



Practicing Co-regulation

Many of us are reactive during difficult conversations. Our nervous system becomes dysregulated. This causes our heart rate to speed up, we might start to sweat or shallow breathe. All our body knows is: we are in danger. In this survival state, we're reactive, we say things we don't mean and end up in a cycle of self-shaming.

Co-regulation occurs when one nervous system soothes another, this communication sends a message of safety and connection. We learn co-regulation in relationships with adults when we are a baby. Our parents or primary carers, give us loving looks, they speak to us with a soothing voice and they hold and cuddle us. A lot of the time the communication is non-verbal. The primary parent or carer's nervous system is always communicating with us and our nervous system is responding. With time the baby learns that they are safe with this person, that they can trust them and predict their behaviour.

If we didn't experience good, consistent, co-regulation in childhood, we struggle with regulating our emotions as we grow through childhood and into adulthood. This can make relationship conflict overwhelming, confusing or make us want to avoid it altogether. The practice of co-regulation helps us have deeper relationships, more authentic connections and empathy.

Here are 2 ways to practice co-regulation

It is great to practise these when you are feeling calm and relaxed so that when you do feel triggered, stressed, disconnected or overwhelmed you will automatically do these to co-regulate with the one you are with.

A decorative graphic consisting of two overlapping circles. The top circle is light teal and contains the number "1" in a teal font. The bottom circle is a slightly darker shade of teal and is partially obscured by the top one.

1

Heart to heart, tummy to tummy cuddle

- Begin by asking your friend/partner or family member if they would like a cuddle.
- Come together, heart to heart and tummy to tummy.
- Resting your head on their shoulder or against their chest, (depending on the height difference). Take a conscious breath in with a slower, longer out-breath and allow your body to relax into the hug.
- Stay here for about 7 seconds or until your body relaxes and you feel a sense of calm wash over you.

2

Hand to heart breath

- Sit across from your friend/partner or family member and place your hand on each other's hearts.
- Close your eyes and begin to take a deep belly breath. You will feel each other's chest rising which will allow you to sync your breathing.
- Visualise your nervous systems both calming each other.
- Exhale slowly at the same time. Repeat 3-5 times.

Use these exercises if you know you're going to have a conversation that might be difficult.

Tip: *It can also be helpful to have a code word or verbally say you need to have a break when you feel like you've become dysregulated. This is a good time to pause and do this practice. Then come back to the conversation when you both get each other know you feel safe again.*

