



Body Double

A Co-Regulation Strategy

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Co-regulation exercises offer you and a partner an opportunity to **test and explore a shared grounding strategy** during emotionally heightened or dysregulated moments. Rather than relying solely on individual self-regulation, this approach encourages you to lean on one another as **surrogates for calming and settling the nervous system**.

Why Co-Regulation Matters

When emotions run high, it can be difficult—if not impossible—to calm yourself using logic or traditional solo techniques. This is because your **nervous system enters a survival state** (fight/flight/freeze/submit), overriding your ability to reason.

Co-regulation provides external support to help return the body to a settled, connected state—enabling you to eventually talk through your emotions with more clarity and compassion.

“The body must calm before the mind can think clearly.”

Co-Regulation Routine: Step-by-Step

Step 1: Create a Code Word

- Together, decide on a **simple, neutral code word** (e.g., “pause,” “reset,” “the thing,” or anything playful).
 - This word signals, *“Let’s use the strategy the therapist recommended to us.”*
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Step 2: Notice and Signal

- When either of you starts to feel escalated or overwhelmed, call out the **code word**.
 - No judgment—just mutual agreement to pause and support one another.
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Step 3: Connect Physically

- Choose a method of **non-verbal physical connection** that feels safe and supportive:
 - Holding hands
 - A gentle hug

- Standing side-by-side with shoulders touching
 - Tossing a soft object back and forth
 - Linking pinkies, foreheads, or backs if more space is needed
 - The goal is **felt safety** and **shared presence**.
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Step 4: Breathe Together

- Use this breathing pattern for 30 seconds to 2 minutes:
 - Inhale through the nose for **3 seconds**
 - Hold for **2 seconds**
 - Exhale through the mouth for **5 seconds**
 - Hold for **2 seconds**
 - Repeat
 - As your breathing slows, try to **attune your rhythm** with one another. This shared pacing activates the calming parasympathetic nervous system.
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Step 5: Offer Words of Reassurance

- Softly and repeatedly say (aloud or internally): “We will be okay.”
 - Repeat as many times as needed.
 - This mantra serves as a **co-regulating affirmation** and reminder of safety.
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Step 6: Ask With Compassion

- When one partner begins to feel grounded, gently ask the other:
 - “What do you need?”
 - “How can I support you right now?”
- If the overwhelmed partner doesn’t know, stay with them in connection—**presence is often more powerful than problem-solving**.

Understanding Emotional Waves

- It helps to remember: Emotions tend to **build, peak, and naturally decline**.
- This cycle typically lasts **10 seconds to 2 minutes**—unless it's prolonged by resistance, judgment, or fear.
- Practicing co-regulation allows you to **ride the wave together** rather than fight it alone.

Additional Strategies

Here are a few optional tools to explore based on what feels right for you both:

Music

- Create a playlist or put on a calming song you both enjoy.
- Sit or stand together in silence while listening, allowing your bodies to settle.

Sensory Tools

- Keep a textured object, soft fabric, or grounding stone nearby.
- Pass it back and forth during regulation moments to **engage the senses**.

Create a Shared Regulation Journal

- Log moments when this routine works.
- Reflect on what felt supportive and what could be improved.
- This creates shared learning and growth.

Create a Ritual or Symbol

- Light a candle or hold a meaningful object when beginning the co-regulation practice.
- This acts as a visual signal of “*We’re safe. We’re doing this together.*”

Practice Makes Progress

This strategy is not a one-time fix. Like any habit, it takes **repetition, patience, and grace**. Each time you practice—even if imperfectly—you’re wiring your nervous systems for greater connection and resilience.