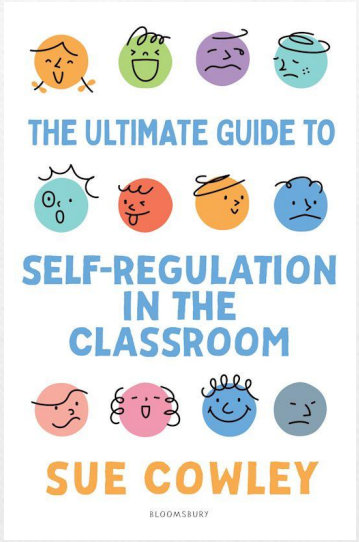
The Ultimate Guide to Self-Regulation



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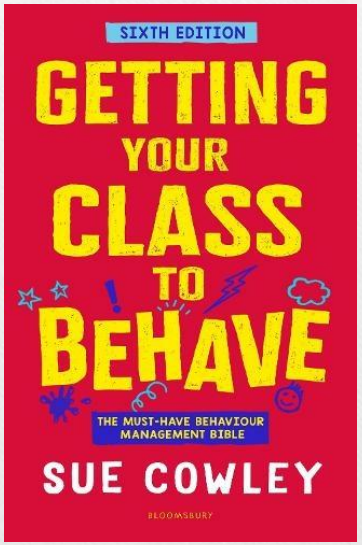
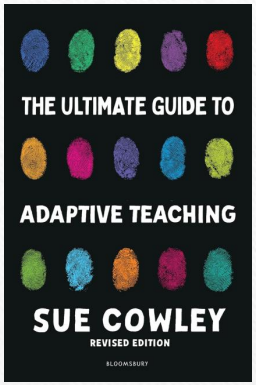
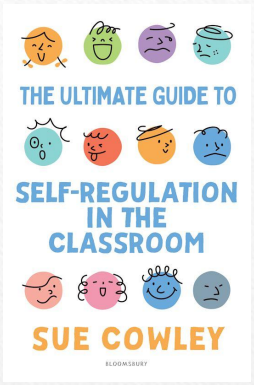
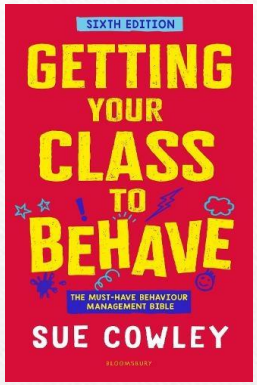


Sue Cowley: Biography







- ✓ Teacher for 30 years: early years, primary, secondary
- ✓ Author of 30+ books on education
- ✓ National/international CPD provider
- ✓ Presenter on Teachers' TV
- ✓ Author of curriculum materials for OUP
- ✓ Currently leader and teacher at an early years setting

The Marshmallow Experiment

Why is being able to self-regulate so important?

"consistently linked with successful learning"

"particularly beneficial for children from disadvantaged backgrounds"

https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/early-years-toolkit/self-regulation-strategies/

What is Dysregulation?

- ✓ Difficulty registering/being aware of emotions
- ✓ Difficulty responding with emotions appropriate to the context
- ✓ Suppressed or over dramatized emotions
- ✓ 'Lizard Brain' – cannot be rational at that moment
- ✓ Issues with development of the prefrontal cortex and the parasympathetic nervous system

children who experience childhood maltreatment demonstrate increased neural activity during emotional regulation tasks, suggesting these tasks were more effortful for these children compared to non-maltreated children (McCrory et al., 2017)

https://aifs.gov.au/resources/practice-guides/developmental-differences-children-who-have-experienced-adversity-guide-no1

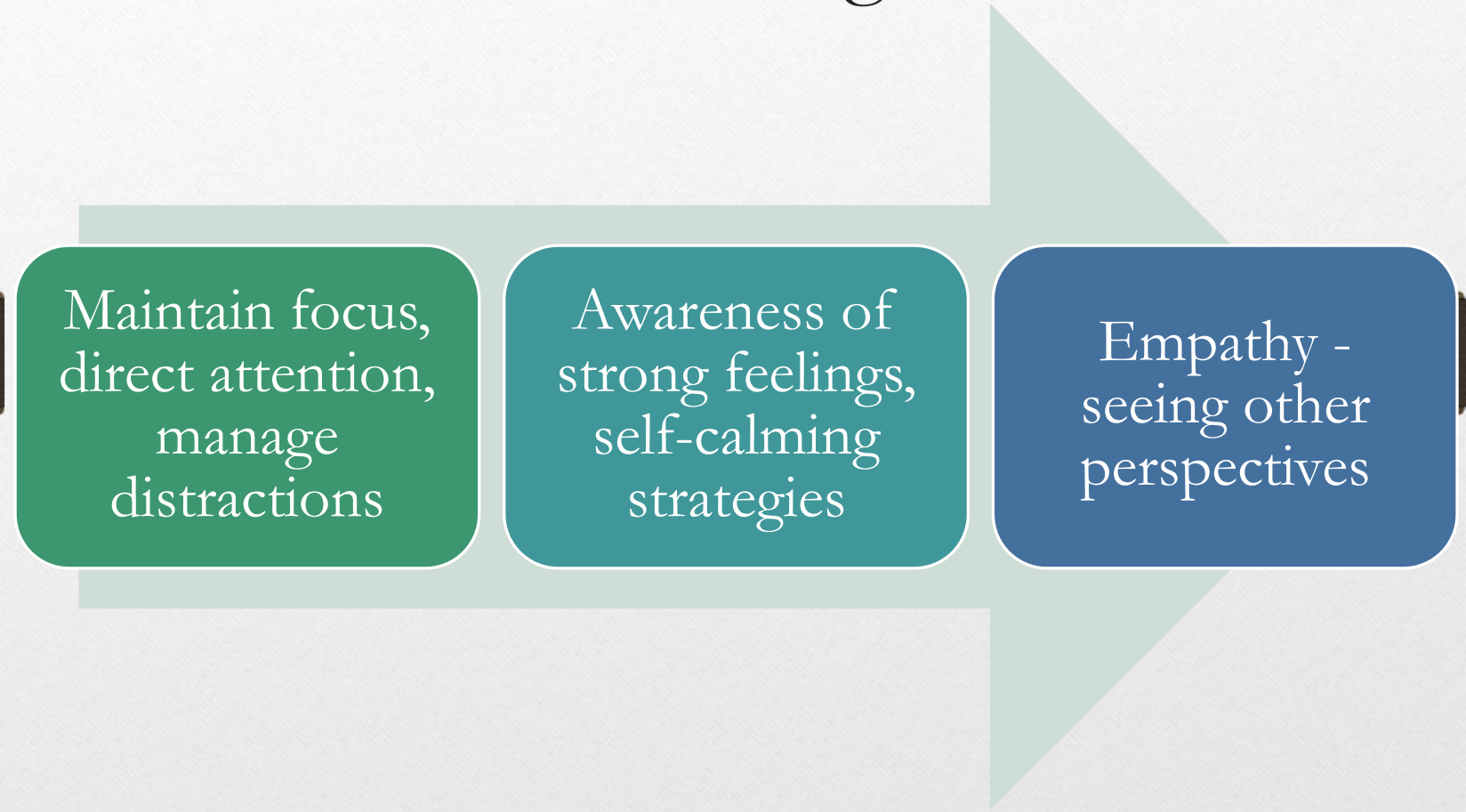
What is Self-Regulation?

Executive function: working memory, mental flexibility, self-control

Be aware of, understand and manage own behaviours

Impulse control and deferred gratification

What is Self-Regulation?



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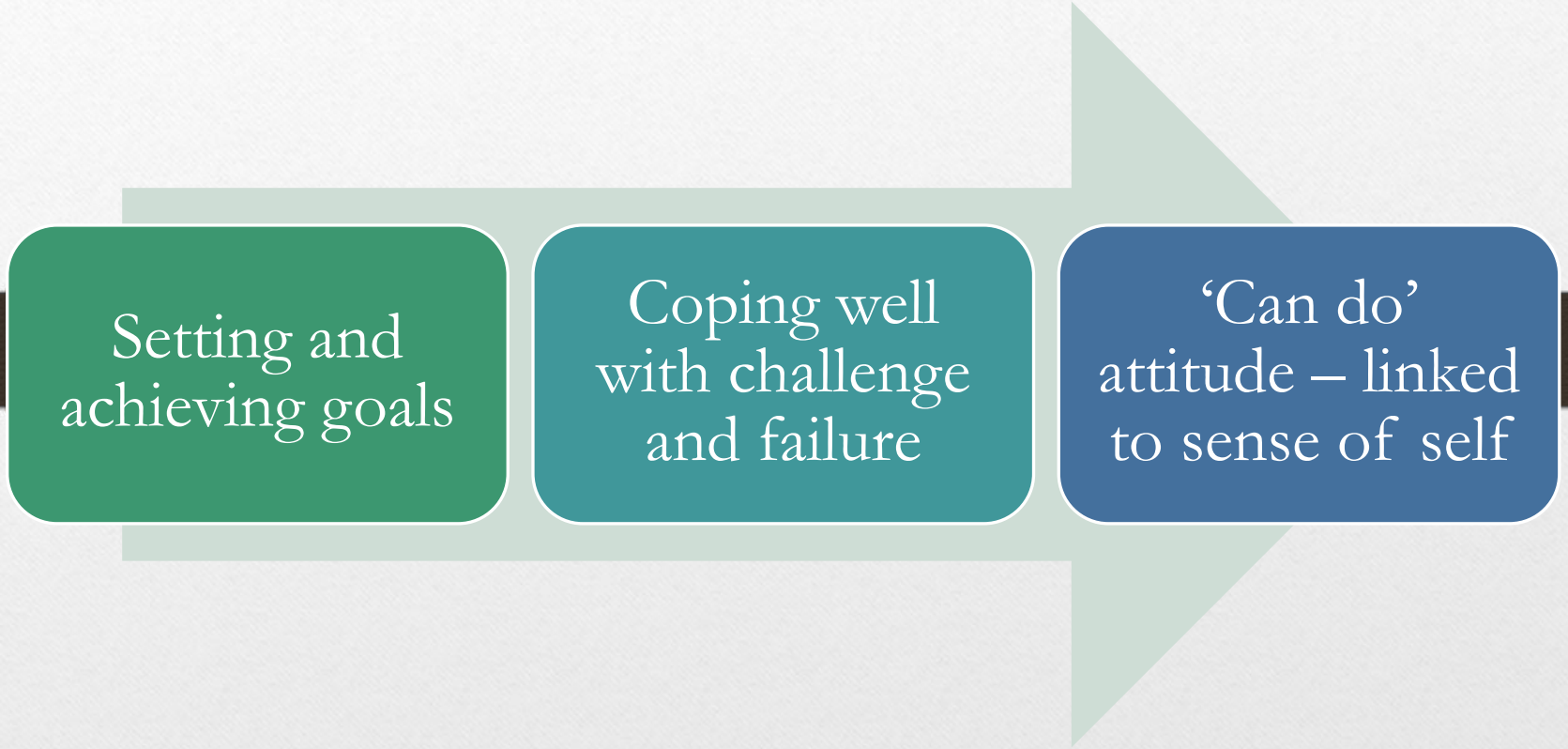
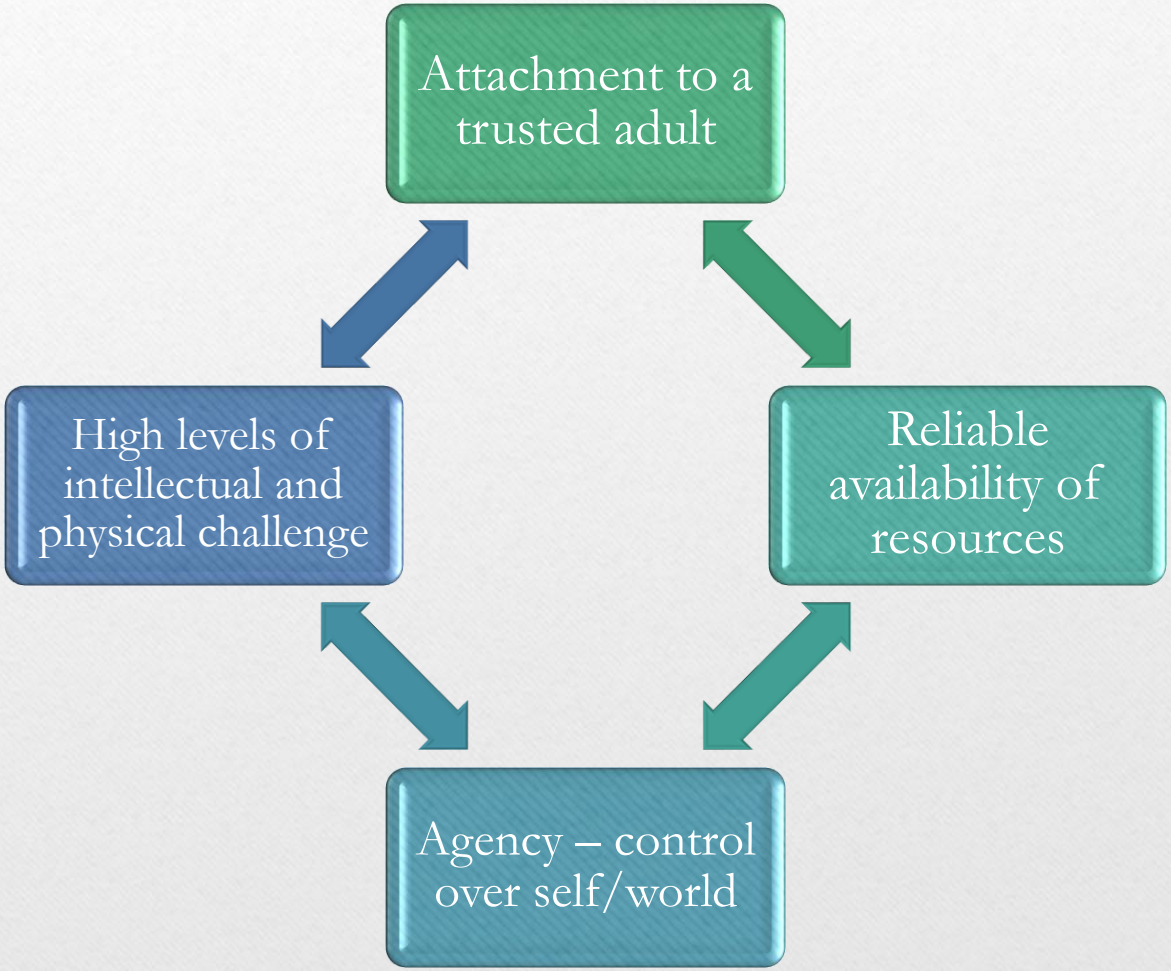
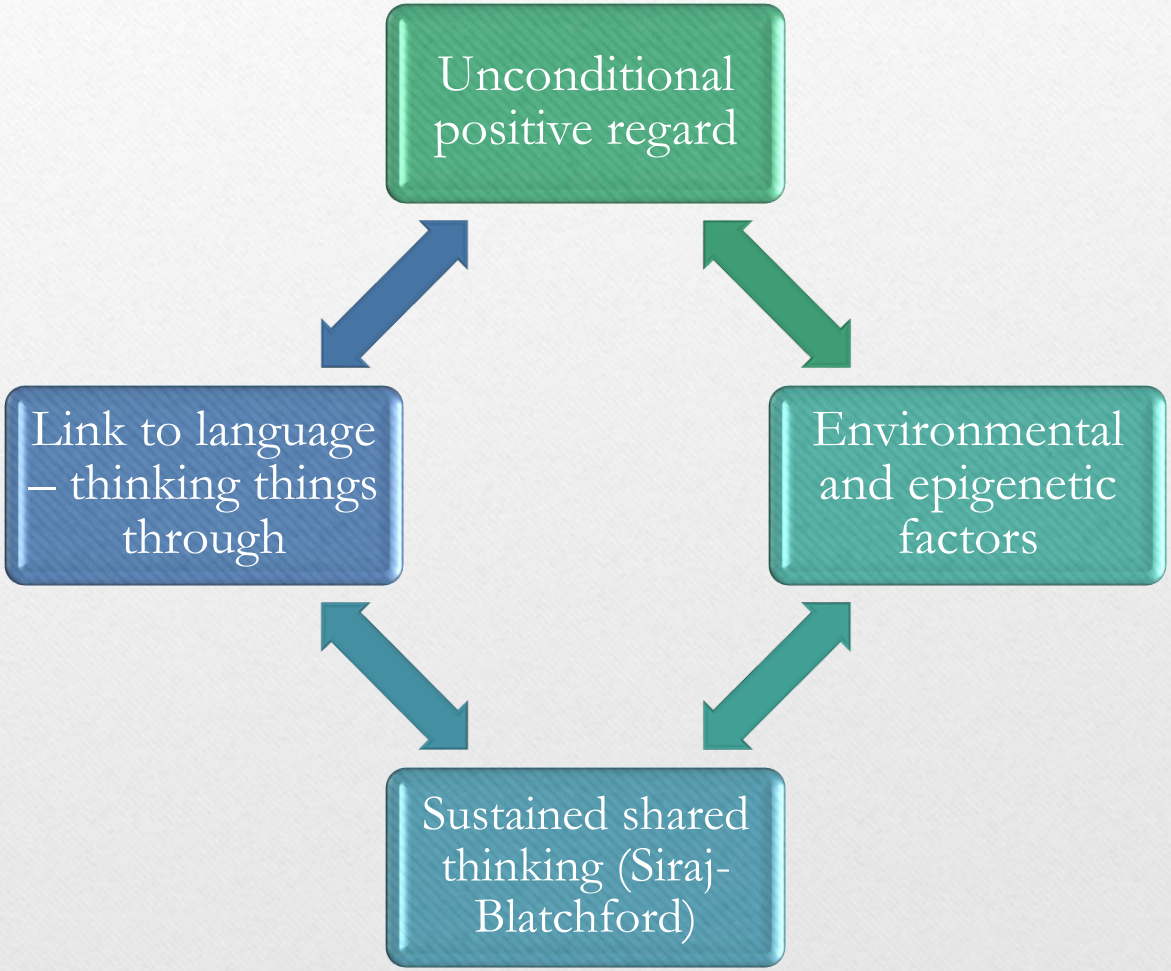


How Does Self-Regulation Develop?



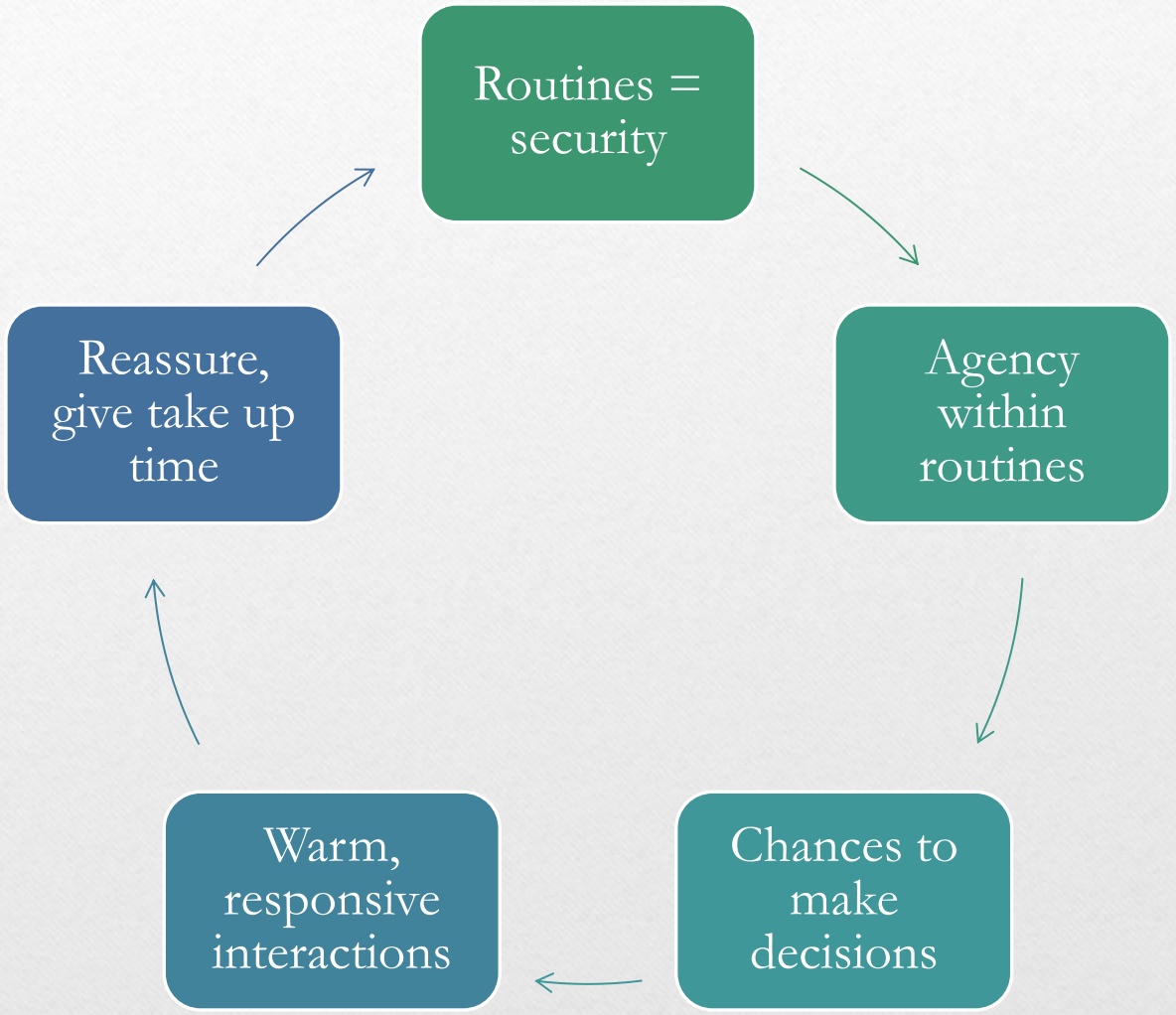
How Does Self-Regulation Develop?



What is Co-Regulation? Climbing Muddy Banks …

- ✓ Modelling, soothing, coaxing, supporting
- ✓ Physical and emotional supports – scaffolding
- ✓ Warm and responsive caregiver interactions
- ✓ Working together to help them regulate
- ✓ Calming and supporting learners when they get dysregulated – regulating yourself

From Co-Regulation to Self-Regulation



Developing Self-Regulation: Interoception and Emotional Control

- ✓ Autonomic nervous system enables interoception
- ✓ Responses to information from our body/organs (via the vagus nerve) – interpreted as 'feelings'
- ✓ Gives a 'sense of self' – what am I 'feeling'?
- ✓ Includes hunger, temperature, pain, etc.
- ✓ Builds awareness of external inputs, feeding into behaviours: am I hot, cold, tired?

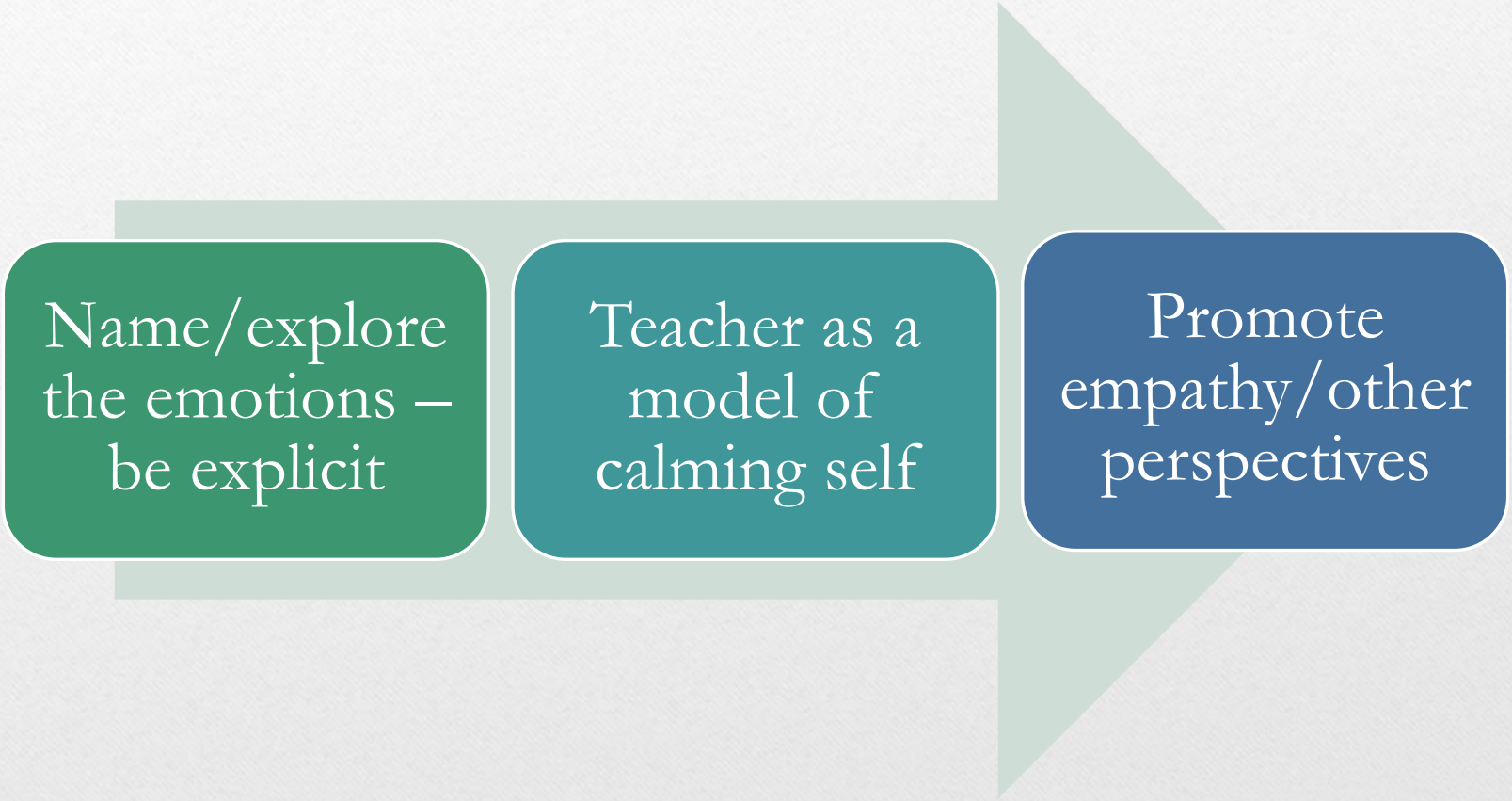
Developing Self-Regulation: Interoception and Emotional Control

- ✓ Responsive caregiving helps to organise this system
- ✓ Stress and trauma disrupt it: stress reactions to the environment trigger defensive mechanisms
- ✓ Encourage thinking and 'going inside' the body
- ✓ Talk through feelings – being explicit
- ✓ Where do I feel this in my body?
- ✓ What is the source and cause of this emotion?

Developing Self-Regulation: Interoception and Emotional Control

- ✓ Tone of voice and prosody trigger the part of the brain which manages emotions
- ✓ 'Serve and return' conversations which mirror the learner create a sense of synchrony
- ✓ Remove tone to calm a situation/a dysregulated learner
- ✓ Model the self-calming process, narrating how you are going about this (metacognitive)

Developing Self-Regulation: Supporting Emotional Regulation



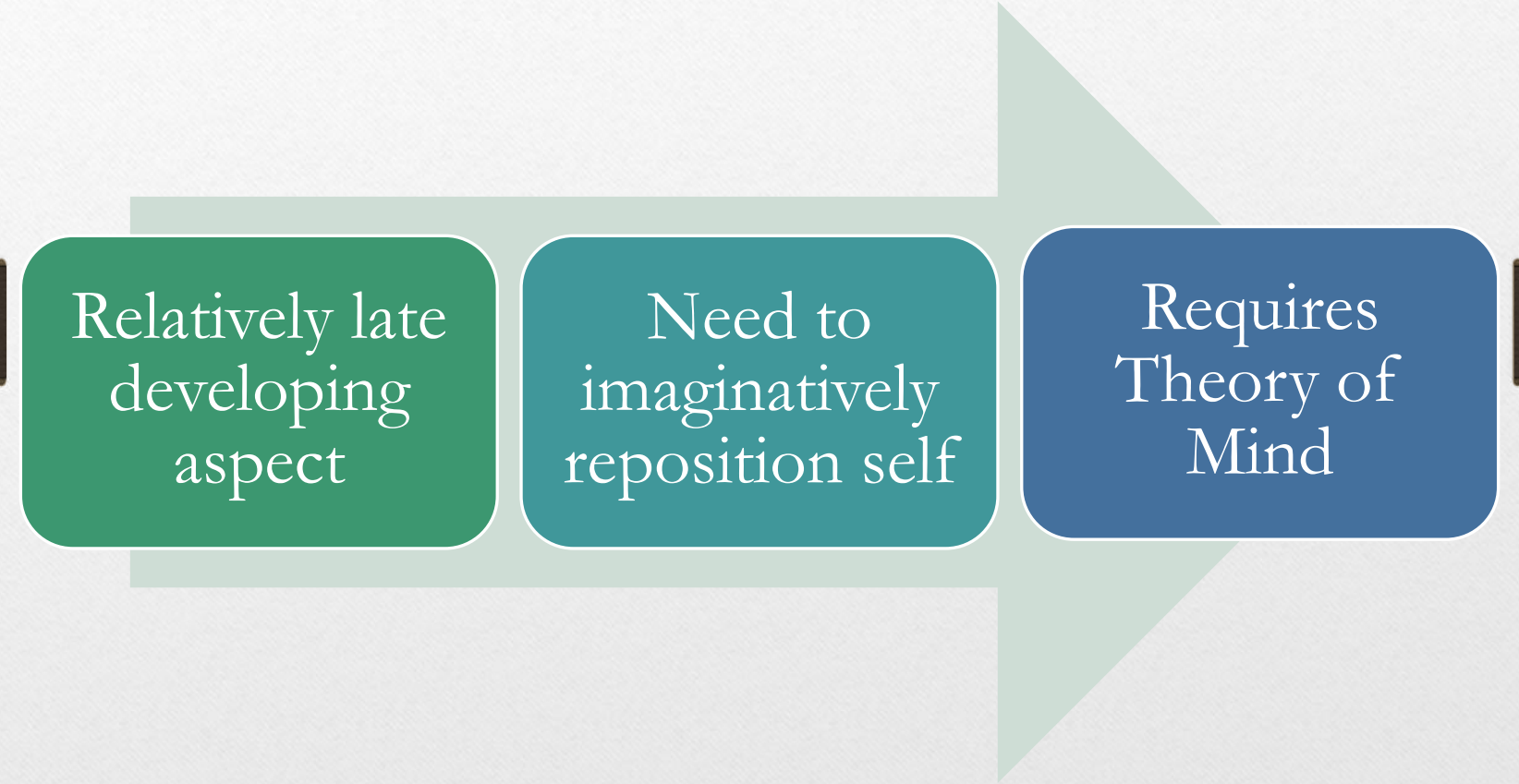
Developing Self-Regulation: Supporting Emotional Regulation

Help learners understand: how do I take action?

'Real time' check-ins – touch cheeks, check heart rate

Offer vocabulary: is it a 'big' or a 'small' pain?

Developing Self-Regulation: Understanding Empathy



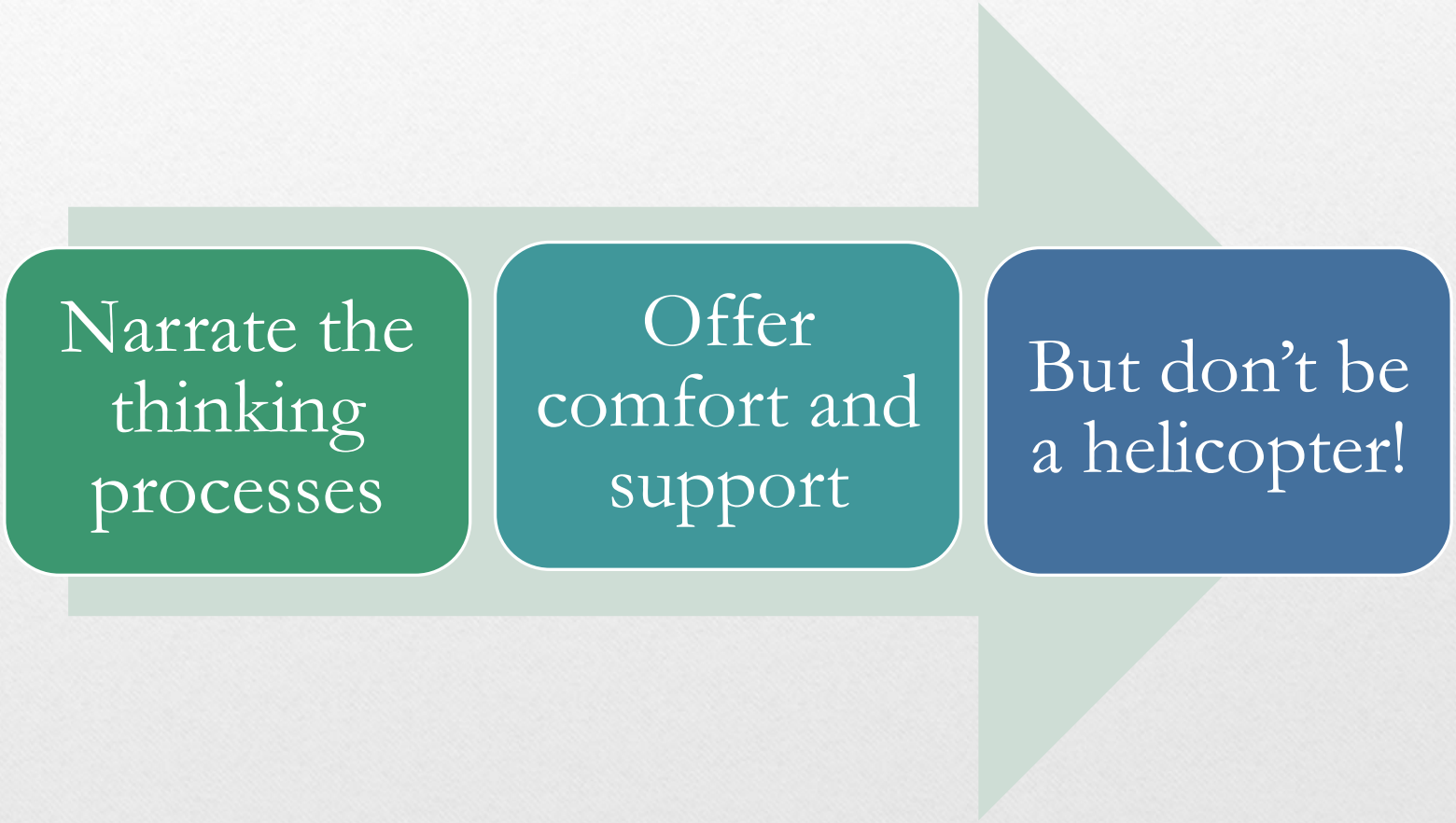
Developing Self-Regulation: Understanding Empathy

- ✓ Practise facial expressions associated with emotions – trigger 'emotion' part of the brain
- ✓ Responsive approach, modelling empathy
- ✓ Emphasise rational explanations and moral consequences
- ✓ Focus on what we have in common with others
- ✓ Positive trait attribution – positive, prosocial traits are 'part of your nature'

Developing Self-Regulation: Goal Setting

- ✓ Encourage children to set their own goals
- ✓ Adults help them discuss and identify purpose of the goal
- ✓ Break the goal down into steps: 'goal ladder'
- ✓ Identify potential obstacles: 'If … [obstacle] then I will … [way to overcome it]'
- ✓ Create visual memory aids to support step completion

Developing Self-Regulation: Encouraging Resilience



How Not to be a Helicopter

- ✓Stop, pause, observe
- ✓Give 'take up' time – to learners, to yourself
- ✓Risk assess but plan for challenge: what's the worst that can happen?
- ✓Leave spaces to fail
- ✓Build independence: give strategies, question tokens, 3 before me, use checklists

Developing Self-Regulation: Building Impulse Control

- ✓Proprioceptive input calms/organises the brain
- ✓Poor proprioception: jump, crash, grab, push
- ✓Pre-empt issues to avoid triggering fear/panic
- ✓Aim to hand behaviour over to the learners
- ✓'Heavy work': dig, pour, roll, cut, push, carry
- ✓Oral activities: chew, crunch, blow bubbles

Developing Self-Regulation: Building Impulse Control

- Look for chances to learn to wait
- Pitch the level of challenge higher than you think
- Always consider: who is doing the work?

Developing Self-Regulation: Building Impulse Control

- ✓The 'Batman Effect' – zoom out, separate from the situation (self-distancing)
- ✓Encourage 'pulling back from an impulse'
- ✓Activities which involve freezing, waiting, moving on a signal, stealth mode (imaginative repositioning)
- ✓Curriculum activities that happen over time – growing, decaying, changes with the seasons

Developing Self-Regulation: Coping with Challenge/Failure

Praise agency rather than attainment

Give learners agency to repair mistakes

Trust: especially the hardest to trust

Learning to Fail Well

- ✓Teacher as model of coping with failures
- ✓Deliberate mistakes – learners to spot them
- ✓Don't immediately 'repair' errors
- ✓Be aware of your own discomfort; sit with it
- ✓Do fast, messy activities
- ✓It's okay to throw it away!

Where is Regulation in the Curriculum? Empathy

- ✓ Imaginative repositioning: stories, role play, drama, puppets
- ✓ Caring for others – preparing food, visits e.g. to care home, community activities
- ✓ Caring for living things – school dog, garden, allotment, chickens
- ✓ PSED/PSHE/Citizenship/Assemblies

Where is Regulation in the Curriculum? Resilience

On a residential visit, Year 6 pupils confronted their fears as they crawled for some time, in pitch darkness, through a warren of underground passageways. They relied on adult instructions and the encouragement of friends, who were also nervous, to reach the end. One girl's responses encapsulated those of many. Arriving back in the daylight, she was delighted at what she had achieved. Her belief in herself rocketed and she soon went back underground, this time without adult help. The experience developed the pupils' confidence and trust in each other, while also honing their skills in giving precise and encouraging instructions.

In 2011, a senior HMI confirmed publicly that this report was the most compelling piece of evidence he had ever seen because learning was improved in all cases.

https://ltl.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/learning-outside-the-classroom.pdf / https://schoolsweek.co.uk/how-much-does-ofsted-really-value-outdoor-learning/

What skills and attitudes are they learning and developing?

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The Role of the Adults: Adaptations and Adjustments

- ✓ Adapting the environment/changing the place
- ✓ Adapting the curriculum/timetable/routines to better support learners
- ✓ Supporting understanding through visuals (e.g. timetables)
- ✓ Other supports for understanding - Makaton
- ✓ An ongoing conversation about meeting needs

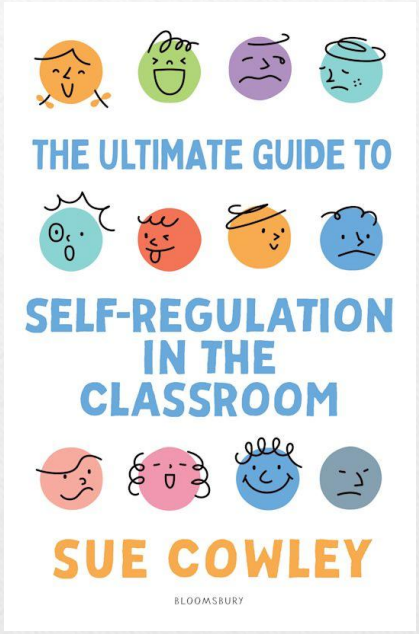
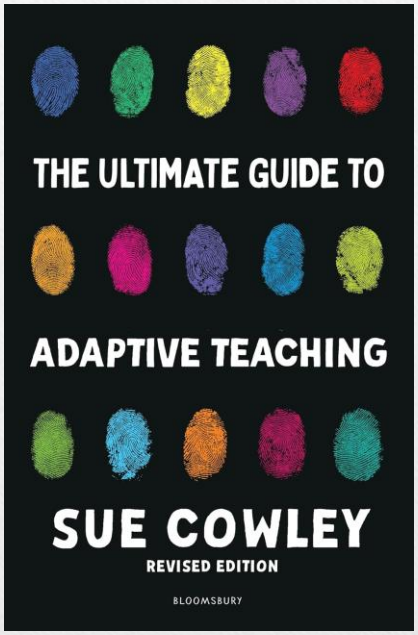
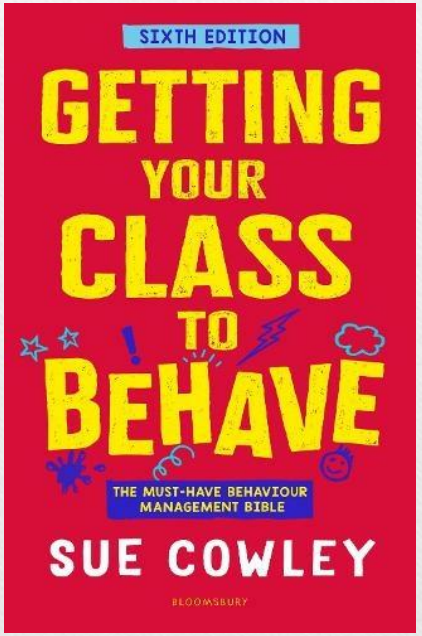
The Role of the Adults: Sustained Shared Thinking

✓Communication for sustained shared thinking:

- Elaborating … *Can you tell me more ..?*
- Re-capping … *So you began with ...*
- Own experiences … *I remember when I …*
- Clarifying … *So you think that …?*
- Suggesting … *How about if we try …?*

The Role of the Adults: Sustained Shared Thinking

✓Communication for sustained shared thinking:

- Reminding … *Don't forget that you …*
- Encouraging … *You worked really hard on that, now could you …?*
- Speculating … *I wonder what would happen if …?*
- Alternative Viewpoints … *Let's pretend we are … what might we do …?*

Any Questions?