

## How Many R's? A Process for Working with Children Recovering from Adverse Childhood Experiences

John Fardon reflects on the work of Louise Bomber.

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Some of you will be aware of Dr Bruce Perry and his 3 R's, and how they relate to children who have experienced ruptured attachment or developmental trauma and how adults can help.

### Regulate - Relate - Reason

Put very simply; if a child is upset or overwhelmed by strong feelings, they can only be soothed by someone whose **own feelings** are regulated, not overwhelmed like the child. Secondly, it is really helpful if that person is an adult the child knows and trusts, feels safe with and has a positive relationship with them. That adult is likely to be able to help soothe the child, or simply 'be with' the child to help them regulate. When that is in place and the child is once more regulated (which may take a long time) then some form of reasoning can happen, as the child has access to their 'upstairs brain.' See [Dan Siegel and his Upstairs Downstairs Brain Model](#).

Louise Bomber, in her latest book<sup>1</sup> describes the importance of a fourth R, which stands for **Repair** – a way of re-connecting after a rupture has taken place. When things have gone drastically wrong for a child or young person at school; possibly hitting, kicking, swearing, spitting or wrecking some equipment, they don't know how to put it right. In addition to this they may have received a sanction or punishment, isolation or exclusion because of their behaviour, which cannot be tolerated by the school. This scenario leaves the child or young person feeling even more shame and confirms their belief that they are bad, a mistake, or should never have been born. If we can find a way to help them repair the situation we will model ways of bringing hope to them and not a completely broken situation. We model this process of repair to the children and do it with them.

Louise Bomber suggests that we will most likely need to continue the cycle of **regulate, relate, reason and repair** time after time, which is very tiring and emotionally draining. This process is best managed by having, not only a **key adult** to support the child, but a **team** of adults that are rooting for the child, know the child, meet regularly (every 4-6 weeks) to discuss what might be happening for the child, what the triggers are and how we can help calm and soothe the child. The team is also there for mutual support in what is very demanding work. This structure, knowledge and planning is needed, along with communication with parents/carers, to help the child or young person to feel safe and contained at school, knowing who they can turn to and what they can do when they feel dysregulated. If the child or young person does not feel safe they need to be taught the tools to help them regulate their feelings, socialise with peers and finally to be able to progress academically.

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<sup>1</sup> Bomber, L. M. (2020) *Know Me To Teach Me: Differentiated Discipline for those recovering from Adverse Childhood Experiences* (Worth Publishing, Oxon)

## Regulate - Relate - Reason - Repair

**Regulate** *‘Every time we regulate together with a child or young person, we teach our pupil that it’s possible to shift states, sensations and feelings by engaging with something on a sensory level. That all important life-changing message that it’s possible to learn how to soothe, quieten and calm the alarm system in each one of us, so that we can then use our social engagement system.’* L Bomber 2020. Try to build up a bank of resources and techniques that work for each child and make it accessible for them. Ask the child or young person to help with this.

**Relate** *‘Every time we relate through quality moments together with a child or young person we teach them that connection is paramount, that relationships are necessary in order to live well. That relationships can be safe and positive, and can bring safety and comfort, love and joy. The message of health and wellbeing.’* L Bomber 2020. Smile when you see them in the morning or afternoon and say how good it is to see them. Relate in a way that feels safe, comfortable and fun for the child. Be playful and curious. Find out how you can relate best with each child or young person.

**Reason** *‘Every time we reason together with a child or young person, we teach them to pause, reflect and consider something in the higher part of their brain, their thinking and cognitive brain. The message that it’s possible to override the emotional limbic brain from time to time, to extend ourselves outside what is known and familiar, to tap into our exploratory system, be curious, interested, excited: to settle to learn.’* L Bomber 2020. Please watch this [Jacob Ham film clip](#).

**Repair** *‘Every time we repair a relationship together with a child or young person we teach them that there is usually an exit strategy. That it’s usually possible to put things right and that we are often made stronger as a result of difficulties. So there is no reason to panic or be afraid of ourselves or of each other. The message of hope.’* L Bomber 2020

This article is a blend of direct quotes from p256 of ‘Know me to Teach Me,’ by Louise Bomber, **(with kind permission of Worth Publishing)** her training and my work with staff in schools, children and young people in Northamptonshire. See links below for more information:

- [Bruce Perry and the 3 R’s](#), and lots more fabulous resources from Beacon House.
- [Louise Bomber’s website](#)
- [The website of Worth Publishing](#) for Louise Bomber’s books, including the Attachment Aware Series boxed set.
- [Book by KL Aspden about the brain, alarm systems and regulation ideas](#).

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