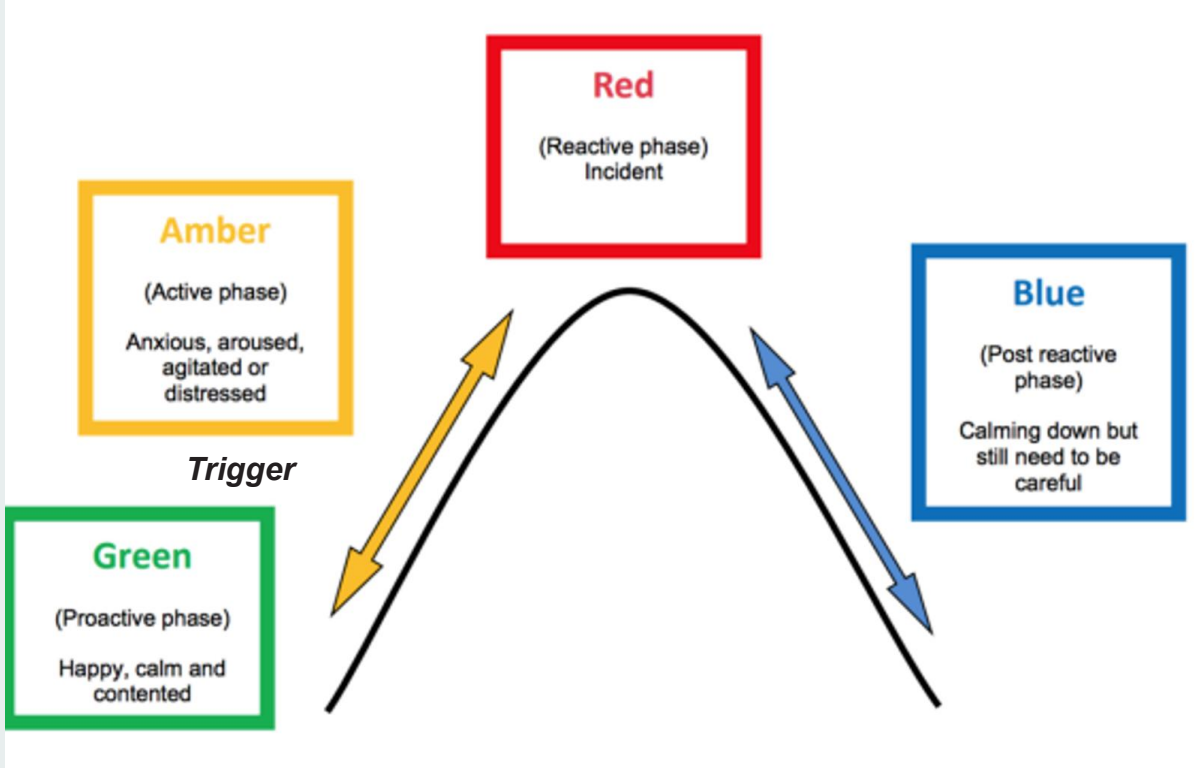
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When emotions become overwhelming = the brain's lid flips and emotional brain is in charge (thinking becomes unavailable).



Arousal Curve

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When emotions are heightened, challenging behaviour can escalate.

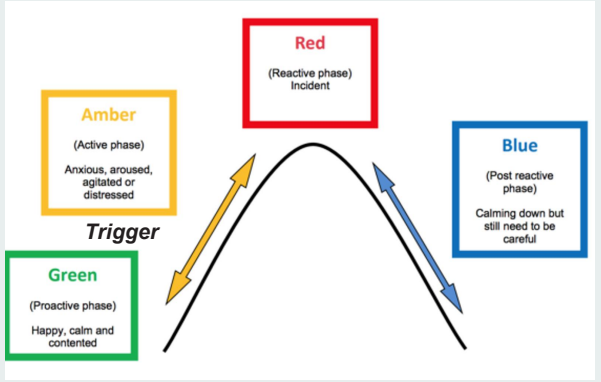
Calm → Trigger → Escalation → Peak → Calm

Spot early signs of escalation, so you can use strategies to prevent things from getting worse.

Amber & Red Zones: De-escalation

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1. Regulate yourself first - slow your breathing, voice, and body language.
2. Use fewer words - keep language calm and simple.
3. Lower the demand - not the moment for lectures or problem-solving.
4. Give space - avoid crowding, following or questioning.
5. Offer simple choices - give *some* control.
6. Validate the feeling - “I can see this is hard right now”.
7. Prioritise safety - move away and reduce immediate risks.
8. Wait for the nervous system to settle - talk it through later.



Top Tips

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Connection before correction:

- Regulate → Relate → Reason

Validate the emotion, hold the boundary:

- “I can see you’re really angry with me, and I’m not going to let you throw things at me.”
- “I understand you don’t want to go, and we still need to work out what happens next.”

Afterwards… repair, reflect, reset:

- What happened? What were the early signs? What helped? What could we try next time? ***Avoid shame***.

Other Information and Support

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- Young Minds: https://www.youngminds.org.uk/
- YoungMinds Parent Helpline: 0808 802 5544
- Calm Harm or Clear Fear App
- SHaRON: https://www.sharon.nhs.uk/
- Kooth: https://www.kooth.com/

- Parenting Special Children Workshop: https://parentingspecialchildren.co.uk/parents-carers/adhd/emotional-regulation-workshop/

If a child or young person requires urgent out of hours mental health support, please call our Urgent Helpline: 0300 247 0000. This phone line is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

If urgent please dial 999 or go to the nearest emergency department

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Thank you

Questions…?











