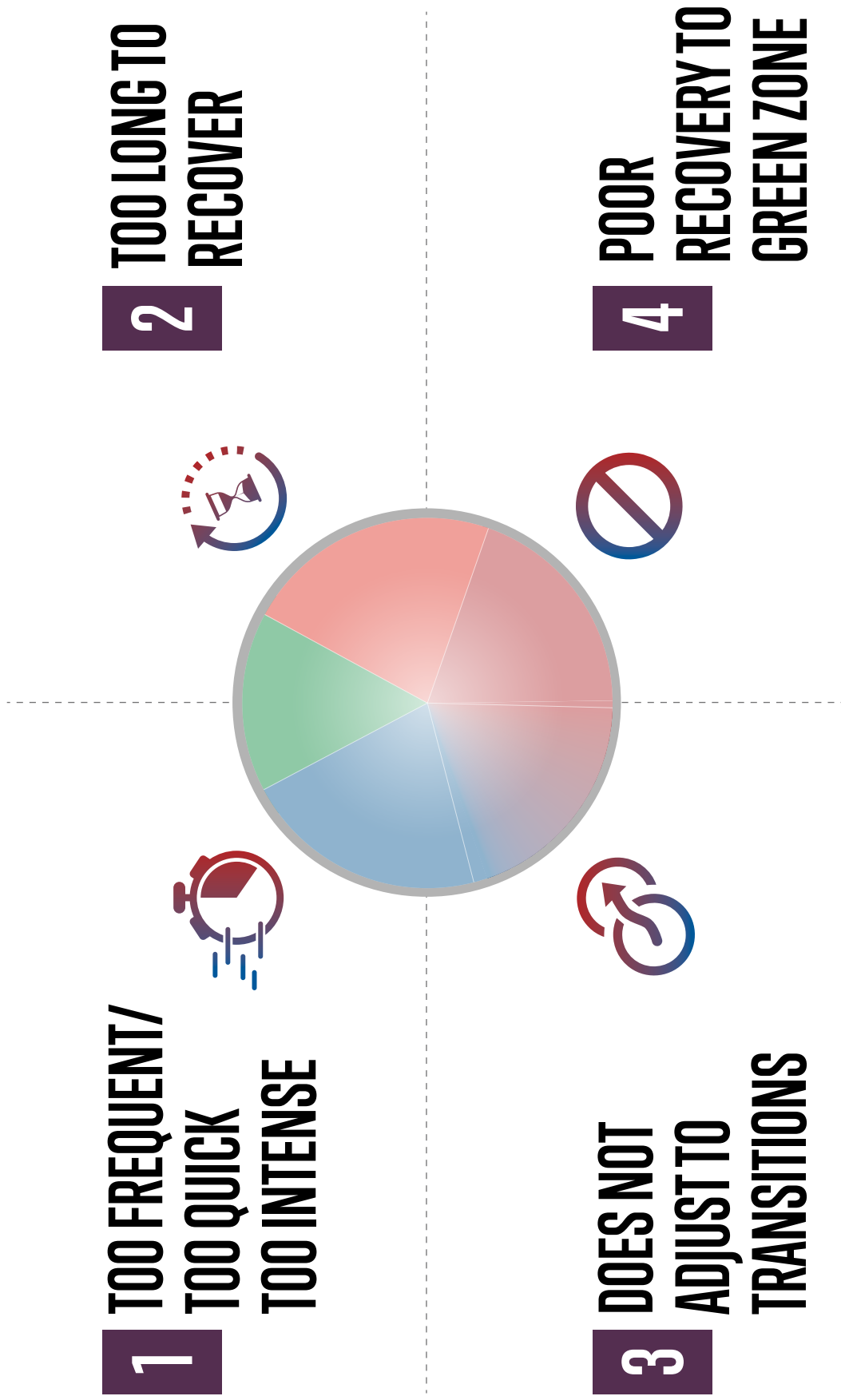


# How Do We Identify Toxic Stress Patterns?



# THE NEURORELATIONAL FRAMEWORK'S Toxic Stress Patterns

To sort out whether stress responses are adaptive and healthy or whether a person is stuck in chronic, toxic stress patterns we need to monitor the *frequency, intensity, and duration* of each type of stress response.

When we are observing children's stress responses, it is important to understand that what is considered adaptive and healthy, depends on the child's level of development. Infants and younger children have immature nervous systems. They can't control their stress responses with language and thinking. Young children may have more frequent, intense, and longer stress responses than older children. They need more help from caring adults to calm stress responses and get back to the green zone.

There are four toxic stress patterns that are useful to describe when stress responses are not adaptive. Remember that we are including all four stress responses, positive and negative red, blue and combo.

- **Too Frequent, Too Quick, or Too Intense:** Does the stress response happen too frequently during the day? Does the stress response happen immediately when a person is presented with a stressor? Sometimes we use the phrase, '0 to 100' to describe this escalation in intensity. In a healthy mature nervous system there are smooth, more gradual shifts between stress responses and intensity matches the context, or level of threat or challenge.
- **Too Long to Recover:** Does the stress response last a long time even after the challenge or threat has been removed? For example, a person is still irritable, despite a conflict being resolved, or is still anxious even though a test is over.
- **Does Not Adjust to Transitions:** Is there a daily transition the child ought to have become used to by now, but is still flung into a stress response by? One example is a three-year-old who cries or shuts down on the way to preschool every day even though they have been going for months, or a child who always gets angry when they must transition from a preferred activity to a non-preferred task.
- **Poor Recovery to Green Zone:** This toxic stress pattern puts an individual at higher risk for challenges. This happens when a person is unable to adequately recover back to the green zone and is chronically in a stress response of any color(s).