

Trauma Informed and Trauma Responsive Interventions

Eva de Gosztanyi, Psychologist
 Martine Demers, Behaviour Consultant
 Catherine Korah, Behaviour Consultant
 Co-ordinators
 Centre of Excellence for Behavior Management



edegosztanyi@rsb.qc.ca
www.cebm.ca

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The Effects of Complex Childhood Trauma

Australian Childhood Foundation

- ▶ **Trauma significantly alters baseline physiological arousal levels in children.**
 - The **amygdala becomes kindled**, releasing stress hormones into the body and brain
- ▶ **Trauma reduces cortical capacity to regulate subcortical activation in children.**
 - The **prefrontal cortex functioning is hijacked** and is also **less well developed** due to stress hormones. Emotions over-ride the capacity to reason.
- ▶ **Trauma disrupts memory functioning in children.**
 - The hippocampus focuses on survival, not on memory transfer of what has been learned at school.
- ▶ **Trauma restricts the attentional capacity of children.**
 - The Limbic System is **preoccupied with survival**

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The Effects of Complex Childhood Trauma

Australian Childhood Foundation

- ▶ **Trauma based behaviour is functional at the time in which it develops as a response to threat.**
 - **Flight or fight response makes sense to the brain** that is trying to survive but causes big problems in a school setting.
 - Flight – avoiding work that makes the child feel vulnerable, especially writing
 - Fight – attacking those who are trying to make the child do something that feels unsafe
 - Hypervigilance is necessary to ensure survival
 - **BUT scattered attention makes it difficult for the child to remember instructions or to stay on task**

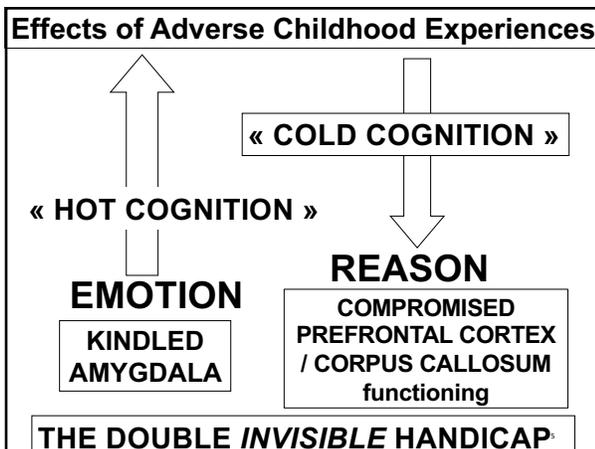
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The Effects of Complex Childhood Trauma

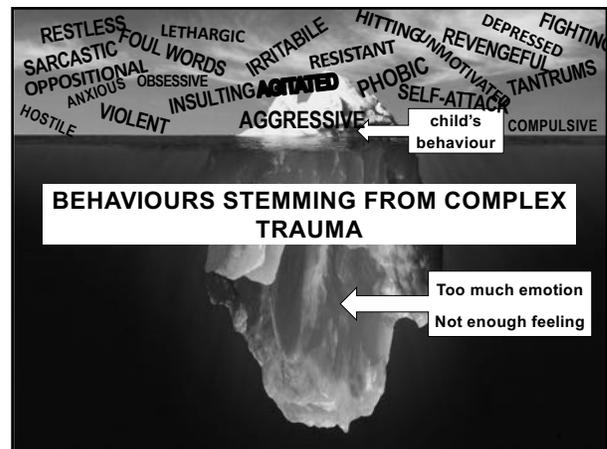
Australian Childhood Foundation

- ▶ **Trauma limits children's response flexibility and adaptability to change.**
 - When in the survival mode cortisol, norepinephrine cause the brain to put the focus on survival behaviours which stem from the limbic system
 - Even though the child "knows better", in the moment, the child cannot "do better" as they cannot access the higher parts of the brain
 - Since cortisol is detrimental to brain development, children have access to fewer parts of the cortex than children of the same age. Less prefrontal cortex access and less communication between the hemispheres (corpus callosum)

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The Effects of Complex Childhood Trauma
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▷ **Trauma disconnects children from relational resources that can mitigate its effects.**

- Challenging behaviours alienate adults trying to intervene, especially
 - if the child “knows” better but can’t “do” better
 - if the child “turns” on them
 - if increasing the intervention does not work or seems to make things worse

Adults can become frustrated and less open to staying connected with the child.

▷ **Trauma undermines identity formation in children.**

▷ **Trauma diminishes social skills and isolates children from peers.**

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Intervening with Complex Childhood Trauma

CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

1. Keep child-adult relationships strong
2. Build a team of interveners
3. Minimize the experience of SEPARATION
4. Compensate for the effects of Trauma (over-reactivity and immaturity) to help the child behave successfully
5. Provide structure and predictability
6. Offer a variety of intervention options
7. Aim to soften the defensive armour through emotional expression and play

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1. Keep child-adult relationships strong

Despite the chronic and difficult behaviours displayed by these students

- Don't let the behaviour cause a break in the relationship with the adults
- Don't take the behaviour personally
- Find ways to reassure the student that adults will continue to care for him/her even when it has been a difficult day or a difficult week
- Find ways to bridge to the next point of connection

“Deep relational safety is certainly the means through which children who have suffered abuse and violence come to settle and find the comfort and love they need to recover from its traumatic effects.” Australian Childhood Foundation

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2. Build a team of interveners

Create or use your existing a school team to

- Plan regular meetings to discuss challenging students and how best to help support them so they can handle being in school
- Put together a team of adults to share the responsibility of caring for challenging students
- Use adult resources in the school creatively

“Children come to feel themselves as being safe through their experience in relationship with a caring and protective adult.” Australian Childhood Foundation

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3. Minimize the experience of SEPARATION

Examine often used interventions for **hidden sources of separation**

- **Time Out**
- **Consequences**
- **Choices**
- **Reflection Sheets**
- **Contracts**
- **Tracking Systems**
- **Agenda – end of day evaluation**
- **Reward Systems**

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TIME OUT	
MATURATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires the ability to reflect on what one did wrong – well-functioning prefrontal cortex
VULNERABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires the ability to feel sad Increases Separation Alarm Can lead to disengagement – “I don’t care”
ATTACHMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes the student feels the relationship is contingent on “good” behaviour Creates feelings of insecurity, “What if I can’t be good enough?”

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TIME AWAY	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Send the student to SOMEONE else <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Behaviour technician, guidance counsellor, childcare worker... anyone who is a SAFE ATTACHMENT figure FOSTER CLASSROOM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Someone else who can take the student for a time Provide a LOCALE for the student who needs some time away <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NURTURING SUPPORT CENTRE Re-establish the RELATIONSHIP as soon as possible <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Let the student know that the relationship is still intact 	
Instead of Time Out	

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CONSEQUENCES	
MATURATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires the ability to remember the consequence in the heat of the moment- well developed prefrontal cortex functioning Interferes with the development of caring
VULNERABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires ability to tolerate vulnerability / feel sadness Risks increasing hardening/ disengagement – “I don’t care”.
ATTACHMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can negatively affect the relationship with adults Feels unfair. “Adults take away what I care about the most.” <p>In times of high emotion, integrative capacity (using all parts of the brain) diminishes</p>

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PREVENTIVE INTERVENTION	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults decide what is in the student’s best interest to PREVENT further problems (not to change behavior) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternative recess Avoiding hallways and lockers Protected lunch Accept that the student will not be happy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult accepts the consequences of being a “wall of futility” Give lots of space for emotional expression Be firm but kind <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do very little talking and explaining Make sure the alternative is pleasant 	
Instead of CONSEQUENCES	

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CHOICES	
MATURATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires good prefrontal cortex functioning
VULNERABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pushes student’s face into failure when once again they made a “poor choice”
ATTACHMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes it feel like the relationship contingent upon a “good” choice
WHEN YOU ARE BEING GUIDED BY YOUR EMOTIONAL/ALARM SYSTEM IT DOES NOT FEEL LIKE A CHOICE.	

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REFLECTION SHEETS	
MATURATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires the ability to reflect on what you did wrong – well developed prefrontal cortex functioning Students tend to fill in these sheets using a formula to please the adults This does not lead to real change or growth
VULNERABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires the ability to feel sad Can lead to disengagement– “I don’t care”
ATTACHMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student sees adults as making life more difficult for them – not as being on their side

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CONTRACTS	
MATURATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires well developed prefrontal cortex functioning Does not lead to real growth
VULNERABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pushes student's face into failure Risks increasing hardening/ disengagement – "I don't care".
ATTACHMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes the student feels the relationship is contingent on "good" behaviour Creates feelings of insecurity, "What if I can't meet the conditions?"

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INDIVIDUAL INTERVENTION
<p>After the student is calm and easily collected (responsive)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solicit GOOD INTENTIONS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the student want to do differently? Help the student to steer in the right direction. Help the student to have realistic expectations. Find a way to make it easier for the student to make a good choice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide alternative and pleasurable options Orchestrate the student's schedule to minimize time in situations that lead to trouble Help the student to create a relationship with adult helpers Script and practice alternate behaviours <p>Remember and expect that this will take time. Be patient.</p> <p>Instead of talking about CHOICES and giving REFLECTION SHEETS or CONTRACTS</p>

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TRACKING SYSTEMS	
MATURATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They only change the behaviour while the system is being used because true growth is not happening Penalizes the immature as they fatigue easily due to an underdeveloped prefrontal cortex
VULNERABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pushes student's face into failure May increase disengagement
ATTACHMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes the relationship contingent upon performance There is little recognition of effort Increases attachment alarm
<p>These systems are often a challenge to manage.</p>	

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STRUCTURE, ROUTINE, HABITS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the list of "desired" behaviours as a reminder of what is expected – like a script or visual prompt Solicit GOOD INTENTIONS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help the student to steer in the right direction Use a tracking system to help <u>adults</u> notice patterns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Then use this information to make changes in the student's schedule or environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide extra targeted support Create adapted routines Practice behaviours to grow them into new habits
<p>INSTEAD OF TRACKING SYSTEMS</p>

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AGENDA AT END OF DAY	
MATURATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Behaviour cannot be changed overnight or as a result of a "talking to."
VULNERABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pushes the student's face into failure Can lead a student to "not care"
ATTACHMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Puts the student into the very difficult situation of having to bring home the "bad news" Causes attachment alarm and possibly separation

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 USING THE AGENDA TO REPORT A STUDENT'S BEHAVIOUR AT THE END OF EACH DAY Affecting relationships / causing separation alarm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When a child brings a "red" or "yellow" face home, the parent is going to be disappointed. Seeing that disappointment triggers a fear of yet another separation. The parent tries to "fix" the behaviour but can't, and becomes more frustrated and upset. This climate of frustration and upset prevents the child from being able to "rest" – a lack of rest increases the likelihood of poor behaviour. The adults at school are not seen as "safe" because they are the ones reporting the behavior to the parents. Children's anxiety increases or they start not caring. Even "good" children can become alarmed – fearful of getting a "yellow" or "red" face = Sunday night meltdowns.

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COMMUNICATE WITH PARENTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite the parent to a problem-solving meeting • Show lots of empathy for the student's challenges • Focus on what each person can do to make school an easier place for the student to manage • Share that there will no longer be a daily report because of its effect on the child-adult relationship • If behaviour needs to be communicated, <u>find another way</u> • If the student has had a difficult day encourage the parent to provide MORE <u>comfort</u> and <u>rest</u> (no homework, bath, story, cuddles) • Find ways to communicate with the parent to offer help 	<p style="text-align: center;">Instead of USING the AGENDA</p>

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REWARD SYSTEMS	
MATURATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students are "good" for the reward and not because they "want to" ○ Can make an unselfish behaviour into a selfish behaviour ○ Use what students value to try to get "good behaviour" ○ Gains are lost as soon as the power of the reward diminishes
VULNERABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increases frustration ○ Increases alarm ○ Can provoke disengagement when the reward is not possible or less than expected
ATTACHMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Makes it feel that the relationship contingent upon performance ○ Can be insulting to the children who naturally want to behave ○ The students can feel manipulated or their effort unrecognized

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	<p>USING A DIGITAL BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT SYSTEM What does it really do?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Puts the child into state of <u>facing separation</u> – keenly imagining the DISAPPOINTMENT of the parent if they didn't EARN "enough" points or if points are <u>removed</u>. ii. The child in such a classroom is now very aware of what behaviour is expected, and wishing to be "acknowledged" will put a lot of effort into <u>acting</u> in a way that will get noticed by the teacher. iii. When children focus energy on acting appropriately, CONSEQUENTLY they will have less energy to engage in real learning. They may <u>look more engaged</u> in the task assigned, but are their brains fully engaged in the learning process? 	

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	<p>USING A DIGITAL BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT SYSTEM What does it really do?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> iv. What if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a student is having a bad day (they are tired, feeling sick, were just rejected by a friend)? • a student is immature and over-reactive and finds the behavioural demands of a full day in school overwhelming? • a student is trying very hard, and the teacher doesn't notice? • a student consistently receives fewer points than their classmates? 	
<p>HOW DOES NOT RECEIVING POINTS MAKE THOSE STUDENTS FEEL?</p>	

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	<p>USING A DIGITAL BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT SYSTEM What does it really do?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> v. If the parents can receive the "results" before seeing their child – they can start to question their child's performance. Now, instead of a "happy face" that summarizes the day, Mommy and Daddy can know <u>exactly how many times</u> the child behaved appropriately. A child said to his mother, <i>"Mommy, I could have gotten 45 points today, but I only got 35 points. CAN YOU STILL LOVE ME?"</i> vi. "Good" children can become alarmed – fearful of not getting enough points = Sunday night meltdowns. vii. The adults at school are not seen as "safe" because they are the ones reporting the behavior to the parents. viii. Children's anxiety increases or they start not caring. 	

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ADULT SUPPORT	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improve STUDENT-ADULT RELATIONSHIP to increase the student's NATURAL DESIRE TO BE GOOD for those to whom they are attached. ○ Provide "rewards" JUST BECAUSE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attachment increases when students are provided with MORE than what is being pursued. ○ Use incentives sparingly: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide extra motivation for something that HAS TO be done • But make sure to recognize EFFORT so everyone can participate 	
<p>Instead of REWARD SYSTEMS</p>	

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Intervening with Complex Childhood Trauma

CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

1. Keep child-adult relationships strong
2. Build a team of interveners
3. Minimize the experience of SEPARATION
4. Compensate for the effects of Trauma (over-reactivity and immaturity) to help the child behave successfully
5. Provide structure and predictability
6. Offer a variety of intervention options

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PREVENTION and INTERVENTION

Key factors in supporting challenging students

Targeted Intervention Based on RTI Model of Response to Intervention



TARGETED INTERVENTIONS TO MOVE THROUGH EMOTIONAL WAVERS AND BEHAVIORS

Tier 1: Interventions that benefit the whole group to function within the classroom in a "build-back" model

- Teacher greeting and engaging their students individually and as a group (in morning and after each lesson)
- Well established structures and routines
- Visuals for social direction (See "Space" area on ground, handwriting station, etc.)
- Short work periods
- Alternate seating options - different areas in or out of class
- Alternate workstations - different locations within the classroom for students to work
- Individual "Quiet Time" activity - in, out of class, standing, mandala/coloring pages, Search & Find, etc.)
- Designated release activity with the whole group - daily
- Designated Area for students to retreat to within the classroom when a break is needed from the group and/or their work
- Community projects (i.e. Paper classroom, Puppets, building game bags, music building, mural artwork)
- Assigned opportunities to be involved in classroom projects, having letters, etc.

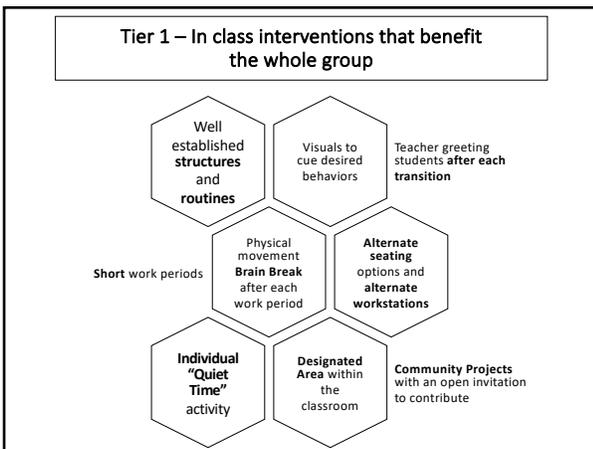
Tier 2: For Challenging students who struggle in the classroom and to stay within the classroom. These students benefit from all the interventions listed in Tier 1, but require additional interventions designed to help them stay in school.

- Daily Check-ins with a significant adult
- Use of the Designated Area within the classroom at scheduled times (in, transition)
- Assigned Stations: Standing centers and alternate workstation options
- Micro-projects: Breaks in the hallway and/or outside as they have set-up emotional and physical energy that must be released before they will be able to focus and be attentive to adult requests
- Resource Room or student's level of energy setting to be released
- Alternate seating - in classroom
- Alternate workstations
- Use of the Designated Area within the classroom for students to have a visual anchor of when they will take short breaks from the classroom
- Use of the Designated Area within the classroom at scheduled times (in, transition)
- Assigned Stations: Standing centers and alternate workstation options
- Micro-projects: Breaks in the hallway and/or outside as they have set-up emotional and physical energy that must be released before they will be able to focus and be attentive to adult requests
- Resource Room or student's level of energy setting to be released
- Alternate seating - in classroom
- Alternate workstations

Tier 3: For highly challenging students who struggle to stay within the classroom. Strategic only with these big emotions and the requirements of school. (These students benefit from all the interventions listed in Tier 1 and Tier 2, but require more specialized intervention strategies to help them stay in school.)

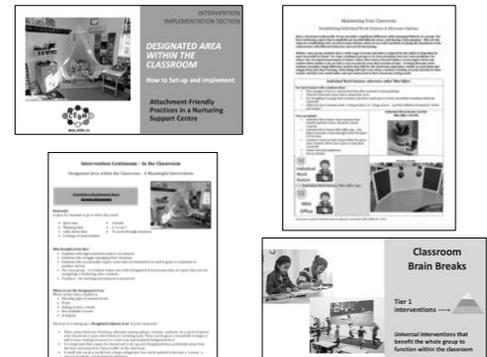
- Daily Check-ins with a significant adult at multiple scheduled times each day
- Students' work done in alternate location with breaks of 10-15 minutes outside of the classroom
- Use of the Designated Area within the classroom
- Assigned Stations: Standing centers and alternate workstation options
- Micro-projects: Breaks in the hallway and/or outside as they have set-up emotional and physical energy that must be released before they will be able to focus and be attentive to adult requests
- Resource Room or student's level of energy setting to be released
- Alternate seating - in classroom
- Alternate workstations

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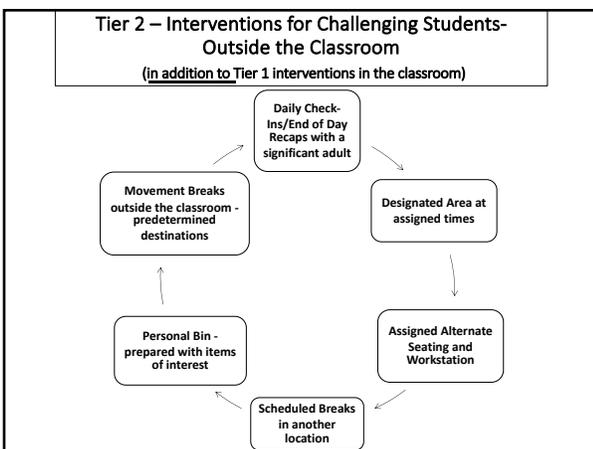


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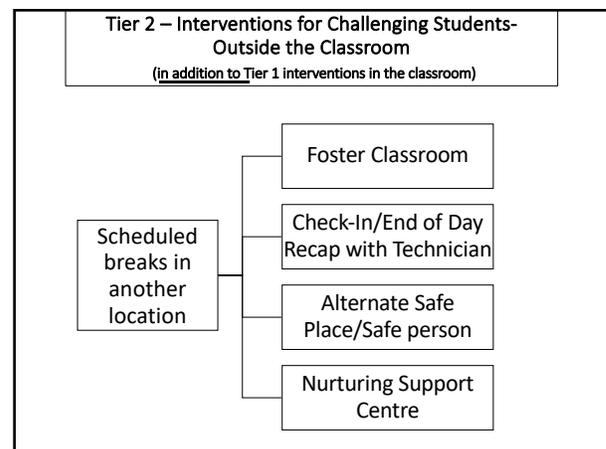
Tier 1 – In class interventions that benefit the whole group



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Tier 2 – Interventions for Challenging Students- Outside the Classroom
(In addition to Tier 1 interventions in the classroom)

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Tier 3 – Interventions for Highly Challenging Students- Outside the Classroom
(In addition to Tier 1 interventions in the classroom and Tier 2 Interventions outside the classroom)

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Tier 3 – Interventions for Highly Challenging Students- Outside the Classroom
(In addition to Tier 1 interventions in the classroom and Tier 2 Interventions outside the classroom)

The objective is to maintain the child in school (this does not mean full-time in the classroom)

Ongoing planning and revision for this student

Selective time in the classroom – when & where successful

A Personalized & Adapted Schedule includes:

- Scheduled time with technician and professionals for targeted intervention
- Prioritize emotional expression in interventions
- Schedule intervention time focused on physical release of emotions – Emotions Room, outdoor play, additional physical education

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Tier 3 – Interventions for Highly Challenging Students- Outside the Classroom
(In addition to Tier 1 interventions in the classroom and Tier 2 Interventions outside the classroom)

Personalized schedules require ongoing review and adjustments – it is key that all adults supporting a student are aligned in the intervention plan

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Resources, available on the CEBM website: www.cebm.ca

Intervention Continuum

Emotions Room

Brain Breaks

Nurturing Support Centre

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ALLOW FOR EXPRESSION WITHOUT REPURCUSSION

- Co-regulation
- Provide safe and dignified outlets for EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION so energy can be released, not suppressed:
 - EMOTIONS ROOM
 - PLAY
 - ART – DRAMA – MUSIC – DANCE etc.
- Encourage the expression of SADNESS AND TEARS:
 - Help the tears to flow (if they come spontaneously)

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STUDENTS WITH CHALLENGING BEHAVIOURS ARE JUST TRYING TO TELL US THAT THEY NEED US TO HELP THEM.

Calvin and Hobbes by Bill Watterson

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Eva de Gosztanyi, Martine Demers, Catherine Korah
Centre of Excellence for Behaviour Management
www.cebm.ca

A website with Trauma-Responsive and Developmentally Friendly interventions for schools.

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TRAUMA RESOURCES

Books:

- Bessel Van der Kolk: *The Body Keeps the Score*
- Bruce D. Perry & M. Szalvavitz: *The Boy who was Raised as a Dog*
- Nadine Burke-Harris: *The Deepest Well*
- Regalena Melrose: *Why Students Underachieve*

Websites:

- **Australian Childhood Foundation:** <https://www.childhood.org.au/>
- **The effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE Study)**
www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/index.html
- **Child Trauma Academy (Bruce Perry):** <http://childtrauma.org/>
- **Burke Foundation (Nadine Burke Harris):** <https://burkefoundation.org/what-drives-us/adverse-childhood-experiences-aces/>

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