Managing unwanted behaviours

Survival in the modern jungle

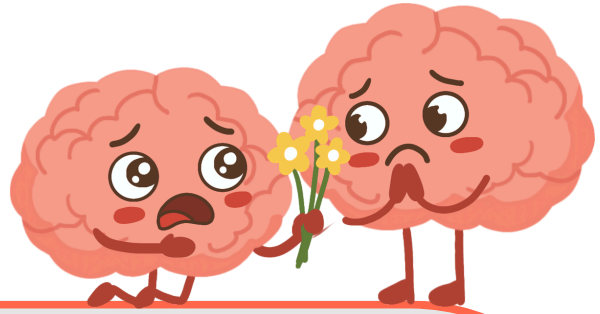
When a person perceives a threat, their autonomic nervous system activates an automatic survival response. Depending on the situation, they may respond through fight, flight, freeze or fawn. These responses are largely involuntary and can affect how a person thinks, feels, communicates and behaves.

What do you find threatening?

social rejection, sensory overload, bullying, loss of control, academic pressure, separation from loved ones, too many demands, injustice, making mistakes, looking like a fool, being made to sit still, bad food, public speaking



Fight: The nervous system responds to perceived threat by preparing to confront it.
Flight: The nervous system responds by trying to escape or avoid the threat.
Freeze: The nervous system responds by becoming stuck or shutting down.
Fawn: The person tries to stay safe by pleasing others or keeping them happy.



Lost control

When the autonomic nervous system becomes highly activated, the brain prioritises survival over learning, reasoning and self-control.

The person may temporarily lose the capacity to process information, think clearly, regulate emotions or control their responses.

Scouts SA
Christie Morrison 4 Nov 26
acc.peopleculture@sa.scouts.com.au

Managing unwanted behaviours

Why are they misbehaving?

Children (and adults) don't set out to be naughty. When they have the skills, understanding and capacity to behave appropriately, they generally do.

Unwanted behaviour often occurs when something gets in the way – they may not know how, may not understand what's expected, or may not have the emotional, physical or cognitive capacity to meet the expectation at that moment. While their fight, flight, freeze, fawn response is activated, they may not be able to control the behaviour.

Rewards and Punishments aren't enough

When something is getting in the way of good behaviour, rewards and punishments don't remove that barrier.

Worst of all, an unachievable goal can increase stress which REDUCES their capacity to meet the expectations!



Remove the barriers

Help them regulate

- Understand their needs (get curious!)
- Adjust the environment, activity or communication
- Reduce stressors
- Provide access to soothers

Increase their understanding

- Have clear expectations
- Break tasks down into smaller steps
- Use their learning style
- Help them learn about their fight, flight, freeze, fawn response

Scouts SA
Christie Morrison 4 Nov 26
acc.peopleculture@sa.scouts.com.au

Managing unwanted behaviours

Get Curious

Every person is different. To provide support, you need to get curious and find out what is getting in the way of good behaviour!! What is causing them to enter fight, flight, freeze, fawn response to activate?

STRESSORS and SOOTHERS
What triggers their body to become overwhelmed and move into survival mode?
What soothers can help them tell their body the threat has passed and regulate their nervous system?

RECOGNISING their REGULATION State
Sometimes it is easy to tell when a person is getting stressed. They might even tell you! Other times, people can mask. (Hide their stress and symptoms). Masking is a survival instinct that can make it tricky to tell what someone is experiencing.

CHANGING CAPACITY
A child may be able to stand out the front and run a whole Scout night when they are feeling comfortable, but may struggle to even make their voice work if they are nervous in front of a crowd of strangers.



Some people feel energised by social situations. Others feel drained.



Scouts SA
Christie Morrison 4 Nov 26
acc.peopleculture@sa.scouts.com.au

Managing unwanted behaviours

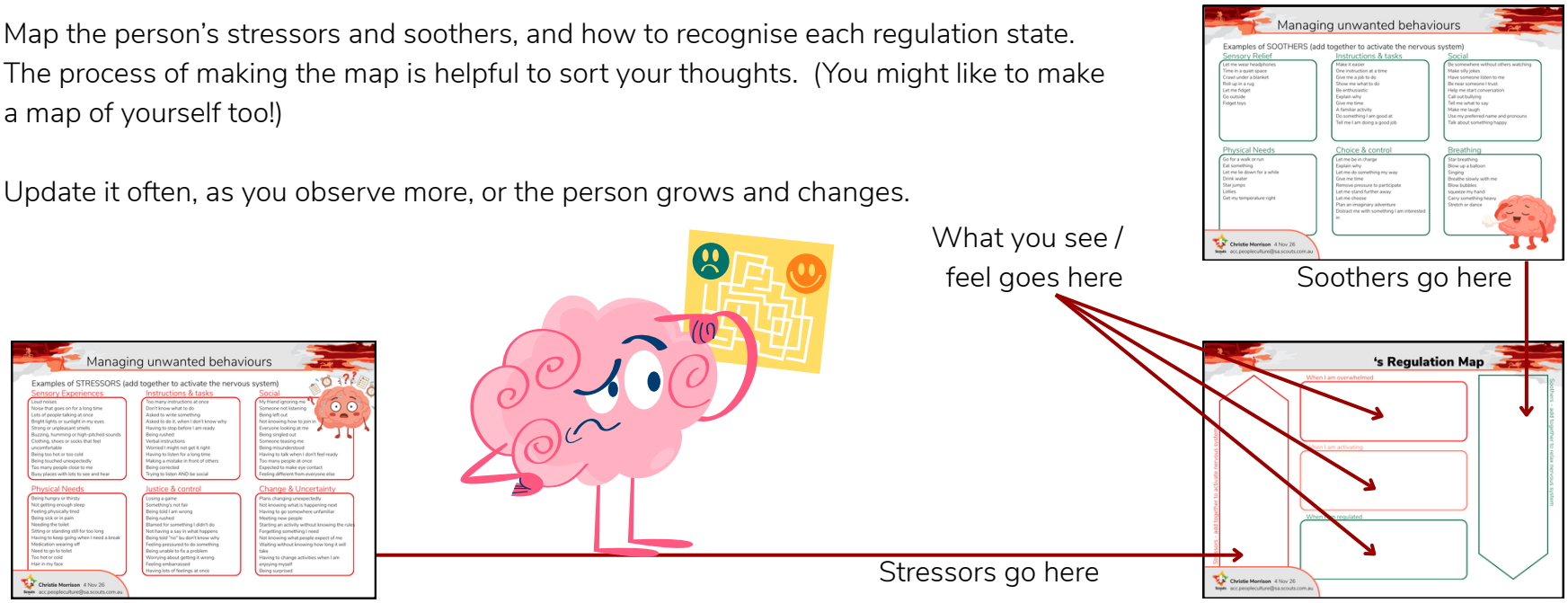
Map It

Print a blank regulation MAP and PLAN. Use the examples, and your own observations to fill in the map. Think about what happened in the lead up to unwanted behaviours.

You might like to work on it together with the person, or with other adults who support them. (Always do this at a time they are regulated!)

Map the person's stressors and soothers, and how to recognise each regulation state. The process of making the map is helpful to sort your thoughts. (You might like to make a map of yourself too!)

Update it often, as you observe more, or the person grows and changes.



If the person (and their guardians) agree, it might be helpful to share their map with others. Then everyone can work together to help each other.

Christie Morrison 4 Nov 26
acc.peopleculture@sa.scouts.com.au

Managing unwanted behaviours

Make a PLAN

Once the MAP is complete, think about what you can change at Scouts to remove barriers that prevent the person from behaving well.

Proactive Changes

The proactive part of the plan is about reducing the stressors. Don't expect to be able to remove them all. You might also make a point to check in with the person or their guardian when they arrive to find out if their day has already had a lot of stressors. When there is a stressor you can't remove, talk about it with the person beforehand. You might choose to include a soother before or after the stressor.

Starting to activate

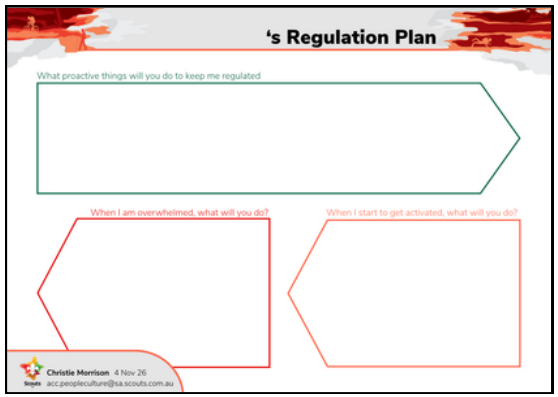
How will you notice when their nervous system is starting to activate? When you do notice it, what can you do to prevent complete overwhelm? Will you provide some soothers?

Overwhelm

What is your plan for next time they are overwhelmed? How will you keep them and others safe while you help them calm again?

Write your strategies in the PLAN

Share the plan with other adults who will be supporting them.



Remember to REVIEW the plan after the activity

Christie Morrison 4 Nov 26
acc.peopleculture@sa.scouts.com.au

’s Regulation Map

Stressors - add together to activate nervous system

When I am overwhelmed

When I am activating

When I am regulated

Soothers - add together to relax nervous system

Christie Morrison 4 Nov 26
acc.peopleculture@sa.scouts.com.au

’s Regulation Plan

What proactive things will you do to keep me regulated

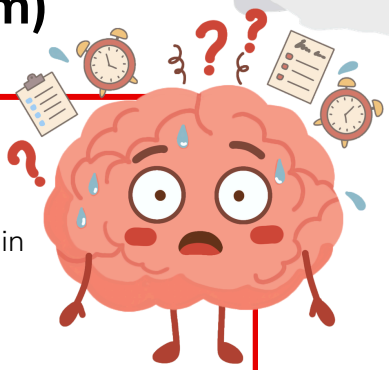
When I am overwhelmed, what will you do?

When I start to get activated, what will you do?

Scouts SA
Christie Morrison 4 Nov 26
acc.peopleculture@sa.scouts.com.au

Managing unwanted behaviours

Examples of STRESSORS (add together to activate the nervous system)



Sensory Experiences

Loud noises
Noise that goes on for a long time
Lots of people talking at once
Bright lights or sunlight in my eyes
Strong or unpleasant smells
Buzzing, humming or high-pitched sounds
Clothing, shoes or socks that feel uncomfortable
Being touched unexpectedly
Too many people close to me
Busy places with lots to see and hear

Instructions & tasks

Too many instructions at once
Don't know what to do
Asked to do it, when I don't know why
Having to stop before I am ready
Being rushed
Verbal instructions
Worried I might not get it right
Having to listen for a long time
Making a mistake in front of others
Being corrected
Trying to listen AND be social

Social

My friend ignoring me
Someone not listening
Being left out
Not knowing how to join in
Everyone looking at me
Being singled out
Being misunderstood
Having to talk when I don't feel ready
Too many people at once
Expected to make eye contact
Feeling different from everyone else

Physical Needs

Being hungry or thirsty
Not getting enough sleep
Feeling physically tired
Being sick or in pain
Needing the toilet
Sitting or standing still for too long
Having to keep going when I need a break
Medication wearing off
Too hot or cold
Hair in my face

Justice & control

Losing a game
Something's not fair
Being told I am wrong
Being rushed
Blamed for something I didn't do
Not having a say in what happens
Being told "no" but don't know why
Being unable to fix a problem
Worrying about getting it wrong
Feeling embarrassed
Having lots of feelings at once

Change & Uncertainty

Plans changing unexpectedly
Not knowing what is happening next
Having to go somewhere unfamiliar
Meeting new people
Don't know the rules
Forgetting something I need
Not knowing what people expect of me
Waiting without knowing how long for
Having to change activities
Being surprised

Scouts SA
Christie Morrison 4 Nov 26
acc.peopleculture@sa.scouts.com.au

Managing unwanted behaviours

Examples of SOOTHERS (add together to relax the nervous system)

Sensory Relief

Let me wear headphones
Time in a quiet space
Crawl under a blanket
Roll up in a rug
Let me fidget
Go outside
Fidget toys

Instructions & tasks

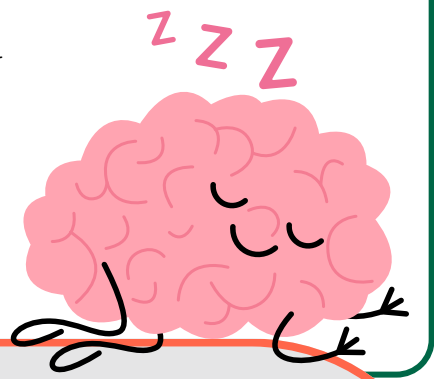
Make it easier
One instruction at a time
Give me a job to do
Show me what to do
Be enthusiastic
Explain why
Give me time
A familiar activity
Do something I am good at
Tell me I am doing a good job

Social

Be somewhere without others watching
Make silly jokes
Have someone listen to me
Be near someone I trust
Help me start conversation
Call out bullying
Tell me what to say
Make me laugh
Use my preferred name and pronouns
Talk about something happy

Physical Needs

Go for a walk or run
Get my temperature right
Eat something
Lie down
Drink water
Star jumps
Lollies
Rest

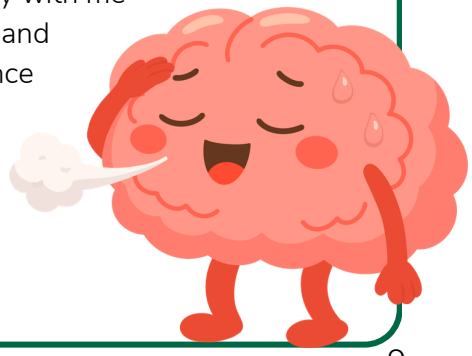


Choice & control

Let me be in charge
Explain why
Let me do something my way
Give me time
Remove pressure to participate
Let me stand further away
Let me choose
Plan an imaginary adventure
Distract me with something I am interested in

Breathing

Star breathing
Blow up a balloon
Carry something heavy
Breathe slowly with me
squeeze my hand
Stretch or dance
Blow bubbles
Singing



Scouts SA
Christie Morrison 4 Nov 26
acc.peopleculture@sa.scouts.com.au

Managing unwanted behaviours

When I am REGULATED:

These are examples of what you might see, or what a person might feel while they are regulated.
This is the best state for learning.
This is the right time to make a regulation map, and talk with them about previous behaviour.



Able to think clearly, communicate, connect, and learn

Can manage everyday challenges

You might see

Interacting with my peers
Smile
Talking / Engaged
Able to reason
I can understand
I can read and write
I can eat most types of food
I am calm
I can be kind
I can listen to you
I contribute ideas
I stay at the activity
I can complete the task

I might feel

My breathing is regular
I can think
I can notice things around me
I feel settled
I understand what people say
I am interested in things
I can tell if I am hungry or hot or need to go to the toilet
Relaxed
I am not scared
I am in control of myself

Scouts SA
Christie Morrison 4 Nov 26
acc.peopleculture@sa.scouts.com.au

Managing unwanted behaviours

When my nervous system STARTS ACTIVATING



When my nervous system starts activating, I get excited.

This can often be helpful.

Focus

Fully focussed on the social situation and nothing else

Really getting into the activity

Unable to be distracted, or think of anything else

	You might see	I might feel
Fight	Arguing with you Irritable Unreasonable Defiant	Angry / Determined Fast pulse My muscles are tense 100% attention focussed on the threat
Flight	I back away from you I ask people to leave me alone I leave the activity I hide in the toilet	My pulse starts to increase My mouth feels dry My tummy rumbles I think about how to get out
Freeze	I stop talking I stand and watch I'm not working on the activity I smile	It's hard to breathe nauseous / dizzy My skin goes clammy My thoughts are spinning
Fawn	I am obedient I comply without opinion I agree with everything I reply in short, snappy words	I work out what is fastest to make you leave me alone I hate being here trapped

Scouts SA
Christie Morrison 4 Nov 26
acc.peopleculture@sa.scouts.com.au

Managing unwanted behaviours

When I am OVERWHELMED



When I am overwhelmed, I can't understand you or reason.

I have lost control.

Help me calm down with slow breathing or big muscle movement.

Give me physical space if I need it. Distract me with screen time or something that really interests me.

	You might see	I might feel
Fight	Hitting or kicking Throwing things Ruin the activity Shouting	RAGE!! My pulse is strong and fast I am bursting with anger Out of control
Flight	I run away or hide I push you if you get too close I throw chairs between us so you can't get closer	I have to get away I can't see where I am going My body starts to run without my control
Freeze	I don't move or respond My body is rigid My eyes are fixed and staring	I can't see, hear or move I think I might vomit My body has shut down
Fawn	I do the task in an angry or unsafe way I am crying	My thoughts are catastrophic You are controlling me

Scouts SA
Christie Morrison 4 Nov 26
acc.peopleculture@sa.scouts.com.au

EXAMPLE

Johnny's Regulation Map

Stressors - add together to activate nervous system

Someone tells me I can't do something I want to do

I lose a game

It is too loud

There are too many instructions or too many choices

I don't understand what to do

When I am overwhelmed

My face goes red and my whole body gets tense
My heart races and I am bursting with rage
I push people away if they come close
I tip the table over or ruin the activity

When I am activating

I copy someone if they do something naughty
I stop listening to you and keep trying to do the thing I want
I won't look at whatever you are trying to show me

When I am regulated

I am good at listening
I like learning new things
I contribute to the conversation
I am helpful and kind

Soothers - add together to relax nervous system

Go outside

Carry something heavy

Run around or climb something

A big squeeze hug with my mum

Talk about Minecraft bed-wars

Play Minecraft

Scouts SA
Christie Morrison 4 Nov 26
acc.peopleculture@sa.scouts.com.au

EXAMPLE

Johnny's Regulation Plan

What proactive things will you do to keep me regulated

- *Give me one instruction at a time.*
- *Only give me a choice of 2 or 3 options*
- *When we play a game with winners and losers, I can be the umpire or the judge*
- *If I am not allowed to do something, say no, then immediately offer a choice of alternatives to distract me. Remove the thing I am not allowed so I can't see it anymore and don't get reminded.*

When I am overwhelmed, what will you do?

- *Stay calm*
- *Move me away from other youth and the activity*
- *Tell me I am ok*
- *Ask me to take deep breaths and breathe slowly with me*
- *Help mum or my carer find a place to sit with me so they can squeeze me tight*

When I start to get activated, what will you do?

- *Ask me to do something physical (carry something to the shed / run fast)*
- *Tell me I am doing a good job, or you like what I have done*
- *Take me outside or somewhere quiet*
- *Ask me to tell you about my Minecraft world*

Scouts SA
Christie Morrison 4 Nov 26
acc.peopleculture@sa.scouts.com.au

Managing unwanted behaviours

De-escalating when someone is not safe

When someone's behaviour puts themself or others at risk of harm, adults need to intervene to keep them safe.



When they are overwhelmed



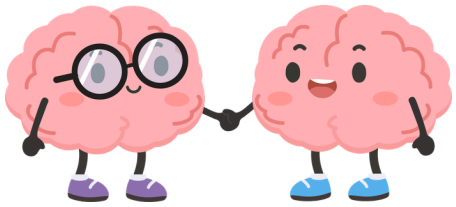
✓ Do

- Keep yourself calm
- Separate the person from anything they might use to cause harm, or anyone they might hurt
- Breathe and move slowly and deliberately
- Use relaxed, non-threatening body language
- Use fewer words
- Suggest simple actions (eg let's go for a walk)

✗ Don't

- Put yourself at risk
- Explain what they are doing wrong
- Try to reason with them
- Discipline or punish them
- Ask them to explain
- Try to identify stressors or have them analyse the situation

Once they are regulated



FIRST CONNECT

- I'm glad you're feeling better
- I'm here to help
- That seemed hard for you

THEN BE CURIOUS

- Ask what happened
- What were the triggers
- Do active listening

THEN DISCUSS

- Tell them the effect of their behaviour
- Work with them to update their regulation map and regulation plan
- Make plans to keep everyone safe

Christie Morrison 4 Nov 26
acc.peopleculture@sa.scouts.com.au