



Responding in Ways to Decrease Challenging Behaviors

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Why We See Challenging Behaviors

Lagging
cognitive skills
due to brain-
based
difference



Expectations
that do not
align with
cognitive skill
set



A poor fit and
challenging
behavioral
symptoms

Today's Focus

How to parent your child in ways that will help calm down their challenging behavioral symptoms (vs escalate them).

What to focus on inside challenging moments and outside challenging moments.



What to do Outside the Challenging Moments



Reflection is Key

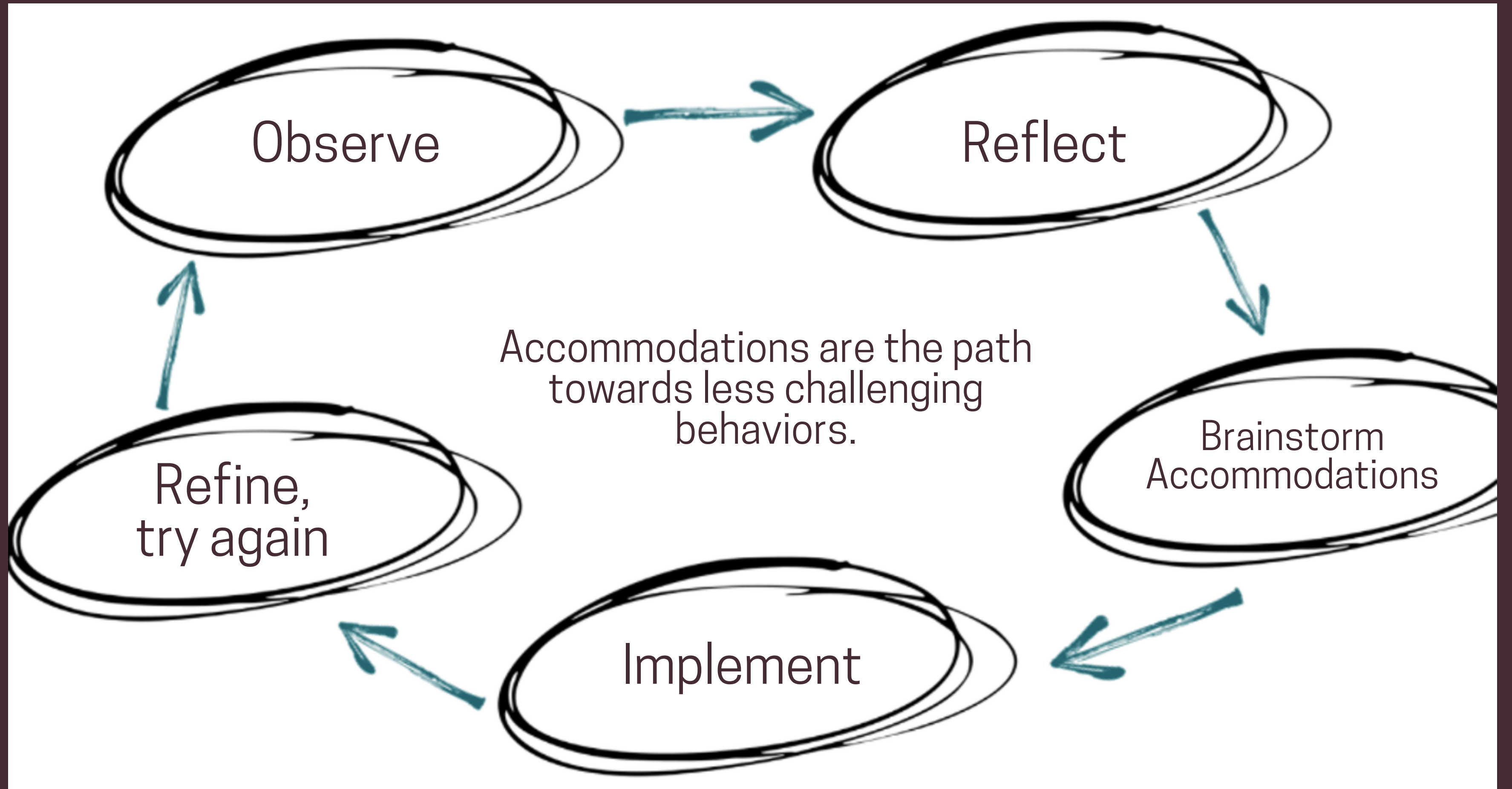
Get clarity on the patterns

5-10 minutes a day, most days

Short/brief notes on a series of key questions

There are always patterns. It's hard to see them if we don't reflect and keep a record consistently.







Developing Accommodations

- Task or expectation
- Cognitive skills required (for anyone)
- How does this align with your child's skill set? (lagging cognitive skills)
- Approximate developmental age
- Defensive behaviors observed
- Brainstorm accommodations

Adjusting
expectations is not
giving in or giving up.

It is a necessary and
appropriate
accommodation.

Age 8

- ✓ Get dressed & tie own shoes
- ✓ Play nicely with others (share, take turns, compromise)
- ✓ Learn basic math, time, reading
- ✓ Sit still and listen for 20 minutes, wait to be called on
- ✓ Follow simple 3-step directions

Age 18

- ✓ Drive
- ✓ Taking on increased responsibility
- ✓ Ability to be reasonable, flexible & logical (maturity)
- ✓ Setting goals for future
- ✓ Growing independence, social life

Age 8 --> Age 4

- ✓ Get dressed & tie own shoes
- ✓ Play nicely with others (share, take turns, compromise)
- ✓ Learn basic math, time, reading
- ✓ Sit still and listen for 20 minutes
- ✓ Follow simple 3-step directions

Age 18 --> Age 10

- ✓ Drive
- ✓ Taking on increased responsibility
- ✓ Ability to be reasonable, flexible & logical (maturity)
- ✓ Setting goals for future
- ✓ Growing independence, social life

Reconnecting

How do you get yourself in a space where you can authentically reconnect with your child after a challenging episode with them?

Moments of connection each day do add up.





Circling Back

How to Address Behavior Effectively

- It requires intentionality and thoughtfulness.
- Circling back is not successful when a child is dysregulated or when we are dysregulated.
- It can't be scheduled, you must look for the opportunity.
- It helps build skills and takes into consideration lagging skills.
- Allows the thinking brain to be online (for them and for us!)
- Promotes connection



What to do
Inside
Challenging
Moments



What You Do



What the Other Kids Do



Who You Will Call & Their Role



What You Don't/Do Say

Why Safety Plans?

Safety plans help reduce your cognitive load when you are under stress.
They need to be accessible, thorough and clear.



How do I respond
to my child's
challenging
behaviors?

Always begin
with thinking
about their
nervous system.



Resist the Urge

To try to teach or reason

This requires thinking brains to be online in addition to other cognitive skills your child is likely lagging behind in. This can look like requiring them to sit still, listen, look you in the eye, reflect on what they did, or explain themselves.

To use power, control, and discipline to change the situation

This looks like using threats, consequences, shaming, and yelling.



The Brain's Accelerator and Brake

Stress = accelerator, impacts brain function, nervous system

"Typical" brains: brakes that balance out the accelerator

"Dysregulated" brains: stress has a more exaggerated accelerator response with impaired ability to brake/self-soothe/calm.

This results in tiny amounts of stress provoking large responses (protective mode/fight or flight).

How does this apply to you? How does this apply to your partner? How does this apply to your child?

Regulated does not
always mean calm.

Regulated does not
mean “happy”.

Regulated doesn't
mean everything's fine.

Co-regulation is Your Greatest Parenting Tool

Creating behavior change by responding with regulation and connection so your child's thinking brain can come back online.





- ✓ Talk Less (or not at all)
- ✓ If you do talk, try short, empathetic statements
- ✓ Offer food and cold drink
- ✓ Get lower with body posture and avoid eye contact
- ✓ Distract with playfulness
- ✓ Move slowly

Small, Impactful Actions to Take



We don't
enter into
parenthood as
blank slates.

A person is sitting on a light blue sofa, holding a brown ceramic mug filled with coffee. The person's hands are visible, with pink nail polish. They are wearing a light blue sweater. The background is a cozy living room with a patterned pillow and warm, bokeh lights.

More self-compassion.
Less self-criticism.

Find your people.

Move your body daily.