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TMC VOICES

GROUNDING LIVING AND LEARNING IN SELF-REGULATION

SEPTEMBER 2018

TMC CALENDAR

September 14

Face-to-Face Seminar, Toronto

September 15

Face-to-Face Seminar, Toronto

September 20

Self-Reg Level 2 Program starts

September 21

Dr. Shanker ECA Australia
Conference

October 4

Self-Reg in Early Childhood
Development course launches

October 10

#TMCtalks 7:30pm EDT

October 17

Dr. Hopkins Huron Perth
Paediatric Conference

October 19

Dr. Hopkins, Manitoba Council for
Exceptional Children Conference

November 1

Foundations course starts

November 14

#TMCtalks 7:30pm EDT

November 29

Dr. Hopkins, Triple P Provincial
Conference, Toronto

Editor's note

John Hoffman, TMC Voices Editor

The Progress of SSRS Mirrors the Growth of TMC

When TMC held its first Summer Self-Reg Symposium in 2015, the term, and brand, Self-Reg were both pretty new, even though Stuart Shanker had been writing about self-regulation for a number of years. One impact of this "newness" was that the pool of Self-Reg presenters TMC could draw from for SRSS 2015 was not very deep. Has that ever changed in the last four years! Now, TMC can draw from a large well of presenters who have, not only deep Self-Reg knowledge, but also the ability to apply it to multiple settings and contexts. What's more, some of them came from outside Canada!

For example: This year, at the Thursday night session What's Possible with a Self-Reg Approach to Parenting, Marie Edwards (from Tasmania, no less) told a story about how doing a five-domain stress scan helped Marie and her daughter get back on track during a family hike that was dogged by background stressors. Gabriela Michaca, of Mexico's Universidad Iberoamericana, outlined a case history that showed how Self-Reg made a huge impact on the life and family of a young girl with ASD. Polish Psychologist, Natalie Fedan shared her family's Self-Reg journey.

This issue of TMC Voices gives a window on some of the other insights and experiences

shared at SRSS 2018. Stuart Shanker expands on the crucial concept of Red Brain Blue Brain balance, which he introduced at this year's conference. We also report on Dr. Jean Clinton's fascinating presentation: How Can Self-Reg Be the Foundation for Mental Well-Being? Vicki Parnell contributes a piece based on her SRSS talk on the stresses experienced by parents of "differently wired" children. And, for added "colour" we've got some choice Dr. Shanker quotes on page 11 and some event photos on page 12.

BTW, SRSS dates for SRSS 2019 are already set: July 8-11. Just sayin'...



SELF-REG IN Early Childhood Development

AVAILABLE OCTOBER 4

Self-Reg ECD is a three-course, 12-module online program designed for early childhood educators and other individuals interested in early child development. The program is designed to give learners a new and more complete understanding of the factors that affect early development by looking at many key concepts in early child development through the lens of Self-Reg, Dr. Stuart Shanker's framework for understanding stress and managing energy and tension, in order to support self-regulation in children and adults. The program is delivered on the TMC e-school and takes three months to complete.

Course 1:
Self-Reg in the Early Years

Course 2:
Self-Reg Reframe of Human Development

Course 3:
The Inestimable Impact of the Self-Reg ECE

Cost: \$695 for the Full Program

FIND OUT MORE
www.self-reg.ca/learn/

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The MEHRIT Centre

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.



Blue Brain Red Brain Balance is the Key

By Stuart Shanker

Parents are forever asking us: "Can Self-Reg help me with my child's challenging behaviours? Nothing I say or do seems to help." Self-Reg will indeed make a difference—a huge one—in dealing with problems like explosive behaviour, aggression, defiance, tantrums, persistent crying, bouts of frenzy and constant arguing. But to address these issues we need to learn about the crucial distinction that Self-Reg draws between *Blue Brain*, *Red Brain*, and *Brown Brain*.

This way of thinking goes back to Paul MacLean's Triune Brain hypothesis that three different brains evolved in different epochs to serve the needs of radically different kinds of species. The oldest brain is the Reptilian, designed for solitary creatures to regulate their motor actions and metabolic functions and keep them safe when threatened. In Self-Reg, we refer to this as Brown Brain.

Next in MacLean's model was the Paleomammalian brain, or in Self-Reg, the Red Brain. This brain developed to deal with the complex demands of social existence: raising babies, primitive emotions, relationships with group members, spotting enemies, kicking the Brown Brain into action when threats were spotted and remembering these occasions for future reference.

Finally, there is the "neocortex": the new brain, which supports our ability to think, plan, listen, speak and be consciously aware of what's going on inside and around us. This is what we refer to in Self-Reg as Blue Brain.

Self-Reg draws on MacLean's Triune model because of the light it sheds on the difference between *rational*, *irrational*, and *non-rational* behaviour. The key for parents struggling with any kind of behaviour that they find challenging is to consider whether their child is in Blue Brain/*rational*, Red Brain/*irrational*, or Brown Brain/*non-rational*. This can help us understand which neural processes are dominant, and how to respond accordingly.

Blue Brain and Red Brain processes are inextricably intertwined. The question is not, which one of these brains is "switched on or off" but rather, which is *dominant*. So much of what we *think* is imbued with *emotions*; so much of what we *feel* is influenced by our *thoughts*. But swing too far in one direction and we don't feel anything; swing too far in the other and what we feel is overwhelming. If one were searching for a suitable metaphor here, it would be that of a teeter-totter, rather than a heating system in which either the furnace or the AC is on.

Why is it "balance" that we should seek, and not, as is often thought, absolute Blue Brain dominion: i.e., self-control? The answer is that children are at their most curious and receptive when Blue and Red Brain are working smoothly together. Energy expenditure and recovery are finely counter-balanced, which promotes, not just digestion, cellular repair and a robust immune system, but emotion and social co-regulation, cognitive and prosocial development.

“Self-Reg helps us recognize the signs of when children are slipping out of the zone of optimal arousal”

Each brain serves as a “brake” on the other. When a child goes “into Red Brain,” the teeter-totter gets stuck on hypo- or hyperarousal. This is where strong primitive emotions rule and the Blue Brain is left with its feet dangling in the air. However, this can be avoided by self-distraction or “reappraisal”: Blue Brain functions that can turn off the limbic alarm or help us to resist a harmful temptation.

At the same time, the Blue Brain can be an energy hog. So a system deep inside the Red Brain, that monitors blood glucose levels, will shut down a Blue Brain activity when it doesn't have enough sense to do so on its own. The Blue Brain is the seat of internal and external awareness; but the Red Brain can tamp this down when it's beneficial to do so (e.g. on a long portage).

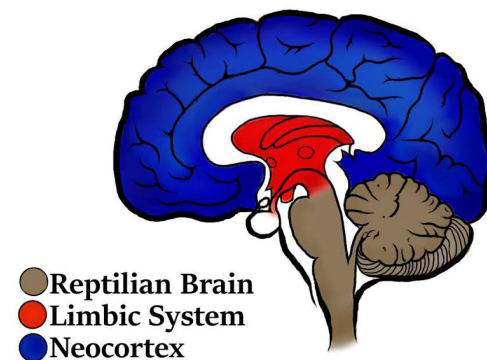
In other words, well-being requires both “brains” working together and not against one another. Blue Brain without Red Brain is Data in Star Trek. Red Brain without Blue Brain is, well, a child with challenging behaviours. The secret to dealing with the latter is to avoid sending your child into “cacostasis”: i.e., a Brown Brain, non-rational state of fight, flight or freeze. And that is where Self-Reg comes in.

Self-Reg helps us recognize the signs that tell us when children are slipping out of the *zone of optimal arousal* (the “Window of Tolerance”): that is, out of Blue Brain Red Brain balance. Being able to know when this is happening, and why, enables us to “move the child's fulcrum” so that she finds stress invigorating rather than overwhelming. That is, so that she is sufficiently

aroused to deal with a challenge but not so aroused that she shuts down or becomes manic.

Children and teens will eventually have to learn how to “move their fulcrums” on their own; but mastering the art of self-regulation is much more challenging for some children than others. That is the real significance of “challenging behaviours,” and the reason why Self-Reg makes such a huge difference in how we respond.

The Evolution-Designed Brain



Self-Reg People

Colleen Dickinson | Executive Assistant for Dr. Shanker

It started with a Kijiji ad, says Colleen, who has been Dr. Shanker's executive assistant for the past two-and-a-half years.

“We had just moved to Peterborough,” she explains. “And I had no connections here, so I was on Kijiji looking at job ads. Susan Hopkins had posted an ad looking for a personal organizer to help her unpack and organize her household after her move from Alberta.” Susan, who arrived in Peterborough in June 2015, just days before the start of the first-ever Self-Reg Summer Symposium, had been so busy since her move that, even several months later, she hadn't been able to fully unpack and organize her house.

Susan hired Colleen, because Colleen's email response to her ad was the “most Self-Reg.” And although she was not a personal organizer by trade, Colleen was up for the task, having worn various hats in her career, including some that included handling organizational tasks for other people. “I started in retail sales before finding work with a credit union. I also tried my hand at selling home and life insurance; but wasn't for me and I went back to the credit union. When I moved to the Maritimes I worked for an IT company managing the preparations of travel and training for 25 employees, who travelled the world. And I enjoyed welcoming guests that came to visit the company.”

Colleen worked closely with Susan for just over a week. Not long after that Susan asked if Colleen could stay on to do part-time work as her assistant in helping TMC gear up for holding Self-Reg events across the country. “I did some research on event management software to help Susan figure out which one was best suited to TMC's needs,” Colleen explains. And then, serendipitously, Stuart's personal assistant gave her notice because she wanted to start her own business. With a little help from Susan's glowing recommendation Colleen got the job and has been Stuart's faithful assistant ever since, helping him organize everything from his daily calendar and travel arrangements to his ever-increasing library of writings, videos and presentations.

“Stuart has a philosophy that life is a learning journey and working with someone who truly believes that is inspirational,” Colleen says. “TMC has developed a safe work space that is Self-Reg in its nature. It is busy and sometimes a little hectic but there is always that knowledge that you are part of a team working towards the goal of expanding the knowledge of Self-Reg.”

FIVE QUESTIONS

1. Where are you from and how did you come to reside in Peterborough?

I was born in Montreal and have also lived in Ottawa twice, with a three-year break in between in a small town in England called Uttoxeter, where my son was born. I moved to Fredericton in 1998 to care for my disabled mom and be near my sister. After my mom passed away, my husband and I decided to move to Peterborough in 2015 to be near our grandchildren, who now live 10 minutes away from us.

2. What is a skill or interest you have that most people don't know about?

I have a real love/interest in nature with a soft spot for whales and dolphins. I have been whale watching yearly for the past 30 years. I have been kissed by an orca and swam with a dolphin. This year we're visiting the mouth of the Saguenay River in the St. Lawrence, and I hope to see a blue whale again.

What are the two most important things you have learned about self-regulation in your time with TMC?

Most important is that Self-Reg is not a program but a process that is for everyone; from infants and their caregivers, to the elderly and their caregivers and all ages in between. Secondly, the learning never stops.

What's your favourite trashy movie?

I love watching movies of all kinds and have a fondness for what I would describe as entertaining fluff or feel good movies.

What is your go-to restoration activity?

Bird watching and walking on the grass or dirt. The connection to nature both visually and physically is very restorative.



The MERRIT Centre



SELF-REG Parenting Course

Available now. Start whenever you want & learn at your own pace

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Self-Reg Parenting is an online course that shows parents how to apply Self-Reg in their day-to-day parenting. This self-directed course, delivered through TMC's e-school, explains the principles of Shanker Self-Reg, and practical ways parents can use Self-Reg to:

- gain a whole new understanding of their child's behaviour and how respond to it
- learn the impacts of excess stress on children's behaviour and mood
- come to grips with their own stress and how it affects their parenting
- identify and address the subtle and hidden stressors that affect children in ways that parents might not realize
- find out how other parents use Self-Reg strategies to deal with real-life parenting situations and problems

SELF-REG PARENTING HAS TEN MODULES:

1. What is Self-Reg?, 2. The 5 Domains, 3. Reframe, 4. Recognize, 5. Reduce, 6. Reflect, 7 Respond, 8. Putting it All into Practice, 9. In the Heat of the Moment, 10. Sharing Self-Reg with Other Parents.

The course costs \$149.00 and parents will receive a certificate upon completion of all the content.

FIND OUT MORE
www.self-reg.ca/learn/

Raising a “Differently-Wired” Child

by Vicki Parnell, based on her presentation at SRSS 2018

Lost papers... missed meetings... kids showing up at school without the right supplies... I have been “that parent,” and I often wonder what our lives looked like to the educators who worked with my family!

I'm the mother of two young people with multiple “invisible” disabilities, and in my consulting work I support parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). These experiences have given me insight into hidden stressors experienced by parents of “differently-wired” children—stressors that can become a kind of “normal” for families like mine.

Putting out fires

Kids whose brains are wired differently often have very intense needs and behaviour. The normal work of parenting—getting everyone out the door in the morning, making sure homework is done, preparing healthy meals—becomes difficult and exhausting when your child is bringing an extra level of intensity to the daily routine!

Add to this the unique stress of being your child's “case manager”: researching, selecting, hiring and scheduling therapy, communicating with your child's teacher and school, making sure siblings get special time and attention... We all do our best, but it's usually impossible to get everything done, and sometimes parents are left to prioritize whatever seems most urgent in the moment, hoping they will have time to catch up later. This can lead to a feeling of constant crisis, an ongoing source of stress overload that can affect parents' mood, energy and tension levels.

Recognition and Awareness

There can be a big disconnect between what a clinician or educator recommends, and what parents are ready to agree to. This disconnect can be very stressful for parents, for a number of reasons.

Parents may have different and evolving levels of awareness about their child's unique needs. Some parents may be quite aware that their child is not typically developing; these parents will pursue assessment and support proactively. However, others may not recognize that their child is different. I was like this myself at first. My children's behaviours and characteristics

came to seem “normal” to us. This doesn't mean I was blind to their differences. My husband and I were both “quirky” kids, and we saw many of our own traits in our children. We didn't recognize the need to seek professional support for our children until they were older and things got very hard at home.

All parents want their children to have every opportunity their peers have, and many parents of “differently wired” kids just want our children to be included, to be treated the same as their peers. Even after their child's differences and unique needs are identified, and extra support is offered, a parent's priority may be for the child to have as normal a life as possible. Many parents worry about the potential stigma and reduced opportunities that may come with labelling a child, so they might avoid pursuing assessment or diagnosis.

Diagnosis

For parents who are open to it, the experience of seeking assessment and diagnosis for a child can be incredibly stressful. Long waiting lists, overworked specialists, wondering what the results of assessment might mean for your child's future... this is the perfect recipe for high tension, uncertainty and frustration for parents. Even once a child receives a diagnosis, there is still so much unknown. For example, professionals and educators often use unfamiliar acronyms or jargon, and parents can be hesitant to ask for explanations. We may feel excluded, or worry about appearing to lack knowledge about our child's needs. Parents sometimes attend meetings where they are the only person in the room who is not a professional. That can feel intimidating and disempowering.

This is not an exhaustive list of stresses. If you happen to be the parent of a differently wired child, you can probably name others! Often there is (understandably) so much focus on the child's needs that the stress of parents can be overlooked—including by parents themselves.

I hope this article has helped to raise awareness of some of the hidden stresses that can lead parents to miss meetings, lose paperwork, or say very little during meetings with our children's schools.

Self-Regulation in the News



The single most important thing to know about a baby

Source: PsychologyToday.com, August 20, 2018

“Babies cannot self-regulate and need caregivers to train their systems to do so (e.g., by calming them quickly so the systems learn to make that the “norm”). Adults should keep them in an optimal state so that the systems continue to grow and develop normally.”

Treating teen depression might help parents too

Source: www.npr.com August 12, 2018

“We’re social creatures. We exist in families, we exist in social networks. And a lot of our well-being, a lot of our highs and lows might come from these relationships.”

The role of evolution in a helping hand

Source: Science Trends, June 25, 2018

“I conducted three experiments and found that altruism is one strategy that humans have developed when they are facing danger and threats. It makes sense. When humans band together, they have a better chance of surviving than a person alone.”



What is green exercise?

Source: Scientific American, July 12, 2018

“Being outdoors can lower our levels of stress, our pulse rate, and even our blood pressure. But what happens when we exercise in a green space?”

A surprising reason why learning is harder with noise

Source: PsychologyToday.com, July 23, 2018

“Even though participants recognize that learning items is harder when there is background noise, they actually studied items for less time when they were presented in background noise than when they were presented in a quiet environment.”

Negative emotions are murkier, less distinct in adolescence

Source: Association for Psychological Science, June 11, 2018

“Children tend to report feeling only one emotion at a time, producing differentiated but sparse emotional experiences. Adolescents begin to co-experience emotions but they are not well differentiated, and adults both co-experience and differentiate emotions.”



People who deeply grasp the pain or happiness of others also process music differently in the brain

Source: SMU Research News, June 11, 2018

“Highly empathic people process familiar music with greater involvement of the brain’s social circuitry, such as the areas activated when feeling empathy for others. They also seem to experience a greater degree of pleasure in listening, as indicated by increased activation of the reward system.”



Self-Reg, the Foundation for Mental Well-being:

By Jean Clinton

Psychiatrist Jean Clinton has been an internationally renowned expert and advocate for children’s mental health for over 30 years. We were thrilled to have Dr. Clinton at our summer symposium once again this year.

In her keynote address, Dr. Clinton drew from her wealth of experience and knowledge to address the question: How can Self-Reg be the foundation for mental well-being? Here are some of the key points she made.

Mental well-being is not just the absence of mental illness. As First Nations teachings point out, mental well-being means having a sense of purpose, hope, belonging and meaning in our daily lives.

Mental well-being starts relationships. “The brain is social organ, wired to connect,” Dr. Clinton said. “The modern human brains’ primary environment is our matrix of social relationships.”

Self-Reg gives us a new lens for understanding children’s learning and development by looking at the child’s environment (both internal and external) and their experience—including their relationships:

- how the Interbrain, and the right-brain to right-brain communication it enables, works for individual children
- how children’s experiences of stress, energy and tension affect their behaviour and mood, and what we can do about that.

Self-Reg gives educators and parents a way to support children struggling with issues like anxiety. In a 2011-2012 Toronto District School Board survey of students, close to half said they had missed school because of anxiety. “We will never have enough professionals to treat that many kids,” Jean said. “So we need to use Self-Reg to teach them how to handle the stress, tension and energy that affect their experience of anxious feelings.”

Self-Reg can support students’ resilience. “When I think about resilience, I don’t think of it as a characteristic of the person,” Dr. Clinton said. “I think about other people understanding and supporting you and also being able to navigate to resources and then being able to use them. I see so many kids who are stacked up with resources and then they don’t want them.”

Humans are best able to reach their potential when they feel safe, significant and situated (having a sense of purpose and direction) in their relationships and environment, according to leadership

expert, Stephen de Groot. “In a Self-Reg Haven we want every one to feel safe and situated,” Dr. Clinton said. “When adults act as stress detectives for children, it shows children that they are significant.”

Self-Reg helps us understand children’s troubling behaviour more deeply. “Understanding the ‘function’ of behaviour, as many people have been taught to do, is a start,” Dr. Clinton said. “But it’s not enough. We need to go deeper and understand why.”

We look forward to more of Dr. Jean’s words of wisdom in the future.





LEARN SELF-REG WITH DR. STUART SHANKER

No matter your journey, The MEHRIT Centre has a program that fits your needs!

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Immerse yourself in a self-guided Self-Reg adventure. Designed to introduce young people to key Self-Reg concepts.

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LAUNCHES OCTOBER 4, 2018
www.self-reg.ca/online-courses-with-dr-shanker



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Memorable Stuart Shanker Quotes From SRSS 2018

As usual, Dr. Shanker was at his inspirational best during our 2018 Symposium. Here are a few particularly thought-provoking quotes.

On resilience, perseverance and motivation

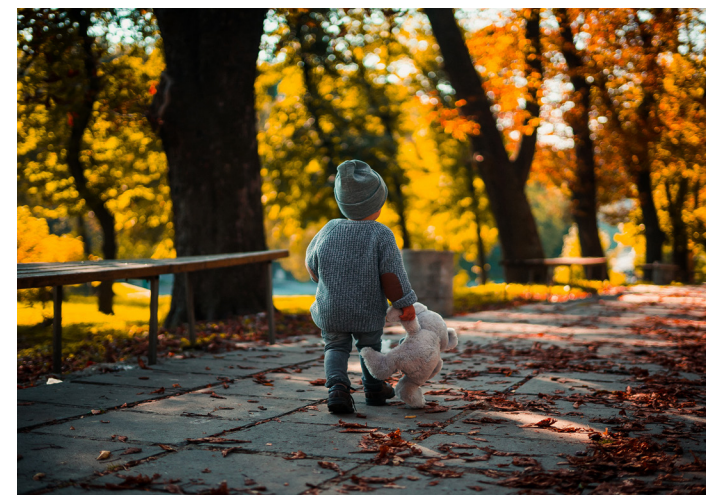
"Saying that a kid is not resilient is like having a big treasure map, with an x that says, 'Dig here.' We need to ask. Why? Then we need to try to understand what we see in children that are not resilient."

"Stephen Porges wrote that resilience is essentially homeostasis. So, when we're thinking about self-regulation, the real question is: How well can a child and his stress response system come back down to set point (balance) after stress, as opposed to staying hyperaroused and unable to transition into a restorative activity."



"It's important to understand that perseverance, motivation and resilience are not about some part of the brain that makes you try harder. They are about understanding the parts of your brain/body system that make you shut down (unable to try harder), why that happens and what to do about it."

"It's not concentration that makes kids stop when they are doing a challenging task. Concentrating makes you tense, but, it doesn't burn that much glucose, so that's not what makes kids stop. It's anxiety that makes kids stop. Anxiety burns the glucose the brain requires for concentration."



On Intelligence

"The real point of a low IQ score is not that it tells us a child's potential, but that it tell us there's a problem; something is holding the child back. We can and must help that child."

"Some say we can't undo things that happened in the first three years of a child's development. But, science is now telling us 'Yes, we can do something.' We can change the child's trajectory in ways that lay the foundation for resilience in adulthood. That's what Self-Reg does."

On Virtue

"In schools we have to inspire not just learning, but also virtue. So we need schools to become 'virtue academies.' The first step in making a school a virtue academy is to become a Self-Reg Haven,' a school in which everyone—students and staff—feel emotionally as well as physically safe."

"We tend to assume that virtue requires will, strength and self-control. That's one thing that the Greek philosophers said. But many people forget that the ancient philosophers also said that virtue requires balance. Virtue is fuelled by desire, and the desire for virtue is a function of balance. When you are in a state of balance you have virtuous desires. When you are not in a state of balance, you have non-virtuous (selfish etc.) desires. In Self-Reg terms that means we're looking for blue brain red brain balance. In schools kids need good relationships, and access to nature, physical activity and music to stay in balance."

"There is a substrate of virtue, that is, a medium that promotes the growth of virtue. And that is the interbrain. If the messages that a child gets through interbrain, are prosocial, the child will develop in a prosocial direction."

On The Importance of Educators

"The demands on today's educators are unbelievable and still not fully recognized. We need to be talking not just about the stress and mental health of kids but also about the stress and mental health of educators."

Our fourth annual Self-Reg Summer Symposium was our biggest and best ever!

Here's a photo montage showing just some of the people and activities from SRSS 2018.



A rapt full house absorbs one of Dr. Shanker's keynotes



Sharing the results of small group work



New and old friends gather in Champlain College's Great Hall for our gala dinner



Hiking in Trent University's gorgeous wild life sanctuary



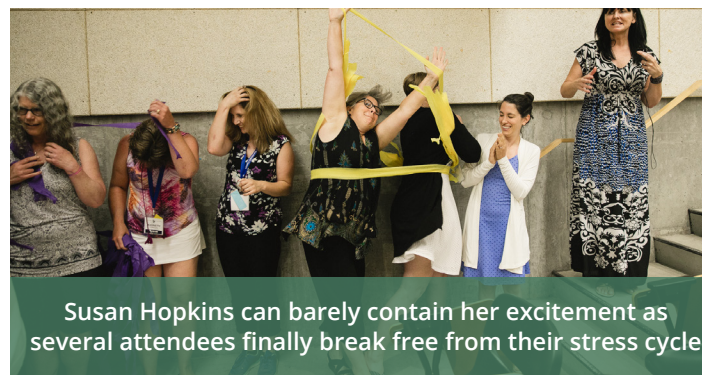
Restoring with yoga



The chance to connect with old and new Self-Reg friends is always an important part of the SRSS experience



Our Symposium's keynotes and workshops sparked many engaging conversations



Susan Hopkins can barely contain her excitement as several attendees finally break free from their stress cycle


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