

STEAM: A Values Aligned Approach to Implementing Extinction

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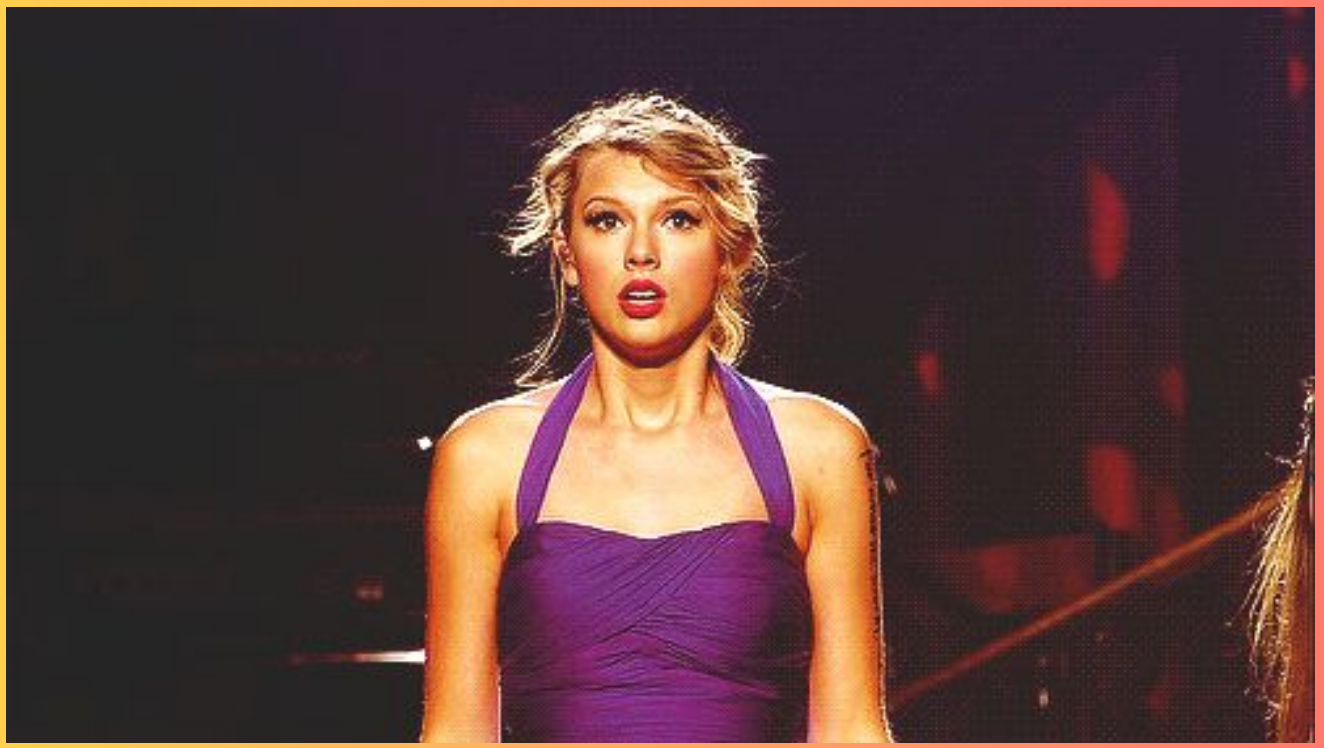


Do you continue to have behavioral challenges even when trying your best to set up a compassionate environment?

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You might have a boundary challenge



What is a boundary?



NOT A BOUNDARY
(A DEMAND)

There is a key difference between what we want someone to do (not a boundary but a demand)



A BOUNDARY
(A LIMIT)

and what we cannot allow someone to do and they will not be happy when we say no, you cant have/do that

You are not alone



The Clinical Reality: Escalations are not rare.

Based on a survey of 114 clinicians managing behavioral challenges.

94%

of clients escalate as a result of boundaries

62%

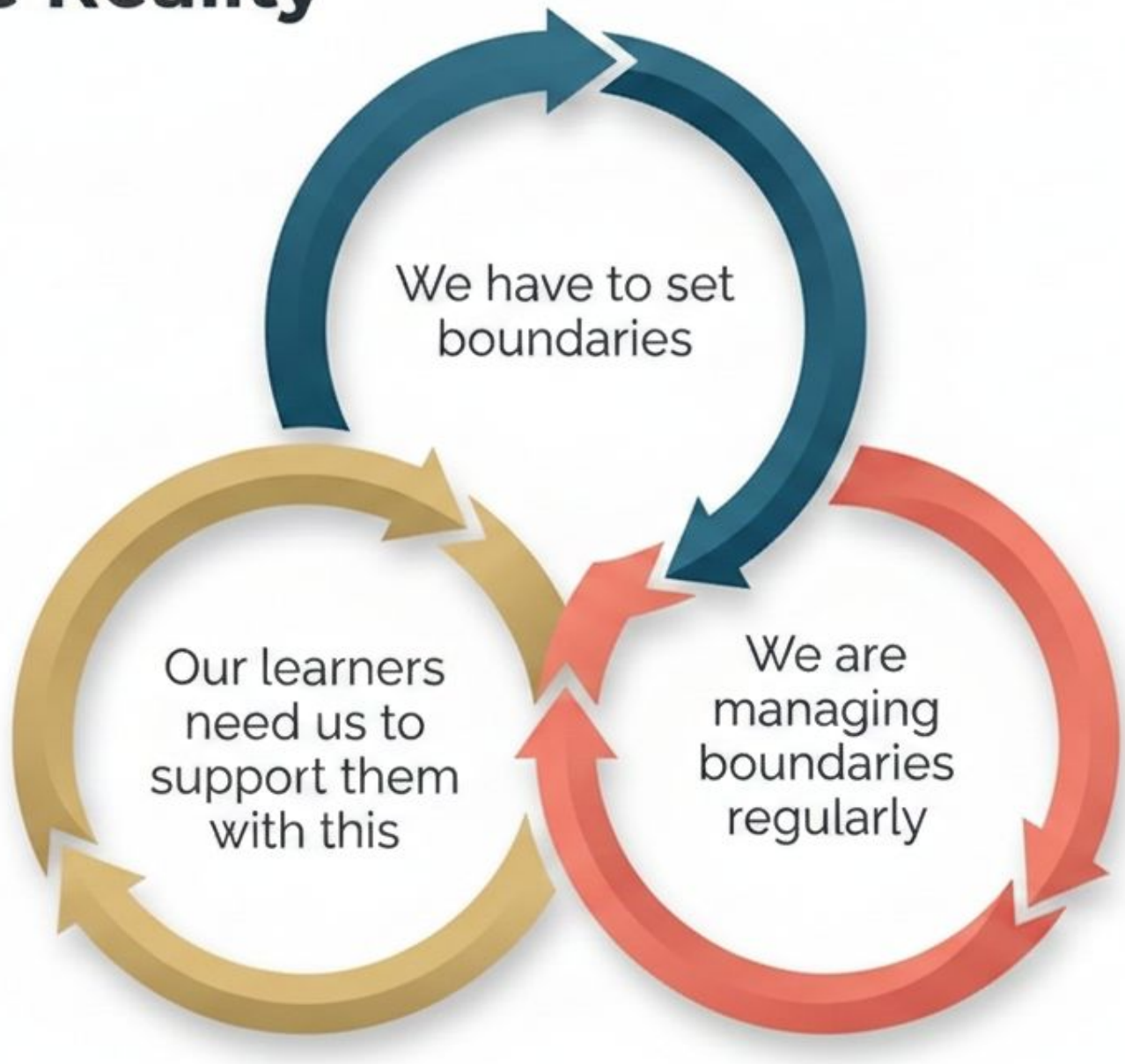
of practitioners are currently managing boundary escalations

72%

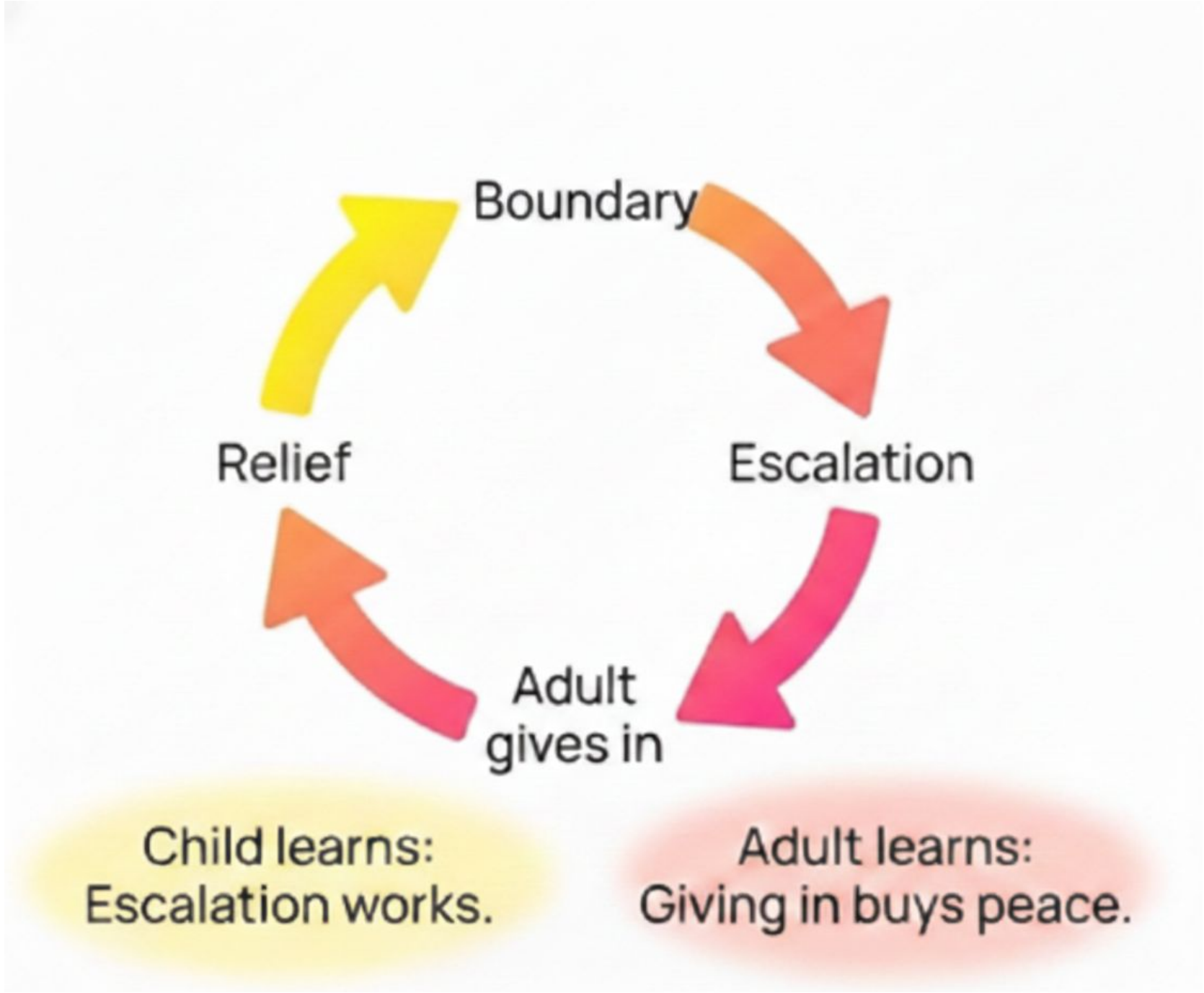
have zero training in compassionate boundary support

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The Baseline Reality



Boundaries function as extinction


Boundary
Escalation
Adult
gives in
Relief
Child learns:
Escalation works.
Adult learns:
Giving in buys peace.

Challenges with extinction



Removal of reinforcement + emotional withdrawal = traditional extinction

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Emotional invalidation

Ignoring

Inadvervent reinfocement delivery

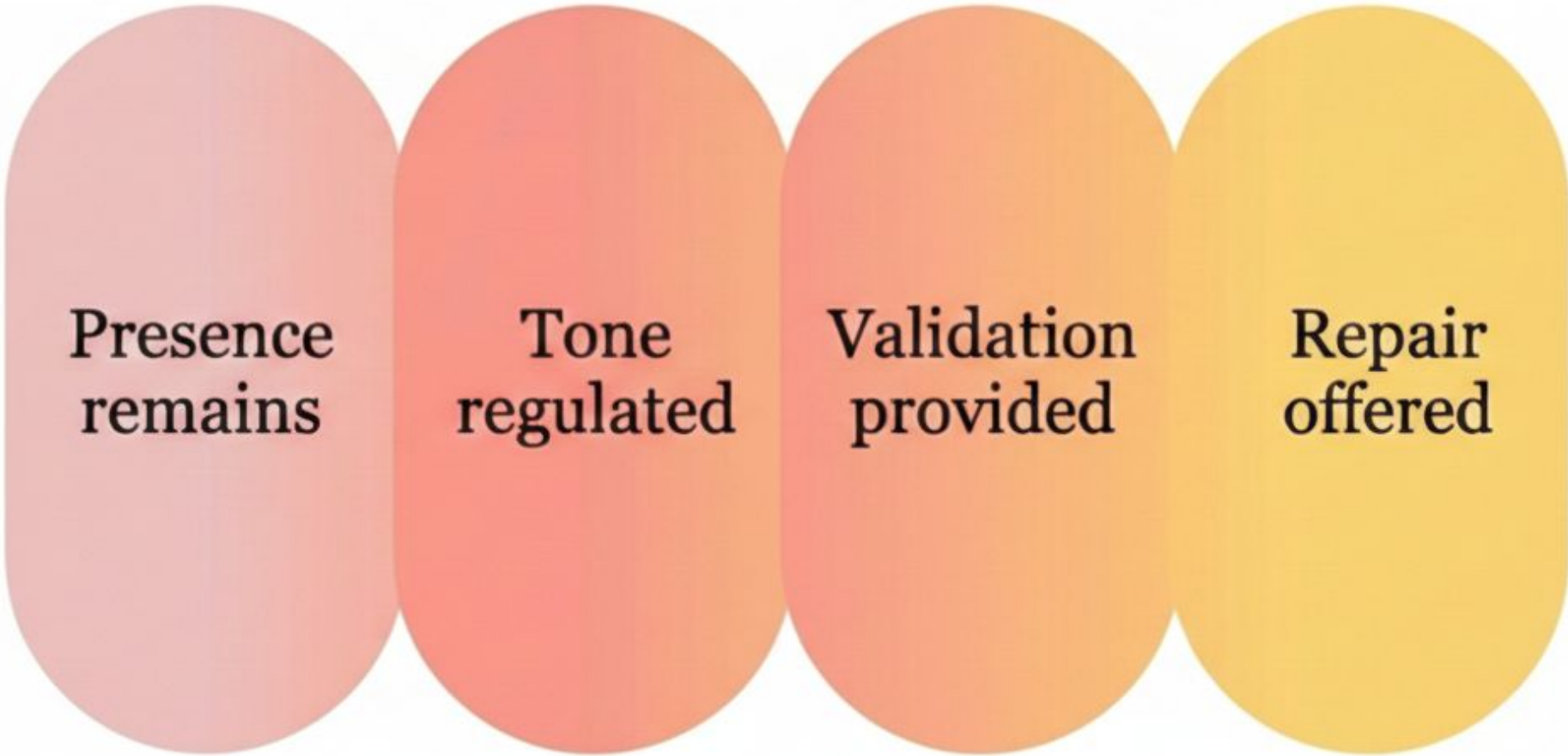
Fidelity challenges

The paradigm shift



Trauma-Informed Extinction.

Removal of reinforcement + regulated presence



Extinction and Psychological Flexibility

Boundaries Support Psychological Flexibility

> "Psychological flexibility is the ability to experience discomfort and continue goal-directed behavior." (Hayes et al., 2012)



Every boundary
is an opportunity
to practice flexibility.

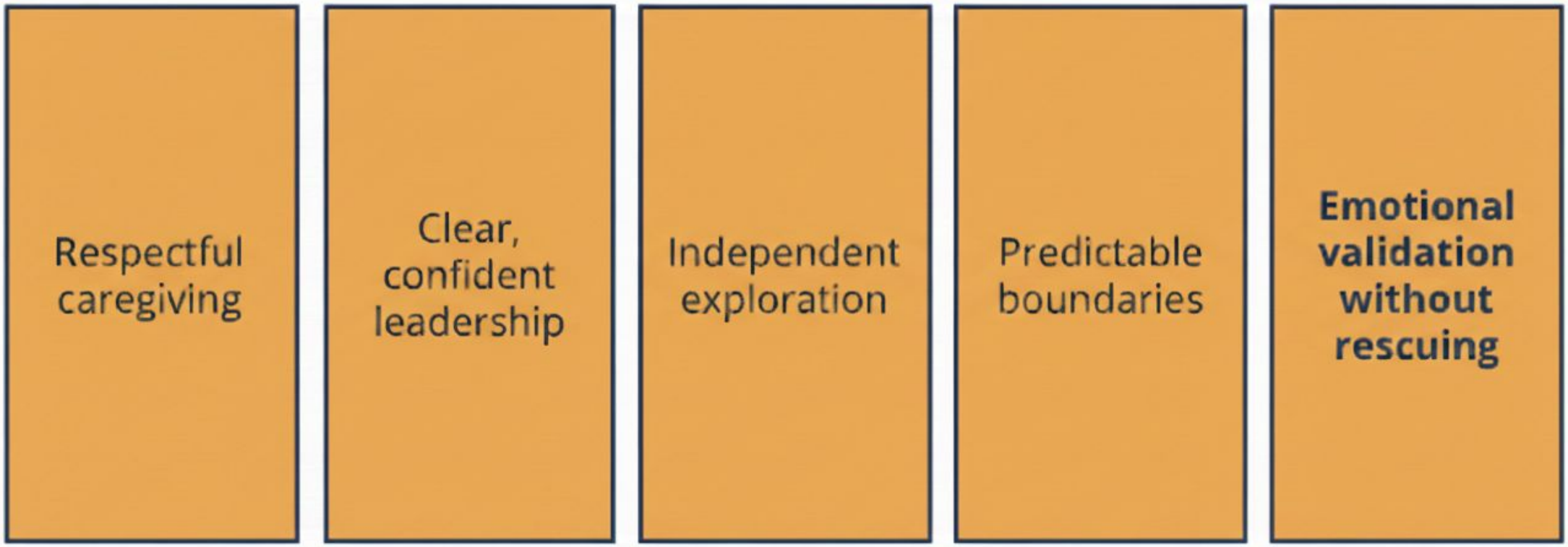
RIE parenting philosphy

Magda Gerber

Janet Lansbury



The Five Core Principles of RIE



How does RIE support boundaries?



The hidden function of limit-testing

Boundary pushing is often an unconscious attempt to ask critical safety questions, not engage in defiance.

"Am I safe and cared for?"

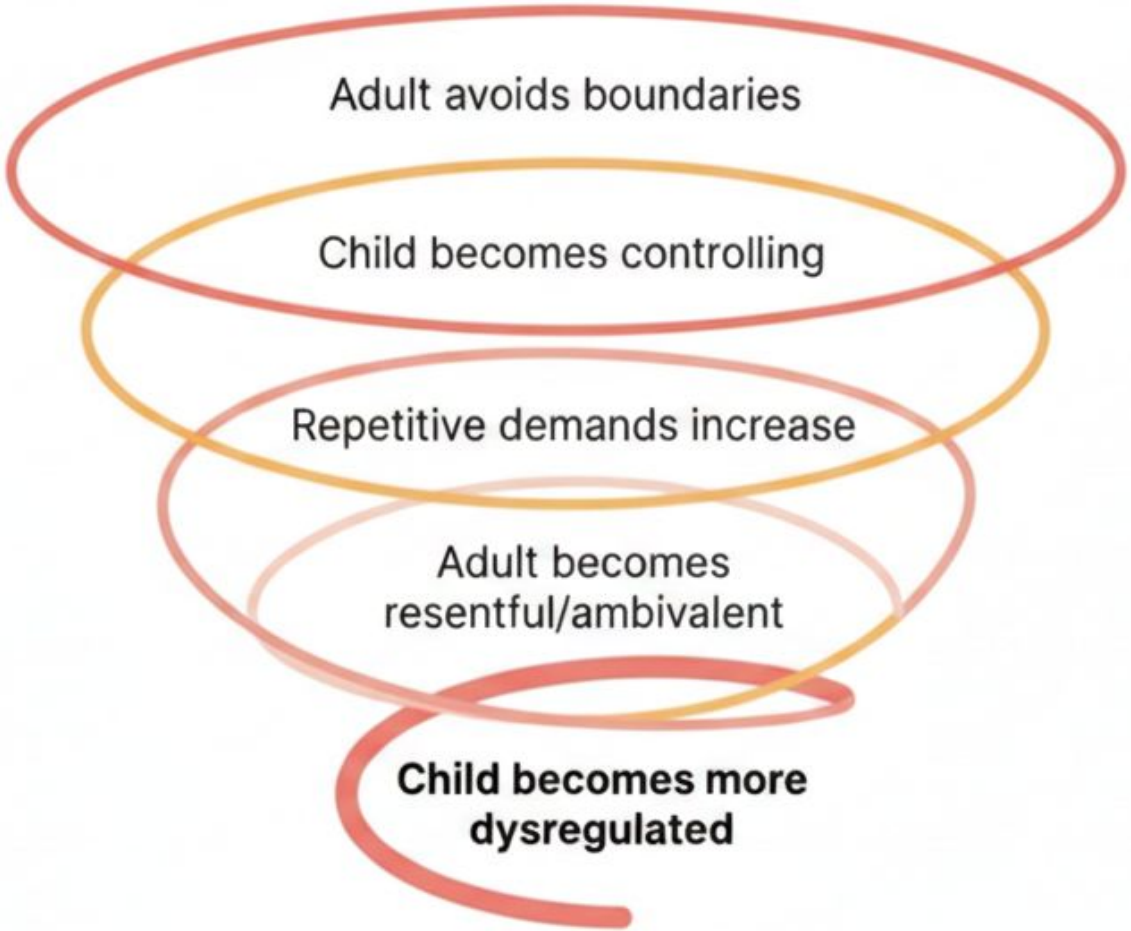
"Are you strong enough to lead me?"

"Are my feelings safe here?"

"Will you fall apart if I fall apart?"

The Paradox of Boundary Seeking

When boundaries are unclear, children become uncomfortable.



Where does the paradox end?



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Children do not feel free when they are controlling the adult

They may push, not because they want power, but because they need the adult to lead

The anchor in the storm



Children feel safest when adults are steady, clear, and emotionally available.

The boundary paradox indicates a need to set a boundary



We understand we need to set boundaries...
what happens when we do?

A big escalation.

But this time, we meet that process with a trauma-informed, regulated presence.

If boundaries are necessary...

If extinction is unavoidable...

If flexibility is the skill...

THEN we need a delivery system.

Introducing the STEAM Protocol

A script for holding boundaries kindly. Respectful containment: A clear ‘no’ paired with emotional safety.

S Set a firm & kind boundary

T Tact from their perspective

E Empathize & validate

A Allow non-judgmental time

M Move on when ready

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What STEAM Solves

- reduces escalation during boundaries
- prevents coercion cycles
- strengthens tolerance skills
- protects rapport and dignity
- supports long-term flexibility and independence



Clinical Distinction:

This protocol specifically represents withholding a reinforcer (not withholding attention).

Establishing Rule Governed Behavior

Definition: Behavior that is under the control of a verbally mediated rule; behavior insensitive to immediate contingencies.

By using consistent language throughout STEAM, we can transition from:

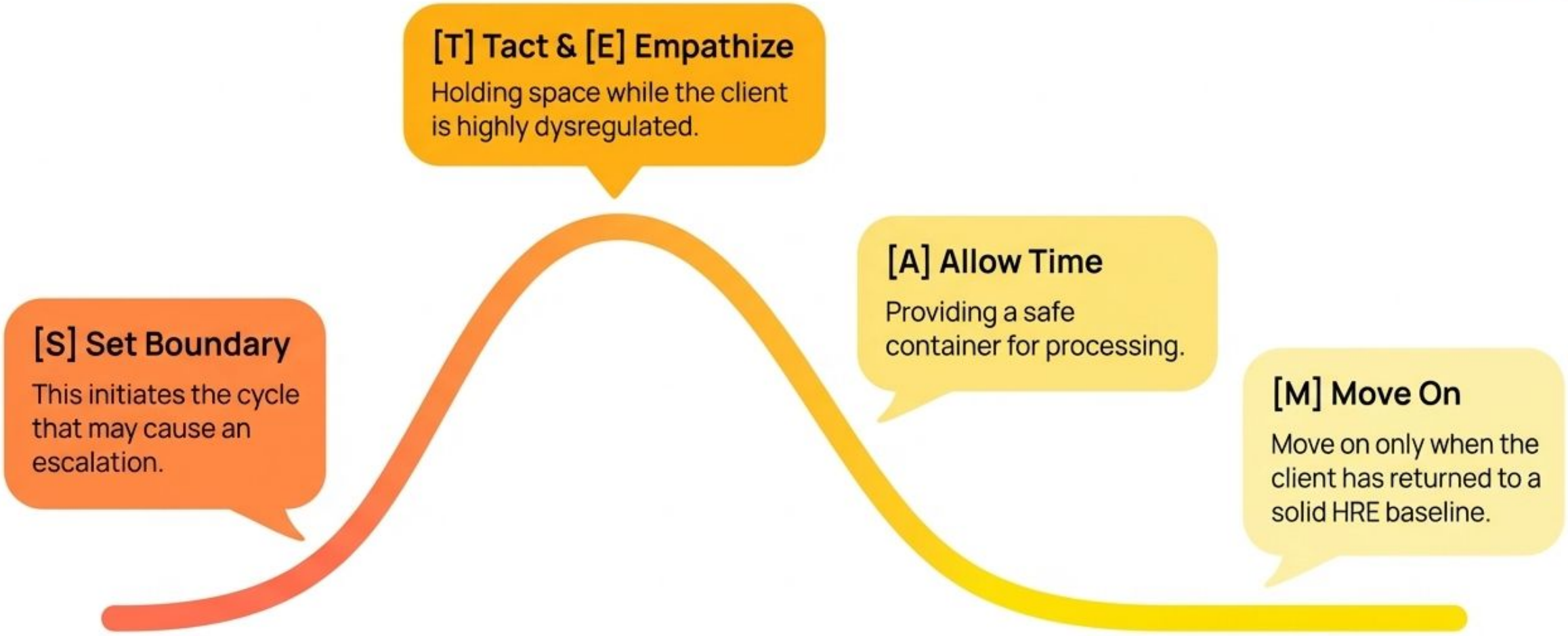
⚠ Contingency Based

Holding the boundary in the face of difficult reactions

To a Rule

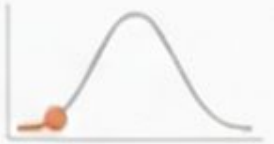
Statement of unavailability and acceptance to move on with no direct contingencies delivered

Mapping the Intervention to the Emotion



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[S] Set Firm & Kind Boundaries



Practitioner Mindset

1. Set firm & kind boundaries
2. Be clear and early
3. Do not be afraid
4. Stay confident and be prepared for the negative reaction.

Practitioner Script

I won't let you...

This is a hard no.

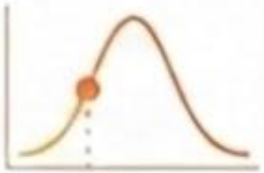
This is not an option.

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Let out STEAM not an eruption



[T] Tact: The Objective Observer



Practitioner Mindset

- Focus on the environment and what is happening.
- Describe reality without adding judgment or demands.

=

I hear...

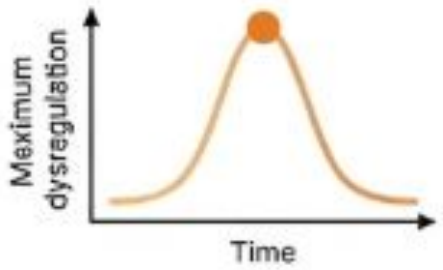
I see...

You are telling me...

It seems as though you are [emotions].

[E] Empathize & Validate

Validation: The Connection Bridge



I am sorry.

That is tough.

I know you don't like it.

What a bummer.

I am here for you.

Empathy vs Sympathy



The Co-Regulation Cheat Sheet

Setting the Boundary (The No)	Tact (The Mirror)	Empathy (The Connection)
This is a hard no.	I see... / I hear...	That is tough.
I won't let you.	You are telling me...	What a bummer.
This is not an option.	It seems as though you are...	I know you don't like it.
		I am here for you.

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[A] Allow Non-Judgemental Time



Be a "Safe Anchor"

Stay steady, calm, and regulated while they process feelings and emotions. Keep things safe.

Sit In It

Don’t rush the process; allow time to sit through the moment together and process. Continue to provide empathy

Non-Contingent Access

Provide safe, pre-available de-escalation tools iPad, stuffy, rituals, sensory input, preferred attention, make it client specific

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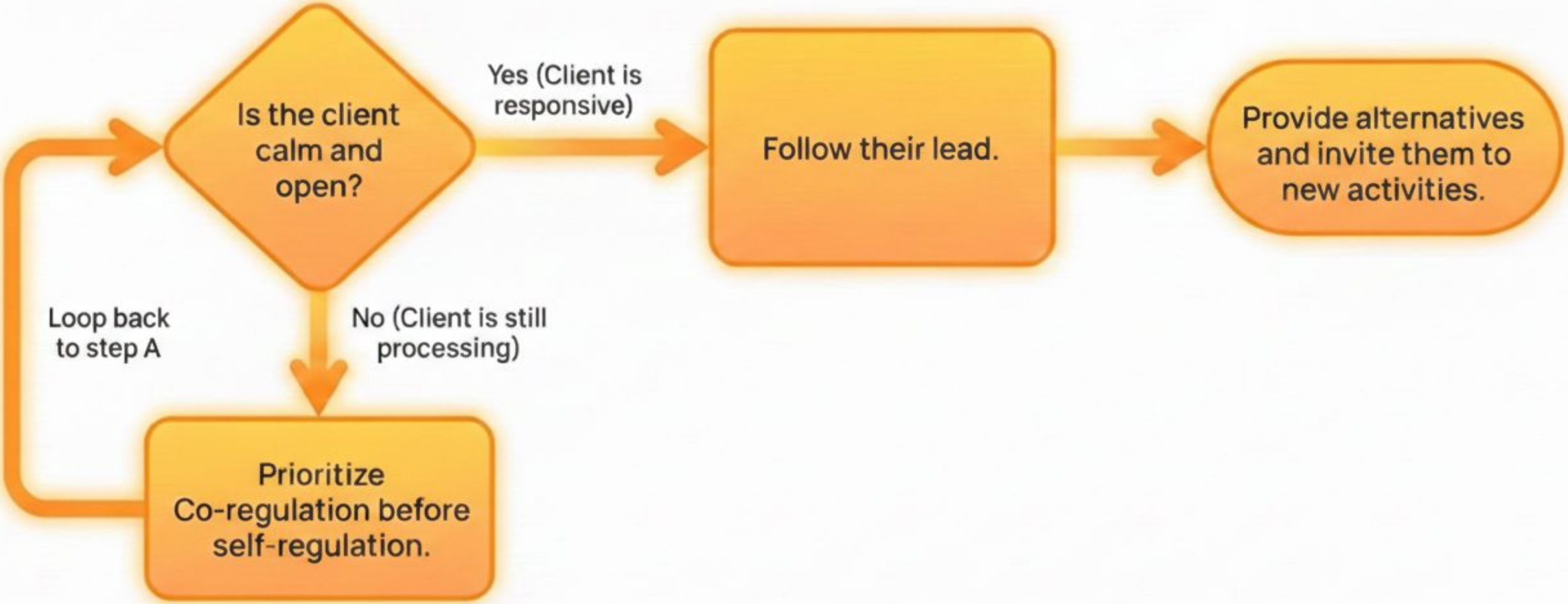
The Framework Shift

Discipline	Understanding
Restrict access	Open access
Stern and judgemental	Continuous empathy
Attention withdrawal	Coregulation

Non-judgemental time is the bridge back to baseline.

By prioritizing empathy and unrestricted access over discipline in moments of crisis, we build trust, accelerate recovery, and support long-term emotional regulation.

[M] Move On When They Are Ready

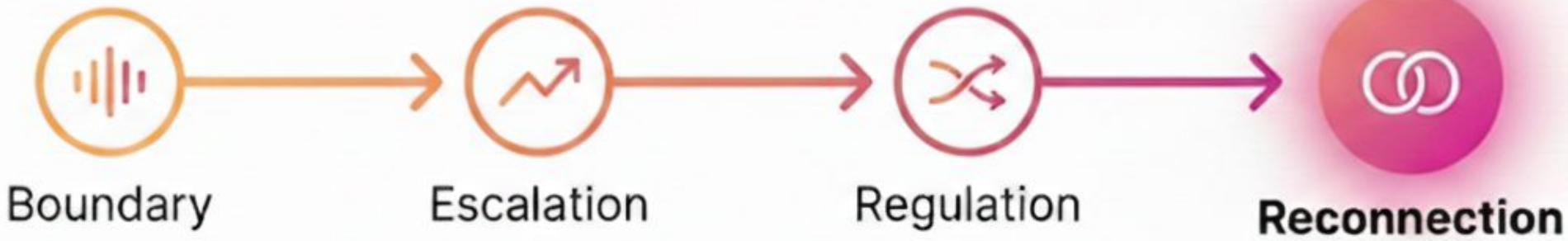


You may cycle through the STEAM process a few times before you r ready to move on

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[M] Move On: Repair is the Reinforcement

This is how you shape tolerance.



The Learner Contacts:



Emotion does not control the adult.



Emotion does not change the boundary.



Emotion ends in safety and connection.



Recovery is reinforcing.

What [M] Communicates to the Child: You're safe again. We're still together. The boundary didn't break our relationship. You can return to life after disappointment.

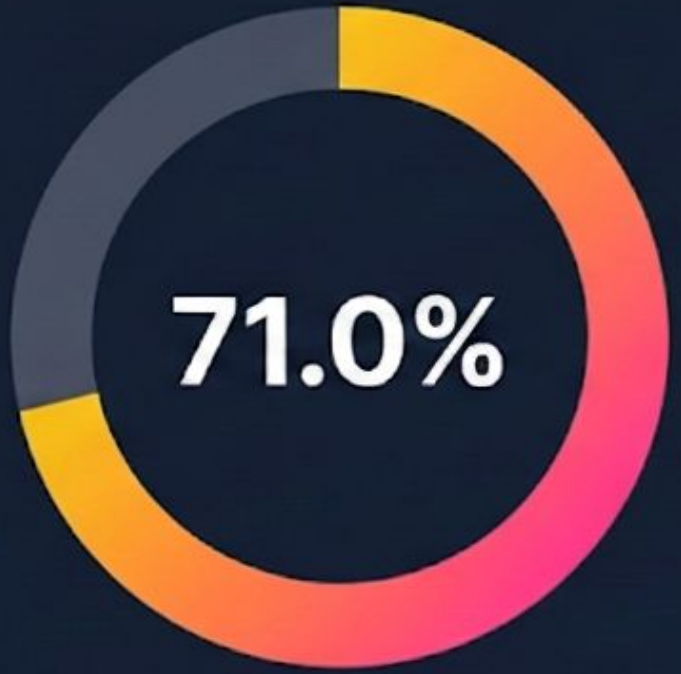
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The only way out is through

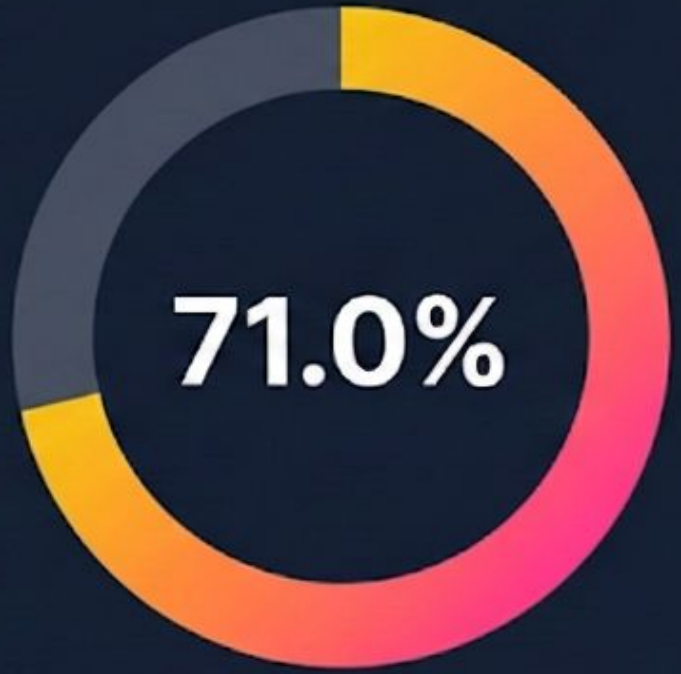
Co-regulation is about enduring the emotion safely, together

The 71% Consensus

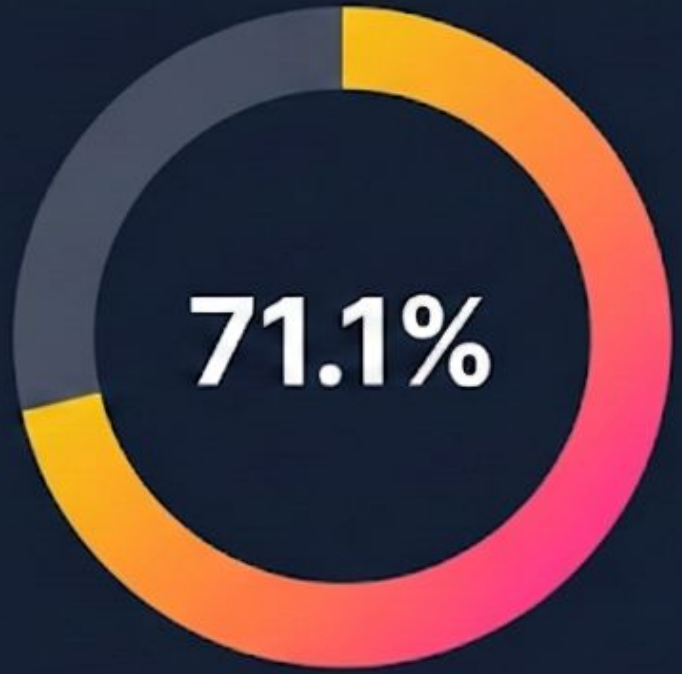
Across 114 practitioners, two different methodologies, and three distinct measurement criteria, the results are remarkably consistent. Exactly 71% of our clinicians rate these innovations as highly successful.



STEAM Acceptability
(Ratings of 4 or 5)



Boundary Confidence
(Ratings of 4 or 5)



Boundary Effectiveness
(Ratings of 4 or 5)

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The Final Takeaway

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Boundaries are not the opposite of compassion. Boundaries are **compassion** delivered with **clarity**.

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