



***Supporting Caregivers with Challenging Children***  
*Strategies and Tools to Help You and Your Child Stay Regulated Together*

## **What Caregivers Bring to the Relationship**

### **Important Points**

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- **What DO Caregivers Bring to the Relationship?** – How we were parented strongly influences how we parent. Caregivers typically repeat parenting strategies they felt worked well, or do the opposite of what they felt did not. Caregivers have many assumptions and expectations of their children that are shaped by their history. However, these “shoulds” are often confounded when parenting challenging children and the typical strategies simply do not work. Reflecting on one’s own experiences can help build awareness, perspective, and skills to better support these kids. The points below address some helpful things to reflect on.
- **Regulation Styles** – How your parents regulated their emotions influenced how your regulation skills developed. What is your regulation “set point,” that is what type of atmosphere feels familiar and therefore safer? Does a freewheeling and chaotic home environment feel more familiar or one that is calm and predictable? Is your set point different from your child’s? What happens in your body when your child gets dysregulated?
- **Independence versus Support** – As a child were you strongly encouraged to be independent or were you given a high level of support? When you had a need or asked for support, how was that handled? Culture strongly influences values about independence or close reliance on family. Based on your own experience as a child, as an adult you are more likely to be comfortable going towards others when they have a need or moving away and encouraging independence. Caregivers should seek to strike a balance between meeting the needs of a child and encouraging independence.
- **Environment and Sensory Experiences** – What environments feel more familiar and comfortable? Do you prefer neat and tidy surroundings or homey messiness? Are there certain smells in your home that are calming or distressing? How do you like and use touch? Was touch safe growing up? Is touch used just for basic caretaking, or is there a lot of nurturing touch and cuddling in your home?
- **Caregiving Styles** – Is your caregiving style more passive or controlling? What was the caregiving style of your parents? Providing kids with boundaries, structure, and expectations provides a sense of safety

for a child. Creating and holding those boundaries using positive emotional engagement helps a child feel validated and cared for.

#### **Permissive**

Gentle, Kind, Giving, Passive

#### **Authoritative**

Good structure and boundaries,  
Positive engagement

#### **Authoritarian**

Controlling, Strict Expectations

- **Multiple Levels of Interaction** – If there is more than one adult caregiver in the home, of course, each brings their own histories adding to the complexity of the interactions. This is also true when interacting with extended family.

## **A Few Easy Things to Try**

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- Notice your patterns of how you engage with your child. Is it similar to or different from how your parents engaged with you as a child?
- Notice if there are times when your response to your child is based on meeting a need of yours. Are there other times when it is based on meeting a need of theirs? Or are you responding to meet the needs of others in the home?

## **For More Information**

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### **Short and Sweet**

- The Past Is Present: The Impact of Your Childhood Experiences on How You Parent Today – <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/339-the-past-is-present-the-impact-of-your-childhood-experiences-on-how-you-parent-today> (Zero to Three website)
- Answer These 15 Questions to Improve Your Parenting – <https://www.sensorymom.com/answer-these-15-questions-to-improve-your-parenting/> (Sensory Mom website)

### **Deeper Dives**

- ***Parenting from the Inside Out: How A Deeper Self-Understanding Can Help You Raise Children Who Thrive*** by Daniel J. Siegel, M.D., and Mary Hartzell, M.Ed. (Book)
- Circle of Security Parent Training <https://www.ctn-madison.com/parent-community-trainings> (8-week course, offered periodically)

For more information on this and other topics link to the podcast based training series found on our website, [www.ctn-madison.com](http://www.ctn-madison.com)