



[Ep. 219: 20 Therapeutic Alternatives to Traditional Therapy](#)

For Highly Dysregulated Kids with Complex Trauma

Not all healing happens in a therapy office

For children with trauma histories—attachment disruptions, early neglect, abuse, substance exposure, or orphanage care—**bottom-up, relational, and sensory-rich experiences** often provide the most powerful pathways toward regulation and connection.

Even if your child hasn't experienced trauma, these types of interventions can be very supportive for kids with vulnerable nervous systems, intense dysregulation, and big, baffling behaviors.

For more information about why rhythmic, repetitive, relational, and somatosensory experiences support a child's nervous system, see Dr. Bruce Perry's work (Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics) or episode 49 of The Baffling Behavior Show: [How the Brainstem Heals](#) as well as episode 53: [Moments of Healing](#)

These 20 experiences are **fun, accessible, and deeply therapeutic**, even if they *don't look like therapy*. Most are inherently rhythmic, repetitive, relational, and somatosensory.

****This handout was partially generated with the assistance of AI based on the information I gave it, including the theoretical basis and different interventions that are included below****

Grounded In:

- Interpersonal Neurobiology
 - Polyvagal Theory
 - Attachment Theory
 - Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT)
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20 Non-Therapy Interventions That Heal

1. Equine-Assisted Therapy
 - Rhythmic movement + connection with a co-regulating animal
 - Builds confidence, regulation, and relational trust
2. Drumming Circles
 - Repetitive, rhythmic input organizes brainstem and midbrain
 - Promotes group synchrony and regulation
3. Dance / Movement Classes
 - Embodied expression
 - Rhythmic, structured, and joyful regulation
4. Martial Arts
 - Predictability + challenge in a relational container
 - Supports body awareness, impulse control, and co-regulation
5. Yoga for Kids
 - Interoception + mindful movement
 - Activates vagal tone and teaches self-awareness
6. Improv / Theater
 - Builds relational timing, flexibility, and connection
 - Right-brain play strengthens social engagement
7. Group Singing / Music
 - Activates the vagus nerve through vocalization
 - Builds connection, regulation, and joy
8. Mentorship
 - One-on-one attuned adult relationship
 - A corrective experience of attachment

9. Volunteering

- Shifts identity to “capable” and “I impact others in a positive way”
- Fosters purpose and self-worth

10. Outdoor Adventure

- Movement + awe + nature = deep regulation
- Supports challenge, accomplishment, and connection

11. Trampolines / Bouncing

- Vestibular + proprioceptive input organizes sensory systems
- Releases energy and supports regulation

12. Swimming

- Deep pressure, resistance, and fluid sensory experience
- Naturally calming and grounding

13. Gymnastics

- Proprioceptive input + mastery
- Builds confidence, coordination, and sensory regulation

14. Art Making (focus on the process, not the outcome/results)

- Sensory rich experience that allows for safe nervous system expression
- Safe, relational creativity supports healing

15. Animal Care

- Simple, steady relationship-building
- Nurtures empathy and emotional attunement

16. Board Sports (Skiing, Surfing, Skating, Skateboarding)

- Rhythm, balance, and body control
- Supports challenge, resilience, and flow

17. Relational Playgroups

- Adult-supported peer interaction
- Builds co-regulation, trust, and social safety

18. Cooking / Baking

- Sensory experience + structure + shared connection
- Encourages focus, creativity, and relational joy

19. Parent Coaching

- Empowers parents as the healing agent
- Builds caregiver co-regulation and presence

20. Sensory Motor Play

- Movement-based nervous system support
- Regulation through obstacle courses, swings, body socks, etc.

✨ A Final Thought

These interventions may not feel like therapy to the child—and that's the point.

They offer safety, regulation, mastery, and connection—all foundational elements of healing from complex trauma.