

# Stages of Arousal/Dysregulation – The Arousal Curve (Breakwell, 1997)

## **Take your time talking this through!**

This is a visual representation of the physiological changes that take place when a person becomes very dysregulated. This is also a helpful visual that you could use with older CYP to help explain to them what is going on in their bodies.

The horizontal line at the bottom represents a baseline level of arousal. It's important to note that this can be different for each individual child. Some CYP may come into school at a much higher level already than other children – their baseline is therefore higher than it might be for other CYP. This is likely to be the case with CYP experiencing EBSA due to their growing anxieties about what the school day might bring for them.

There is then a trigger. This is something that occurs to trigger a release of hormones. Sometimes we can see what this trigger is. Other times it may not be noticeable to us (or we may have perceived it as something small, but to the CYP it's huge). It might be an internal feeling or a smell that has been the trigger. The trigger phase is a good time to intervene if possible, as there might be something that could be done to de-escalate the CYP before they reach the crisis point. For some children, this can be done in time, for others, the jump from the trigger phase to crisis might be too quick.

At crisis stage, the situation must be managed as safely as possible until the young person calms. The focus should be on their safety, and on the safety of others.

CYP will also need time to calm (recovery phase). This will also look different for different people – for some it might be a short time, for others, it might take a very long time. It's important to also be aware that additional spikes can happen if an adult tries to reason with them or pushes a child with EBSA too quickly before they are ready (e.g., a well meaning adult could say “shouldn't you be in class” when they are out in the corridor and that could tip them over the edge again). So although a CYP may appear to be calming down, chemical hormonal levels are still high and it is very easy to trigger further crises.

Following a period of dysregulation the recovery may be followed by a period where the CYP feels very low and exhausted with what has been happening in their bodies.

This visual could be used to map out with CYP which strategies would help them at the different stages of the curve.

