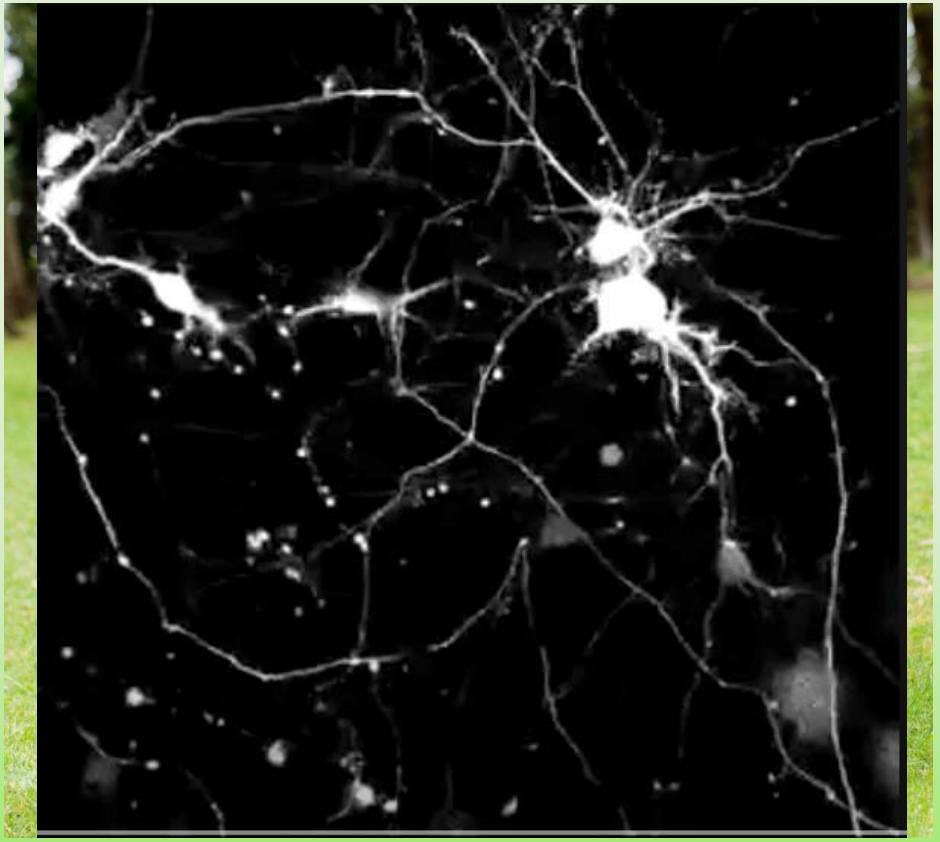
From Self-awareness to Self-regulation

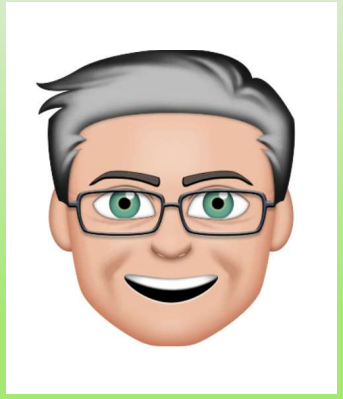
- A closer look at how child-centred, play-based, relationship-first pedagogies are essential to help our young children enjoy healthy happy relationships and successful learning.



Dominic Gunn
Associate Trainer with Early Education

About me

- Dominic Gunn
- Associate Trainer for Early Education
- Specialist Teacher for Local Education Authority
- Schools, settings and childminders
- Autism Education Trust Trainer
- Mainstream, Special and Alternative Provision
- London, Sussex and Kent
- @EdTangled



More than a curriculum area ?

- ‘Self-regulation’ is an Early Learning Goal in the Early Years Foundation Stage but it has always been ‘an essential life skill’ (Sutton Trust)

- Is SR the strongest predictor of future success in learning, career, relationships, well-being?

- ‘Starts from birth and moves [children] from being purely reactive to events… and dependent on others to undertake any task (eg feeding), to being proactive and able to independently undertake tasks in strategic ways which work for them’ David Whitbread

Definition and connection

- 447 definitions globally (Shanker, et al 2015)
- Much more than self-control or compliance
- Essential for both effective learning and healthy well-being
- Inextricably linked with meta-cognition and executive function (Conkbayir, 2023)

- Respect and care is modelled by adults, leading to self-respect, self-care, care for others and the environment

Self-regulation and Sustainability

CREC
CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN EARLY CHILDHOOD


SIREN
FILMS

Key functions required for self-regulation

- Attention and the ability to filter and shift to relevance
- Memory and manipulation (adapting the information from that memory)
- Inhibitory control and replacement

Metacognition and control

- “How am I doing with my task?”
- “Have I forgotten something?”
- “I don’t think this is going to work because…”


SIREN
FILMS

Play is the place

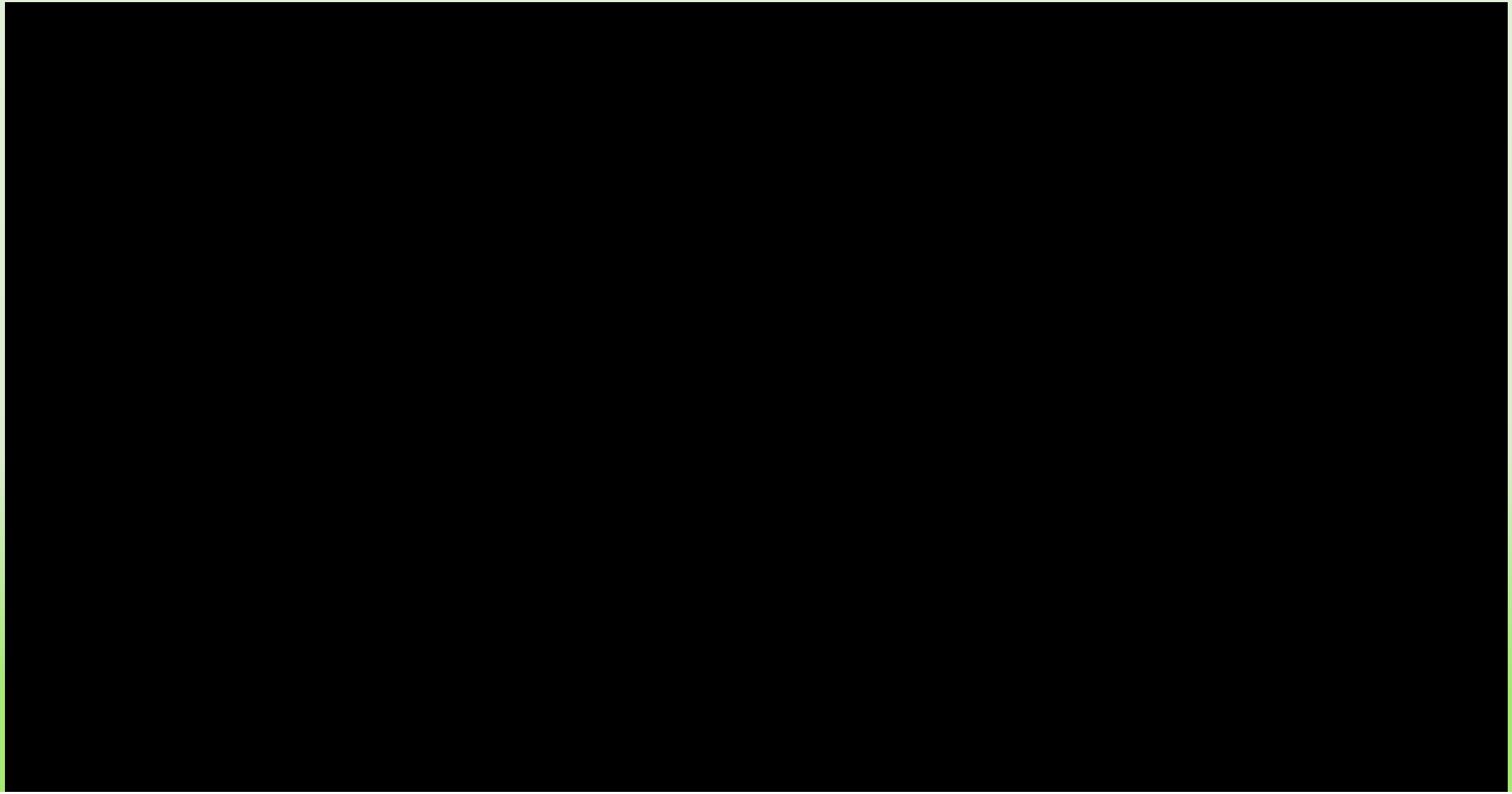
Self-regulation, co-regulation, shared regulation happens naturally and most profoundly in child-led play

Characteristics of Effective Learning is our foundation and our guide

Course content

- Meaning
- Curriculum connectedness
- Key components
- Flurries or flags? (Identifying delay and additional need)
- Play and Pedagogy
- Practical strategies for different learners (including behaviour that challenges us)

When do we act?



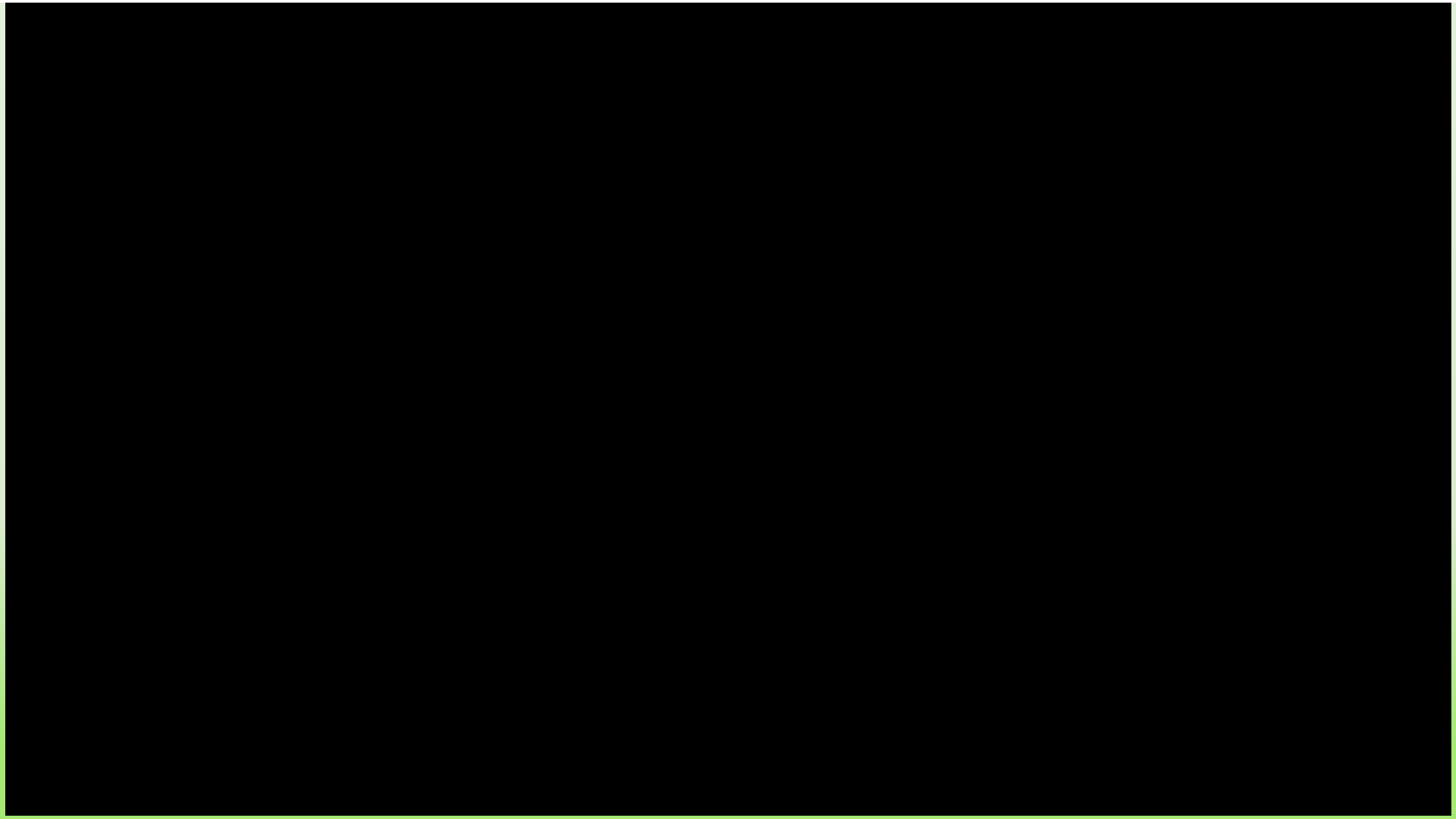
The Power Struggle

- The two powers – self-control or being controlled?

How do we act?

The Elation of Self-Regulation

- What excites you about self-regulation in the developing child?
- Think of some successful observations or interactions where you have enjoyed seeing self-regulation evolve.
- Make a note of any concerns you have around your provision to support SR in your current experience.



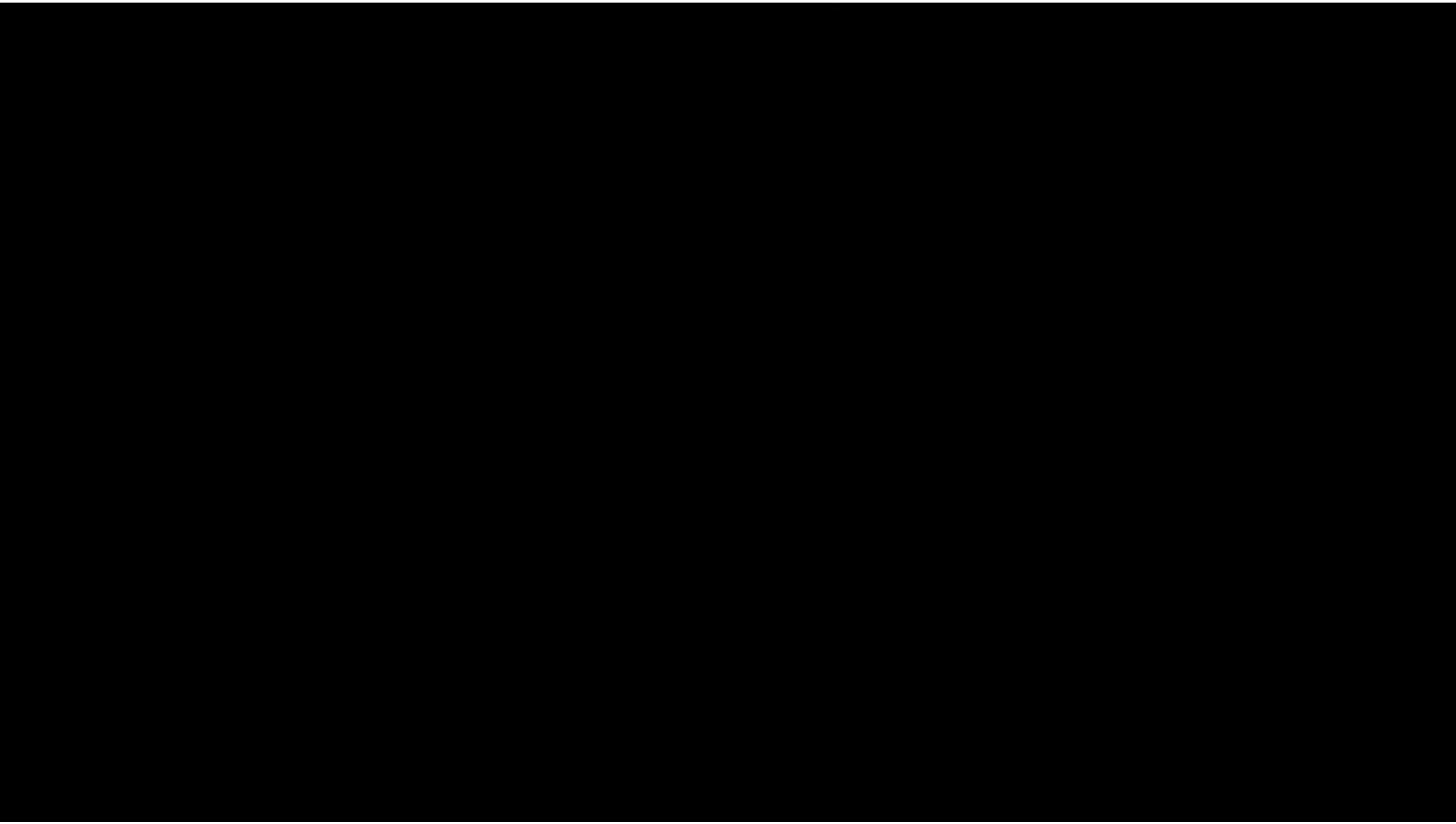
Perspectives

Courtesy New York Times

- Understanding the event

- What does the situation look like to a child?
- That is our entry point for guidance.

- Educators will be a trusting and trusted partner in the child's dysregulation (a co-regulator), motivating and enabling a capacity for independent learning



The Curriculum

- Understanding and supporting babies vulnerability is simpler

- **'Executive function and self-regulation** skills are the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully' (Schonkoff/ Harvard)

- This is required throughout
- the curriculum

The Curriculum - milestones

- ‘Children vary tremendously in how they express their emotional experiences’ (Froebel Trust)
- This is in addition to acceptable chronological-developmental variations
- It also includes cultural differences, unexpected or significant events, additional needs…

‘FLOW’ (Csikszentmihaly) and social and emotional skills

Questions so far?

- Communicating with parents?
- Consistency and continuity amongst colleagues?
- Environmental challenges?

The Neuroscience of Self-regulation

- 86 billion neurons at birth
- 1 million synaptic connections formed every second
- 15,000 synaptic connections per neuron at age 3
- 90% of the brain developed by age 5

- But…25 years for the prefrontal cortex to complete

The Neuroscience of Self-regulation

Neural connections create the highway between experience and metacognition

They are formed by repeated experience

‘Neurons that fire together, wire together’ (Hebb)

If the repeated experience includes comfortable, co-regulated, safe resolution, the brain will become resilient and able to self-regulate.

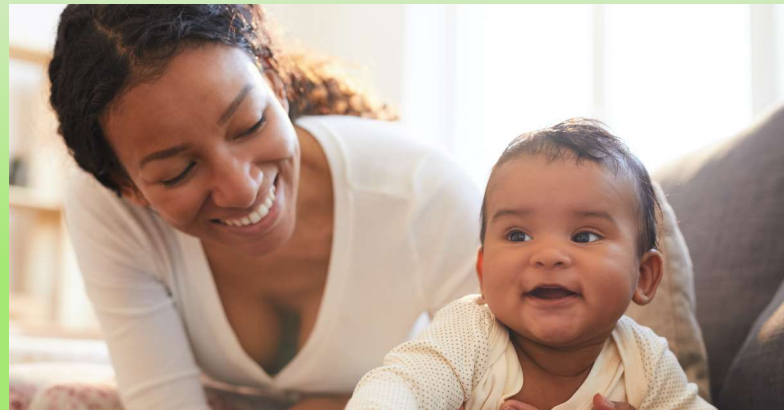
Consider the opposite…

ACEs and Healthy Brains

The Arc of Feelings

- It is important to let feelings run their course, with our relational support.
- What does it feel like when our feelings are dismissed or our attempts to make sense of difficult experiences are interrupted?

- Acknowledge, Affirm, Assist (at the right time)
- But assert boundaries where necessary



Rules and role-play (symbolic representation)

Developing Self-awareness

- [Children will be learning to] keep on trying when things are difficult (Development Matters)
- What is required of us, as educators, to enable this?

- Time vs transitions
- Resources
- Relationships
- Observation and attention to the child
- And…?

The Frustration of Transitions

- Formal transitions in Yr R -1 average two or three each half day

- How many do we average in Yr R?

The Frustration of Transitions

- Transition Commentary (and other non-directive, information carrying statements
- Educators will describe what they are doing, alongside children, making it fun eg. Tidying up
- Educators will make statements which prompt thought and independent action eg. ‘I can see its raining outside’, ‘I wonder what we could do about…?’

Other causes of dysregulation

- What might be typical causes of frustration?
- Which of these are easily addressed and which might need additional specialist services?
- NB. Remember gestalt processing

The Impact of Additional Needs

Autism

Sensory Processing

ADHD

ACEs

Dyslexia
Dyspraxia
Dyscalculia…

Developmental Delay

Speech and Language


The trampoline

Some SEND reflections

- “I thinked in my head and then I done it” - the significance of talk (Sue Robson)
- How can we ensure this is possible for those children who are not speaking or who are struggling with language?

SEND specifics

- Sensory Processing impacts on:

- All learning, social interaction, self-esteem, environmental interaction, emotional regulation, threat response, it is linked to memory and it has a dynamic relationship with PLAY

- Big responses to small experiences

SEND specifics

- Sensory Processing

- Proprioception and vestibular system – are we referencing common difficulties in ‘Behaviour’ or ‘Relationship’ policies?

- We are not born with the ability to process sensory experiences – this develops through PLAY

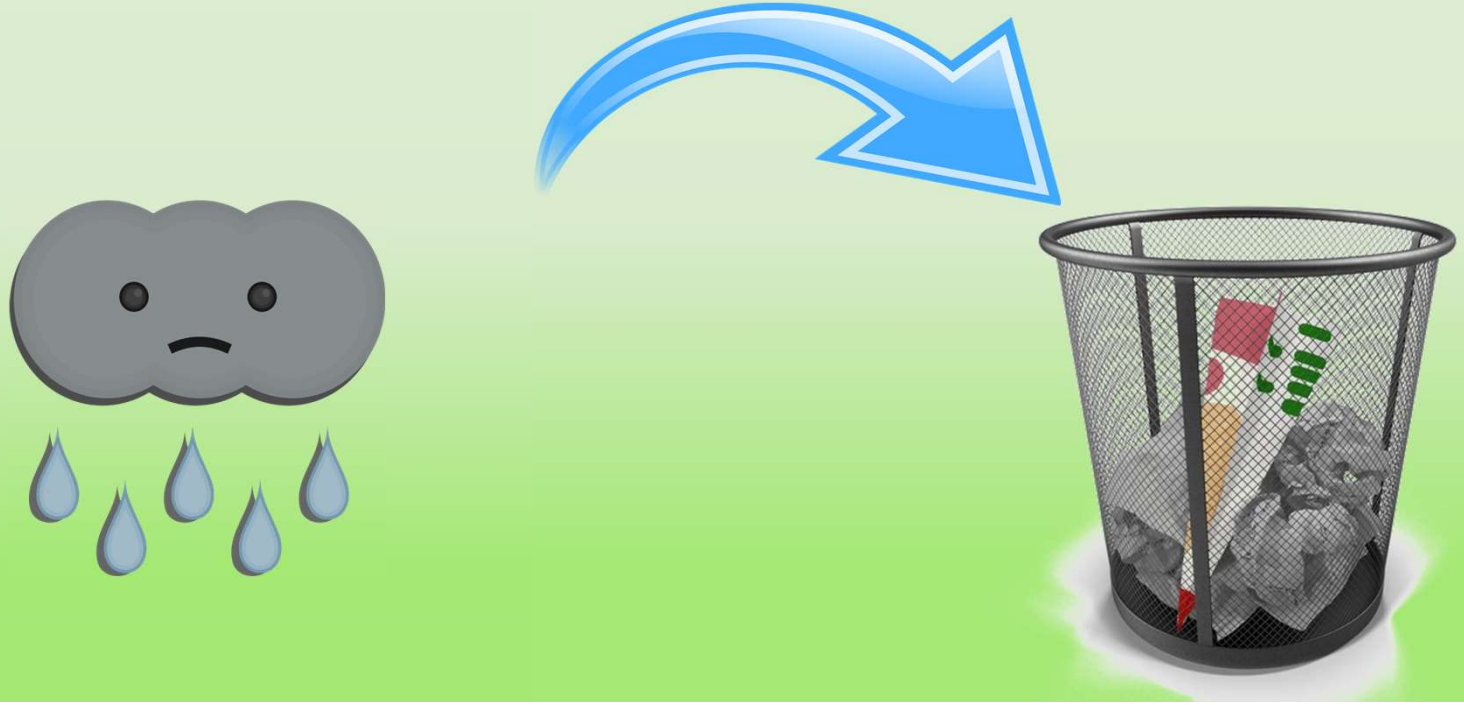
SEND specifics

- Developmental delay

- How would we usually support this and what might be different for self-regulation?

Misunderstandings

- There is a place for behaviour management systems…
- …and its in the bin



Rewards and sanctions

- '…likely to have negative effects on their well-being, including a less well developed internal moral compass and a feeling that they can't trust their own judgement.' (Froebel/ Tina Bruce)

- Most importantly, compliance through extrinsic devices is an illusion of learning. This approach bypasses the understanding and self-awareness gained from the steady, socially supported, safe experience of sharing complex feelings in real situations (Gunn)

What next for your setting or school?

- Time
- Resources
- Environment
- Parental partnerships
- Relationships
- Training

References and resources

- Development Matters (DfE)
- Birth to 5 Matters https://birthto5matters.org.uk/
- Early Education https://early-education.org.uk/early-years-pedagogy/
- The Froebel Trust https://www.froebel.org.uk/about-us/froebelian-principles
- Siren Films https://www.sirenfilms.co.uk/library/
- SEBDA https://sebda.org/newsletter/
- Mine Conkbayir 'The Neuroscience of the Developing Child' (Routledge)
- Harvard/Oxford Brain Story https://www.oxfordbrainstory.org/our-team
- ACEs: https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/aces-and-toxic-stress-frequently-asked-questions/
- Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC)/ C. Pascal https://www.crec.co.uk/becera-posts/being-planet-positive-how-building-self-regulation-in-early-years-supports-understanding-of-sustainability-issues