



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.

Managing challenging behaviour with children in kinship care

Al Coates MBE





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About Al Coates MBE

Al (he/him) is an independent social worker, who supports kinship carers to manage challenging and aggressive behaviour – a subject he's co-authored several publications about.

Al and his wife have extensive personal experience, having adopted three children themselves in 1999, then becoming foster carers to two more in 2008. They went on to adopt those children and their sibling in 2013. In the same year, Al qualified as a social worker and has worked in fostering since.

He has used his own experience to campaign and raise issues around adoption and fostering, working since 2015 with the Department of Education. Al was awarded an MBE in 2018 for services to adoption, and has founded/co-hosts the Adoption & Fostering Podcast.





For family or friends who
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We are Kinship. The leading
kinship care charity in England
and Wales.

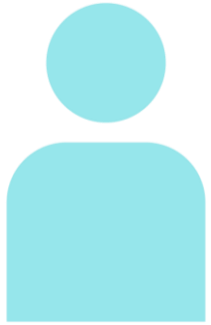
By supporting, advising and
informing kinship carers, and
campaigning for fairer services,
we are changing lives, changing
the system.



Working together



For family or friends who
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Confidentiality



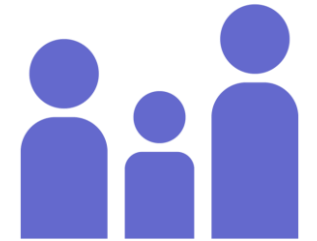
**Duration of
the session**



**One voice
and respect
for others**



**Disturbances
and mobiles**



**Sharing what
is comfortable**

Housekeeping



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.

1. About the room or online set-up
2. About the venue
3. Breaks

Agenda



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.

1. Develop effective strategies to reduce and manage challenging and/or aggressive behaviour
2. Develop understanding around why children's behaviour may be challenging and/or aggressive
3. Find and explore further information and support

Risk factors

Underlying causes for
children's challenging/
aggressive behaviour

What we mean by challenging behaviour



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.

- bullying
- defiance/refusal
- ignoring
- insults
- lying
- physical violence
- property destruction
- threats
- withdrawn

The impact of children's challenging/aggressive behaviour on carers



For family or friends who step up to raise a child.

- isolation/stigma/shame
- mental and physical ill health
- altered:
 - perception of self
 - perception of others
 - relationships with others
- trauma

Trauma definition

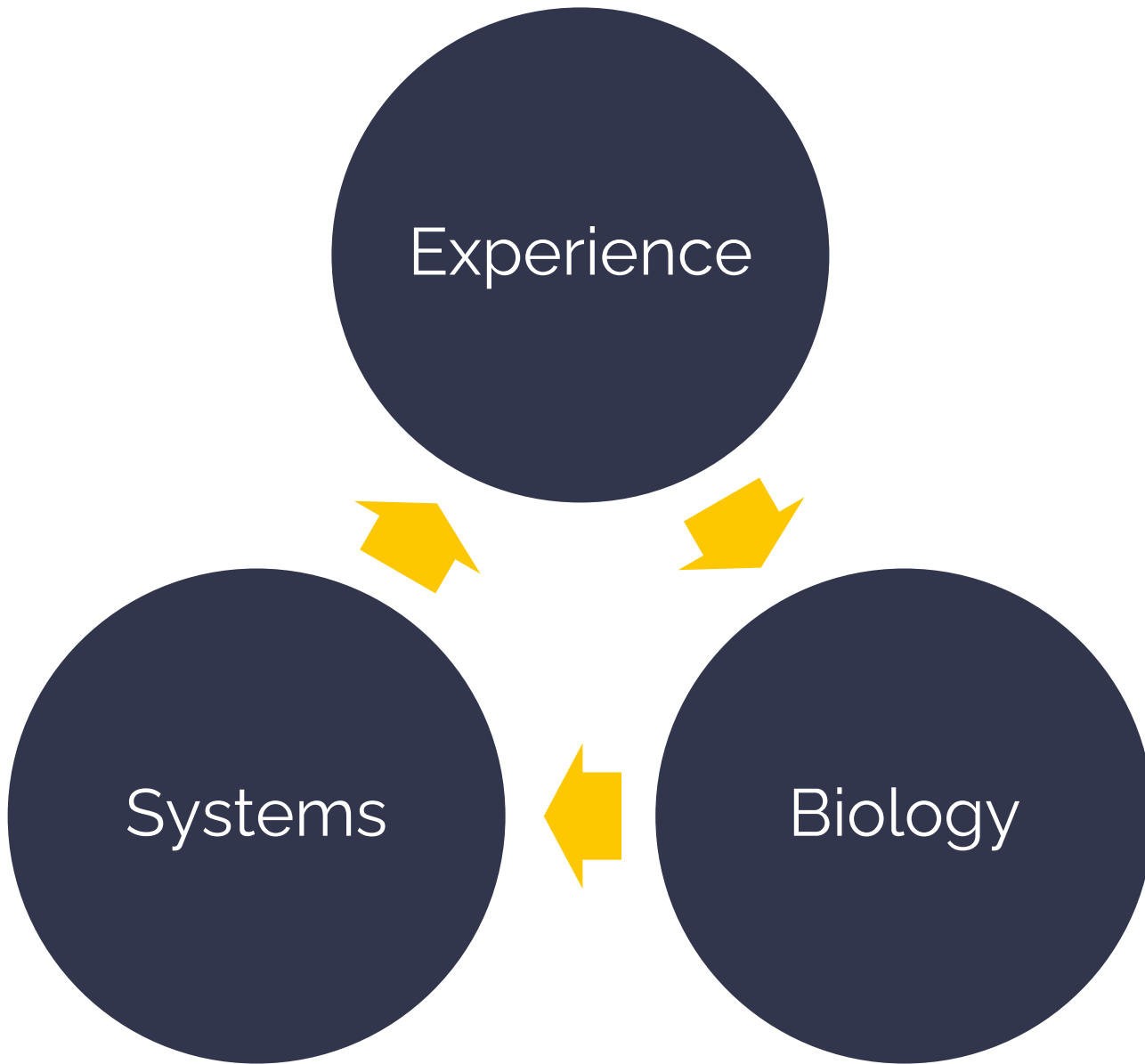


For family or friends who
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- when we experience very stressful, frightening or distressing events that are difficult to cope with, or out of our control
- this could be one incident, or an ongoing event happening over a long period of time



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.



"There is **never** just one cause for complex behaviour. 'Explanations' of a child's behaviour may be in terms of the individual (genetic/ biological and past experience), the family and wider society."

Gallagher

Our children's lived experiences



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.

- abuse
- adversity
- loss/separation
- pre-birth exposure to alcohol/drugs/trauma
- trauma

Our children's biology



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.

- ASD (autistic spectrum disorder)
- ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder)
- developmental trauma
- FASD (fetal alcohol spectrum disorder)
- insecure/complex attachments
- learning disability/ies
- PDA (pathological demand avoidance)
- sensory challenges

Window of tolerance

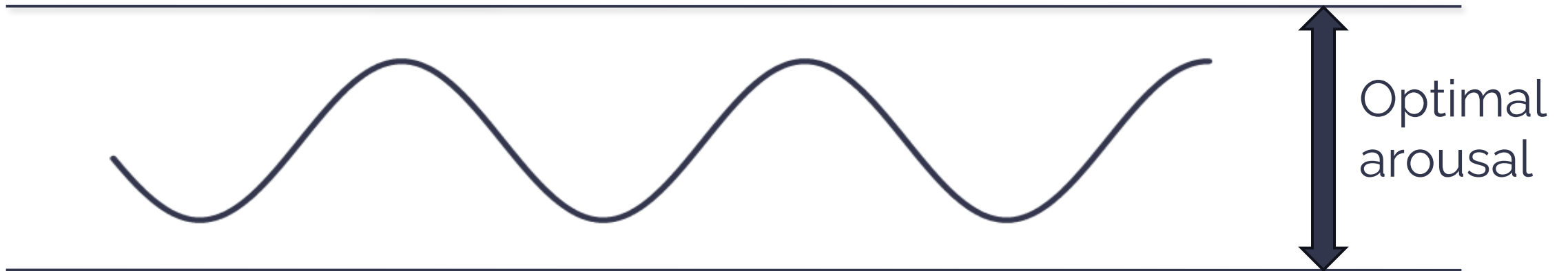
Dr Dan Siegel



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.

Hyper-arousal

angry anxious – defensive – dysregulated – fearful – panicked – hypervigilant



Hypo-arousal

lack of energy – numbness – no feelings – lack of energy – inability to think or respond
reduced physical movement – ashamed

Window of tolerance

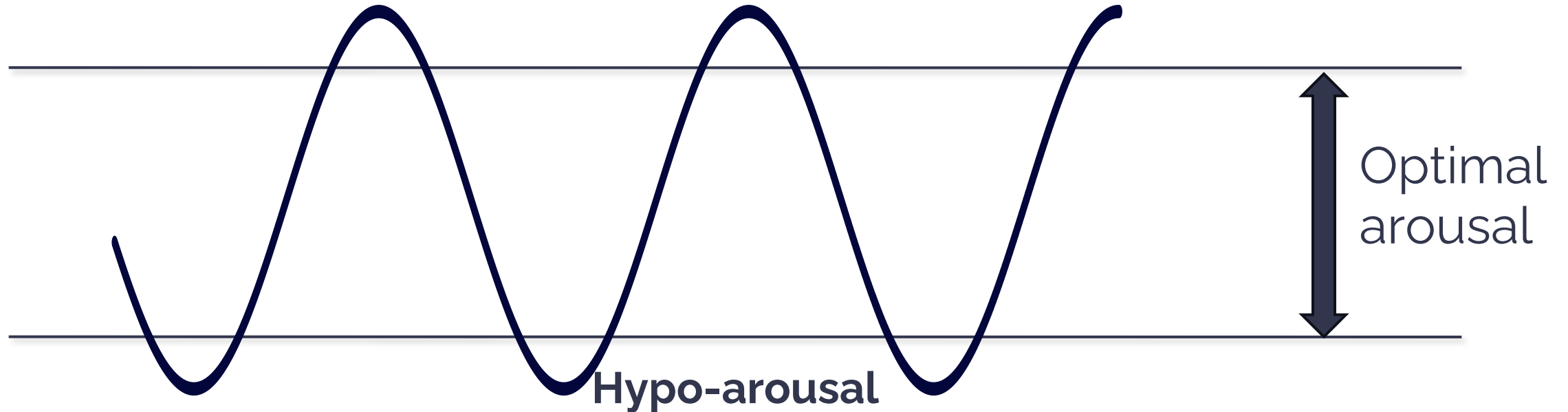
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The "**systems**" our children live in



For family or friends who
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- the 'family systems theory' states families function as a system – each member plays a role and follows certain rules
- based on these system roles, people are expected to interact with and respond to each other in certain ways

Systems our children live in

- classroom
- community
- family
- groups/clubs
- home
- school yards



For family or friends who step up to raise a child.

All with distinct boundaries, challenges, expectations, rules etc

What we can do

Effective strategies to
reduce and manage
challenging and/or
aggressive behaviour

Change what we can



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.

Take care of ourselves (self-care):

- mind
- body
- soul



De-escalate



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.

- avoid situations
- choose words carefully
- distract
- plan ahead/anticipate challenges
- speak words carefully
- step back from hazards
- pick your battles

Three Rs

Dr Bruce Perry



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.

REGULATE

Help child regulate – calm their
fight/flight/freeze responses

RELATE

Connect with them through an
attuned, sensitive relationship

REASON

Support child to reflect, learn,
remember, articulate, become
self-assured

Regulate

(Brainstem/mid – or the "sensory" brain)



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.

Help the child to regulate and calm their fight, flight or freeze. Offer soothing comfort and reassurance.

Empathise with and validate the child's feelings, so they are seen, heard and understood:

- choose words carefully
- be prepared/anticipate challenges
- step back

Relate

(Limbic - or the "emotional regulation" brain)



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.

Relate and connect with the child through an attuned, sensitive relationship. Acknowledge that this is unpleasant and:

- be together (physical proximity)
- offer comfort/food
- identify, acknowledge, empathise and validate feelings
- reassure that you're there when they're ready

Reason

(Cortical – or the "great human thinking" brain)



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.

Support the child to reflect, learn, remember, articulate and become self-assured:

- avoid "why" questions
- look for solutions or ways to avoid it happening again
- make sense of what happened
- not a time for consequences
- strike while the iron is cold
- teach self-regulation strategies



**Building and finding
support**

Support network



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.

Barriers to getting help:

- don't want to be a burden (or burden others)
- fear of:
 - being judged or rejected
 - being seen as a 'bad parent/carer'
 - child's reaction, disloyalty to child
 - role change (only comfortable supporting others)

Support network



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.

What do you need?

- buffer
- logistic supporters
- mediator
- mentor
- practical help
- protector
- sibling supporter

Support network



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.

What they offer:

- comfort and support
- challenge carer's thinking and behaviour (if needed)
- deter child from violence
- legitimise carer's position
- reduce isolation

Support from Kinship



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.

Advice service

0300 123 7015

kinship.org.uk/advice

Workshops and training

kinship.org.uk/events

Peer support groups

kinship.org.uk/groups



Support from Kinship



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.

Someone like me

kinship.org.uk/someone-like-me

Kinship Compass

kinship.org.uk/compass

Kinship Community

kinship.org.uk/community





**Any questions or
comments?**

Other external support



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.

- Al's website
- Beacon House – resources to understand children with complex needs
- CAPA First response – support for carers/parents of children with aggressive/challenging behaviour
- Beacon Family Services – resources to support children

References



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- Gallagher E (n.d) – ['Childrens violence to parents'](#)
- Mi-Psych | Mindfulness & Clinical Psychology Solutions (2021) – [Emotion regulation 101: your window of tolerance](#)
- Mind (2023) – [About trauma](#)
- Herman, J.L. (1992) – [Complex PTSD: A syndrome in survivors of prolonged and repeated trauma. Journal of Traumatic Stress, 5\(3\), p.377–391](#)
- Dr Dan Siegel – [The Developing Mind, 3rd edition](#)



For family or friends who
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This workshop was
developed with funding
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Education. Next steps:

- evaluation form
- future workshops





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www.kinship.org.uk