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TMC VOICES

GROUNDING LIVING AND LEARNING IN SELF-REGULATION

NOVEMBER 2017

TMC CALENDAR

December 6

Face-to-Face Seminar, Pulling Back the Veil, Toronto

December 7

Face-to-Face Seminar, Stress Management as a Distributed Social Phenomenon, Toronto

December 13

#TMC Talks 7:30 pm EDT

January 1

Game-based learning course for adolescents launches

January 4

Foundations courses start

January 10

#TMC Talks 7:30 pm EDT

January 11

Level 2 module starts

February 14

#TMC Talks 7:30 pm EDT

February 22

Level 2 module starts

March 1

Foundations courses start

For eSchool start dates, visit
www.self-reg.ca/calendar

Editor's note

John Hoffman, TMC Voices Editor

Resilience. That's a word I've been hearing a lot over the past 20 years. And, as is the case with self-regulation, I've seen a number of different conceptions of resilience out there. Some experts say resilience applies only to people who have had to deal with very significant adverse experiences or circumstances. Others use it in a more general way—a set of assets that helps us maintain and, at times, even regain mental wellness. Dr. Michael Ungar, of Dalhousie University, defines resilience as the ability to navigate and negotiate resources that sustain well-being. But, even if we agree on a definition, some folks might still wonder, "Yeah, but what is it about, or within, a person that enables resilience?" Character traits? Skills that can be taught? Temperament?

We at TMC see a close connection between Self-Reg and resilience. That's why resilience is the theme of this issue of TMC Voices (and also part of the theme of Summer Self-Reg Symposium 2018).

In the following pages, Stuart Shanker shares his ideas about how the need for resilience is greater than ever these days, and the role that social engagement plays in people's resilience. Susan Hopkins shares a powerful and poignant reframing of the resilience she can now see in her own troubled youth. And several members of our Self-Reg community share their stories about what has helped to foster resilience in themselves and the children around them.

This edition also features news about some new TMC initiatives (would you believe we are launching game-based Self-Reg learning?) and products, along with a profile of Melissa Raine, a TMC Self-Reg Consultant with a particularly interesting (and unusual, for a Self-Regger) background. Finally, we've pulled together some stats that show just how much TMC and Self-Reg have grown in 2017. That growth could not have happened without the dedication, diligence and great work of our TMC community. Thanks so much everyone!



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www.self-reg.ca

About TMC

The MEHRIT Centre was formed in 2012 to work towards a vision of calm and alert students, educators, and families flourishing in physically and emotionally nurturing environments.



Self-Reg: Looking to the Future

By Stuart Shanker

There is a widespread tendency to see resilience as a trait. For Self-Reg, it is an aspiration. We are constantly looking for ways to build a child or teen's resilience: their capacity, as [Ungar](#) puts it, to access the resources that sustain wellbeing. And, Lord knows, we need to be doing the same for ourselves these days.

We are in the midst of a perfect stress storm. Extreme social, emotional, and prosocial stresses have been unleashed and are ricocheting off of each other, straining our capacity to deal with even the most mundane stresses of daily life. These pressures have been building for some time; but over the past year they reached a boiling point, and we suddenly find ourselves struggling to preserve our most fundamental principles of liberal democracy, and, for that matter, basic human decency. It is the resilience of our society, our whole way of being, that is now being tested.

The psychological interest in resilience was inspired by [Emmy Werner's study](#) of 698 at-risk infants in Hawaii, two-thirds of whom developed self-destructive traits, while one-third thrived. Werner's question was: What were the "protective factors" that characterized these latter, "resilient" children? In a [blog on this topic](#) I raised the question: What can we do to make these "protection-seeking factors" even stronger and help those children who lack them entirely? But now we have an even more urgent matter to address: What are the protective factors that characterize a "resilient society," and how can these be preserved, let alone reinforced?

Werner defined resilience as a child's capacity to deal with internal and/or external stresses. Her thinking was that, for whatever psychobiological reason, some children have more of this capacity than others. From the start in the early 17th century, "resilience" was associated with the ability to rebound from some debilitating experience, like illness or adversity. In the early 19th century it became bound up with the image of elasticity, which is very much the manner in which we now think about resilience: e.g., in terms of how far an HPA pathway can be stretched without its breaking.

The problem with seeing resilience as a trait, however, is twofold: first, this leans towards a static view, when, in fact, there is a flux and flow to our resilience. There are times when an individual—any individual—is very resilient, other times much less so, and we need to learn from the setbacks how to bolster the capacity. And second is the problem that the trait view sees resilience as a function of an internal property or attribute: e.g., psychological, or physiological. But resilience, as Porges explained, is intrinsically social. →



Porges' famous line "we didn't evolve to be singletons" underscores the idea that we need social engagement in order to feel safe and thereby resilient. One of the most profound studies I've seen in this regard is **RISK**, run by Mary Waters, Jean Rhodes and Beth Fussell. What had started out as research about improving educational outcomes for low-income parents enrolled in community colleges in New Orleans was suddenly transformed by Hurricane Katrina into a study of resilience.

Looking at pre/post levels of happiness in 491 female participants, they found that, four years after the disaster, 89% of the women had returned to their pre-storm levels of happiness. But 38 of the women continued to have lower levels of happiness four years after the storm. What the latter had in common was that they were more likely to be living on their own and reported lower levels of social support from their communities (both before and after the storm).

There is an incredibly important message here: whatever the sources of the stresses that are assailing us, we desperately need social cohesion if our society is going to weather this storm and grow stronger as a result of this experience.

But what happens when social engagement becomes dysregulated: not just at the level of the Interbrain, but at a societal level?

The time for recriminations or polarized thinking is long past. Just as in dealing with trauma one has to acknowledge the past while looking to the future, so too, in dealing with today's perfect stress storm, we have to understand why this happened and what we can do to make our society even (ever) more resilient. It is the work of historians and political theorists to help us understand how we got here; the work of Self-Reggers to enable us to look to the future. With Self-Reg, we can create the safe emotional space in which regulated and regulating political discourse can occur and healing can commence.

Self-Reg People

Melissa Raine | Self-Reg Consultant and Foundations Graduate

Why is an expert in medieval English literature studying Self-Reg? Melissa Raine, a Self-Reg consultant and Foundations graduate in Melbourne, Australia, is an independent humanities researcher who happens to be one of the world's leading experts on children's voice in medieval English literature.

Melissa came to Stuart Shanker and Self-Reg by way of Stanley Greenspan. "I discovered Dr. Greenspan's parenting books when my eldest son was a baby," she explains. "He was very hard to soothe and Greenspan's books exhibited the best understanding of how to parent a child who was not easy to soothe. Without judging, he provided a way forward. And he took seriously the entire child, body as well as brain, in ways that helped me to understand my son's challenges. It seemed clear that I should learn more about the work of a man whose parenting books were already speaking to me more coherently than anything else out there."

Eventually the path led to Melissa reading *The First Idea*, where she first encountered the name Stuart Shanker (who co-authored that book with Greenspan). She was astonished to find how much their ideas intersected with her research interests. "*The First Idea* addressed many questions that I was interested in and also demonstrated the urgent need to improve our understanding of how children develop," she says.

Although her family's needs are the primary focus of Melissa's Self-Reg learning, she finds it relevant to her academic research. Several years ago, Melissa received a grant to research children's voice in medieval English literature. She began with some basic questions: When do children get to use their voices in medieval fiction? Under what circumstances could they express themselves? Is the main mode of communication linguistic, or are other factors significant, such as singing, laughing or crying? Does the sound of a voice often also imply complementary facial expressions, gestures and postures? "Although literature is fictional, stories where children get to 'speak for themselves' tell us something about how 'real' children were expected to behave, as well as how and why they were (or weren't) valued," she says. "I became aware that these questions are just as important for contemporary childhood, especially so since not all children have the same ability to communicate their own experiences, due to age and different kinds of processing, amongst other factors."

FIVE QUESTIONS

How did your study of Self-Reg change or influence your pre-existing ideas?

Directing awareness towards effective listening needs as much work as focusing on the child. Everything a child says or does involves a relationship; we need to understand the relationship to understand what the child is telling us. Our most important contribution to helping children express themselves is to make them feel safe.

Is there a Self-Reg community in Australia?

I would say it is under construction. I'm looking forward to its growth, and doing my part by giving presentations to interested groups.

What are you doing differently in your personal life as a result of Self-Reg?

Responding more supportively when my kids are struggling.

Has Self-Reg helped you identify personal stressors that you were not aware of?

Rather than ignoring "little things" I try now to catch them and reflect on them, as they build up and drain energy. I've become better at recognizing when to take a break and come back when my regulation is better.

What aspects of Self-Reg would you still like to understand better?

Pattern recognition, changes throughout the life cycle, and deeper knowledge of how to recognize specific processing differences in order to respond more effectively.



The MHRIT Centre



See A Teenager Differently:

A Self-Reg Reframe of a Teen
"At-Risk" | By Susan Hopkins

My teenage years remain a blur. I was one of the troubled ones. I was "THAT" teenager—the at-risk kind of kid that neighbours whispered about and relatives avoided asking about at family gatherings. I was THAT kid.

My deep interest in understanding resilience, combined with what I have learned through Self-Reg, have helped me to see my "thatness" differently, with softer eyes. I also know that Self-Reg has the power to help all of us reframe how we see and understand the teenagers we care about and worry about. The ones we imagine poor trajectories for, or give labels like "at-risk." It's so important to be able to remove our cognitive blinders so we can see, not just the "at-risk" kid, but also just how competent and capable these young people often are, and how much resilience is there. It can also help us see how a relationship with even one person—maybe one of us—could make a huge difference.

When I was a teenager my father once told me that I never finished anything.

These were only words; there were no sticks, no stones involved, but I can assure you that these words hurt. And they haunted me for many years, ringing especially true in moments of struggle, when I felt more vulnerable and less resilient.

My dad had little control over my actions from about the age of fourteen, when I first ran away (for two months and he didn't come looking for me). He would use the only weapon he had: words. My dad's verbal sticks and stones came flying at anyone who wasn't complying with or recognizing his authority, especially when he was overstressed. He was quite masterful at mean labels and questioning my integrity, intelligence, or backbone. Sometimes his verbal stones would come in the form of expressions of disgust that made you feel that he couldn't bear to even look at you anymore. Once there was the silent treatment, a "you don't exist," version of sticks and stones that went on for well over a month. He had a way of shackling my sense of value as a person and filling my backpack with stressors that followed me through my life, hobbling me in vulnerable moments, bringing out the resilience in me in others.

My dad was struggling with his own self-regulation and my family paid the price.

For years, I had anxiety dreams about "not finishing anything." There were the dreams about the exam I missed, or the ones where I got mixed up on my degree requirements and somehow missed a full course. The worst ones involved the anxiety of forgetting something and not being able to remember what it was. They don't sound like nightmares, but they felt awful. I'd wake up feeling sick every time. →



The day my dad told me that I was a quitter who never finished anything, I pulled off a classic fight-or-flight response with my limbic brain in full self-protection mode. My mouth was obeying the red brain command center and yelling back at him equally hurtful assaults. I had a friend tell me once that I could become a “junkyard dog” when I was hurt. This was my survival brain kicking in to gear.

It’s been six years since my father’s passing and I am now able to see him and memories like this with slightly softer eyes thanks to understanding of how the brain-body stress system can wreak havoc on vital relationships of those stuck in a stress cycle.

There was also some truth to his point about my quitting, giving in and not sustaining. My childhood and adolescence was filled with peaks and valleys, highs and crashes. As I think back to all the “unfinished” business in my teenage years, my question is “why” and “why then?” And what are the connections to resilience that I might be able to share with others who have their own speckled stories of ups and downs and so many circles left unclosed?

Looking back, I wonder, did I lack resilience? Did I not have “the goods” to endure the tough knocks and so, when things got too hard, I split? Well, I dropped out of high school twice, was a so-called at-risk teenager who got into lots of trouble all the time. I found the “outlets” for coping through drugs, alcohol, unhealthy relationships, the “in” crowd. Lack of resilience, right?

But there’s another side to my story. I also held down part-time jobs from the time I was 15 and babysat three to five nights a week starting when I was 11 years old. My bosses always really liked me because I was so hardworking, dependable, and

polite. Resilient, right? High school teachers kicked me out of classes in the morning all that time (math class especially) and then a few hours later I was a teacher’s assistant leading the class research study (sociology) and all in the same day.

So was I resilient or lacking resilience?

Did I have the tough upper lip, good citizenship, and hard work goods to be successful in life? Or was my trajectory on a downward spiral?

Well, if you’d asked my dad or my math teacher you’d get a very different answer than you’d have gotten from my sociology teacher or my boss at the clothing store where I worked. And this was all happening at the same time. Was I different people, putting on different faces under different circumstances? No. This was all part of the incredible complexity of being a teenager who was struggling, striving, and over-stressed. Resilience is not a fixed trait in an individual. It’s context dependent, and looking at it through the lens of the five steps of Self-Reg explains the “why” and “why now” of not just my own behaviours, but also those of my father, the teachers who influenced me, and the peers who at the time were the center of my world.

Self-Reg can help us navigate this complexity so we can see, support and appreciate the strengths of the teenagers (and anyone else) we worry about. It can also help us share their journeys with more compassion, more enjoyment at times, and a lot less stress for all.

Self-Regulation in the News



Feeling bad about feeling bad? Embrace good emotions instead, study says.

Source: bigthink.com Aug. 28, 2017

"We found that people who habitually accept their negative emotions experience fewer negative emotions, which adds up to better psychological health," said study senior author Iris Mauss, an associate professor of psychology at UC Berkeley."

Why telling people with ADHD to "try harder" simply doesn't work.

Source: Psych Central, Sept. 2017

"Whether you believe that I have ADHD or not, whether you believe it exists or not, the scientific evidence points to its reality and our experience tells us bluntly that stress makes it worse, not better."

How modern life became disconnected from nature

Source: Greater Good Berkeley, Sept. 20, 2017

"Instead, our findings point to a different explanation for our disconnection from nature: technological change, and in particular the burgeoning of indoor and virtual recreation options."



Releasing "too much" or "too little" stress-induced cortisol may be detrimental

Source: Psychology Today, July. 24, 2017

"The most significant contribution of the current work is to highlight the importance of accounting for individual differences in response to stress, rather than overlooking them, when attempting to identify biological markers of stress vulnerability and resiliency in humans."

Catnapping may be the answer to better baby sleep

Source: bellybelly.com.au, Aug. 21, 2017

"The key here is to try and keep your baby's sympathetic nervous system (SNS) dialed down... When the SNS is dialed up, the biological sleep regulators can't do their job and your baby is unable to find and maintain sleep."

Neuroscience study uncovers how threatening information invades the working memory of anxious people

Source: psypost.org, Sept. 9, 2017

"More anxious individuals were more likely to allocate working memory resources to threat-related information. This misallocation was linked to heightened reactivity in the amygdala, which is located deep in the brain and is known to play a key role in anxiety disorders."

Human selfishness is secondary, compassion is primary: Emma Seppälä

Source: bigthink.com

"From social applications of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution to Richard Dawkin's book *The Selfish Gene*, human beings have been misunderstood as purely, or at least primarily, self-interested creatures."

Game-based learning for High School Students

In January 2018, TMC will launch an online Self-Reg game-based learning course for adolescents. The 14-module course will take teens into an online "noir world," which learners will navigate via a personal avatar, as they work to identify the sender of a mysterious "gift" which sends anyone who comes into contact with it into a limbic state. Through a series of videos, activities and challenges, the learner will be immersed into the world of Self-Reg and learn the skills of being a "stress detective."

The program is designed for young people aged 13–18. Access can be purchased individually or for classes of up to 25 students. For more information visit the [TMC website](#).

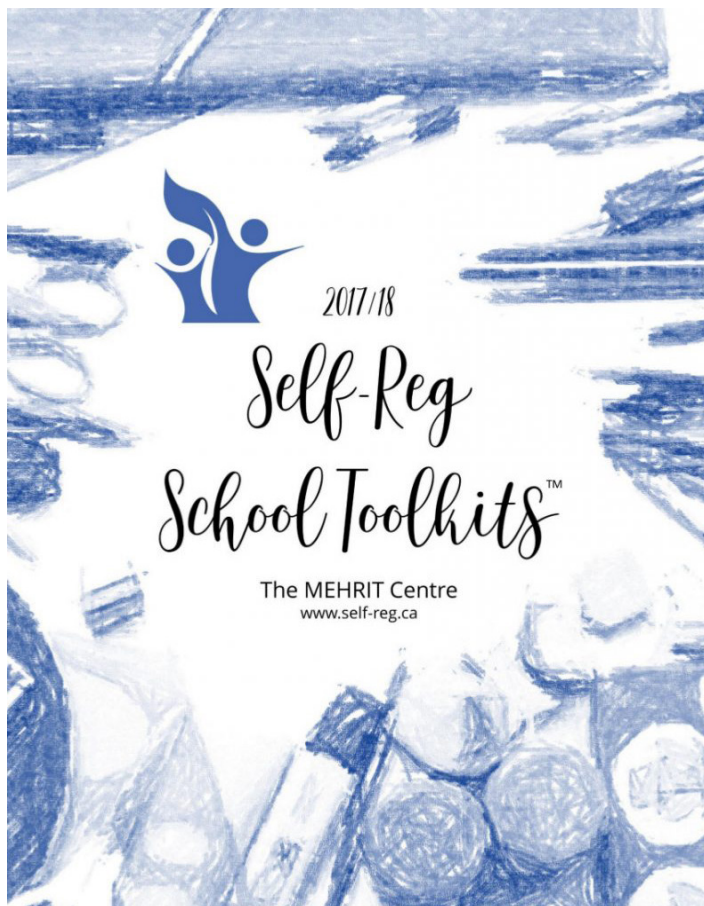


New Self-Reg Toolkit

In late summer we introduced our new, updated 2017-18 Self-Reg School Toolkit. Our goal is to provide practical tools such as posters, rubrics, charts, discussion guides, graphics and checklists to help people on their Self-Reg learning journey. Our toolkit was originally introduced in 2016.

After receiving some valuable feedback from our community, we identified gaps and areas that we could address to further aid individuals in schools who are striving to implement Self-Reg into their professional practice and daily routines. We also learned some lessons about the level of Self-Reg knowledge needed to use the tools effectively.

"What we learned last year, as we made these tools freely available, was that some of the tools require a little bit of experience with Self-Reg and some of the tools require a fair bit of experience," says Stuart Shanker. Accordingly, we have introduced a tool ranking system to identify the level of Self-Reg knowledge required for optimal use of the various tools. For example, some tools are suitable for people who are just beginning to learn about Self-Reg, while our higher ranked tools are designed for people who have completed our Foundations courses. For more information visit our website's [toolkit page](#).



SRSS 2018 Save the Date!

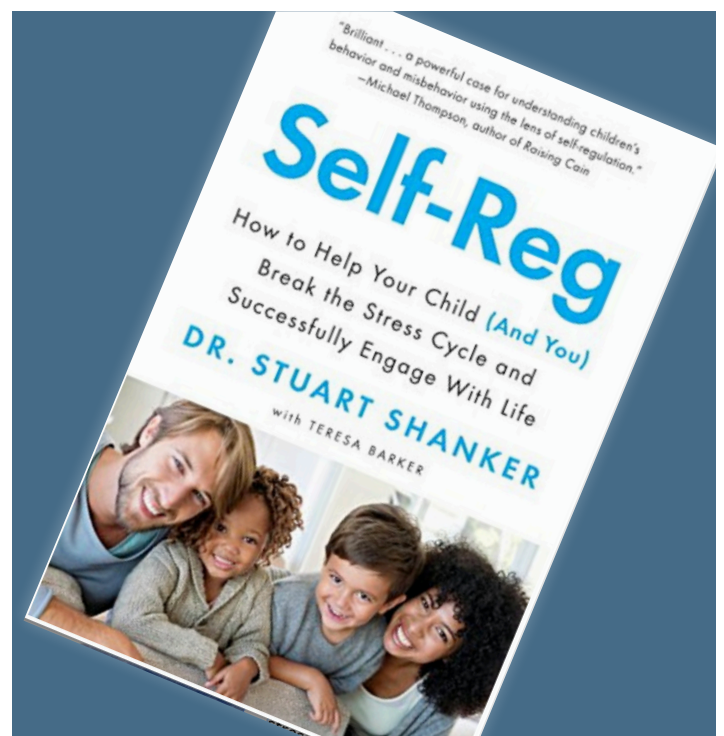
Did you know that we have already had some registrations for Summer Self-Reg Symposium 2018? Next summer's symposium, *SRSS 2018*, will take place at Trent University, in Peterborough, Ontario, July 9–12. We are excited to announce

that Dr. Jean Clinton will be joining us again, along with Dr. Shanker, Dr. Hopkins and other members of the TMC team. Our keynotes and sessions will explore many factors in school and life success: resilience, perseverance, motivation—even Math anxiety—through a Self-Reg lens. Dr. Shanker will also give a special talk on where the science of Self-Reg is leading us next. For further information about the program and how to take advantage of our Early Bird price, [visit our website](#).



Paperback Edition of Self-Reg

And may we remind you that the long-awaited paperback edition of *Self-Reg, How to help your child and you break the stress cycle and fully engage with life* came out last summer? The book is available from retail and online booksellers everywhere. TMC has developed a group discussion guide for people who want to work through *Self-Reg* as part of a study group. The guide is available free-of-charge from our [website](#).





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What You Need to Know.
by Dr. Stuart Shanker

Self-Regulation: The Early Years

The Self-Reg View on Series.
by Dr. Stuart Shanker

The Self-Reg View on: Mindfulness (Part 3)
by Dr. Stuart Shanker

The Self-Reg View on: Mindfulness Pt.3
by Dr. Stuart Shanker

10 Self-Reg Lessons Learned

Self-Reg: What You Need to Know

The Everyday Process of Research

The Self-Reg View On Series

Many other Self-Reg tools and resources are available free of charge on our website.
www.self-reg.ca

TMC by the Numbers

SELF-REG PRESENTATIONS BY
TMC MEMBERS OTHER THAN
STUART SHANKER

2016:

21

2017 (as of October 1):

42

TMC Website
50,000
monthly
page views

OF PUBLISHED BLOGS ON TMC
WEBSITE

November 2016:

35

October 2017:

67

Blog subscribers:

177

TOTAL FOLLOWERS ACROSS VARIOUS
SELF-REG AFFILIATED TWITTER ACCOUNTS



November 2016:

14,000

October 2017:

18,154

80,000 INDIVIDUALS REACHED EACH
MONTH WITH #TMCTALKS

AVERAGE # OF IMPRESSIONS 900,000
FOR EACH #TMCTALKS

FACEBOOK LIKES

November 2016:

1231

October 2017:

3027

FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS

August 2016:

862

October 2017:

3174



YOUTUBE



November 2017:

6638 views of 20 videos

September 2017:

24700 views of 53 videos

MAILING LIST

Total subscribers
August 2016: 1450
August 2017: 2079

SELF-REG PARENTING GROUP

Total members
April 2017: 640
October 2017: 1,280

FOUNDATIONS

Total students
November 2016: 230
October 2017: 437

FOUNDATIONS GRADUATES
(across all levels)

Total graduates
November 2016: 48
October 2017: 146

STUART SHANKER'S 2017**21**

Speaking Engagements

1Teach Ontario (TVO)
Live Webcast**1**

Autism Ontario Webcast

1Appearance The Agenda
With Steve Paikin**2**

Podcasts

19

Radio Interviews

Fostering Resilience in Children and Adults

Last year, in his blog, *The Self-Reg View on Resilience*, Dr. Shanker wrote: “Resilience, then, according to the Self-Reg view, rests on how well we can stabilize after a challenge, serious or otherwise. That’s what an ‘adaptive response’ to stress or adversity consists in: the ability to get back to our optimal state of equilibrium.”

With that in mind, we asked members of our community to answer this question:

How has Self-Reg fostered resilience in your own life, or in the children around you? Here are some responses.



“What helps me is looking at both my child and myself with ‘soft eyes.’ That’s related to the idea of reframing—of trusting that the ‘challenging’ behaviours we observe are likely due to stress, rather than simple ‘bad’ behaviour. It means recognizing that the anger, frustration or over-excitement is simply a function of the individual’s stress level, a limbic response, rather than a ‘choice.’ That allows us to see the whole individual in relation to their hidden and overt stresses, beyond just their outward behaviour. It also means approaching the situation with gentleness and thoughtful



insight rather than anger or punishment. I find that this approach also helps me check my personal stress level, or tension/energy ratio in a heated moment. That helps me to calm my mind, movements, and voice etc. so I can become more regulating for the other person.”

VICKI STORAAS

"Self-Reg has enabled me to see myself first as a biological being. It has allowed me to reframe my thoughts and behaviours through a neurophysiological lens. This stripped-down self-view nourishes a sense of humility but also a heightened self-respect as I gain regard for the neural systems that govern me. This practice of honouring my biology promotes an overall agency, which is energy restoring. As the riddle of my stress and stress processes are increasingly demystified, tension in all domains diminishes, especially the cognitive domain. This, for me, is the essence of growing more resilient."

ANGIE ROSATI



"My nine-year-old daughter is a competitive gymnast at the Provincial level. She is extremely dedicated and works very hard. I was talking to her the other day about learning a new skill and how frustrating it can be when you can't do it right away. She always keeps trying and rarely gets upset. So I asked her what she does when she is trying to do a 'kip' on the bars and she just can't get there. She says to me 'I listen to my coach tell me what I need to do, I repeat what she says in my head and then I close my eyes and I see myself doing it.' I thought that was very insightful for the strategies she already has to help her be resilient."

SUSIE ELLIS



"From the perspective of a retired military wife, resilience means that we learned to adapt to unusual circumstances such as deployment. Reframing helped me to become more self-aware of my internal balance and how to recognize those outside stressors. Over the years, we have learned to reduce stressors by reflecting on how far we have come and enjoy where we are yet to go."

TINA BERGMAN



"My daughter is 11. She has Asperger's, Sensory Processing Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, and Generalized Anxiety. It has taken six years for her to attend school all day (with a break at home for lunch). It takes resilience for her to be successful within the challenges of our traditional school setting, and this would not have happened without Self-Reg. Each day I look at her energy levels and stressors. I reframe her challenging behaviours, and assist her in developing school strategies. Without the Self-Reg process she could have easily become a school attrition statistic, but she has developed the resilience necessary to get up each day and happily go to school. It has been life-changing for her and our family."

LISA PINHORN



"As Dr. Shanker said in one of his blogs, we need to train our kids about the inner signals we have in order to stop the stress from taking over our bodies. Training our students when they are calm instead of trying to train them when they are in the moment, is key for kids to become resilient and parents as well. For example: breathing techniques can help with fast breathing, fast heart beat/ putting hand on chest to make you more aware of how stressed you are, and hot skin or red face when we get over stressed. Being able to recognize these things and come up with coping strategies will help children be resilient."

MELISSA STIENEKER



TMC VOICES

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