

Transcript

The Zones of Regulation: Tauna Davis Interviews Creator Leah Kuypers on Emotional Control

Tauna: How many of us in the world of education have had those students in our classrooms that have challenges with self-regulation, whether they were diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, nonverbal learning disabilities, behavioral challenges, etc.? These challenging struggles can exhaust us, but more importantly make us feel like we are not helping these individuals to reach their potential. After looking through the book *The Zones of Regulation* I see there is curriculum designed to help foster self-regulation and emotional control. And today I would like to introduce the creator of this program, Leah Kuypers.

Leah earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Occupational Therapy from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, a graduate certificate in autism, and a Master of Arts degree in education from Hamline University in Saint Paul, Minnesota. She has practiced as an OT, an autism specialist, in school and clinical settings, specializing in self-regulation and social learning. And has worked with students of all ages and challenges, including anxiety, ADHD, and ASD.

In addition to this book, Leah is the author of two apps, *The Zone of Regulation* and *Exploring Emotions*. She works directly with students, provides trainings and consultation to parents and professionals on self-regulation and challenging behavior, as well as offers workshops on zones to groups across North America.

Leah currently resides in Minneapolis, Minnesota with her family. My name is Tauna Davis and I am a Global Professional Instructor with the Crisis Prevention Institute. Welcome, Leah, and thank you for your time today.

Leah: Thank you, Tauna, and thank you to CPI and the invitation to share with you and your listeners today.

Tauna: Yes, excellent. Leah, can we start by hearing more about you, your professional background, and where your interest and expertise about self-regulation and emotional control comes from?

Leah: Sure. I am trained as an occupational therapist and worked in the public schools as well as in a private setting supporting students. And it was through the work in the public schools

that I really started to see this need arise in helping students support more than what my skill set allowed me to address at the time.

I really felt confident in my skills to address those sensory regulation challenges that students were experiencing in the schools. But as I would, say, take a kid to the sensory motor room to find a more regulated state of arousal and bring back the student in a calm, organized state, I was watching the student explode because they missed the first five minutes of math. And the teacher is looking at me like, "Well, now what do we do?" And I'm looking at the teacher thinking the same thing. And I realized that there was a lot of us looking at each other really unsure how to support these kids when they had these big emotional experiences that often manifested themselves with disruptive behavior.

I would hear from people in the field these kids are naughty and they needed to be taught a lesson so that they would have that more adaptive prosocial behavior. But the lesson they were referring to wasn't a self-regulation strategy-building lesson, it was that they were going to be punished and they would learn from that punishment not to do it again. Too often it was the same kid subjected to the punishment time and time again and they weren't learning the lesson.

So I really took a step back and wanted to look bigger-picture of how else could I support these students beyond that sensory motor sense. Look at that social learning, the executive functioning skills that may be underlying behavior, looking at the emotional regulation that was impacting their ability to manage different stressors.

So I started taking some graduate courses and working towards my graduate certificate in autism spectrum disorders. And often what I was learning I was applying with my caseload that served students with all different diagnoses and abilities. And from there I started getting this idea around the zones and putting into place with my students. My colleagues were feeling really excited by what they were seeing in their students and the students were excited learning and really engaged in this process. So with that I continued on just trying to get as much information as I could, taking any continuing ed. lecture I could take in to educate myself further and figure out how I could apply that to my caseload.

And ultimately I went on to get my Master of Education and for a few years prior to this my colleagues were saying, "You should write a book on the zones thing you're doing." And I really put that off thinking I will never write a book. I saw my kind of path through life working as a school-based therapist, I felt very rewarded, challenged by that. And it was that completion of my master's for my culminating capstone I could either write a curriculum or do research. And so it was with the guidance and that mentorship I had, and I had some amazing mentors along the way. Kari Dunn Buron, one of the coauthors of *The Incredible 5-point Scale*, and then later Michelle Garcia Winner, the who is the creator of *Social Thinking* and the body of work that comes under *Social Thinking*. Supporting me and

ultimately getting my capstone published into the curriculum it is today, The Zones of Regulation.

Tauna: Excellent. And it sounds like those coworkers found that senses program was becoming so effective, or the strategies you were implementing were so effective, that they really backed and encouraged you to expand on that to help other educators. So that's excellent.

It seems like you have a lot of...an incredible amount of experience with implementing self-regulation and emotional control strategies. Can you give us some more context on the profound effect that these challenges have had on education in the last 10 years or so?

Leah: Yeah. Well, I see so many kids in the school context and what ultimately we focus in on is so often these core curriculum, the math, the reading, and so forth, but the students often aren't at a place for learning. And there is this foundational skill of being regulated that is the pretext to then taking in this higher level information that the teacher is providing and turning it into knowledge. And I was seeing kids come to me on my caseload with skills that were higher level, but there was so much dysregulation with that student. And when I speak of dysregulation, I'm referring to a lack of being in a regulated state. And we weren't able to address those skills, like handwriting or shoe-tying, that commonly I had saw on the students IEPs when they would transfer onto my caseload that I needed to dig in and get these kids to a more rounded, organized place so that they were available for learning.

And a big push for me was observing these high school students that I was working with and observing how they were getting tapped on the shoulder to take a break in the classroom. And I was thinking that in a couple years the only break these kids are going to get is their lunch break. And if their employer is having to come by and tap that to calm down and take a break, there was no way they were going to sustain employment, there was no way they were going to be able to maintain meaningful relationships, and these are two of the best predictors of happiness in adulthood.

So I really felt like we were failing our students by not giving them the skill set. And then my colleagues, the stress, the struggles that we experience as the professional is trying to educate and support these kids can be really exhausting when we see kids with the challenging behavior. And there is a lot of energy and emotions that go into supporting these kids, and often that burnout was so pronounced amongst my colleagues, who were struggling to figure out, "How do we help these kids with the challenging behaviors, let alone that child who is experiencing this and perceiving themselves as the naughty kid?" That toll that takes on that kid, we know a lot about self-fulfilling prophecy of you tell a kid that they're the naughty one enough times, they're going to go on and act that out in their life.

And it was so painful for me to watch just these kids' confidence dwindle as they were met with challenges that they were not able to overcome and become incapacitated and have these big dysregulated moments that impacted not just their learning, but also their relationship with peers, their relationships with teachers, and certainly the relationship with caregivers in a home place, as well.

So it was kind of this culmination of all these different factors that I was seeing and hearing, "The kids today in our classroom are so much more dysregulated than they were 10, 15 years. And how do we support that?" That just really got me kind of thinking and keeping me up at night to figure out how can I create a tool that is easy for teachers, therapists, caregivers to use and meet a child with an empathetic lens and supporting a skill set that is developmental in nature.

Often people don't understand that self-regulation is developmental in nature, just like learning to walk and learning to talk and learning to read. But all too often our approach for a child with lagging skills and self-regulation is a more disciplinary model where we would never take that approach with a kid who has a motor impairment or a reading delay. We meet that child with an empathetic lens, we support and wrap services around that child and really do everything we can to bolster that student skill set so that they can be more proficient and have that more adaptive skill set to function.

And so it's really with that sort of same attitude that I'm trying to get people to understand kids with self-regulation challenges and meet them with an empathetic and supportive mindset to build skills so that they too can be more adaptive and functional.

Tauna: Okay, excellent. And in those strategies to help those individuals overcome those challenges you developed a program that you called The Zones of Regulation. Can you tell us exactly what are The Zones of Regulation and how did you develop this concept?

Leah: Sure. Excuse me. So the zones is a systematic framework. Essentially we're giving a person a very black and white, or in this case we're going to talk about red, yellow, green, and blue, way to categorize all the different ways we're feeling, that energy we experience, that emotion, that internal state that we're experiencing, into these four color-coded categories, or zones.

So we're taking a rather abstract, kind of this emotional world we live in and putting it into these four categories, or zones, that allows students then to cognitively be able to conceptualize easier "how am I feeling?" And then once they get that general zone, they have a bank of emotions that fall into each of the four zones. So they're building that awareness of where they're at, we're giving them a very visual structure to use to support that, as well as a very easy way to communicate it with a caregiver, with a teacher, which will assist in that co-regulation between student and caregiver. And with this system too

then, as students build that awareness and are better able to recognize what zone they're in, they can be matching tools for each of the four colored zones.

So with that now, again, we're just systemizing it one step farther to say, "I understand I'm in this zone and this is my go-to set of tools that support me with that." So helping then ease that ability to start managing these different emotions and states we're experiencing with that predetermined bank of tools that they've been learning and practicing.

So essentially there's a cognitive layer to this and we're helping them become more aware and working to ultimately build more increased independence in regulation as that awareness increases and they're recognizing where they're at, they're starting to then integrate in the use of tools to manage and move away from hopefully that maybe dependence on others, like my schoolers, that tapping them on the shoulder and telling them they need to take a break. This is something that I'm trying to help the student gain that awareness of and have the know-how of "I know what to do, I can figure out where I'm at and how I need to manage it in this context." So ultimately moving towards that self-regulation.

Tauna: Okay. Yeah. And just to get a little more specific, I know that the goal of the zones is to help those students develop social, emotional, and sensory regulation and strategies to do that. Can you give us a brief overview of how that happens with the student? How do they start learning those concepts?

Leah: Sure. So the curriculum is divided into 18 lessons. And as they're first introduced to the framework, we spend a lot of time in looking at emotions, gently expanding their emotional vocabulary, and reduce on the framework of looking at it in others. And then as they gain comfort, starting to reflect on "where am I at? How am I feeling? What zone does this fall in?" And as they're building that awareness and becoming more consistent and recognizing this in themselves, we're looking at, "Well, what are the cues my body gives me? How do I perceive these feelings in me or these zones? Are my muscles tighter? What's going through my mind? Has my voice volume or rate changed?"

So there's self-reflection into those physiological cues so that they can be identifying. And we know through research that physiologically we become aware of these subtle changes, sometimes not so subtle changes, in our body before our brain catches up and identifies how we're feeling. So I really wanted to get kids tuned into better being able to read their body to recognize. And then as they gain that competency, we're looking at things that might trigger them to move between the different zones or helping understand that it's natural to experience all the different zones, that this is a part of life. But we also don't have to be at the mercy of our feelings, we can learn how to control our zones so that there are circumstances where maybe we don't need to manage a zone. But in other

contexts we're around our peers, we're trying to get our work done, and we're full of a feeling that may be overwhelming us, then we may need to apply some tools.

So essentially, with the zones...I should say, too, that with these four colors, the blue zone describes when we're sad, sick, tired, bored, these lower levels of arousal, these down emotions. That green zone describes more neutral emotions and organized states, you can think of calm, focused, ready to learn. I also put happy, okay, content in there. The yellow zone describes intensified emotion, yet I feel the hallmark of the yellow zone is we still have some of that cognitive control. So it can be frustrated, it can be silly and excited, positive emotions, it can be wiggly or agitated or when those sensory needs are starting to get ramped up and we're maybe overwhelmed in that sensory environment. It can be nervous, embarrassed in that yellow zone.

And then that red zone is when we really have these intense emotions that essentially overwhelm, overcome us. Panicking, terror, devastation, feeling irate, enraged. As well as elated, when we're overcome with joy, we're jumping up and down, we're maybe crying, screaming. Maybe our soccer team won the state championship, we would likely be in that red zone overcome with that sense of excitement and elation.

So we experience all these different zones and just helping kids understand though that you don't have to be at the mercy of your feelings, that we can learn strategies to manage our different zones. And as they gain more awareness of the social environment around them and thinking about how their behavior may be impacting other's thoughts and feelings and taking in clues from the environment, they can learn strategies then to manage their zone differently so that they can have adaptive prosocial organized behavior as the outcome in the situations where they might need to make some tweaks.

"I have this big red zone feeling, but I can't be slamming my fist down in the classroom. I'm really irate about this score I got, but I'm going to take a deep breath, I'm going to talk to the teacher after class." And thinking about some tools to help them manage that red zone emotion that they have in a classroom context. Versus they get that test score back online when they're home alone, they may be in that red zone and, at this context, slamming their fist down and yelling. Because there's no one else around that would be impacted by displaying that zone emotion differently.

Tauna: Excellent. It even sounds like those zones pair well with our Crisis Development Model here at CPI and kind of give those strategies of how those individuals can grow and help and learn from those behavior levels from there.

Leah: Certainly. I must say I've been a huge fan of CPI and something we were using when I was working in the schools. And one of the things that always stuck with me with the CPI training was as the students become elevated and they're increasing in that dysregulation,

that caregiver, that teacher goes often right up with them, too. And it was, for me, just kind of this, "Yeah, if we can catch them as they're starting to elevate as well as ourselves being aware that we become more dysregulated, too, we can have different outcomes. And how do we get kids to understand that you have these feelings, but we can have some other options when we feel this way."

And so giving them this, essentially, set of lessons to learn about that and become more aware. As well as the caregivers, who can be adapting the zones for themselves and thinking about, "I'm in this stressed place right now and what do I need to do?"

Tauna: Yeah, absolutely, for sure. In your book, *The Zones of Regulation*, it is mentioned that this is a collaborative effort. And when I hear the word "collaborative," with an education background, it just makes me think of a team approach. So can you share with us what the teams may look like and the different roles each member might have?

Leah: For sure. The zones is something that would never have come to be if it were not for that collaborative team that I was working with. And understanding how we're all stakeholders in giving students the skill set. None of us can address the goals or get those academics in for these kids unless they're in this regulated state.

And so putting our heads together, what can we bring to the table from our different diverse backgrounds or disciplines and be working on this together in collaboration? The framework is there and we can be plugging in different pieces. So the speech and language pathologist may be an integral part of a team. However, the zones really looks at that pragmatic language, the nonverbal communication, and how we are understanding the social cognition or theory of mind that you may be thinking, you may be feeling, you may be experiencing that's very different than myself, who has a different mindset.

And so a speech and language pathologist may be able to take that part of the curriculum and work more intensely with the student on that kind of skill set. Say the OT has a lot of background into sensory regulation and working with...supporting kids and developing tools. And they're putting in efforts in that part of this curriculum. The regular ed. or the special ed. teacher, they have that daily interaction with the students, so they're using the language, they're referencing the visuals, they're modeling it in themselves, they've helping students apply it real time to the different situations that may arise.

And then, of course, there's your social workers and your guidance counselors, often I find these are fabulous bridges between regular ed. and special ed. and helping support that student or the classroom in adapting *The Zones of Regulation* culture, essentially. And there's frequently a whole class getting on board, or often even a whole school, where they're supporting the regular ed. kids in being able to identify what zone they're in and developing tools to manage their different zones.

So then there's the administrator, I find that the administrators are often really key in setting the tone, the culture, the attitudes of staff in understanding these kids with challenging behavior. Not as "you're naughty kids" who you got to find just the right punishment for, but essentially embracing these kids as having a deficit, a delay, just like other students who have a math/reading relay and helping support these students thinking about maybe the discipline model, the school, and how is this effective for these kids. Communicating this with staff, with students, with parents and caregivers.

So I find, school to school, the makeup of that team is going to be variable. And there may be players I didn't hit on, and certainly some of our kids have some really significant mental health issues that underlie this dysregulation, and really important that they have those support personnel, too, to be addressing those mental health needs. But when we can be working in collaboration, I just find it's profound for the student to be able to move between context and environments and amongst different people supporting them and hear the same language, that the visuals are there, that essentially that environment, that culture is embracing them and setting them up for success as they travel between maybe the cafeteria and the classroom, and their specialist and their resource room.

So there's certainly that. And then, I guess, when we're putting our heads together and really looking at this whole child, we're getting at this dysregulation, those deficits that might be contributing to it from different perspectives as each team player has their specialties and are able to bring that skill set to that student to support the different areas and needs.

Tauna: Yeah, excellent. And I think, too, being part of that team just helps provide that consistency, that constant...they know the expectations and things like that that go, like you said, across from any environment that they're in to help set them up for success.

Leah: Right. It's really like trying to make a child feel safe and comfortable. And that rapport, that relationship is so integral to be able to take risks and to challenge one's self. You have to feel safe and supported. And so the more we can provide that sense of safety and that these kids are understood and that they have a partner in the different...people who support them throughout the day, I think, goes a really long ways. And giving them that solid foundation to then start taking this on and applying it across the different context and supports.

Tauna: Yes, agreed 100%. Can you give us an example of a successful impact The Zones of Regulation have had on some students or educators that have implemented the zones and how it affected their classroom?

Leah: Sure, I'll give you a couple examples. One of the boys that will just always stay with me, that I was supporting. I started working with him, his family, his educational team when he was in early childhood, he was four. And when he came onto my caseload he was spending a vast majority of his day either under the table, running out into the hallway, he was often in that fight, flight, or fright freeze mode. And there was a full-time aide assigned to him, a thick positive behavior intervention report that I had to read and sign off on before I could meet him, or start working with him, because of the flight risk and the safety.

So with this boy and working with him, his family, his school, by the end of first grade he was predominantly in the regular ed. classroom, occasionally pulled out for speech and language pathology or OT. But the regular ed. teacher was saying, "He is not needing any aide support," the special ed. team was in agreement, and we were able to successfully launch him into second grade without an aide.

So to go from a full-time aide in...well, so through early childhood and kindergarten, to being able to successfully manage his different needs in second grade was really profound. And what we worked with this boy to support is him being able to identify his zones and what tools support his zones. And with the different tools, the blue zone tools help you become more alert and comforted, feeling better; the green zone tools I see as your proactive supports, they keep you feeling good or your best foot forward. So for this boy, he had some sensory needs that if left unchecked he would typically find himself in the yellow zone, feeling very wiggly and/or overwhelmed from the sensory stimuli in the environment.

So we really built up his green zone tools and integrating them into his daily routine, his lifestyle. And with that he had at his desk, available at all times, a weighted lap pad, a fidget ball, he had gum, noise-blocking headphones, and a sit and move cushion that he sat on. When he went out for recess then he played with the other kids. And when the bell rang, that was his cue to do two laps around the playground, one set of monkey bars, and then he filed in line with the end of the class. This way he didn't need an aide or that resource teacher to be coming and pulling him out of the classroom, missing academics, and getting that motor movement break. We figured out how to integrate it into his routine proactively as his green zone tools. And as a side note, just to finish, yellow zone tools are calming in nature and red zone tools start that calming process and keep us safe.

So with that we were able to help him stay in this more regulated green zone state. And if he did move into the yellow zone, certainly there's never any punishment or there should be no judgment for kids moving between the zones, it's about how they're feeling, but he also had that awareness of what he needed to do to manage that yellow zone if he was, say, in that classroom. And as he was running his laps on the playground I hear the classroom teacher and she's standing at the front of the line and his whole Lohr Elementary School had adopted the zones.

And so it was something that his classroom teacher was using with all the regular ed. kids in her class, as well. And she's saying to them, "Think about what zone you're in. When we get inside it's going to be read aloud. This is a great chance to use any tools if you need to manage your zone." So all these regular ed. kids are using different breathing strategies, or I love Brain Gym and this teacher taught Brain Gym moves, and then they used the moves and classified those different Brain Gym moves into what zone or zones they felt like they would help them in. So some of them are doing the hook-ups or the owl as they're filing into line to help them take care of their zone and prepare for what's to come.

So I thought that was really cool. And talking with the classroom teacher, she's reporting to me that, "Yeah, certainly this helps the one student with the special ed. education needs. However, this gets all my kids thinking about how can they be more responsible, how can they be more aware. And I'm in charge of classroom management, but I love that we're giving kids the tools and the resources for self-management here." And so often in that classroom system we are looking at behavior from the kids and redirecting around that. Well, teachers are not equipped with giving them tools to support learning alternatives so that down the road we can try to reduce some of that maladaptive behavior.

So this gives them that resource to be teaching and really supporting kids in developing a skill set, rather than kind of a more disciplinary model where there's a consequence for negative behavior and that classroom management is coming from the teacher without that reflection from the students on "how can I be developing self-management?"

Tauna: And it sounds like it gives those kids an opportunity to be a little more empathic to those that don't manage their emotions as well as they may. It kind of gives them some insight just to let them know these are just feelings that they have and could possibly help them find some coping strategies to manage those feelings, as well.

Leah: Yeah.

Tauna: So those are great examples.

Leah: Hearing from teachers, too, just appreciating that so often we're identifying those kids who have the disruptive, more overt behavior, but how many kids are we missing who internalize their feelings and it doesn't show through, necessarily, in their behavior until maybe they find more maladaptive coping strategies down the road that present themselves.

And so we're helping by creating this safe place to build some awareness, to connect with our peers, and understand that we all experience different feelings. We have a

nonjudgmental way to talk about and learn some healthy coping strategies to manage these feelings, hopefully offsetting unhealthy habits that may develop in the future for some of these kids who internalize some of those feelings. And really also being able to target some of those at-risk kids who may not be qualifying for services, but are on that cusp. And putting an intervention in place that is supporting them developing a skill set and hopefully reducing then that disruptive behavior by them having more adaptive prosocial coping mechanisms and strategies down the road.

Tauna: Absolutely. Would you be able to give our listeners some guidance on where they might be able to learn a little more about The Zones of Regulation if they don't have the book or are kind of interested in it but don't want to quite make the purchase just yet and learn a little more?

Leah: Sure. So a way to get your feet wet is I've developed two zones of regulation apps and both give an overview of the zones framework. You'll walk away understanding what the four zones are, you're going to walk away being able to think about tools to help manage each of your four zones. But I'll give you a little bit of the differences, too, just so you can understand.

The way this came to be... Excuse me. I apologize, I'm getting over this cold here. Is essentially how can we get caregivers engaged in this? What's a way that they can help carry this over for their kids so their students aren't kind of left with the zones only being utilized in the classroom or the school context? Caregivers, by accessing the apps, now have a nice way that they can also learn about the zones. And when done with the student, can really get a great sense of what is this. And another purpose was to try to help make this very fun and engaging for kids. This often isn't the preferred subject for kids who have had a history of certainly being aware that this is a challenge for them. So I'm trying to give them a fun medium to learn on, apply the zones into their daily life.

So the first app is called The Zones of Regulation. And in this app there is a picture studio that you can access where you're utilizing the camera on your device. And both the apps are available on iPhones and iPads, Androids, on Kindles, and MacBook Pros. So you utilize the device's camera and there's prompts to have kids thinking about their blue zone feelings, and they essentially create six different blue zone portraits of different feelings they may find in the blue zone. And then they create yellow zone portraits. And so we're teasing out these nuances between these emotions that fall into each zone, thinking about what cues is my body giving me that I can recognize I'm in this zone feeling this feeling. And then we snap a picture of that and label it.

So you create your blues, green, yellow, and red zone portraits in that one. You can explore tools that teaches you several of the tools that you'll find in the curriculum, as well, and walks you through the concept of using that tool. There's a lot of mini games and

we work out recognizing facial expressions and identifying emotions and sorting them into the four zones.

Then the second app is called Exploring Emotions, or the longer title The Zones of Regulation: Exploring Emotions. In this app one of the pieces of feedback we received on the first app was there was no voice-over, so that is something that we integrated into the second app. We also heard from users that they wanted data tracked. So this allows students, one of the lessons in the book is graphing your zones across the day and helping kids see that we're going to fluctuate through the different zones and understanding how, when we manage our zones, we are creating comfortable feelings for people around us versus maybe less comfortable feelings. And it's impacting outcomes, like our academic success or our peer relations.

So that is embedded into the second app and it allows you to store those graphs for data, it allows you to e-mail them to parents or maybe the after-school personnel who supports that student so that there can be that communication, that collaboration between different providers. And essentially though the goal of both of the apps is to get kids to understand and start really reflecting on their tools and trying to connect it to real-world applications that can be applied...that they can apply it.

So my website is zonesofregulation.com and you can read more about the different apps, as well as see some screenshots and little YouTube videos that have been put together on the two different apps. And my website has just a lot more information on it, as well, just generally about what the zones are and getting more depth of knowledge on essentially what is this framework.

Tauna: Excellent. So they can go there and learn definitely more about it. And yes, to get through to kids I think technology is definitely the way to go to make it more fun and exciting for them.

Leah, as I was reading through The Zones of Regulation, I couldn't help but notice there was, or it seemed to be geared more toward elementary level. Do the zones continue to work at a secondary or higher level and is it ever too late to start an individual being aware of those zones? And how does that look different at an older level?

Leah: Sure. Well, I will be very honest to say that the zones is something that much of the curriculum I developed with my high schoolers in mind. Many of the learning activities you'll find in the curriculum I first came up with that concept with my high schoolers, that I was trying to decrease that dependency on getting tapped by their aide to take a break. And so there's a lot of self-monitoring built into the lessons that that metacognition may not be there yet for some of your younger elementary school ages and really is evolving as these kids are developing and can be applied with more success as they get older.

So I think the problem that...the conception that this is for younger kids, where that comes in is you see the four colors, you see maybe the different emotions illustrated in the book, and you just kind of snapshot make a judgment like, "Oh, this is geared for younger kids," when I really feel that's not the case. I've used this concept with adults and I find all the time, as you start using the zones, teaching the zones, you're going to adopt that cognitive framework often and apply it to yourself. And you might see a colleague that also is aware of the zones and she starts talking to you and you might say, "I'm in the yellow right now, I'll talk to you later." And it's just understood, "I'm not in a place."

And so I hear about this all the time when I'm giving trainings, I travel and train on the zones. I hear audience members talking in the zones and they don't think I'm in earshot, but they're using it to describe their own states. So I don't think there's ever a threshold where any of us ever stop working on becoming more efficient self-regulators. There's always a challenge that overcomes us that outstrips our capacity to cope. And I know I'm obviously thinking about, "How could I manage that better?," or, "What are my tools to help me through this?" And so with that, that zones framework gets played upon all the time, if you're aware of it, as you go through life.

So thinking though more specifically about your adolescence, your teens, your tweens, how do we make this feel relevant for them? The apps is one avenue, other things that I've done though, I really work on making sure I'm engaging with these kids in a way that they feel connected to me. I feel like you have to kind of change your tone. I might say, "I know you guys have talked about emotions before, thought about tools, likely, in the past. Here's what we're going to do, we're going to think about this in four colors. And maybe we get the iPads out or phones out and we just make a memo, emotions that go in each of the four zones. And then underneath it let's look at some tools to help us manage these four zones." It's just a way to think.

You can take away those illustrations, the visual, fade those visual supports as they gain that metacognition, enabling them to think about what zone they're in and their tools to manage it. That's all this thought process that ultimately we're trying to get kids to in being able to apply it real time in contexts that can be dysregulating for them.

So other things I've done with these older kids, I really get at what is meaningful to them, what do they want to accomplish, what's their goals. So they want their driver's license, they want a girlfriend, they want a job. One of the boys I've been working with over the last few years, he wants to ditch his aide. And how can we frame learning about the zones and self-regulation in context to achieving these goals that are certainly important for them to be working towards.

So thinking about driving, parents aren't going to give you keys to their car if they're worried that you're not going to be able to manage maybe a red zone situation if someone pulls out in front of you. And there's a lot of stressors, a lot of triggers that can cause us to change zones. They want to see that you're capable of managing your different zones to be able to take that leap into independent driving.

Or the ditching the aide, my student needed to learn to manage himself in the hallways, in the cafeteria, those unstructured times, and self-regulate so that that aide could take a few steps back and kind of be lingering behind instead of right next to him. And so as he gained competency in managing his zones, the aide can create distance and not...essentially, often aides are there to co-regulate. And ultimately my hope is that we learn self-regulation and we can decrease that dependency on aides and reduce that additional resource. Certainly aides are fantastic. But if we can get kids to be building the skill set, we can really be, I think, making some big strides in increasing independence and that fading of the aides.

Tauna: Yeah, absolutely. And I love the way you're talking about taking this and customizing it to their goals. What is it they're wanting in the future? And like you said, to talk about those zones and how those can help once we can learn to regulate those, how those can help achieve that goal.

Leah: Yeah. And I will say, too, even the younger kids, I often talk about how we can take care of our different zones simply to get back to the fun or to get on with the day or to move on in our schedule or finish up what we're doing. And putting it in that context I often find is really powerful for kids to see what is the value in this, what is the connection.

Tauna: I do know, as an educator, that some of the challenges that come into play getting through our day is getting through the core curriculum objectives. If an educator was interested in starting to implement this into their classroom, into their daily language, is it feasible to implement these lesson plans into an already overwhelming day for these educators?

Leah: Certainly. Though it will take some time, most likely some planning, some preparation. One thing that I think is a challenge is that if you don't take that time and teach the zones and only start applying this when kids are dysregulated, this is going to be something they become resistant to. This is not meant to be a reactive, essentially a behavior support when kids are in a dysregulated state. The ultimate goal is that we're working on that student developing awareness and understanding this connection between feelings and behavior and that they can manage feelings and use tools and have these more adaptive outcomes.

So with that it takes some teaching and the students need to be in a regulated state in order for that to happen, we can't just be applying those when they're dysregulated and

hope they get regulated. So with that said, often regular ed. kids really are able to conceptualize the four zones quickly. And that awareness-building, those lessons in the beginning, they may breeze right through those. Some kids see the four colors, a couple emotions paired with each color, and they instantly are able to say, "I'm nervous. I'm in the yellow zone, I've never met you before," just like that.

So for those regular ed. kids you may be able...often I found you can select kind of those core lessons, that conceptualizing what the four zones are, understanding it's natural to move through the zones, that we have tools to help us manage the different zones and so forth, and apply those maybe in a morning meeting. Maybe it's 20 minutes every couple weeks that you're talking about giving more formal instruction on this, but then that framework is in the classroom, the visual supports are in there.

And this is something you can now be weaving into everyday conversations, that language can be modeled by the teacher just to set the tone that, "Sometimes my teacher is tired in the blue zone or stressed in the yellow zone," or whatnot. It's not that we're always in the green. And we can be infusing zones into some of the core curriculum classroom work. So maybe it's read aloud and we're thinking about the character and what he or she is feeling and what zone that would fall in. We're thinking about maybe a tool that could help that character manage their zone in a situation more efficiently. Or maybe it's written expression time and now you're taking some zones discussion prompts that you'd find in the book and having kids use that instead as a journal response for that written expression time. Or it's science or math and you're working on graphing. Well, maybe you can graph your zones across the day instead of the math-suggested activity in the math book.

So I think there's ways you can marry this into that common core time and that you're likely not going to do all 18 lessons. For some of the grade levels, kindergarten, first grade, several of the lessons are too advanced, the metacognitive skill set of a typical kindergarten or first-grader isn't there anyway, so those lessons wouldn't be appropriate for those younger aged kids as it is. But that's where I also think a leadership team is really great, kind of those invested people who have a deeper knowledge of the zones that can be resources to those regular ed. teams and helping give them some direction, some guidance. Maybe coming in and teaching some of those core lessons to the classroom, but then that teacher is there to carry it over and essentially infuse it with discussion maybe already happening or integrating it with if they're doing Second Step or MindUP. The zones isn't a stand-alone curriculum by any means, I think it's best used in collaboration with other curricula and resources out there.

Tauna: Yeah, absolutely. So many ways that it can be integrated in so many different subject areas, so excellent job.

Well, I would like to thank you, Leah, Leah Kuypers, for sharing your valuable time and insights today, and thanks for giving us some practice strategies that, as educators, give us a way to kind of stay connected to things. And I know we were only able to skim the surface, you can find more information about the topics we discussed by reading Leah's book *The Zones of Regulation*. And you can find it by the apps that she had written, as well, *The Zones of Regulation* and *Exploring Emotions*. Are there any closing comments or thoughts that you want to share with our listeners, Leah?

Leah: Yeah, I just want to thank you, Tauna, and the listeners for your investment in supporting these kids with sometimes behaviors that are confusing and certainly challenging. And I feel that these guys are so often misunderstood and they certainly can be a lot. I hear teachers grumble, like, "Oh, I got that kid in my class this year." And so I really appreciate your listeners taking the time, you taking the time, to be thinking about these kiddos from a different lens and really putting some effort into understanding them and receptiveness to thinking about it differently to be approaching them with skill building and empathy to hopefully build a skill set so down the road we can see some more adaptive prosocial behavior when met with stressors that maybe in the past derailed them.

So thank you to you and all those listening for just your dedication, your devotion to supporting students with different needs.

Tauna: Same to you, for developing a program to help those individuals, as well. Also to our listeners, feel free to contact me directly. My name, again, is Tauna Davis. My number is (414) 784-3834, or by e-mail at tdavis@crisisprevention.com, if you have any other questions that I may be able to help with. Good luck to our listeners and educators with a successful year and thank you for making a difference. And thanks, again, Leah.

Leah: Yeah, thank you. And I can also be contacted at info@zonesofregulation.com if anyone would like to get in contact with me. So thank you, Tauna.

Tauna: Thank you very much, have a great day.

Leah: Bye-bye.

Tauna: Bye.