

TTAC

NYC Early Childhood  
Mental Health

Training and Technical Assistance Center



# **Beyond Behaviors and the Brain-Body Connection**

Presented by: Dr. Mona Delahooke

# Who We Are

The New York City Early Childhood Mental Health Training and Technical Assistance Center (TTAC), is funded by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH)

TTAC is a partnership between the New York Center for Child Development (NYCCD) and the McSilver Institute on Poverty Policy and Research

- **New York Center for Child Development** has been a major provider of early childhood mental health services in New York with expertise in informing policy and supporting the field of Early Childhood Mental Health through training and direct practice
- **NYU McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research** houses the Community and the Managed Care Technical Assistance Centers (CTAC/MCTAC), which offer clinic, business, and system transformation supports statewide to all behavioral healthcare providers

TTAC is tasked with building the capacity and competencies of mental health and early childhood professionals through ongoing training and technical assistance

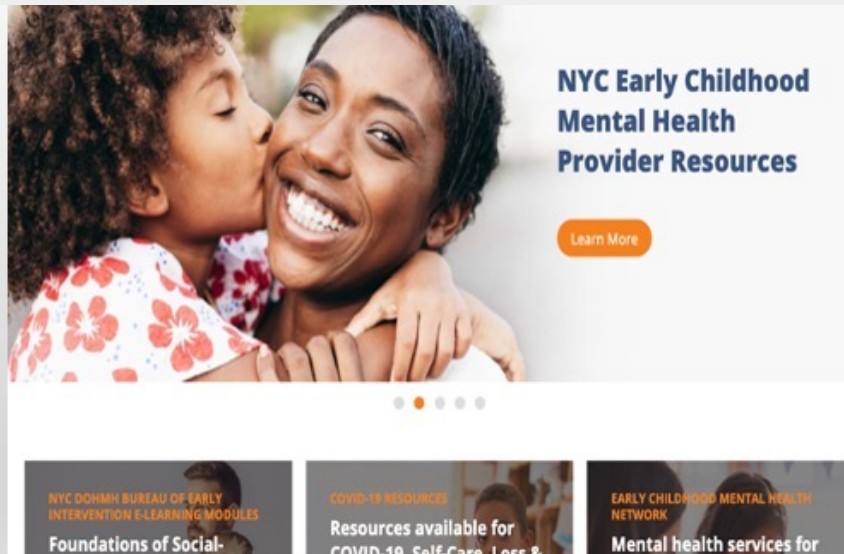
<http://www.TTACny.org>



# Updated TTAC Website

## A Selection of Features:

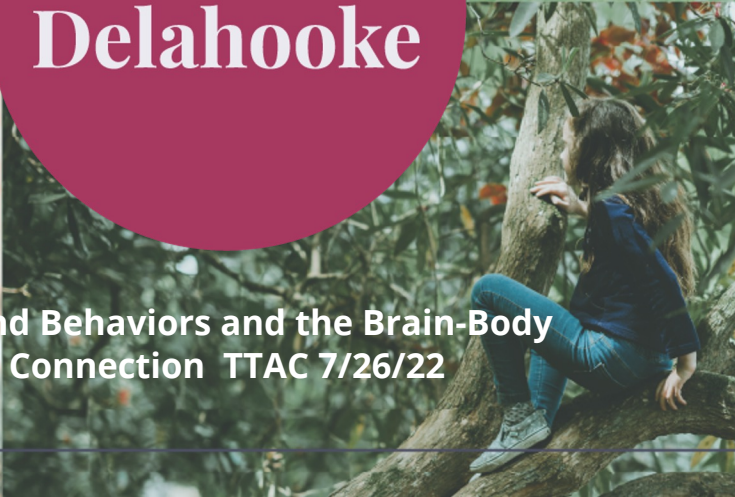
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Delahooke*

**Beyond Behaviors and the Brain-Body  
Connection TTAC 7/26/22**

# **The Importance of Looking Beyond Behaviors to Support Children's Social and Emotional Development**

**Mona Delahooke, Ph.D.  
TTAC July 26, 2022**

# Overview: The Paradigm Shift Beyond Behaviors

- A shift from focusing on behaviors to nurturing relationships and nervous systems
  - A shift from focusing on compliance to focusing on safety in relationships
  - A shift from generic advice to parenting that's customized to each child
-

# Beyond Behaviors to Resiliency

- To find answers that fit each child and family
- To understand how Self-Regulation develops
- To understand the role of self-regulation in developing resilience
- Brain-Body Parenting is a new category, encompassing aspects of positivity, consciousness, attunement with the added benefit of personalizing

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# Resilience

Flexibility through change

# Self-Regulation

The ability to manage and control emotions and behaviors







**Self-regulation and resilience  
grow from specific kinds of  
interactions.**

**That are *customized* to each child's  
(and parent's) nervous system.**

# 3 Big Ideas



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## Big Idea Number One

**The Behavior We See Is  
the Tip of the Iceberg**

The behavior we see is  
merely an indicator of the  
“whys” of a child’s  
behaviors.





# Big Idea Number Two

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**Not all behaviors we observe in children are intentional. Many behaviors are children's instinctual, protective responses to stress.**

- A child doesn't consciously choose these seemingly negative reactions and behaviors. The child's nervous system makes the choice.
- A child who struggles usually isn't *choosing* to be difficult. They're experiencing a stress response.



# Big Idea Number Three

## Self-Regulation Comes From Co-Regulation.

The way to help children isn't by offering rewards or consequences. It's by helping their nervous systems feel safe. We do that through something called Co-Regulation.

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**Brain-Body Parenting:**

# Co-regulation: It's not just about being “nice.”



- The basics of Responsive Parenting and how it builds future emotional flexibility.

# Self-Regulation Develops from Co-Regulation



- We help our children learn to manage their emotions and behaviors through our loving interactions.
- Researchers have consistently found that co-regulation is the “superfood” that nourishes children’s growing capacity to self-regulate.
- When we co-regulate with children, we help them feel safe and tolerate and make sense of their sensations and basic feeling.

We regulate through our emotional tone,  
our **body budget balance**, how we talk to  
and interact with our children.

When we do this, we accomplish a  
remarkable feat: We help regulate their body  
budget through our interactions.



**But how do we know  
what's a deposit or a  
withdrawal in our child's  
body budget?**

**What's going on under  
the waterline?**





**Let's learn about the**  
*Biobehavioral Markers*  
**that reflect the Body**  
**Budget.**

# GREEN Pathway



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**Signals that the child  
is in the robust  
social engagement  
space and a great  
time to try new  
things or teach.**

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**CALM**

**PLAYING**

**COOPERATIVE**

# Awake States with Stress Responses

## Green Zone — Just Right/Alert



### EYES

- Bright, shiny eyes
- Looks directly at people, objects
- Looks away for breaks, then returns to eye contact
- Seems alert, takes in information



### BODY

- Relaxed with good muscle tone
- Stable, balanced and coordinated movements
- Infant moves arms and legs toward center of the body
- Infant molds body into a caregiver when held
- Moves faster or slower depending on environment



### FACE

- Smiles, shows joy
- Neutral
- Can express all emotions



### VOICE

- Laughing
- Tone changes



### RHYTHM / RATE OF MOVEMENT

- Changes smoothly to respond to the environment
- Movements not too fast or too slow

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# RED Pathway

## Not in Control



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**Signals that the fight  
or flight response is  
in charge and the  
child is in need of  
support, not talking  
or reasoning, but  
compassion with few  
words.**

**YELLING**

**CRYING**

**SCREAMING**

## Awake States with Stress Responses

Red Zone — Too Fast/Gas Pedal



### EYES

- Open, squinted or closed eyes
- May have direct, intense eye contact
- May avoid eye contact
- Eyes roll upward
- Eyes look quickly around the room



### BODY

- Fingers spread out
- Arched back; tense body position
- Constant motion
- Demands space by pushing, shoving, and getting into others' space
- Biting, hitting, kicking, jumping, throwing
- Bumps into things, falls
- Threatening gestures (shakes finger or fist)



### FACE

- Wide, open mouth
- Anger, disgust
- Frown, grimace
- Fake, forced smile
- Clenched jaw or teeth



### VOICE

- High-pitched crying, yelling or screaming
- Loud
- Hostile or grumpy
- Sarcastic
- Out of control laughing



### RHYTHM / RATE OF MOVEMENT

- Fast movements
- Impulsive movements

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# BLUE Pathway



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**Signals that the child  
is experiencing  
stress and needs  
your energy and  
support to help her  
back to feeling calm  
and connected.**

**DISCONNECTED**

**CHECKED-OUT**

**FROZEN or SLOW-  
MOVING**

# Awake States with Stress Responses

## Blue Zone — Too Slow/Brake



### EYES

- Glazed-glassy eyes (looks through rather than at)
- Looks away for a long time, looks down
- Seems drowsy/tired
- Does not look around the room for interesting items
- Looks at things more than people



### BODY

- Slumped/slouching
- Low muscle tone
- Little or no exploring play or curiosity
- Wanders
- Frozen or slow-moving



### FACE

- Flat/blank
- Mouth turned down, sad
- No smiles or hints of smiles
- Few emotions shown



### VOICE

- Flat
- Makes few to no sounds
- Sounds cold, soft, sad, too quiet

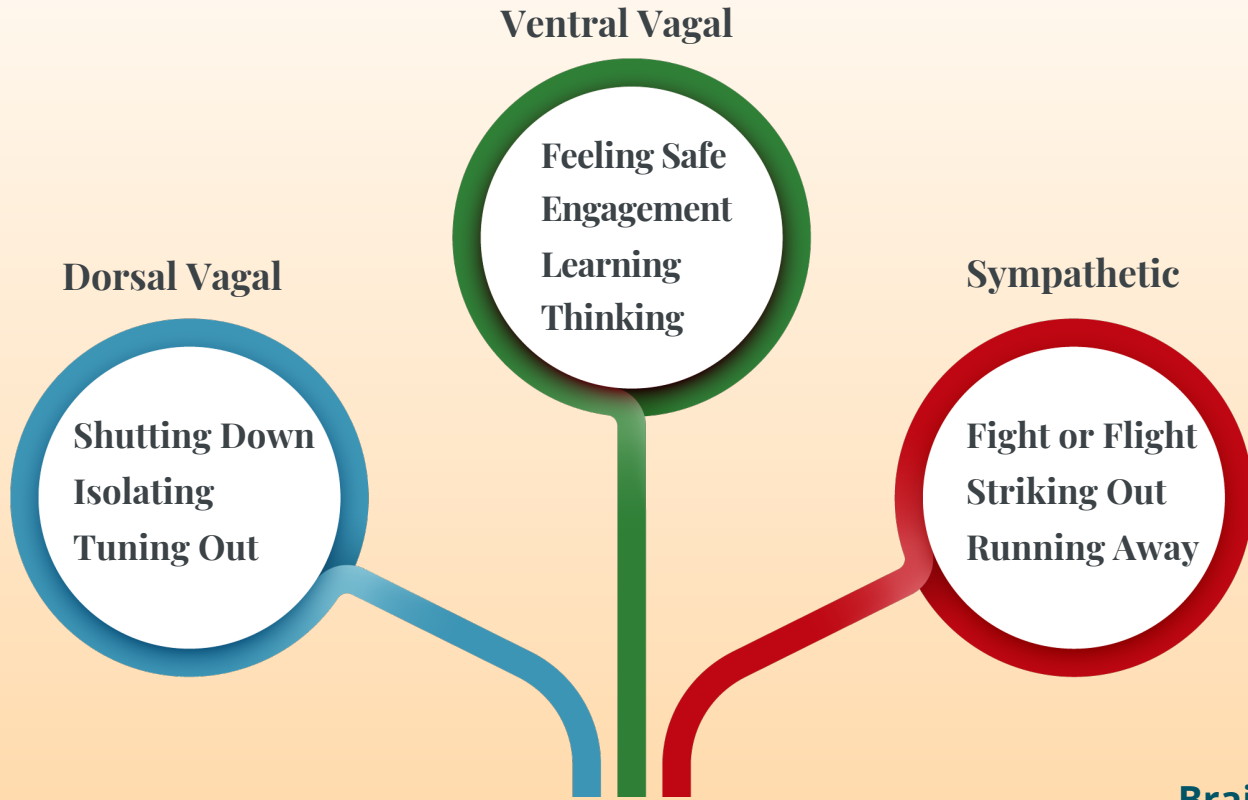


### RHYTHM / RATE OF MOVEMENT

- Slow movements
- Slow to start moving

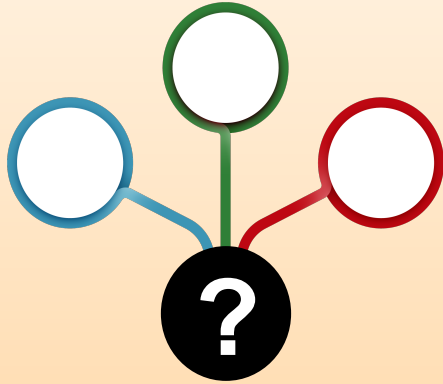
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# The *pathways* lead to



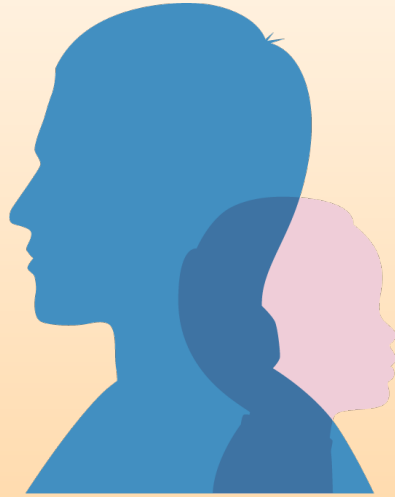
# The Colors

*What pathway is the ADULT on?*

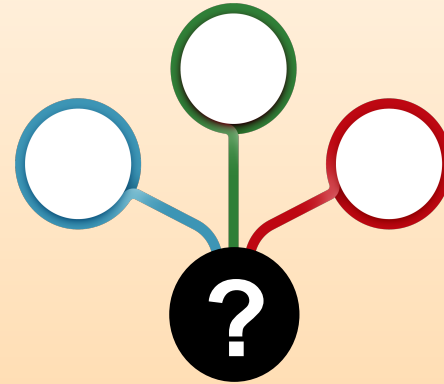


What is the quality of the pathway?

- Strong
- Medium
- Light



*What pathway is the CHILD on?*



What is the quality of the pathway?

- Strong
- Medium
- Light



# Just-Right Challenge Zone

**Green** pathway: A little stress allows us to learn

**Red** or **blue** pathways: Too much shuts us down

We want to titrate what we ask children based on:

1. The state of the platform
2. Child or teen's developmental abilities
3. Their unique and individual differences

# The Paradigm Shift

## Beyond Behaviors in Brain

## Body Parenting

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Delahooke*

