



Embodiment:
Supporting family
wellbeing during transitions



Inspired by the webinar delivered by

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The PDA Space

The PDA Space Portal 2024
(www.thepdaspace.com)

Created by Helen Edgar



Supporting family wellbeing during transitions

Transitions are moving from one state to another

This booklet will look at:

What wellbeing is

What embodiment is and why it is important to consider

Why transitions are hard - especially for PDAers

Strategies and suggestions of how to support family well-being during times of change

Embodiment is being here and now in our bodies so we have some autonomy over our emotional reactivity and sensations.

Embodiment is not just thought - it is our entire bodymind, sensory system and emotion.



Embodiment

What does it mean to be embodied?

For our children to feel safe they need to feel connected and regulated. We need to support them to understand the way their mind, body and sensory system all work together and to feel 'embodied'. When people are regulated they will be able to learn, enjoy life and be the best version of themselves.

Embodiment: to stay present in our own bodies to sensations, emotions and the external environment without going into dysregulation without going into fight/flight/freeze/fawn

Somatic: soma is 'of the body', being able to be in a relationship with the body and to support the body to do what it needs to do to be healthy. This may involve releasing what we hold physically in the body (ie a trauma response).

(Definitions from Kay Louise & Dan Aldred's Embodied Education)



Polyvagal Theory

Polyvagal theory was developed by Stephen Porges in 1994. He proposed that we have a three-part autonomic nervous system (ventral vagal, sympathetic vagal and dorsal vagal system).

Co-regulation can help people that are struggling with an over or under active nervous system (including sensory system) to support them to feel safe again and reconnected.

Dorsal Vagal - Sympathetic Nervous System Freeze

Burnout, shutdown, depression, disassociation, mind and body may physically go into survival mode to preserve energy

Sympathetic Nervous System Fight, Flight, Fawn

Anxiety, anger, panic, worry, frustration or trying to please and 'mask'

Ventral Vagal - Parasympathetic Nervous System

Feelings of safety, connection, joy, in the present and ready to learn and engage



What one adjustment can you make to bring more pleasure & comfort to your body, right now?

It can be really valuable to do a body-mind check-in before any change of activity to ensure you are ready and that your children are ready for a transition.

This can be useful before any transition in the day such as; meetings, school run, shopping, and other routines in the home such as bedtimes.

For many neurodivergent people, especially young people they may need support especially if they have difficulties understanding their interoception system (internal sensory system that tells you if you are hot/cold / hungry/ thirsty/ need the toilet or are in pain).

Temperature?

Hydration?

Toilet?

Food?

Movement -do you prefer to sit / stand. / lie down?



Well Being

To have a good quality of life we need to feel comfortable so we can function.

Being embodied means feeling whole.

EVERY family member (including parents/carers) deserves to access the quality of life they deserve and need to enable them to thrive.

Letting go of some power dynamics and listening to children's needs can create safe spaces for them to share how they feel with you. When children have a sense of belonging they are less stressed. When children are less stressed they have more capacity to communicate and understand their own sensory needs and well being.

Kay Aldred shared some ideas for us to consider that she calls 'wellness factors'. These include thinking about hunger/thirst/temperature/ movement and considering environmental needs. When our needs are met we are able to be in a better place to help ourselves and our children to become more embodied. Being embodied supports good mental and physical health and promotes self-compassion and overall wellbeing.

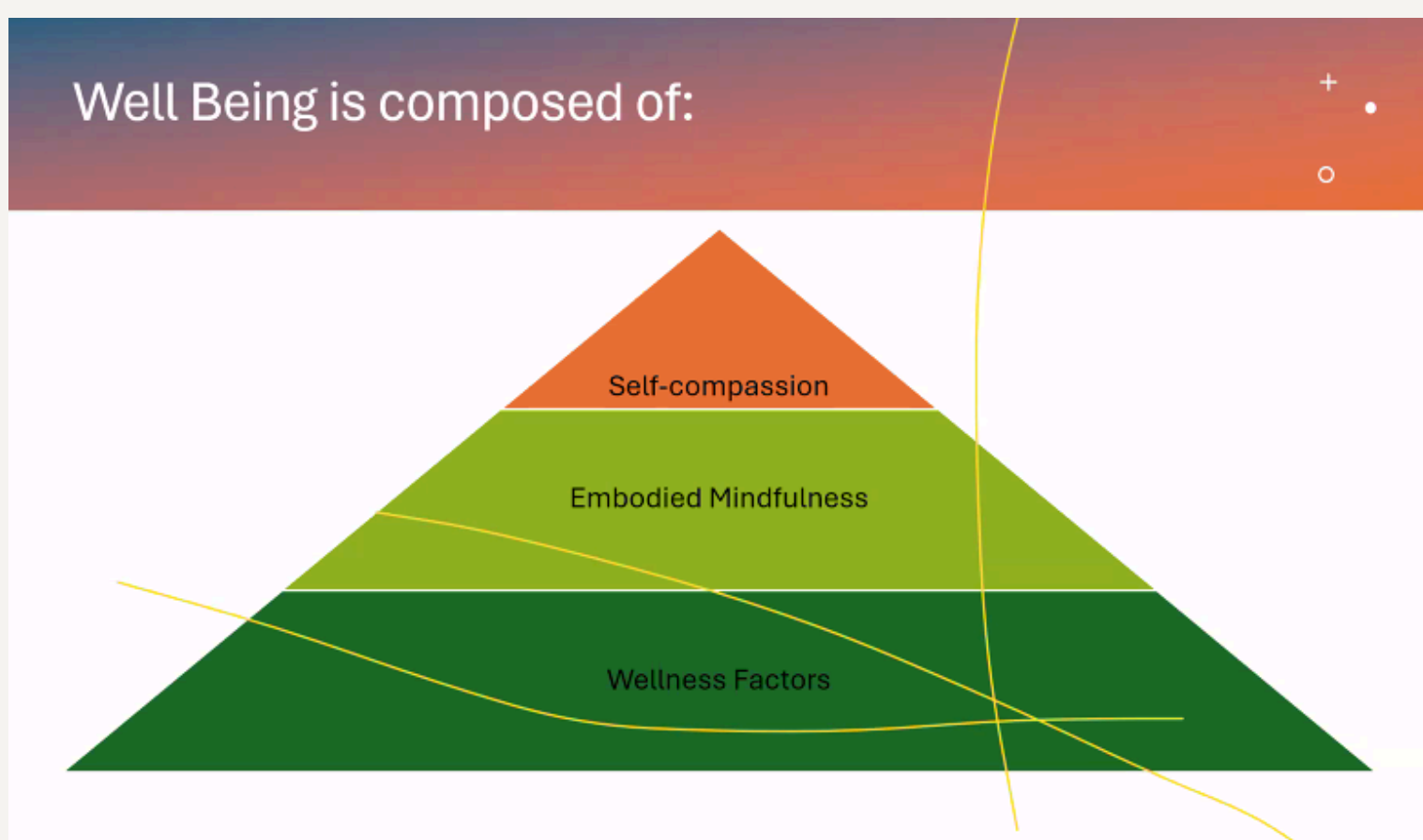


Image used with permission from Kay Aldred's PDA Space Presentation June 20204



Wellness Factors: environmental, nervous system, meaning, emotional, creative, social

Health-giving, non-toxic, physical environment

Tending to your nervous system

Sense of meaning

Vulnerability

Creativity

Social connection

Time out for self to recharge and decompress

Sense of identity

Emotional resilience

Ability to ask for help

Supportive, non-abusive relationships

Being heard and seen



Embodied Mindfulness

When we are in the NOW MOMENTS we are present.

Giving yourself and your child **time and space** to adjust to different places you go and will help you to transition to new environments / activities as smoothly as possible. It can help reduce meltdowns and shutdowns. It helps everyone be more regulated.

Preparing for transitions in advance **with** your child will give you time to consider what they may need, eg ear defenders if it is going to be noisy, their own safe favourite foods if you are eating out.

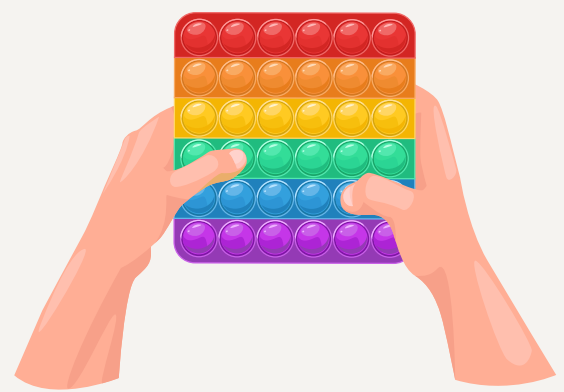
Having **familiar objects**, such as favourite toys, scents, food and thinking of places you can go to regulate your own and your child's body and mind in advance can help reduce family stress.

Consider what brings you and your child moments of joy, moments of calm, regulation and balance.

Moments of Joy

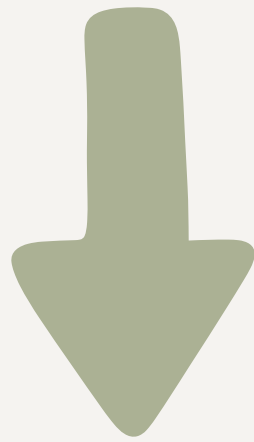
What is your / your child's favourite space?

Favourite toy / object?



The importance of self-compassion

Self-compassion is extending compassion to oneself in instances of perceived inadequacy, failure, or general suffering.



Being your own best friend and loving parent.



Kristin Neff has defined self-compassion as being composed of three main-components: self-kindness (no judgement), common humanity (not isolation) and mindfulness (not over-identification).

Neff, K. (2011). Self-compassion: Stop Beating Yourself Up and Leave Insecurity Behind. Yellow Kite.



Transitions are Hard!

We all know transitions through the day can be hard for us and for the young people we support. When transitions are not managed well, or when the environment does not meet needs a person will reach their capacity far quicker. If a person has reached their capacity then that one extra demand or change can be the final straw and lead to meltdowns or shutdowns. Kay Aldred shares her ideas as to why transitions are so hard to navigate:

Why are transitions so tricky to navigate?

Demand creates sympathetic activation

- Routine (which supports regulation) is compromised
- Requires the creation of a new schema
- Increases sympathetic activation
- The body can perceive transition as a threat
- Can take us out of our window of tolerance

Limbic resonance and co-regulation is vital for parent/carer wellbeing

"a symphony of mutual and internal adaptation whereby two mammals become attuned to each other's inner states"

Deep connections are formed

A sense of belonging can be fostered

"the door to communal connection"



Strategies and suggestions of how to support family wellbeing during times of change

Prepare and co-create photos, maps, videos - as much as possible & share with your family in advance

Be flexible and offer choices and options

Rest and regulate, do somatic exercises as a family to increase everyone's capacity and window of tolerance in advance

If you are going somewhere new try and keep things as 'normal' as possible.
Recreate rooms/routines/activities.
Bring same safe food/ toys / comforters.

Allow extra time for processing and decompression

Giving yourself extra time and more flexibility can allow a breathing space for transitions to flow more smoothly.



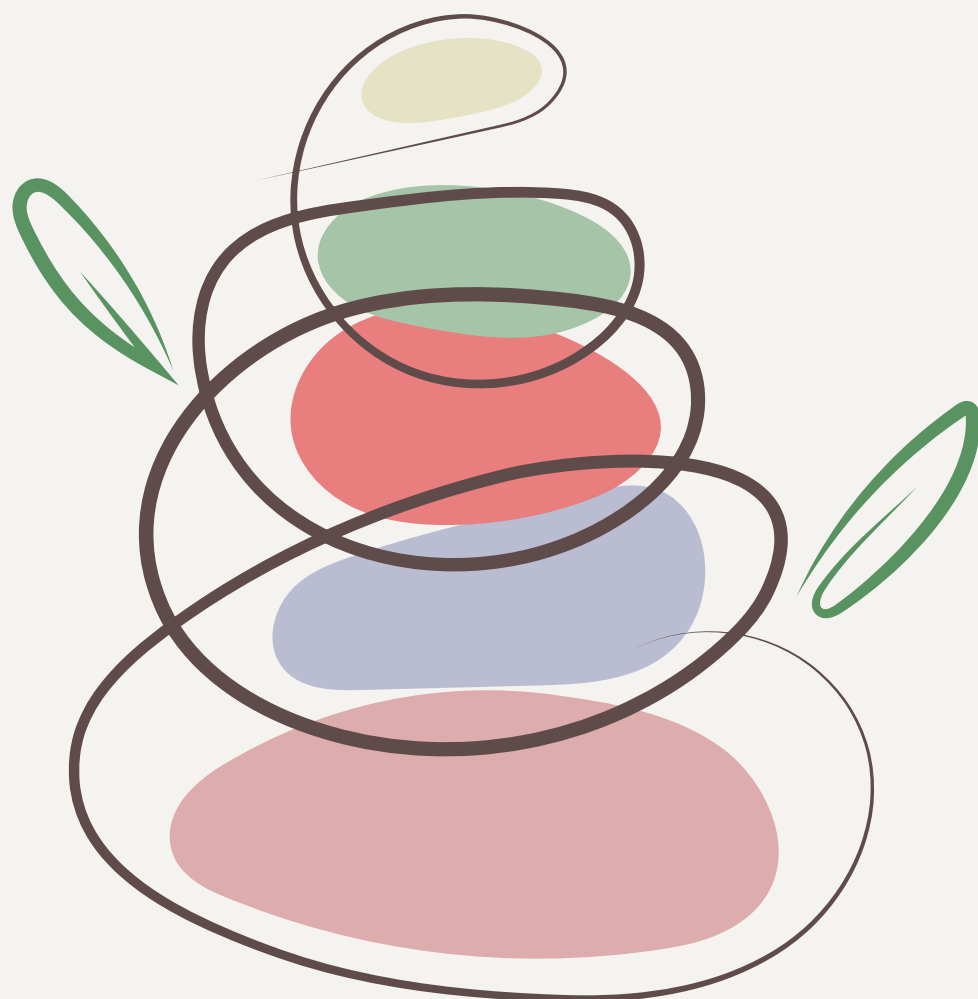
Embodiment Strategies

Think about what works for you and your family in the short and long term, we are aiming for a balance.

Embodiment strategies such as these listed below may help you and your family achieve a balance. If your young people sees you modelling some of these strategies it will help them learn ways to manage their own body, mind and sensory system. Over time they may copy or join in with you.

Modelling is often a good low demand strategy for your people especially PDAers.

- Breathing
- Self-Holding
- Containment
- Self-compassion



Breathing for calm

Left nostril breathing creates calmness, emotional balance and lowers blood pressure.

Close your right nostril with your right thumb.

Close your eyes if possible.

Begin to breathe long and deep only through your left nostril.

Continue for at least one minute.

You can repeat this as needed.

Try modelling this with your children and see if they want to join you in a moment of calm!



Signposting



1

www.thepdaspacespace.com

Family support workshops
webinars, coaching and online
peer support groups.

(Founder: Nicola Reekie)

2

www.kaylouisealdred.com

Specialising in Embodied
Education, Embodiment
Spirituality and Fleshy Knowing

(Founder: Kay Aldred)

3

www.autismunderstood.co.uk

Website designed by autistic
young people, for autistic people
by Spectrum Gaming

4

www.autisticrealms.com

Autism/education/ mental
health articles and resources

(Founder: Helen Edgar)

*Please seek professional advice if
needed.*





A free community resource
to support the webinar delivered by

Kay Aldred (2024)

Created for
The PDA Space

By
Helen Edgar
Autistic Realms

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