



Module 2: Co-Regulation in the Sand & Social Baseline Theory

As therapists, we learn a lot about teaching a client self-regulation. Now, I'm going to maybe blow your minds just a little bit, and I know it did mine when I first started thinking about this. Bonnie Badenoch, again, if you guys haven't had a chance to look at her stuff, it's fascinating. What she posits is that there is no such thing as self-regulation. There is only co-regulation because the only way we learn how to self-regulate is through what is reflected back to us and through what another person has done with us to help us soothe ourselves. And even if the person who helped you co-regulate in the beginning isn't there, what happens is, your brain will activate a mental model of that person and you may be able to bring up the feeling or the thought of what would happen as if they were there. So this is how we get carried around with our clients, with them all the time, even if we're not there. And this is how change can happen, even if we're not there. So again, why it's very, very important that you are with your clients providing that neuroception of safety and providing that ability to co-regulate.

Now to think about how this happens and how this co-regulation is important, let's talk a little bit about the Social Baseline Theory. The Social Baseline Theory comes out of the social psychology world. And what the social baseline theory says is this. Now this is Amy speak. This is not. . . I'm like way simplifying it for us here. So what it says is that when we have certain conditions met, we can do more of the hard things. So let's say, for example, you have a person and they are standing there by themselves and you ask that person, "You think you can hike that mountain?" They're going to go, "No, I can't do that." So, then you have that person again, but this time they have another person standing next to them, the only thing different. And you go, "You think you can hike that mountain?" And they go, "I don't think so, but maybe." So, then in the third condition, you have that same person and this time you have someone who is very close to them and they are in relationship with and you ask them the same question, "Do you think you could hike that mountain?" And they go, "You know? I think I could." And so, what Social

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Baseline Theory says is again, we can do more of the hard things if we have

someone next to us who we feel that we are safe with and that we are in relationship with. Now what this has to do with sandtray is that when implicit memories or a trauma gets triggered, what our clients often have done in the past, that's worked very well for them, is they've just shut it down and been like, "I can't go there." Again, all of this is adaptive, there's no such thing as maladaptive behavior. Everything is adaptive depending on what's going on inside as well as externally. So, again, when we have a client who gets triggered, we are able to come in through what Social Baseline Theory says and when we are safe then our clients believe and will act, and the different neurons fire letting them know that they are safe. And then they can go farther than they would have been able to otherwise which means they make more progress, more integration, meaning greater health. And that again, is why it's important that you are there during the sandtray session.