

THRIVING HUMANS
a Raising Thriving Humans guide

Free Starter Kit

The Brain Stoplight

A simple tool for understanding your child's behavior,
and your own.



Green



Yellow



Red

Rebecca Thompson Hitt, MS, MFT
Founder, Thriving Humans
formerly The Consciously Parenting Project

Be curious. Be kind. Start with yourself.



WELCOME

It may feel like you're broken. But you are probably dysregulated.

And there is a very big difference.

When I was in the middle of a power struggle with my eight-year-old, when the boot came flying across the room at me, I felt broken. I felt like I was failing. I didn't know what to do.

What I didn't know then was that my son wasn't being defiant. He wasn't trying to hurt me. He was dysregulated, deep in his survival brain, with no access to reason, impulse control, or connection. And my response? I was right there with him.

This guide introduces one of the most important tools I've ever learned: the Brain Stoplight. It's simple enough to teach to a three-year-old. It's deep enough to change the way you understand behavior forever.

“If you're broken, you're waiting for all the king's horses and all the king's men. But if you're dysregulated, you need tools. And that's what this is.”

THIS GUIDE IS FOR YOU IF

- You have a child whose behavior feels impossible to understand
- You find yourself reacting in ways you don't like and don't know how to stop
- You want a practical framework, not a list of scripts, not a reward chart, not a punishment system
- You're ready to get curious instead of reactive

Start with yourself. Everything else follows.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Read it once. Then keep it nearby.

This is a reference, not a to-do list. You don't need to memorize it. You don't need to get it right immediately. Just begin to notice, in yourself, and in your child.

The reflection prompts throughout are optional. Some people find it helpful to write. Others just let the questions sit. Both are fine.

The goal isn't perfection. It's awareness. And awareness is already change.

THE FRAMEWORK

All behavior is communication.

This is the foundational principle of all of my work. Your child's behavior, the meltdowns, the shutdowns, the defiance, the clinginess, the boot thrown across the room, is not random. It's not manipulation. It's not a character flaw.

It is information about what is happening inside them.

The same is true for you.

When we learn to read behavior as communication, we stop reacting to the surface and start responding to what's actually happening. That shift, from reaction to response, changes everything.

The Brain Stoplight is a simple model for understanding what's happening in the brain and nervous system in any given moment, and what it means for how you respond.

THE THREE LIGHTS

What each one is doing.

Green light · Go

Access to the thinking brain (prefrontal cortex). This is when we are most regulated, most connected, and most able to reason and problem-solve. Access to full IQ.

WHAT YOU MIGHT SEE IN YOUR CHILD

Calm, curious, playful, cooperative, able to listen and respond. Can tolerate frustration. Open to connection. More flexibility, can handle changes more easily.

WHAT YOU MIGHT NOTICE IN YOURSELF

Patient, present, able to think before responding. Feeling spacious rather than reactive.

WHAT HELPS

This is the time to have the conversation about more difficult things. This is the time to explore, problem-solve, and connect. Green is when cognitive learning happens.

Green is where we want to be, but none of us live here all the time. Life nudges us toward yellow constantly. Noticing when you're on green is the first step.

What does green look like for you? How does your body feel? What are you able to do that you can't do on yellow or red? What does green look like for your child?

YOUR NOTES

Yellow light · Slow down

Activation of the emotional brain. Getting louder, more erratic in movement, less patient. Starting to argue or push back. Difficulty listening. Not quite melting down, but heading there.

WHAT YOU MIGHT SEE IN YOUR CHILD

Shorter fuse. Less patience. Agitation. Volume turning up. Feeling the urge to speed up rather than slow down. More emotional.

WHAT YOU MIGHT NOTICE IN YOURSELF

Starting to explain things too much or raising your voice. You may feel frustration, anger, sadness. You may notice you want to control your child's behavior so that you'll feel better.

WHAT HELPS

This is the fork in the road. Slow down. Ask: what can I do to connect right now? A pause, a breath, a softer tone, these can shift the moment. Speeding up runs the red light.

When we're in the emotional brain (yellow), we lose access to about 25 IQ points. This is not the moment to reason, lecture, or explain. It's the moment to slow down and connect. Some children live on yellow most of the time, especially sensitive children. For them, one small thing can tip quickly into red. If this is your child, the work isn't to fix their yellow, it's to understand what keeps them there and what helps them find green.

What does yellow look like for you? What are your early warning signs? What does yellow look like for your child? What tends to tip them from yellow into red?

YOUR NOTES

Red light · Stop

The survival brain online. Fight: hitting, kicking, throwing, screaming, aggression toward people or objects. Flight: running away, hiding, bolting. Freeze: shutting down, going silent, not responding, avoiding eye contact. (Freeze is often missed, it looks like non-reaction, but it's just as dysregulated.)

WHAT YOU MIGHT SEE IN YOUR CHILD

Full reactive mode. Wanting to fight back, flee the situation, or shut down completely. Acting in ways you'll regret. Feeling overwhelmed or numb.

WHAT YOU MIGHT NOTICE IN YOURSELF

You might have one main way you respond in red or you may switch between them depending on the situation. You may fight back when your child raises their voice, or you may freeze when things get too loud. Or you may find yourself running out of the room and putting yourself in time out. Just notice what shows up for you.

WHAT HELPS

Stop. Do not try to reason, explain, or get compliance. The goal is to reestablish safety. Be close without getting hurt. Use few words. Wait. Help them regulate enough to move to yellow, then you can connect and eventually talk. Start with regulating yourself.

On red, your child has no access to the thinking brain. Consequences, explanations, and negotiations will not land. They are in their survival brain, and survival brain doesn't process words or respond to logic. This is also true for you. If you're on red, you are just as dysregulated as your child. Two people in survival brain cannot solve a problem together. Someone has to find their way back to yellow first. Stop. Pause. Find a way to move the energy that doesn't hurt yourself or anyone else. Then support your child to do the same.

What does red look like for you? Fight, flight, or freeze, or a combination? What does red look like for your child? Which expression do you see most often?

YOUR NOTES

TOOLS FOR REGULATION

When you or your child needs to come back to green.

These are not tricks or distractions. They are ways of communicating safety to your nervous system, and your child's. You can use these yourself, and you can teach them to your children.

Breathe deeply.

A full belly breath (not just chest breathing) delivers oxygen to your prefrontal cortex and helps activate your thinking brain. Try: in for 4, hold for 2, out for 6.

Feel your body.

If you're sitting, feel your seat. If you're standing, feel your feet on the floor. Wiggle your toes. Bring your awareness back into your body.

Complete the impulse.

Sometimes the body needs to finish what it started. Run on the spot, shake your arms, jump up and down. A trampoline is worth its weight in gold for dysregulated children (and adults). Squeeze your muscles while you hold your breath. Exhale slowly until you can't hold the air out any longer. You're completing stress cycles here.

Orient to nature.

Look out the window at something growing. Check the bird feeder. Notice a plant. Even a brief shift of attention toward the natural world can help regulate.

Call an amygdala buddy.

Have someone you can call when you're dysregulated, not to process, just to hear a safe voice for a minute. It works. I used a recording of my buddy's voice for a while. Eventually I used my own. Having a regulated voice in my ear helped me get through some very rough times.

Rest.

Close your eyes for a moment if it's safe. Go into another room. Sit quietly. Rest is not giving up, it's refueling.

Moving attention away from the stressor is not the same as distracting. After everyone has regulated enough, you can come back together and talk about what happened.

YOUR HOME PLAY THIS WEEK

Three things to try.

These are invitations, not assignments. Try whatever feels possible.

1. Check in with yourself.

Set an alarm two or three times a day and ask: where am I right now? Green, yellow, or red? What does it feel like in my body? If you're on yellow or red, what do you need?

2. Notice your child.

Start to observe when their behavior is at its hardest. Are they on green, yellow, or red? Which expression of red do you see most? What seems to tip them from yellow into red?

3. Ask the question.

When things get hard, ask yourself (silently): “What can I do right now to connect?” You don't need to have an answer yet. Just asking the question begins to shift something.

“Even if you don't have an answer yet, just start by asking the question and notice what shifts.”

TEACHING THE STOPLIGHT TO YOUR CHILD

A conversation starter for any age.

You can teach the Brain Stoplight to children as young as 3 to 4 years old. Older children and teenagers often find it liberating to have language for what they experience inside.

Start by teaching it using yourself first. Then, when things are calm (green!), introduce it to your child. Ask your child the questions about what they see when you're on green, yellow, and red. It helps to not have them be the center of attention and most children I've worked with enjoy being asked what they see about someone else, especially their parent.

TRY ASKING

- “What do I look like when I'm on green? How do you know?”
- “What do you notice when I am starting to go yellow?”
- “How do you know that I'm on red? What kind of red do you see, fight, flight, or freeze?”
- “What do you see that helps me to come back to green?”

You might be genuinely surprised by what they notice about you.

If they're willing, you can ask if they'd like to hear what you notice about them. Some children would rather not be the center of attention like that, so pay attention to what your child needs here to keep it safe for them. If they're willing to share what it's like for them, ask what it feels like in their body on green, yellow, and red. With younger children, you can ask them to show you with sounds, their face, or their body. It can be a fun connecting exercise if it is approached playfully.

WANT TO GO DEEPER?

This is just the beginning.

The Brain Stoplight is the first of six principles in the Unlocking Connection Masterclass, a self-paced, 6-module series built on 18 years of real family work.

In the full masterclass, you'll explore:

- Why traditional rewards and punishments often backfire, and what to do instead
- How attachment shapes behavior and what repair actually looks like
- Boundaries that hold without breaking connection
- How to build a family culture where everyone's needs matter

Each module is about 30 minutes, with a recorded Q&A session included. Work through it at your own pace, with lifetime access.

Enroll in the Unlocking Connection Masterclass — \$50

consciouslyparenting.newzenler.com/courses/unlocking-connection

And if you're looking for ongoing community, real connection, and monthly live calls with Rebecca, the Thrive Community is where this work continues.

Join the Thrive Community

consciouslyparenting.newzenler.com/courses/cpthrive

You showed up. That matters.

The fact that you're here, reading this, thinking about this, is already part of the shift.

Be curious. Be kind. Start with yourself.

With warmth,

Rebecca

Rebecca Thompson Hitt, MS, MFT
Thriving Humans · Raising Thriving Humans