

A Brain-Based Approach in a Daycare Context

How play, connection, and co-regulation
serve as anchors.

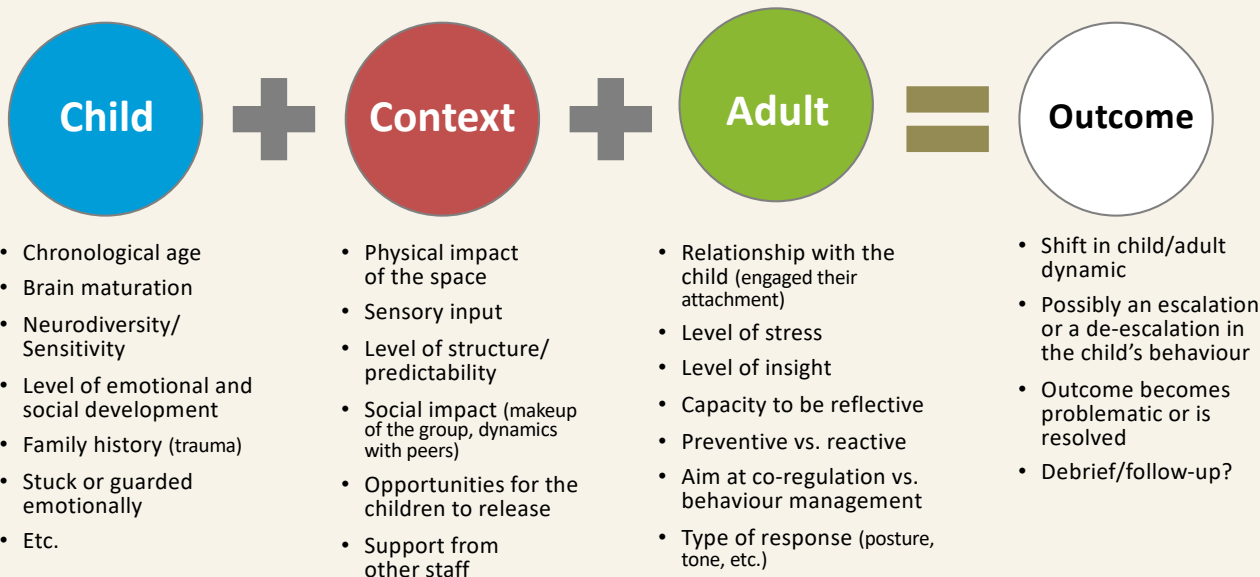
Presented by Catherine Korah and
Kerrie Bremner, CEBM.



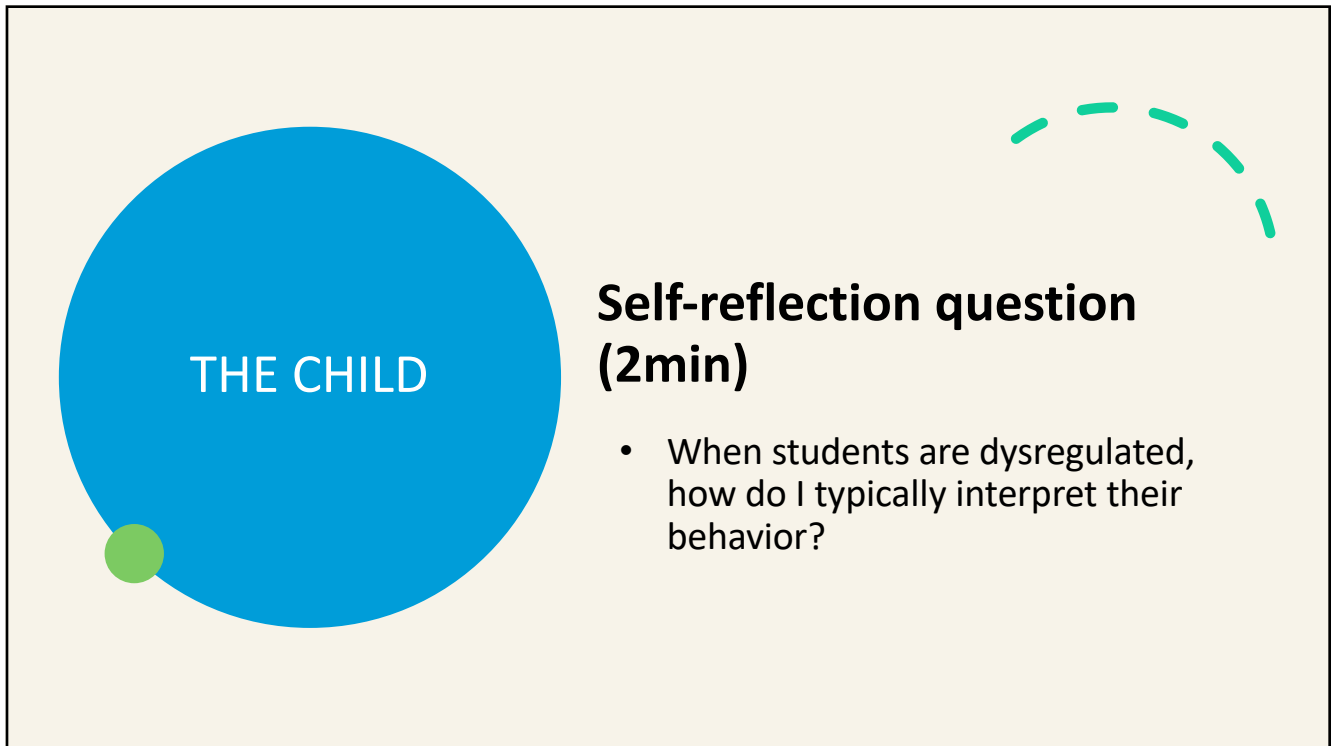
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IN A DAYCARE SETTING

Considering all the elements involved in a child's day



2



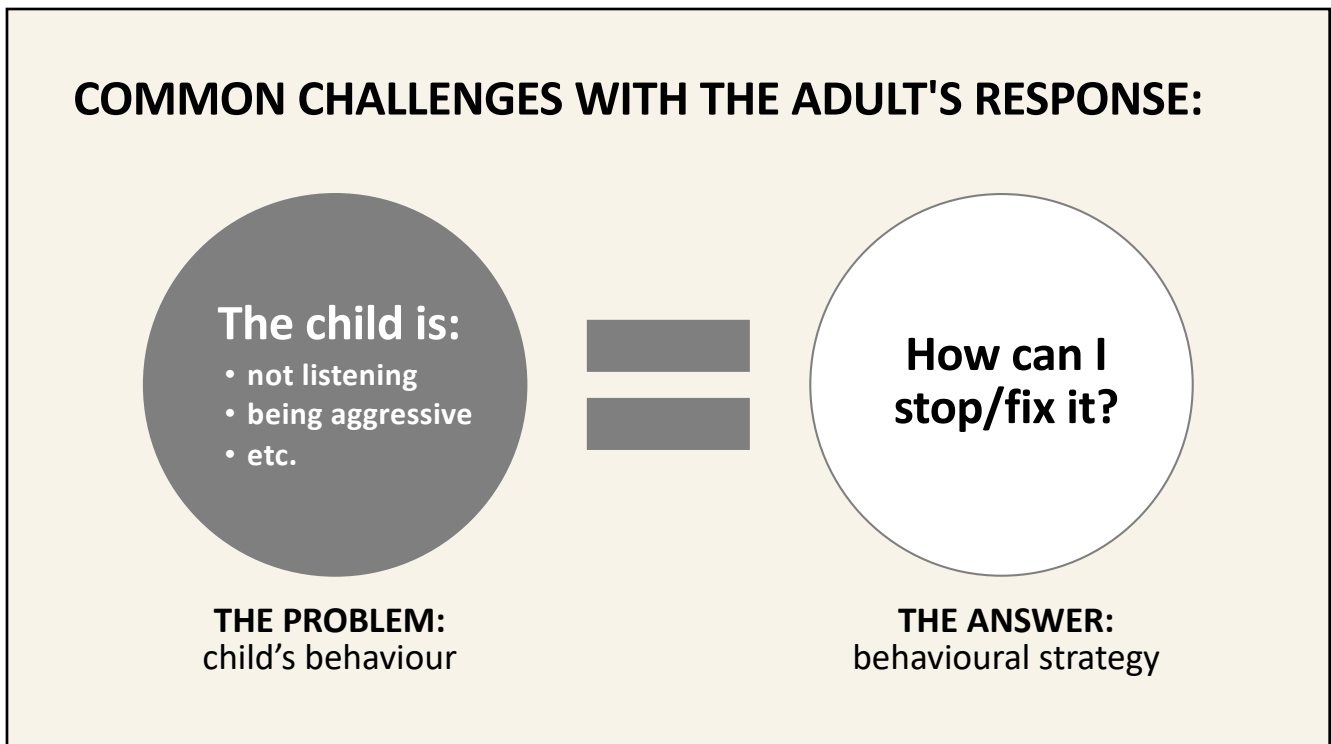
The diagram features a large blue circle on the left with the text "THE CHILD" in white. A small green circle is positioned at the bottom-left edge of the blue circle. To the right of the blue circle, the text "Self-reflection question (2min)" is displayed in bold black font. Below this text is a bulleted list: "• When students are dysregulated, how do I typically interpret their behavior?". A dashed green arc is located in the top right corner of the slide.

THE CHILD

Self-reflection question (2min)

- When students are dysregulated, how do I typically interpret their behavior?

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The diagram is titled "COMMON CHALLENGES WITH THE ADULT'S RESPONSE:". It consists of two circles connected by an equals sign. The left circle is dark grey and contains the text "The child is:" followed by a bulleted list: "• not listening", "• being aggressive", and "• etc.". Below this circle is the text "THE PROBLEM: child's behaviour". The right circle is white with a grey outline and contains the text "How can I stop/fix it?". Below this circle is the text "THE ANSWER: behavioural strategy".

COMMON CHALLENGES WITH THE ADULT'S RESPONSE:

The child is:

- not listening
- being aggressive
- etc.

THE PROBLEM:
child's behaviour

How can I stop/fix it?

THE ANSWER:
behavioural strategy

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COMMON MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR

1



The child's reaction came out of nowhere; they had no reason to behave like that.

2



Children can choose to behave properly.

3



This has happened before; the child should get it by now.

4



Children should be able to ask for help when they need it.

5



The child has no excuse to behave that way; they don't have a history of trauma nor a diagnosis.

6



Children who are not disciplined will never learn.

7



We must address the inappropriate behaviour immediately, if not we're giving it permission.

8



Managing emotions has to be taught and the goal of SEL is self-regulation.

Children's behaviour is communication.
Understanding the why helps us respond with empathy and support.

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What is wrong with this student?

What We See

- Defiance
- Withdrawal
- Constant Interruptions
- Refusal

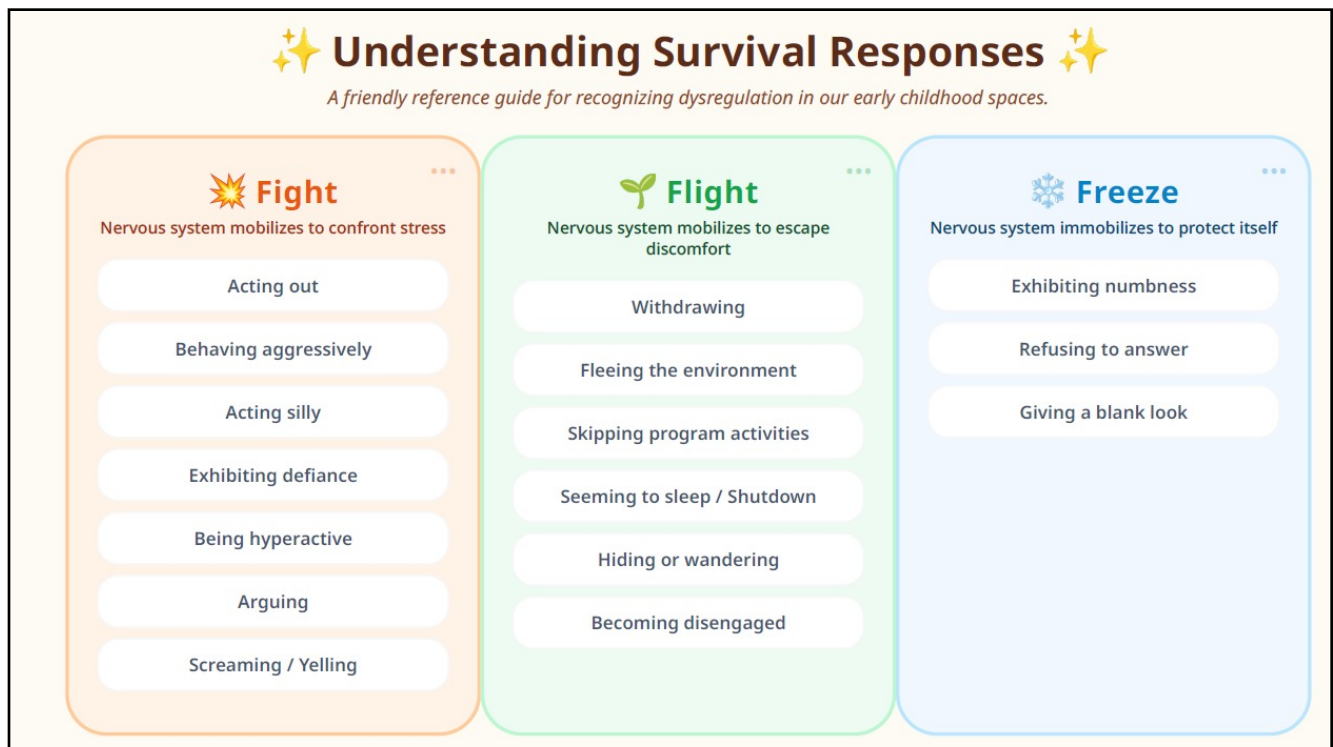
What might be going on for this student?

What is Being Communicated

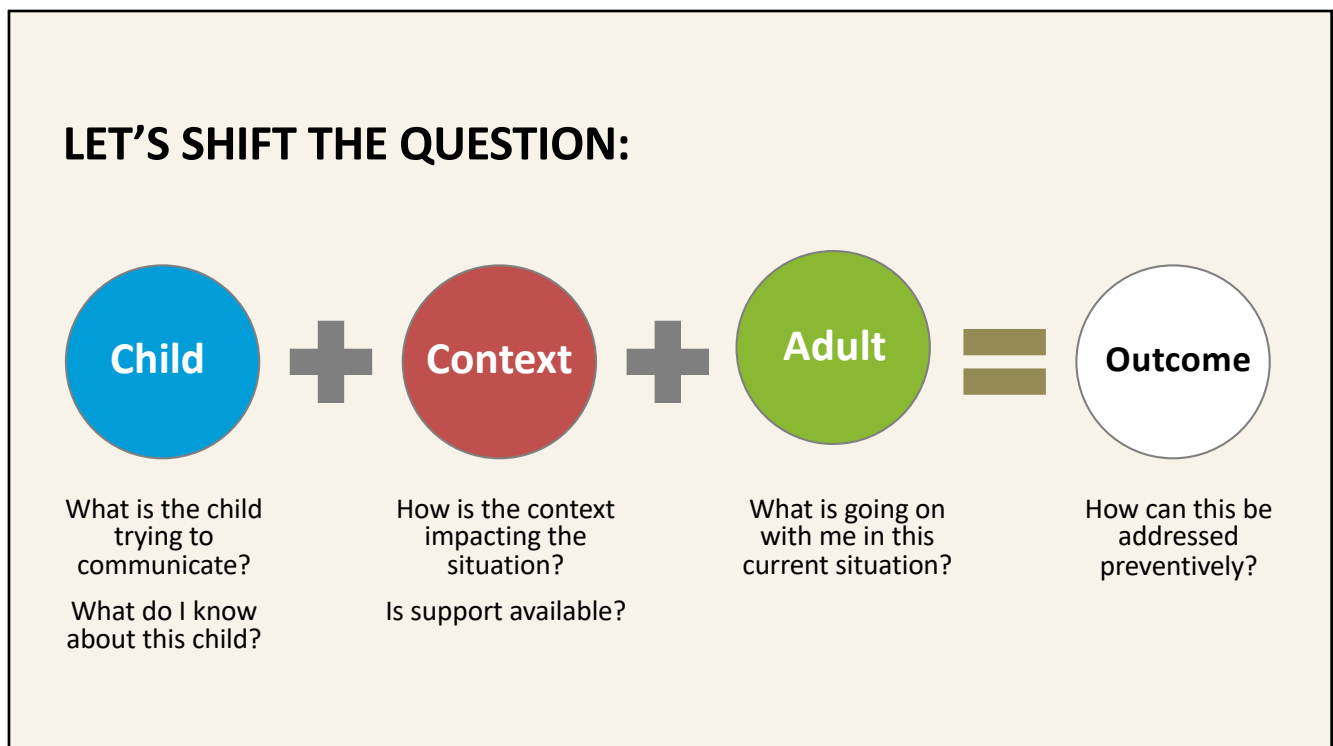
- Sensory overload
- Fear
- Unmet relational needs
- Reliving a traumatic memory

Behavior is never random. It is a last-resort attempt to communicate an unmet need. All behavior is a form of communication, and all communication is an opportunity for connection.

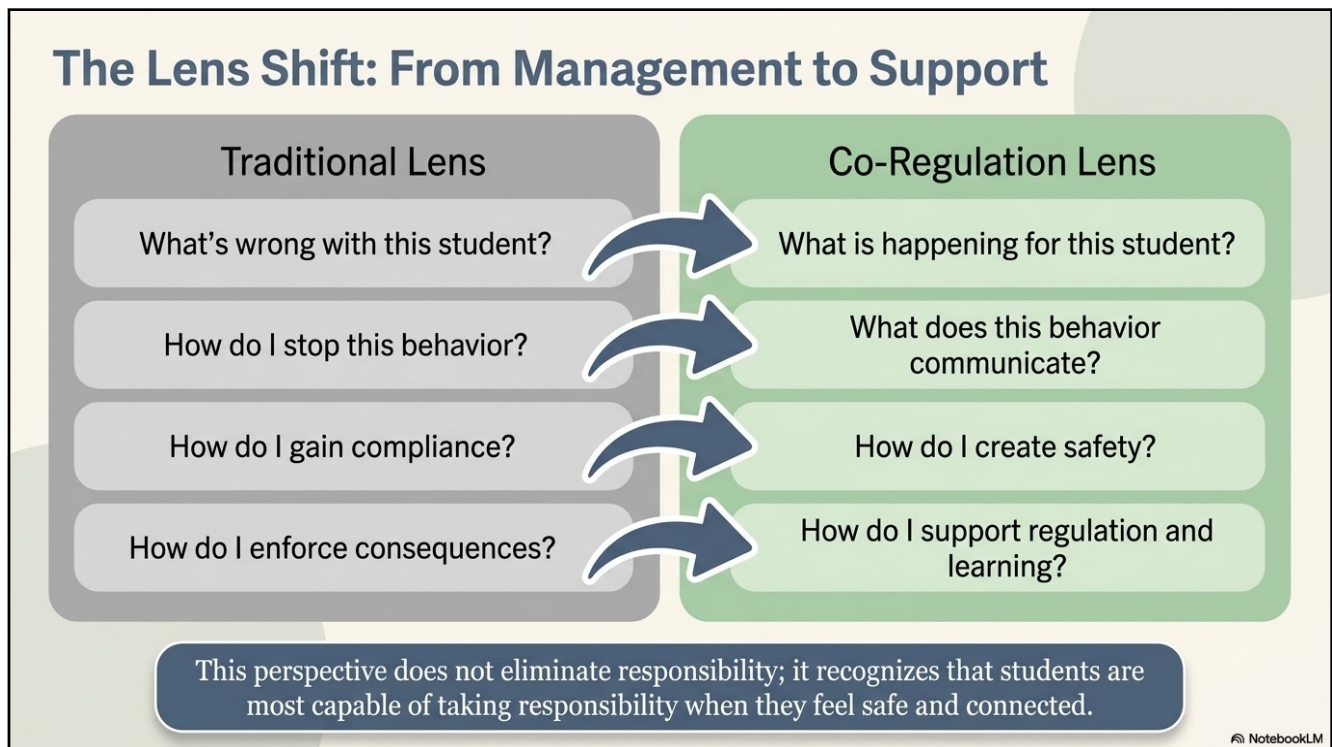
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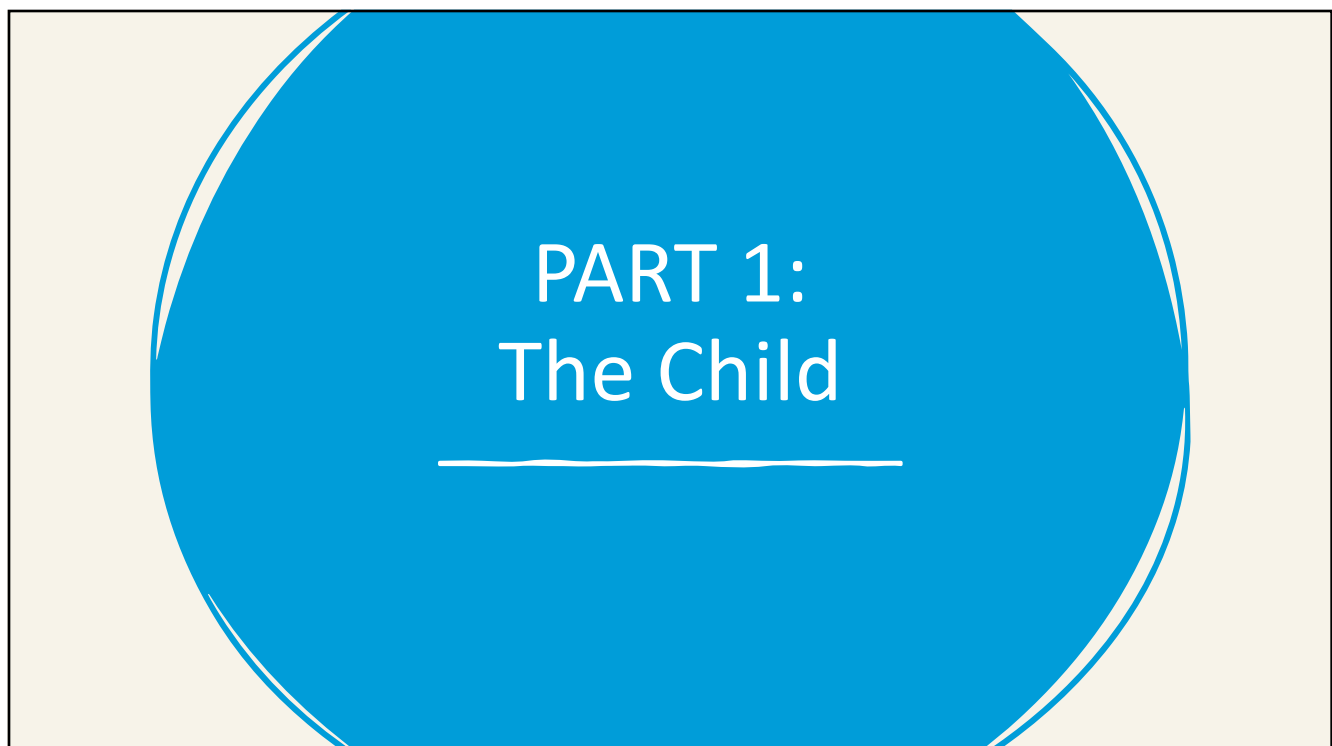
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PART 1: THE CHILD

- Chronological age
- Brain maturation (capacity for perspective taking)
- Neurodiversity/ Sensitivity
- Level of emotional and social development
- Family history (trauma)
- Stuck or guarded emotionally
- Capacity to cope and adapt
- Other individual differences

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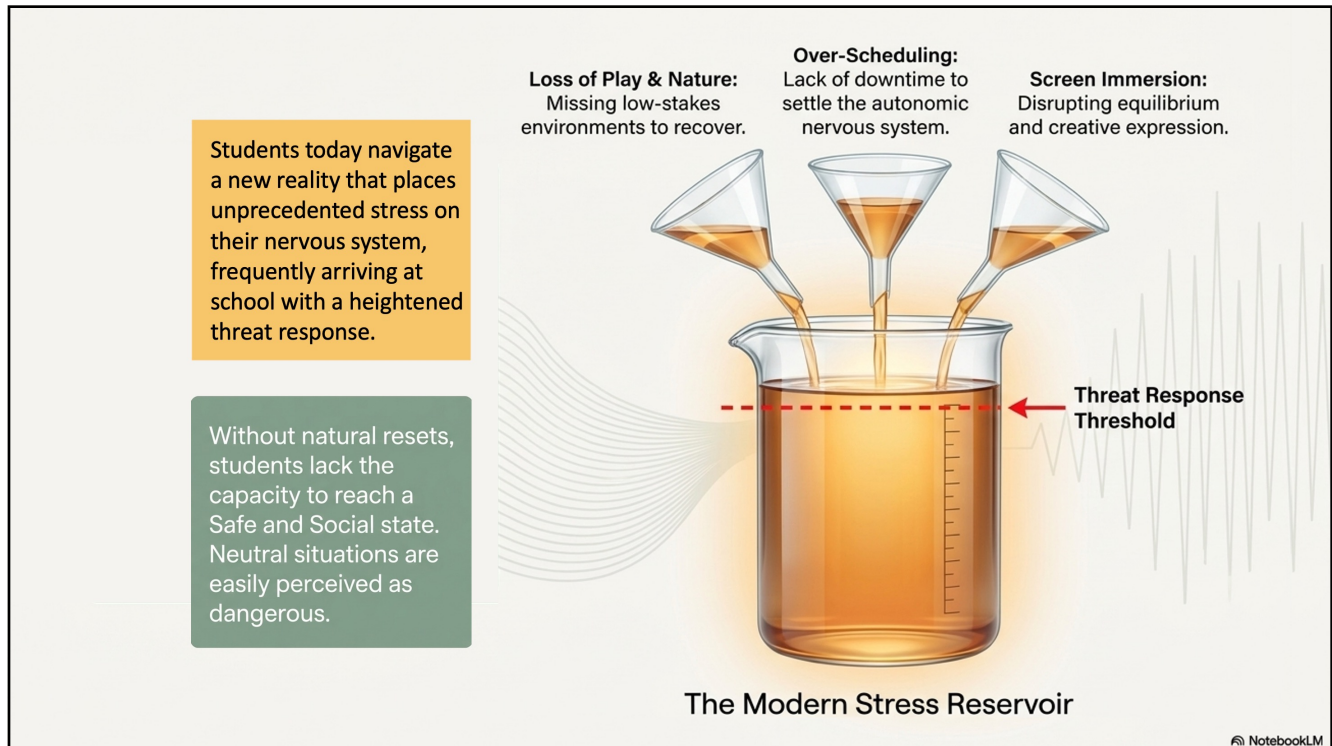
Elements That Influence Children's Emotional Maturity

Factors in today's world that can impact social-emotional development

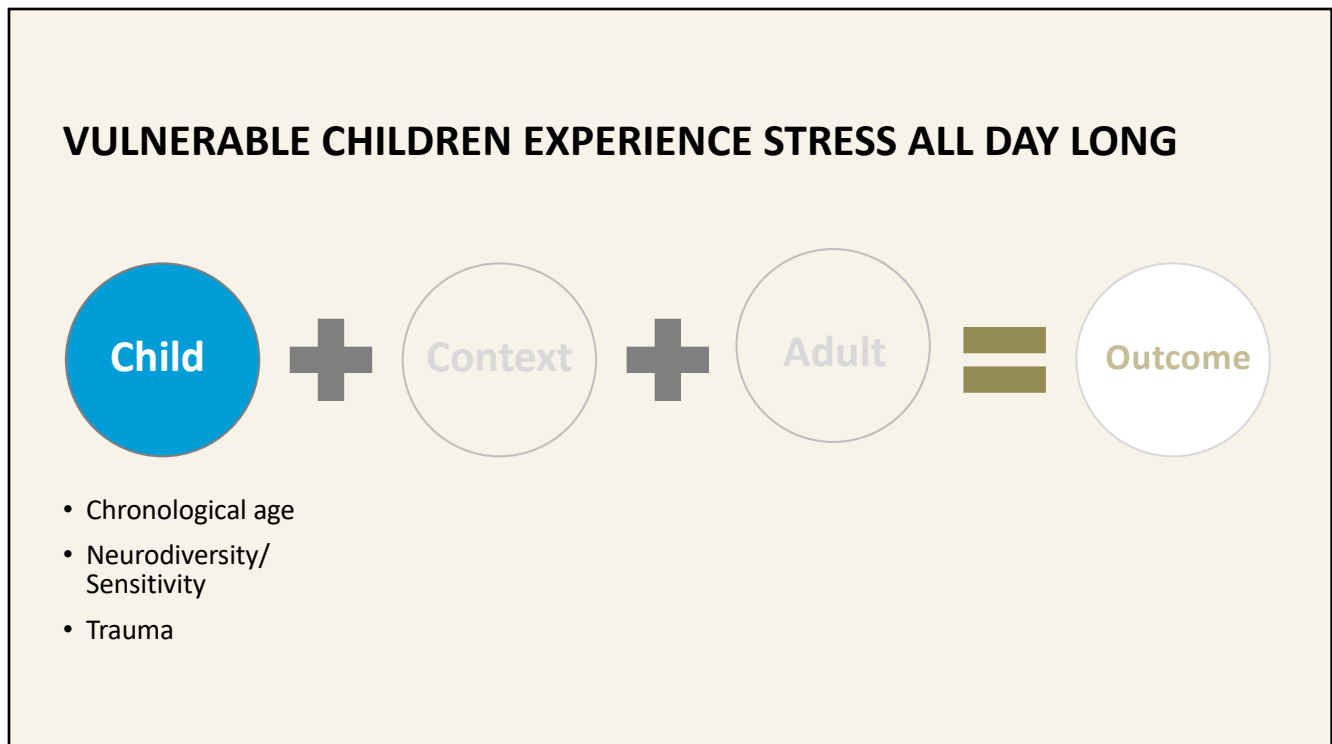


Emotional maturity develops through relationships, play, emotional expression, and supportive experiences—
not simply with age.

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Individual exercise (10 min)

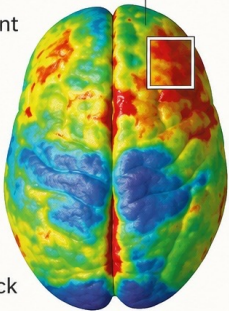
Student Experience Mapping:
Imagine a full school day from the perspective of a vulnerable student and consider how their environment impacts them.

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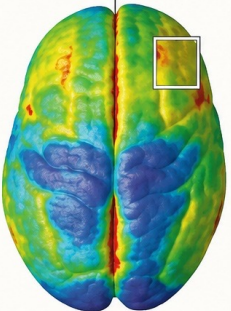
Judgment last to develop

The area of the brain that controls “executive functions” — including weighing long-term consequences and controlling impulses — is among the last to fully mature.
Brain development from childhood to adulthood:

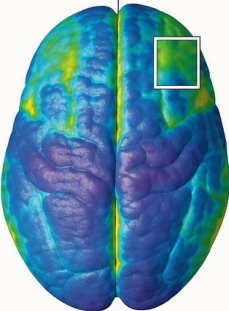
5-year-old brain



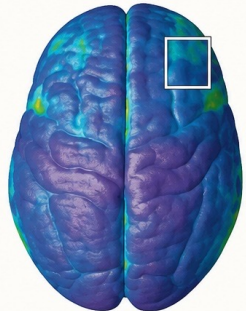
Preteen brain



Teen brain



20-year-old brain



Front

Top view

Back

Dorsal lateral prefrontal cortex (“executive functions”)

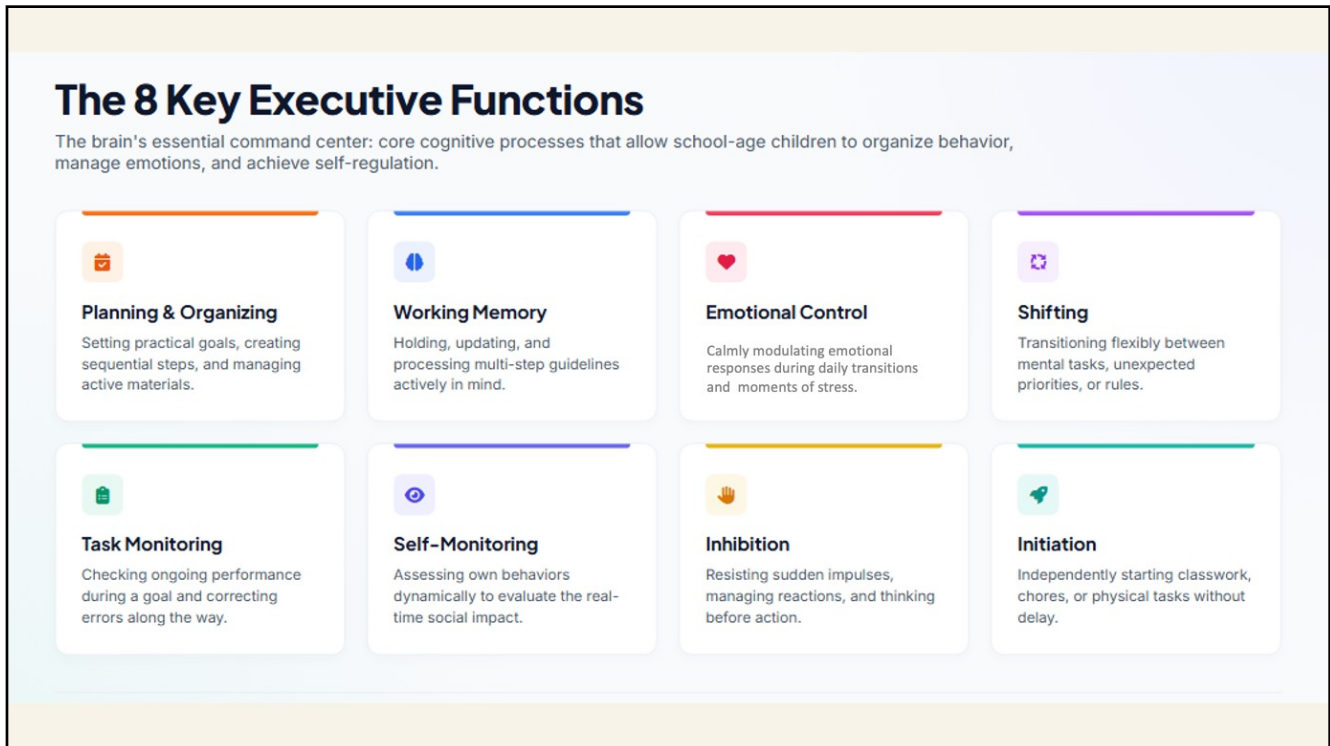
Red/yellow: Parts of brain less fully mature



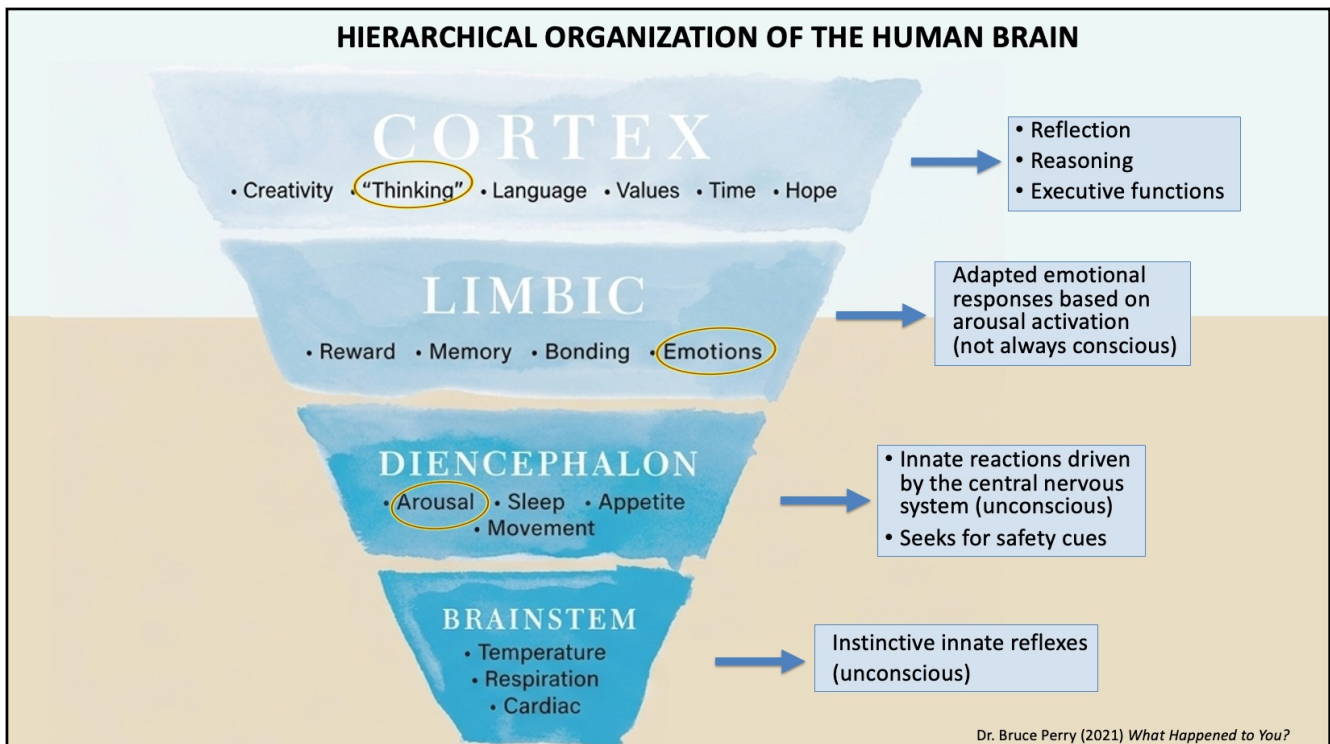
Blue/purple: Parts of brain more fully matured

Image from the National Institute of Mental Health; Paul Thompson, Ph.D., UCLA Laboratory of Neuro Imaging

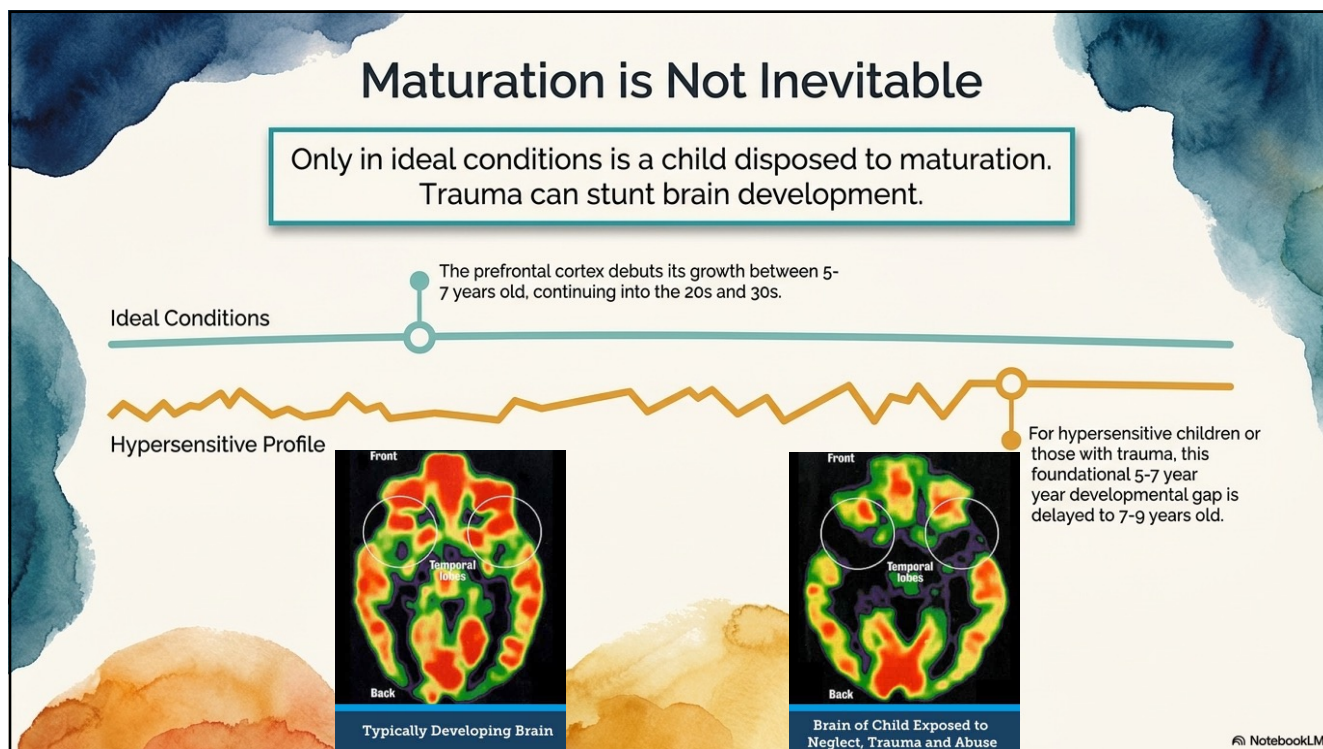
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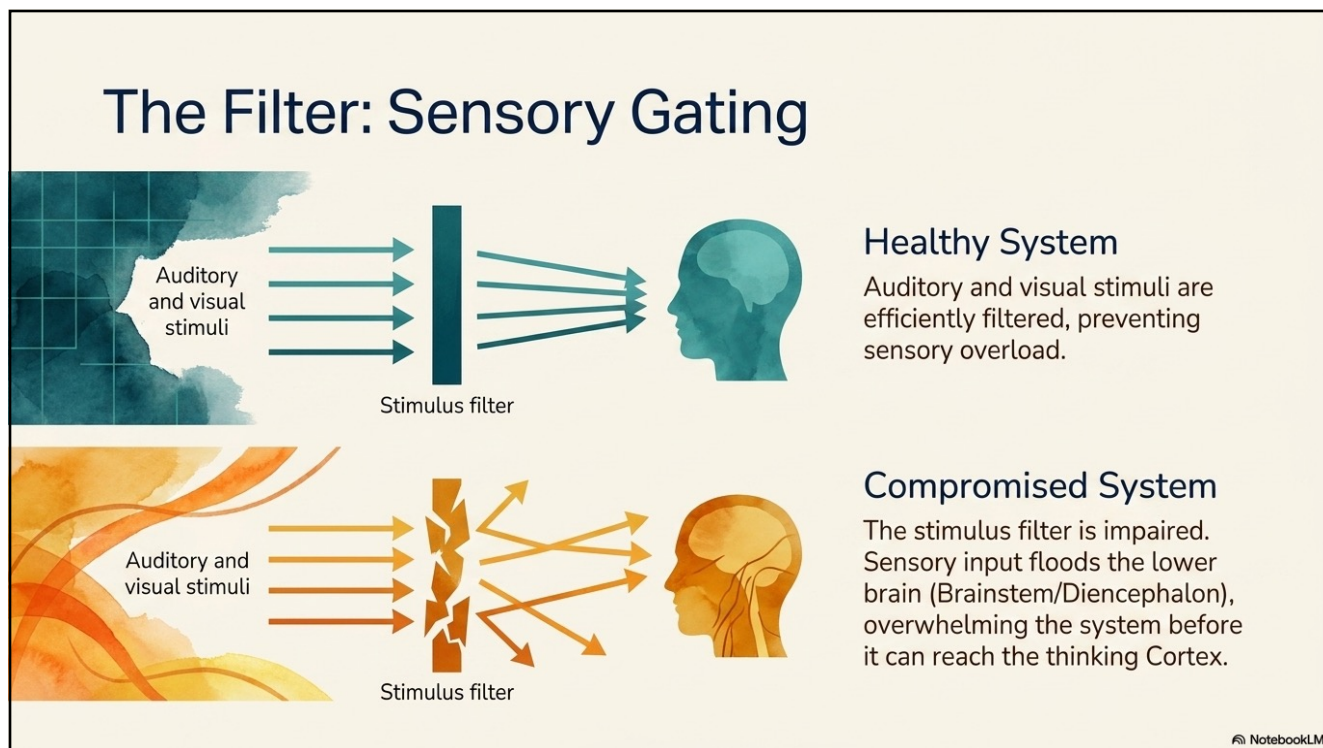
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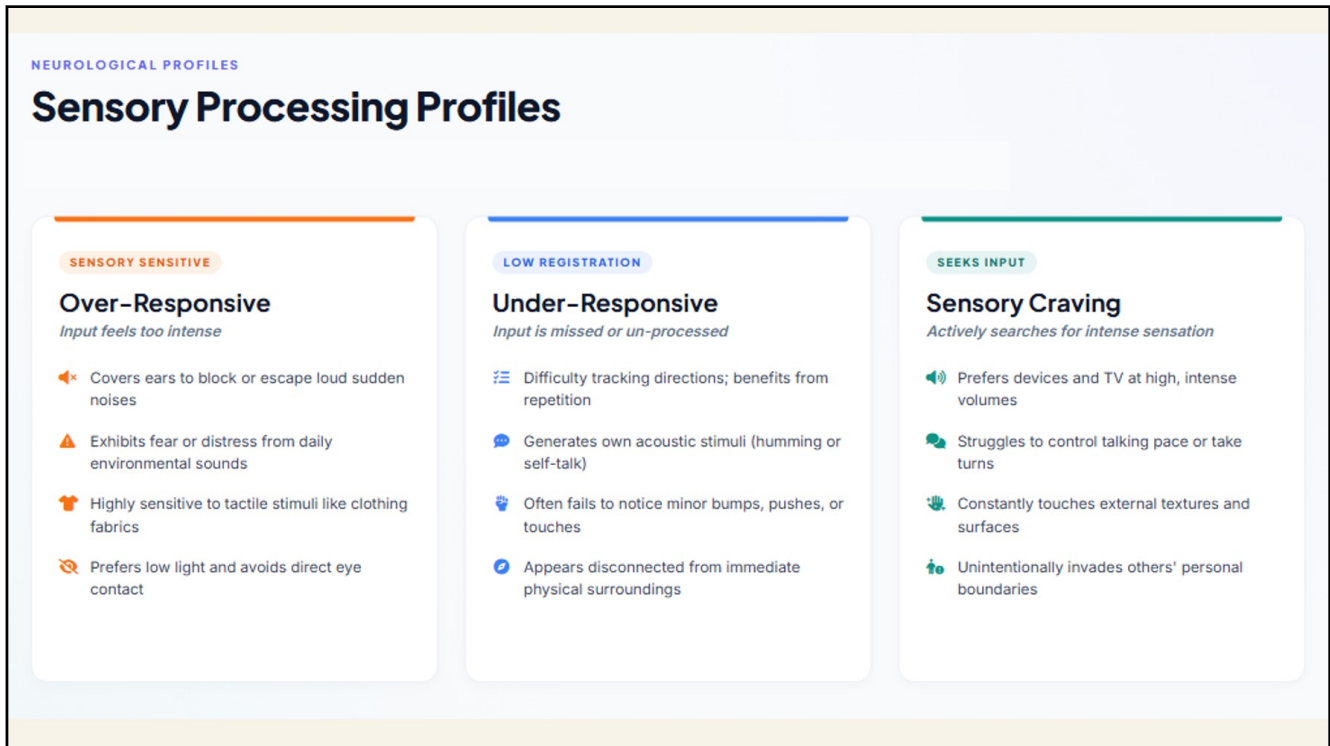
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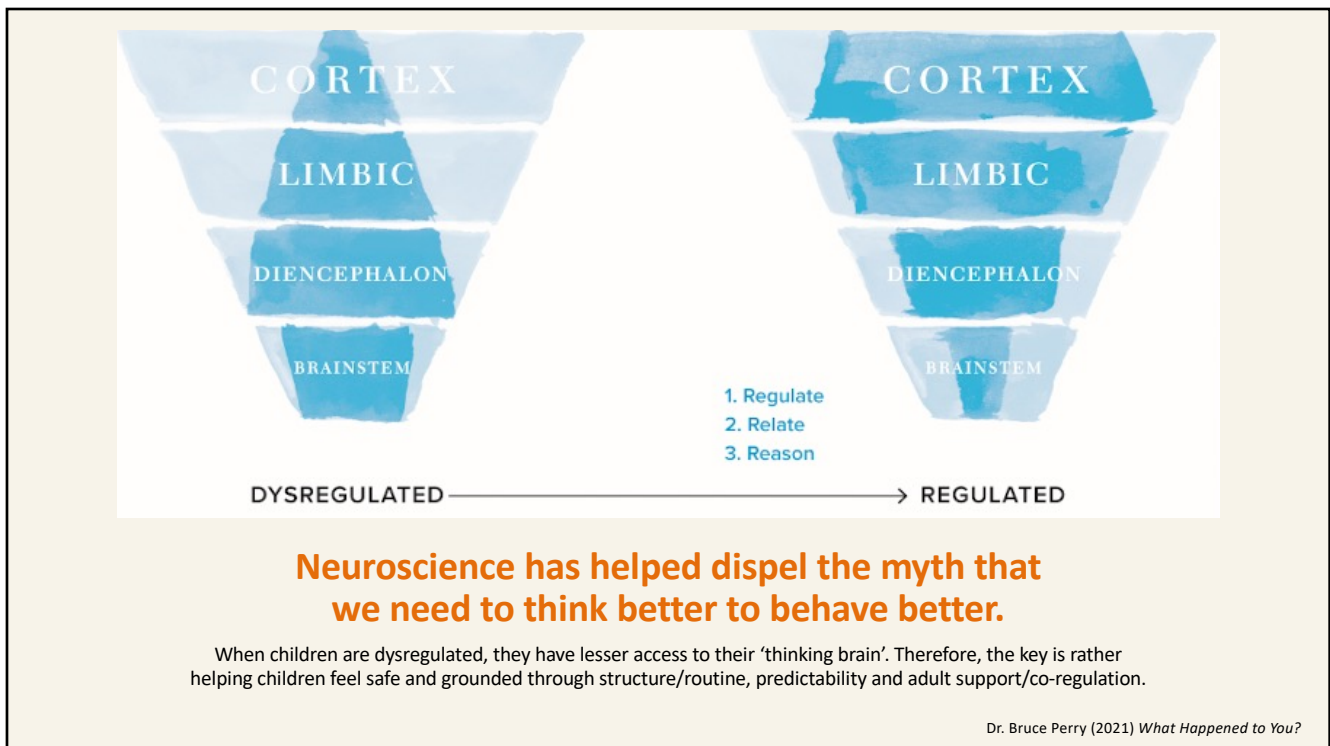
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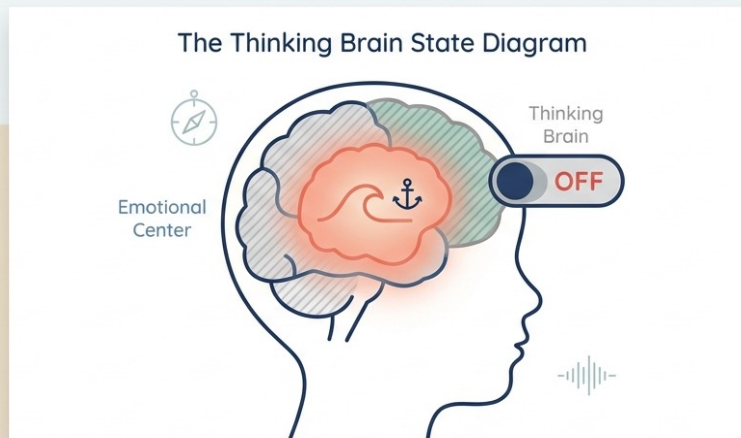
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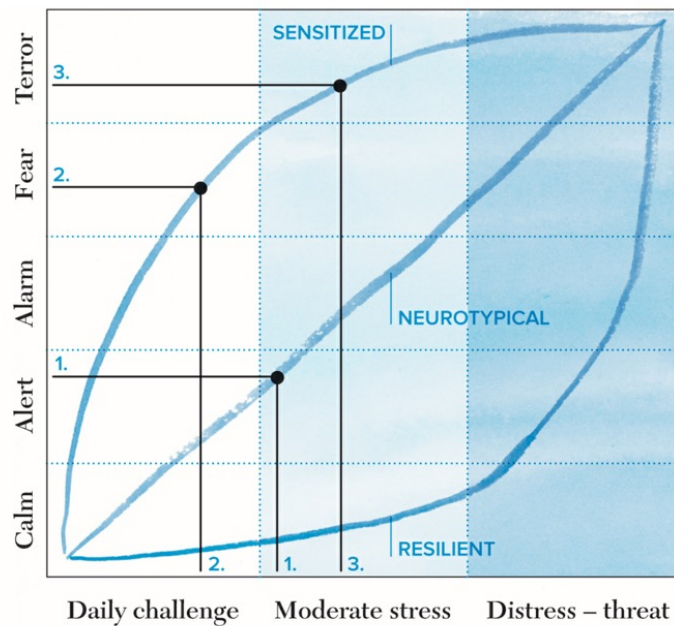
The thinking brain shuts down during emotional distress

When a child is overwhelmed, their thinking brain is not fully working.
They cannot process logic, learn lessons, or answer questions.



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Dr. Bruce Perry (2021) *What Happened to You?*

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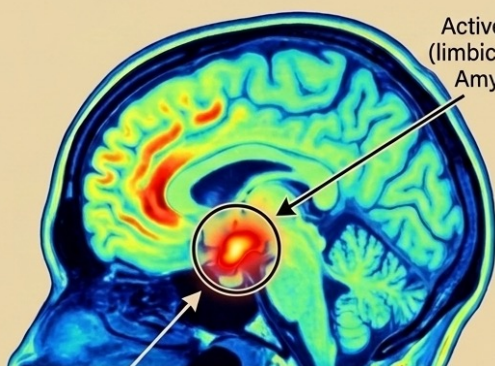
Small group activity (10 min)

Expectations vs. Biology:

Refer to the brain scans of the "Youth Brain" (amygdala) next to the "Adult Brain" (prefrontal cortex). Have a group discussion about specific rules or expectations in your setting that might be demanding adult-level emotional regulation from brains that physically have not built those pathways yet.

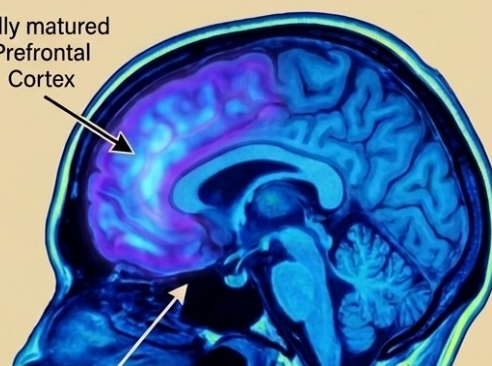
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The Youth Brain



Youth rely on innate reactions driven by the central nervous system. They **seek safety cues** and respond **instinctively**.

The Adult Brain

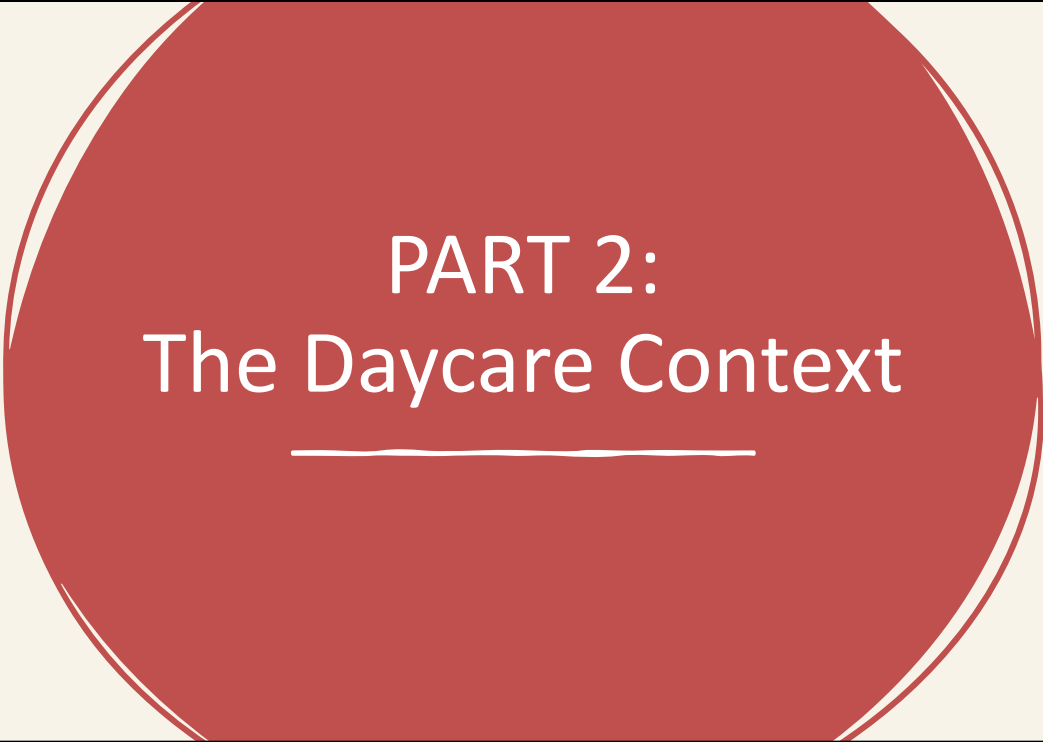


Adults rely on the **Prefrontal Cortex** for reasoning, executive functions, and weighing long-term **consequences**. This area is among the last to fully mature (developing into the 20s and 30s).

We cannot expect adult emotional regulation from a brain that physically has not built those pathways yet

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PART 2: The Daycare Context

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PART 2: THE DAYCARE CONTEXT

- 
- Physical impact of the space
 - Sensory input
 - Level of structure/
predictability
 - Social impact (makeup of
the group, dynamics with
peers)
 - Opportunities for the
children to release
 - Support from other staff

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THE DAYCARE CONTEXT

Self-reflection question (2min)

What does your group look like in terms of size, grade level, same age vs. mixed-age, individual student need, etc.

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The Crucible of the Daycare Context

Classroom		Daycare
Single cohort, static size.	Group Dynamics	Often larger groups, mixed-age ranges, children arriving from multiple classrooms simultaneously.
Mid-day, stable energy.	Timing & Energy	Early morning variable states; Afternoon decompensation after a full day of cognitive load.
Teacher-directed, rigid pace.	Structure	Flexible, child-directed, highly fluid.

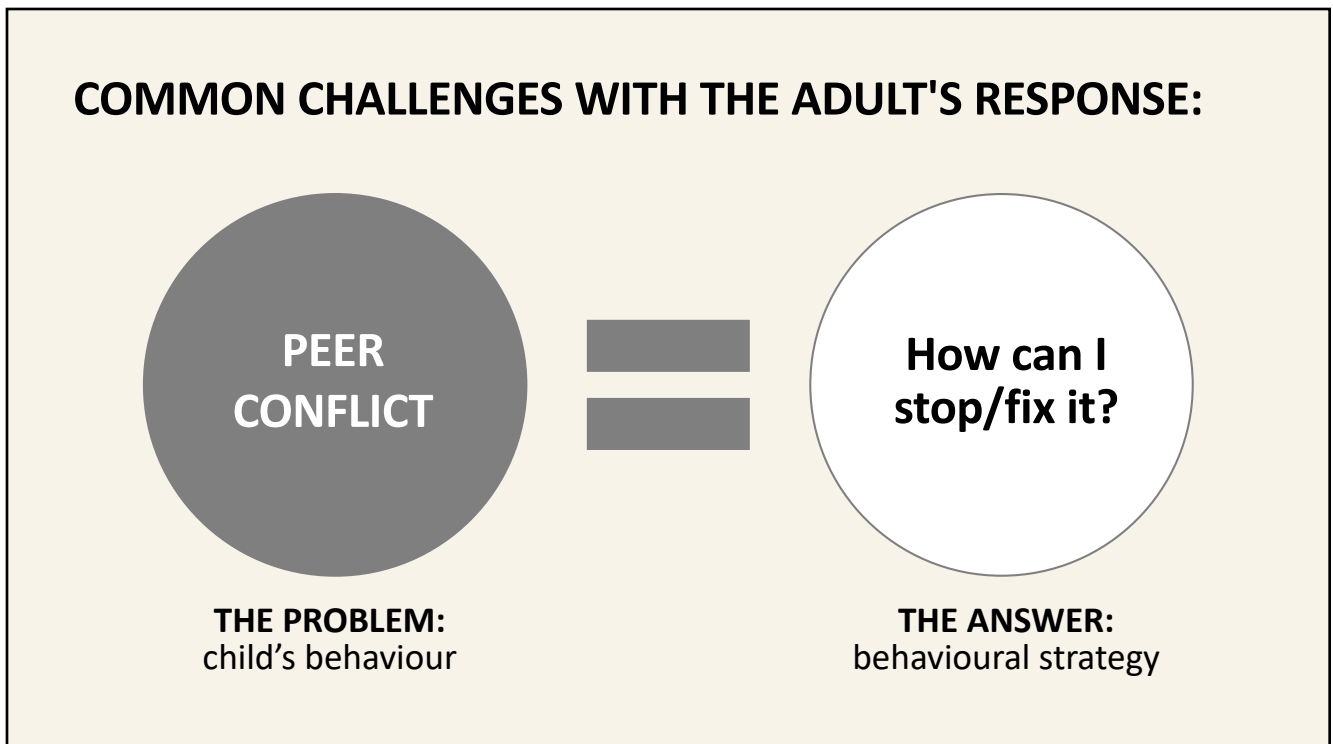
Conclusion: Behaviours seen in daycare will inherently differ from those in the classroom.

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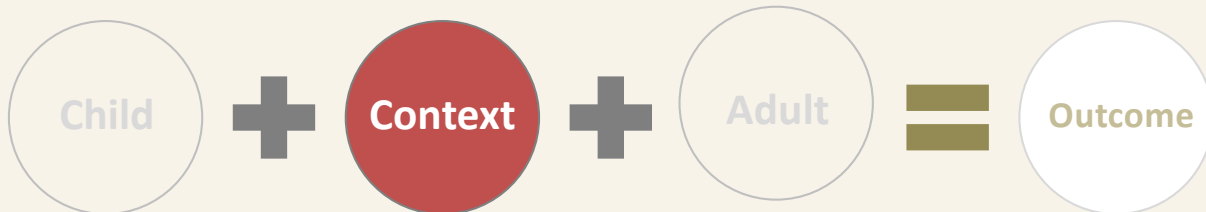


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VULNERABLE CHILDREN EXPERIENCE STRESS ALL DAY LONG

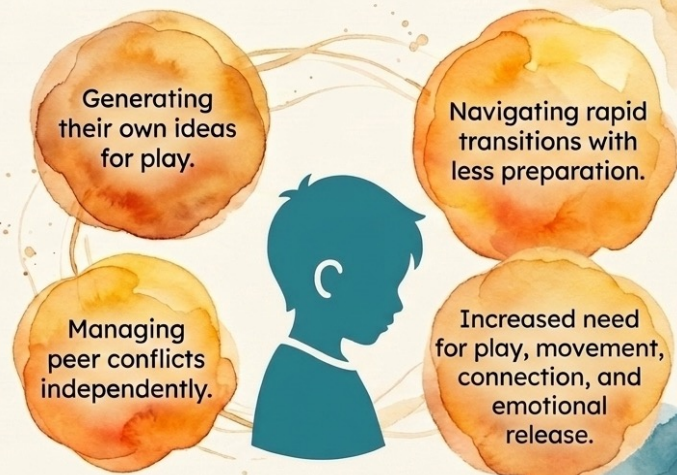


- Level of structure
- Dynamics between these two peers
- Opportunities for the children to release

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The Invisible Load of Unstructured Time

Children have fewer external structures guiding their behavior, leading to complex social demands. With a larger child-adult ratio, students are forced to independently manage:



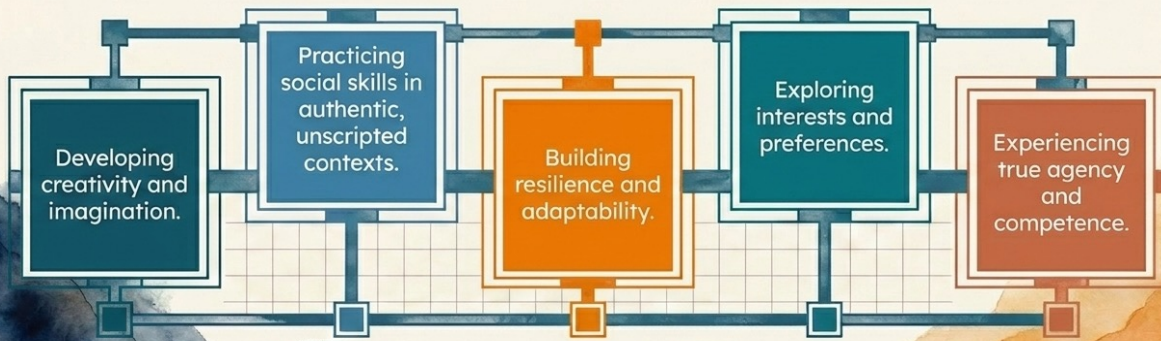
The Vulnerable Profile: For children struggling with executive functioning, sensory processing, or emotional regulation, this lack of structure is uniquely exhausting.

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The Purpose in the Chaos

Unstructured settings are challenging, but they are developmentally critical. They provide the authentic context needed to practice foundational lifelong skills.



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Redefining the Adult Role

The Misconception:
Unstructured
environments require less
adult involvement.

The Reality: They require a
different kind of involvement. The
goal is not to eliminate challenges,
but to ensure relational support.

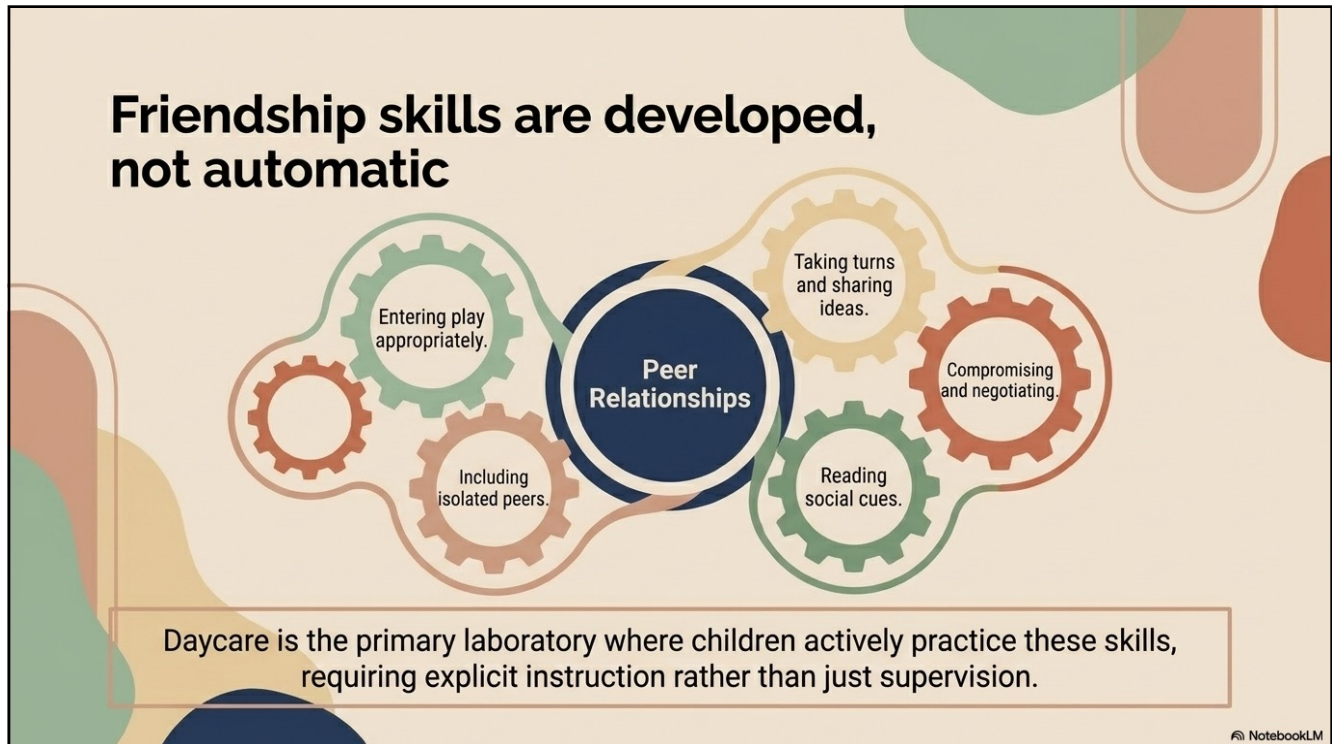
Instructor

The Anchor

- Monitoring emotional states.
- Supporting peer interactions.
- Helping children recover from disappointments.
- Facilitating problem-solving.
- Providing emotional and relational safety.

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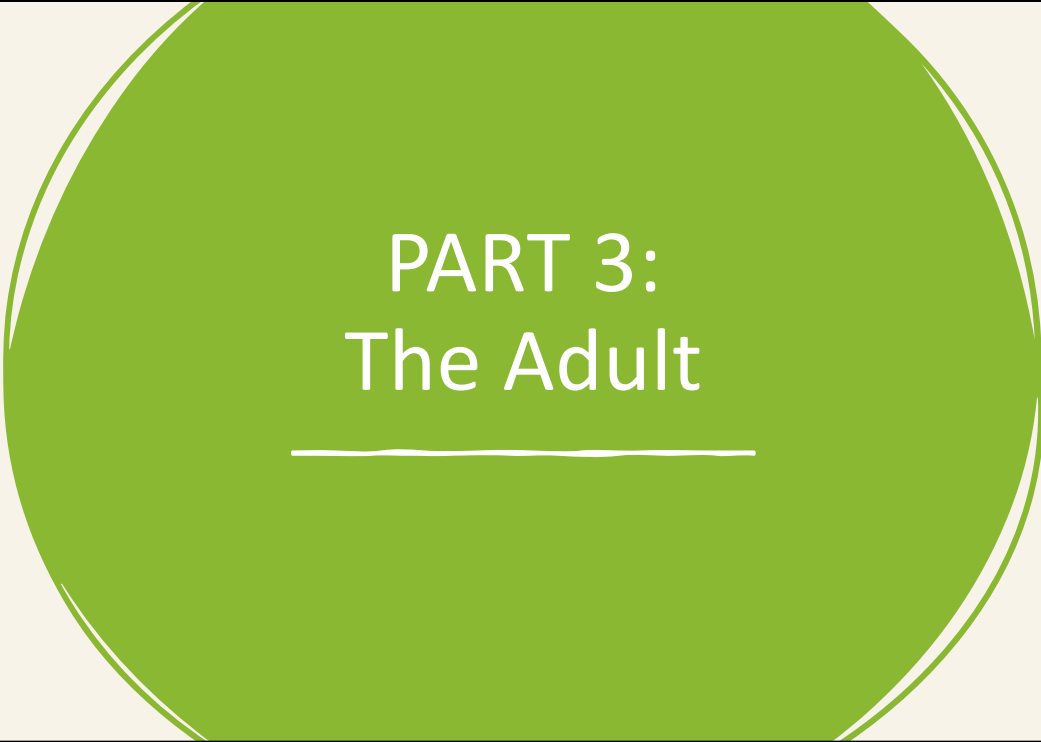
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THE DAYCARE
CONTEXT

Exercise in dyads (10 min)

Roleplay: From Instructor to Anchor: Present a common scenario involving an unstructured play conflict, such as two children arguing over how a game should be played. Ask the staff to roleplay the situation twice. The first time, respond as an 'Instructor', trying to eliminate the challenge. The second time, respond as an 'Anchor', focusing on supporting peer interaction instead, helping the children to recover from disappointment and facilitating their own problem-solving.

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PART 3: The Adult

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PART 3: THE ADULT

- Relationship with the child (engaged their attachment)
- Level of stress
- Level of insight
- Capacity to be reflective
- Preventive vs. reactive
- Aim at co-regulation vs. behaviour management
- Type of response (posture, tone, etc.)

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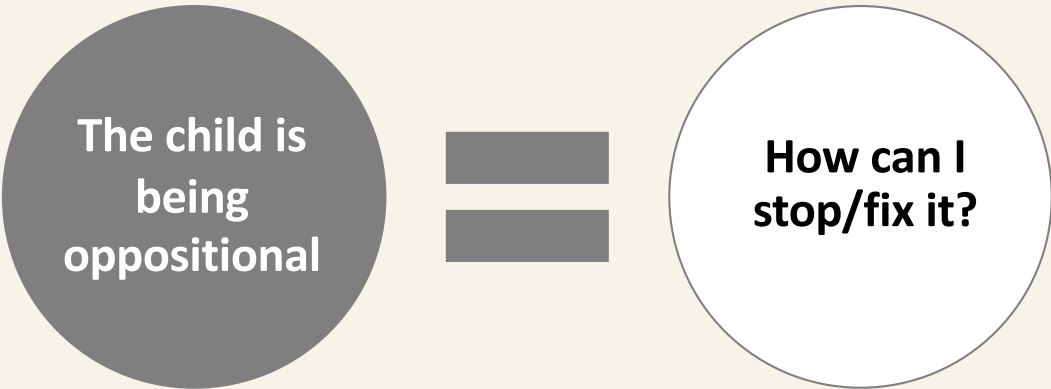
Individual exercise (5min)

What specific student behaviors trigger judgment in me?

Trigger Mapping: Identify personal triggers and typical reactions.

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COMMON CHALLENGES WITH THE ADULT'S RESPONSE:

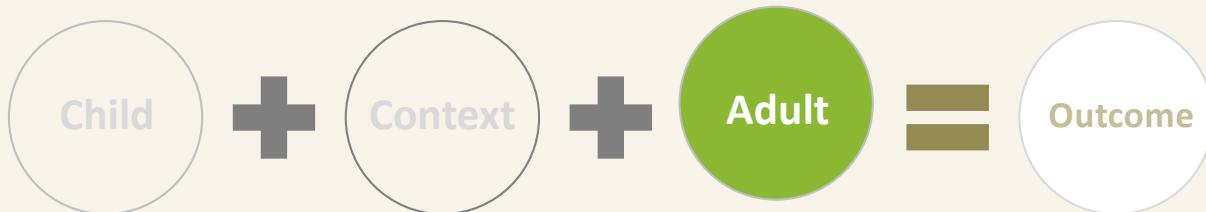


THE PROBLEM:
child's behaviour

THE ANSWER:
behavioural strategy

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VULNERABLE CHILDREN EXPERIENCE STRESS ALL DAY LONG



- Relationship with the child
- Level of stress
- Type of response (posture, tone, etc.)

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The baseline



Calm meets Calm. The nervous systems resonate in safety. The baseline is maintained.

The anchor



The adult's grounded nervous system absorbs and neutralizes the child's dysregulation. The child is anchored by and mirrors the adult's calm.

The escalation



Chaos meets chaos. Without an anchor, both nervous systems escalate into a mutually destructive survival response.

The contagion



A regulated child cannot withstand a dysregulated adult. The adult's stress state is biologically contagious.



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Cultivating natural influence through secure attachment



Daily Rituals: Create consistent, predictable moments of connection upon arrival and departure.



Leverage Interests: Learn and actively use children's specific interests to strengthen the relational bond.

Find Commonalities: Explicitly highlight points in common between the educator and the child.



Ensure Universal Anchor: Guarantee that every child has at least one exceptionally strong connection with an adult in the room.

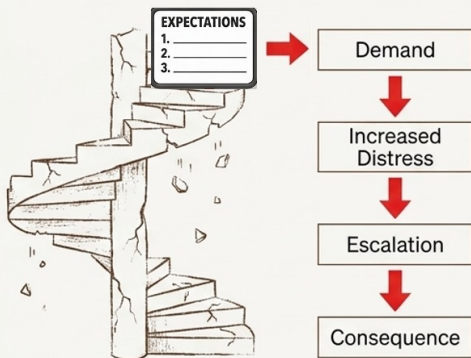


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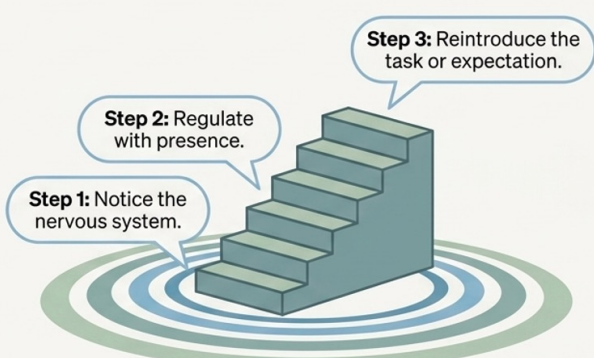
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Regulation Before Expectation

The Trap: Traditional Sequence



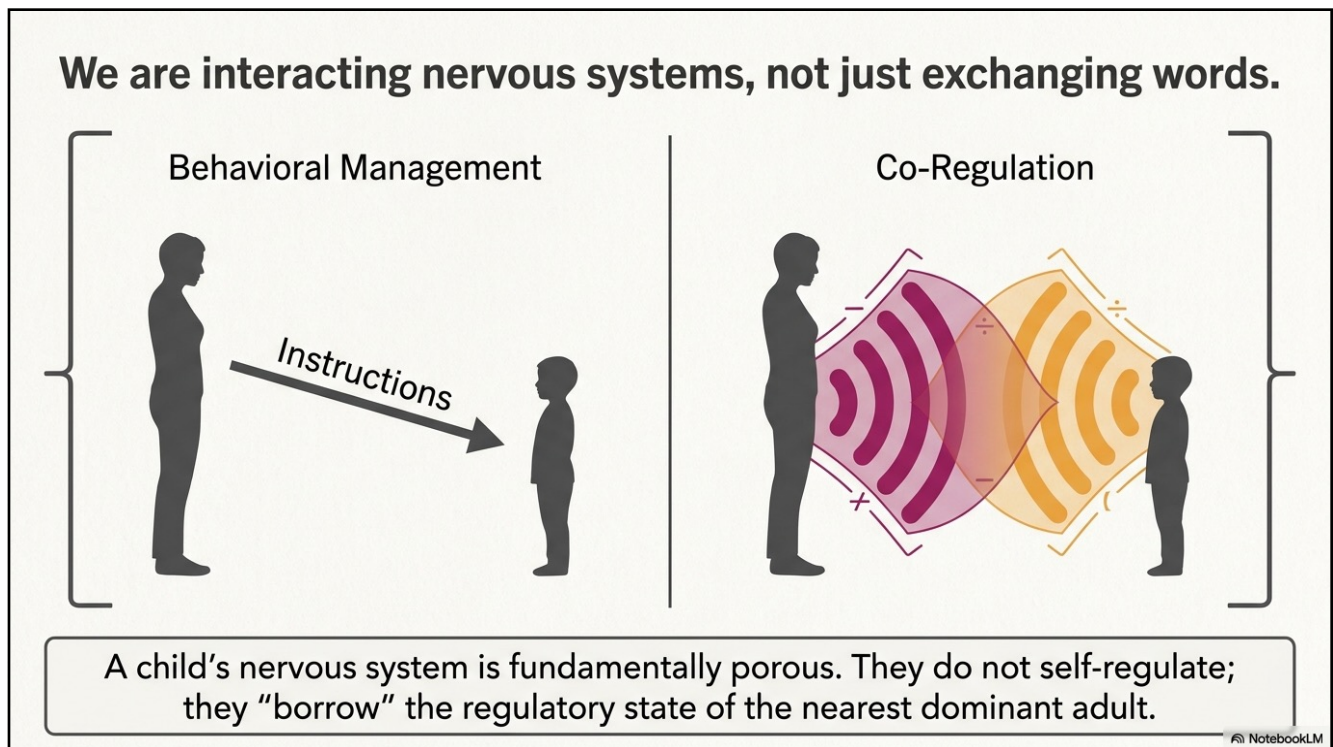
The Scaffold: Trauma-Informed Sequence



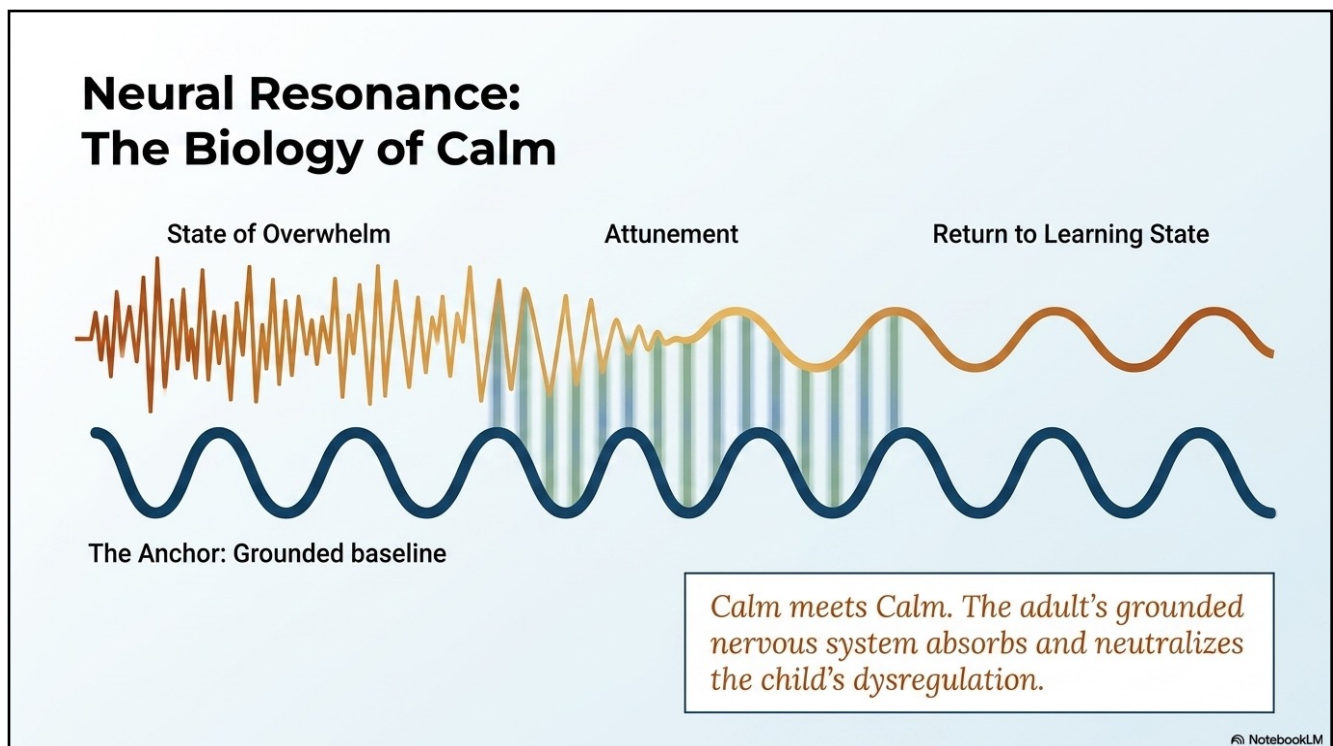
This isn't permissiveness; it's prioritization.
We are not lowering the bar; we are scaffolding the ladder.

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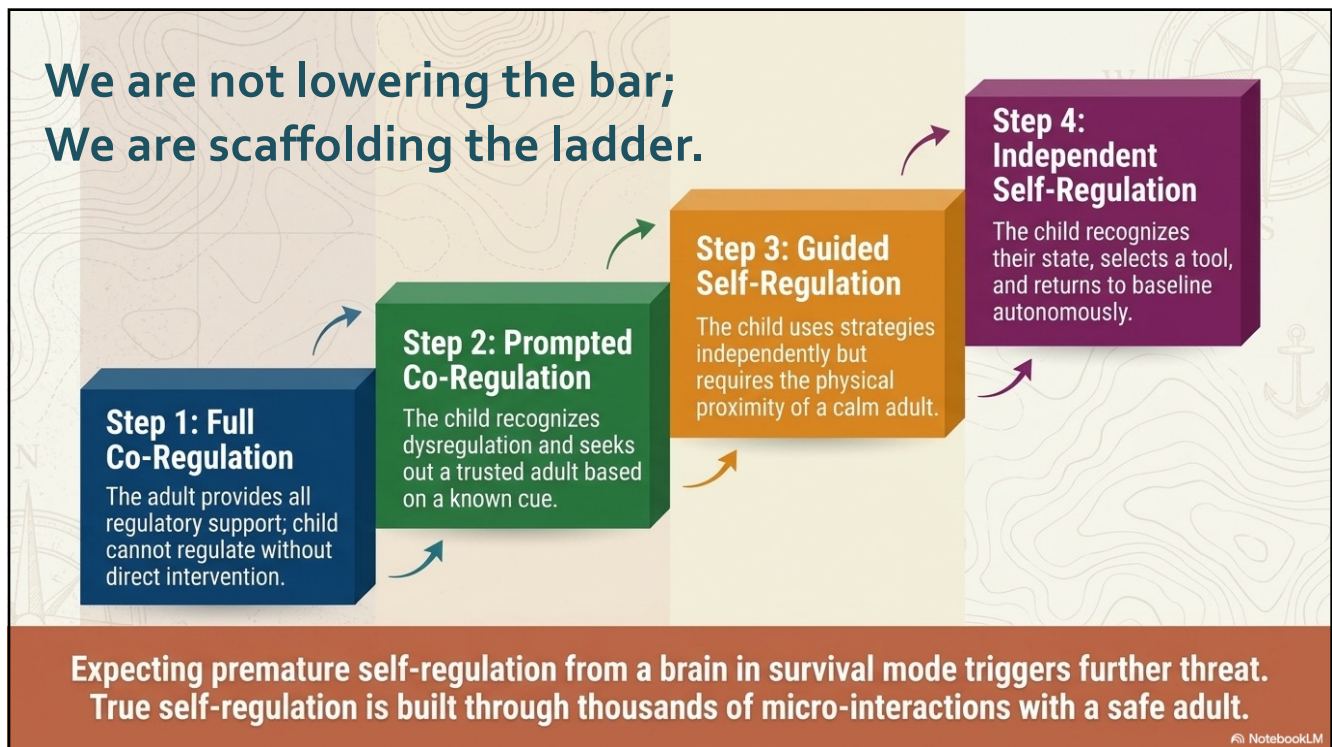
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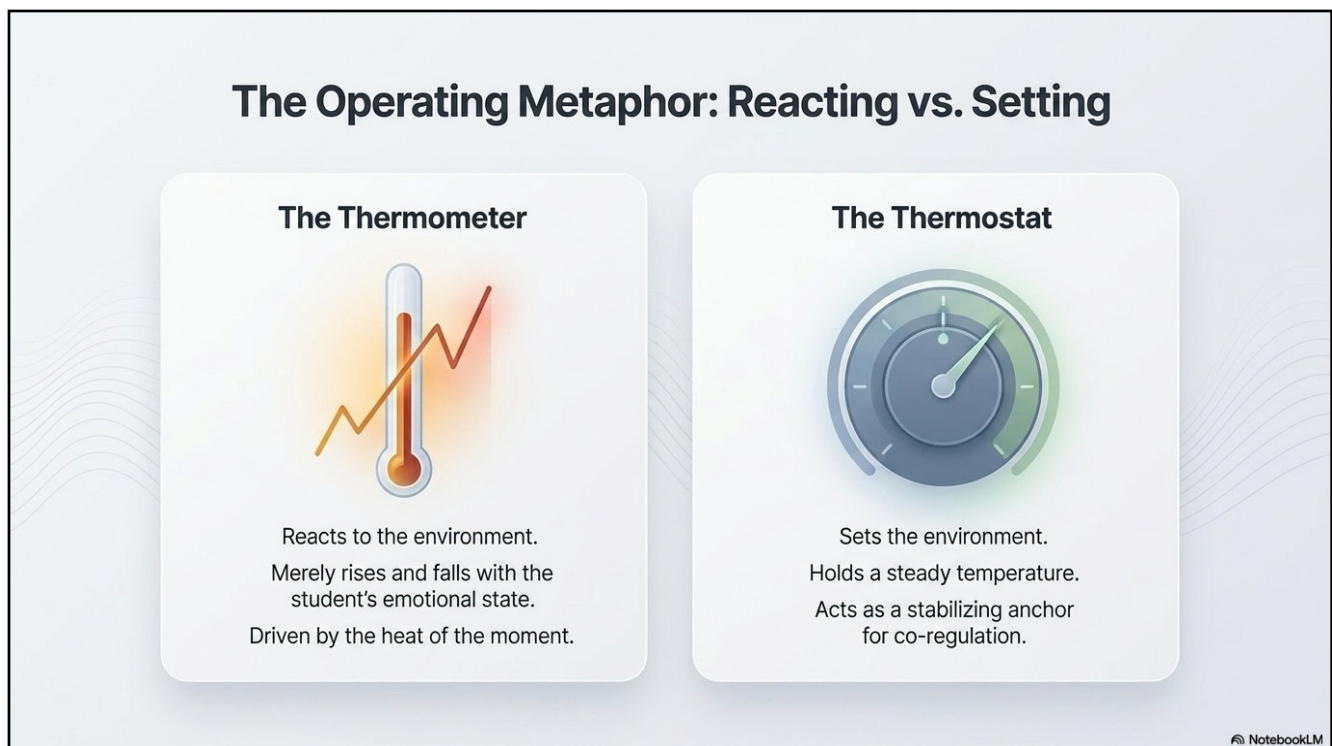
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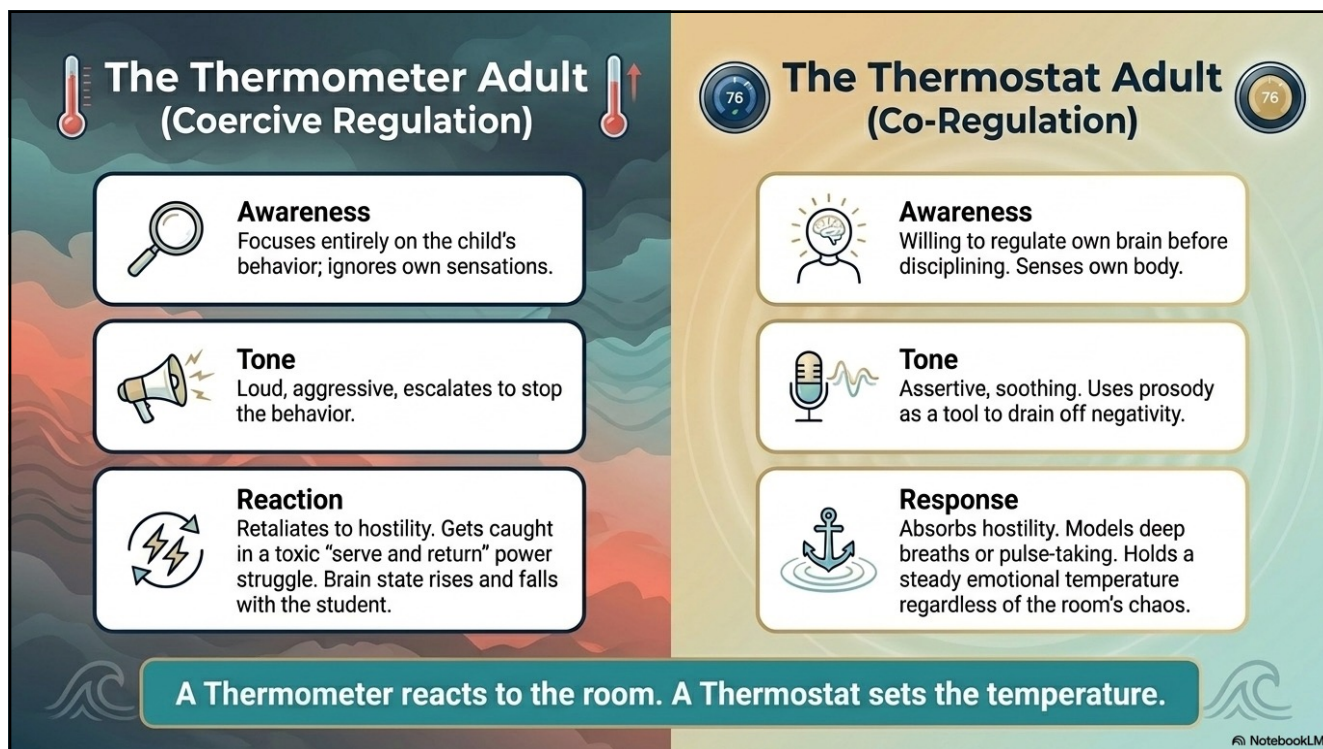
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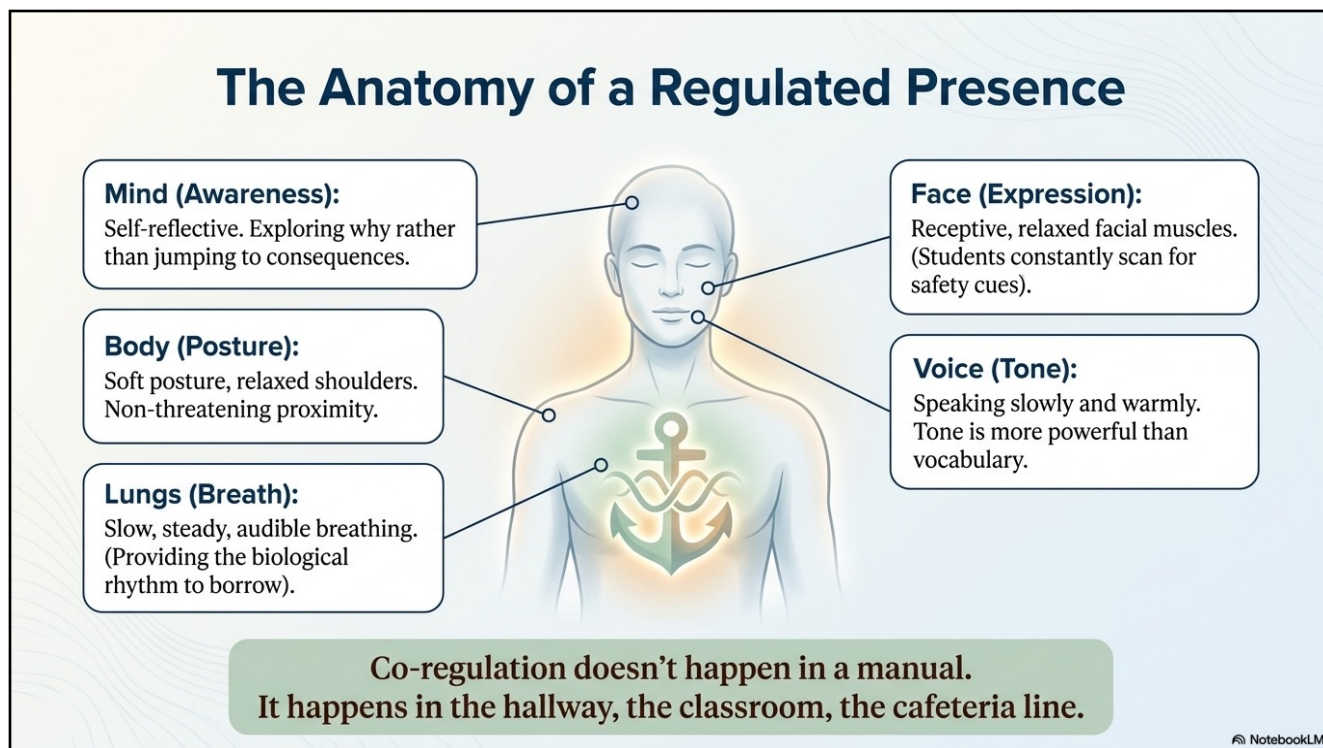
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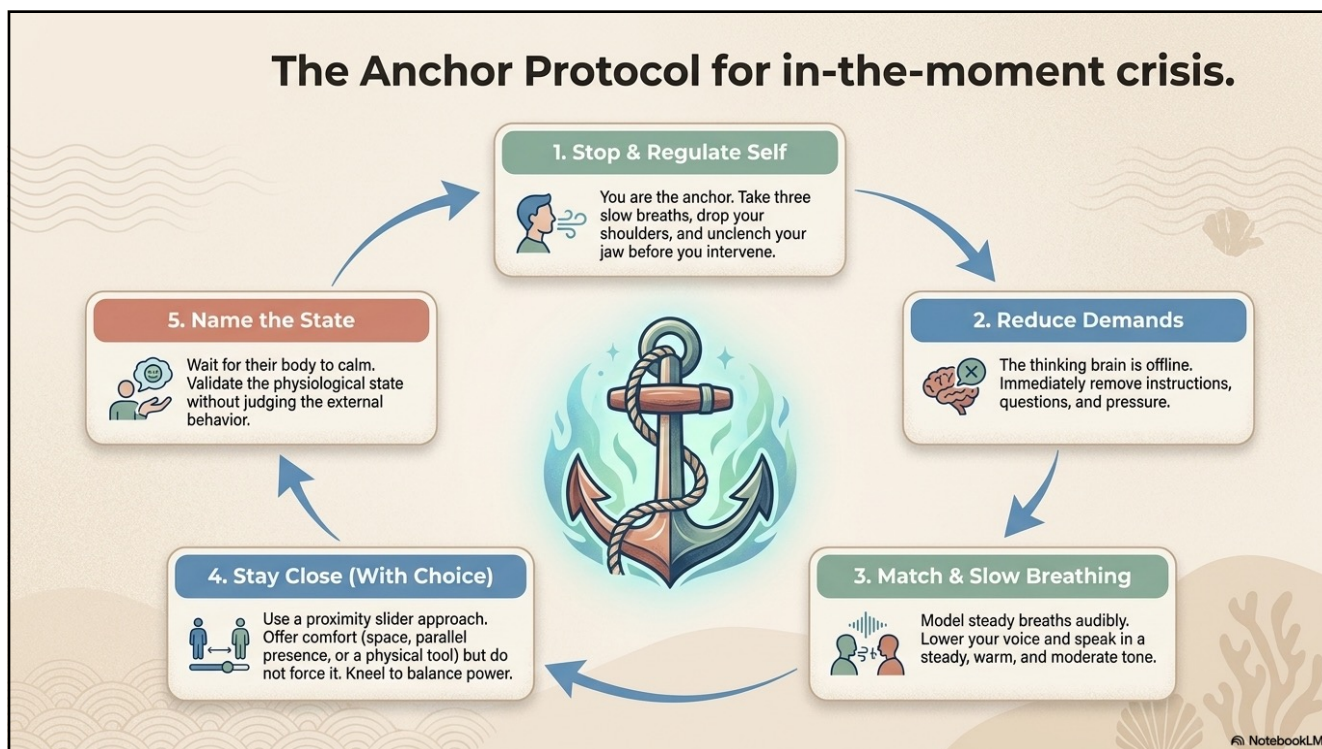
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The Master Co-Regulation Matrix

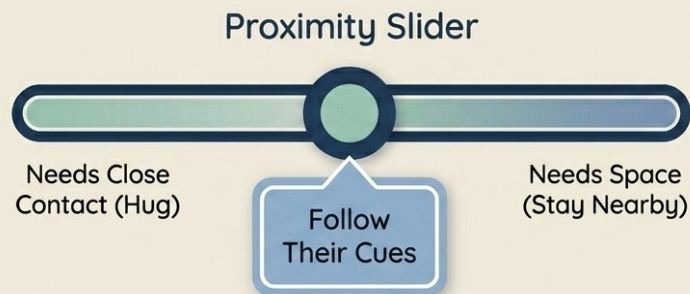
DO: The Regulated Adult	Dimension	DON'T: The Reactive Adult
Grounded, takes 3 slow breaths	Mindset	Takes behavior personally
Open arms, gentle expression	Body Language	Crossed arms, pointing fingers
Eye-level, parallel stance	Spatial Presence	Towering, confrontational face-to-face
Slow, quiet, warm tone	Voice	Matching volume, retaliating
Narrate, validate, offer choices	Communication	Interrogate, dismiss, demand
Delayed until calm (Repair)	Consequences	Imposed during crisis (Shame/Exile)

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Stay close, but not too close

Some children want you close. Others need space but want you to stay nearby. Offer comfort they can accept—comfort helps the child's brain calm down.



Comfort Choices



Blanket



Quiet Space



Favorite Object



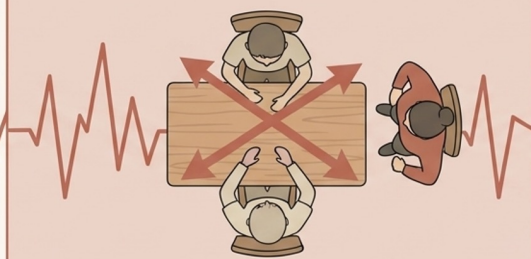
Hug

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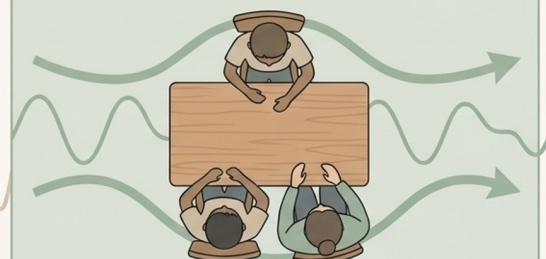
The Body: De-escalating through physical presence

The Confrontational Stance



DON'T use threatening body language. Avoid towering over, crossing arms, or pointing fingers—biological cues of threat.

The Parallel Stance



DO practice parallel regulation. For students with autism or trauma histories, sitting or walking alongside them balances power and reduces confrontational threat. Get to eye level and keep facial expressions gentle.

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What Co-Regulation Sounds Like

These are not scripts to memorize, but grounding options for adults who want to stay connected.

When a student shuts down completely:

"It's okay to need some quiet. I'm going to sit near you for a bit."

When a student refuses to participate:

"You don't have to talk right now. I'll be here when you're ready."

When a student begins to escalate:

"Let's take a few breaths together. We can handle this."

Building agency in moment:

"That was a lot. I'm proud of you for getting through it. Let's talk."

Building agency in the moment:

Instead of asking "How can I help?", try asking "What would help you right now?"



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Systemic Support: We Cannot Pour From an Empty Vessel



Adult Regulation

If an educator is burned out, running on empty, they cannot be emotionally available for a dysregulated classroom.

Student Co-Regulation

Our students count on us to have calm to share with them.

Student Calm

What fuels the adult's vessel?



Protected time for planning



Compassionate leadership communication



Regular trauma-informed professional learning



Spaces where staff feel seen

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Modeling repair builds trust more effectively than never getting it wrong.



The Rupture

Ruptures are inevitable. When an adult loses their cool or a student has a melt down, the connection is severed. Regulation isn't about being unshakable; it's about being reachable.

The Repair

Repair is co-regulation applied to relationships. Wait for regulation, revisit without blame, and focus on metacognition over consequences.

Scripting the repair:
I'm sorry I raised my voice. You didn't do anything wrong. I got frustrated, and that's not your fault. We'll figure it out together.

Gemini Notebook

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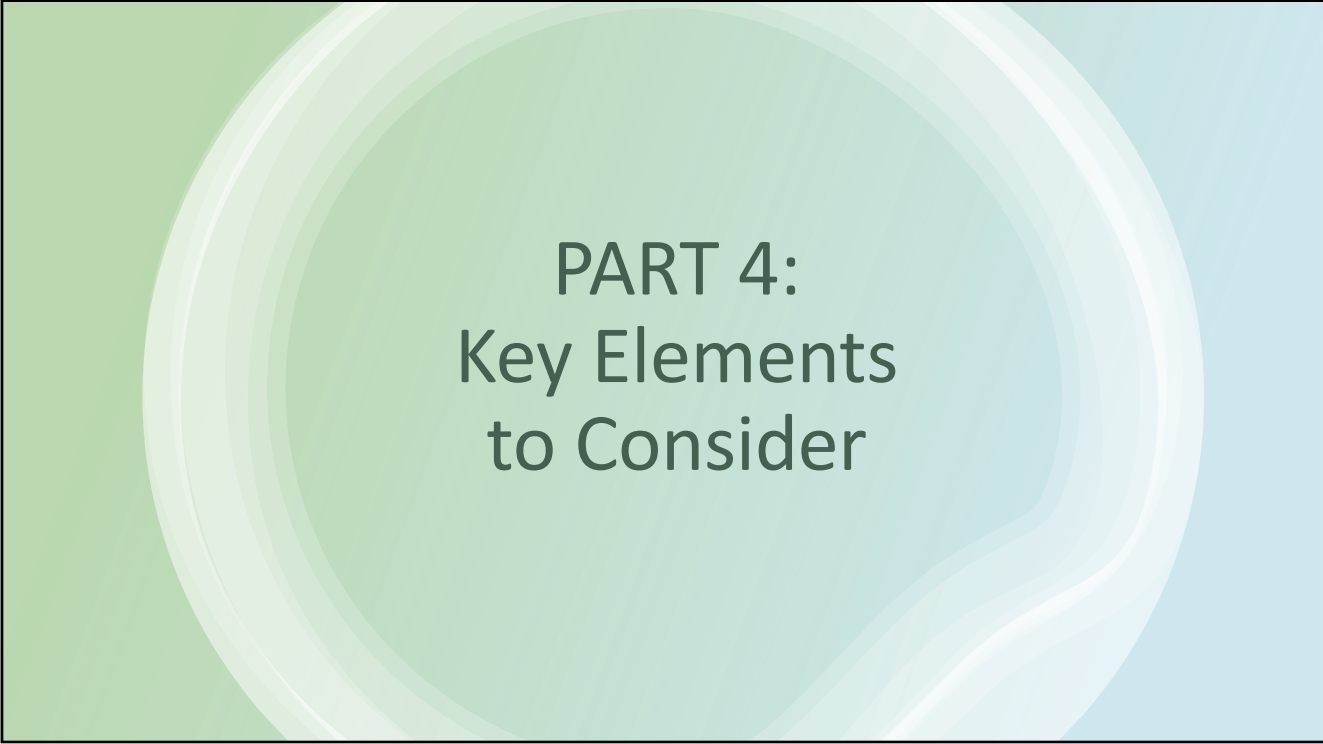


Individual exercise (5min)

Somatic Toolkit:
Build a list of regulating strategies that work for you.

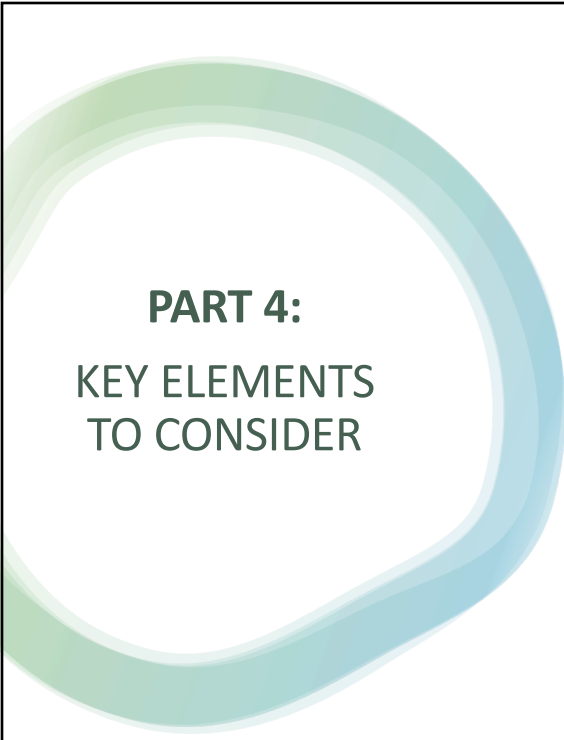
THE ADULT

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PART 4: Key Elements to Consider

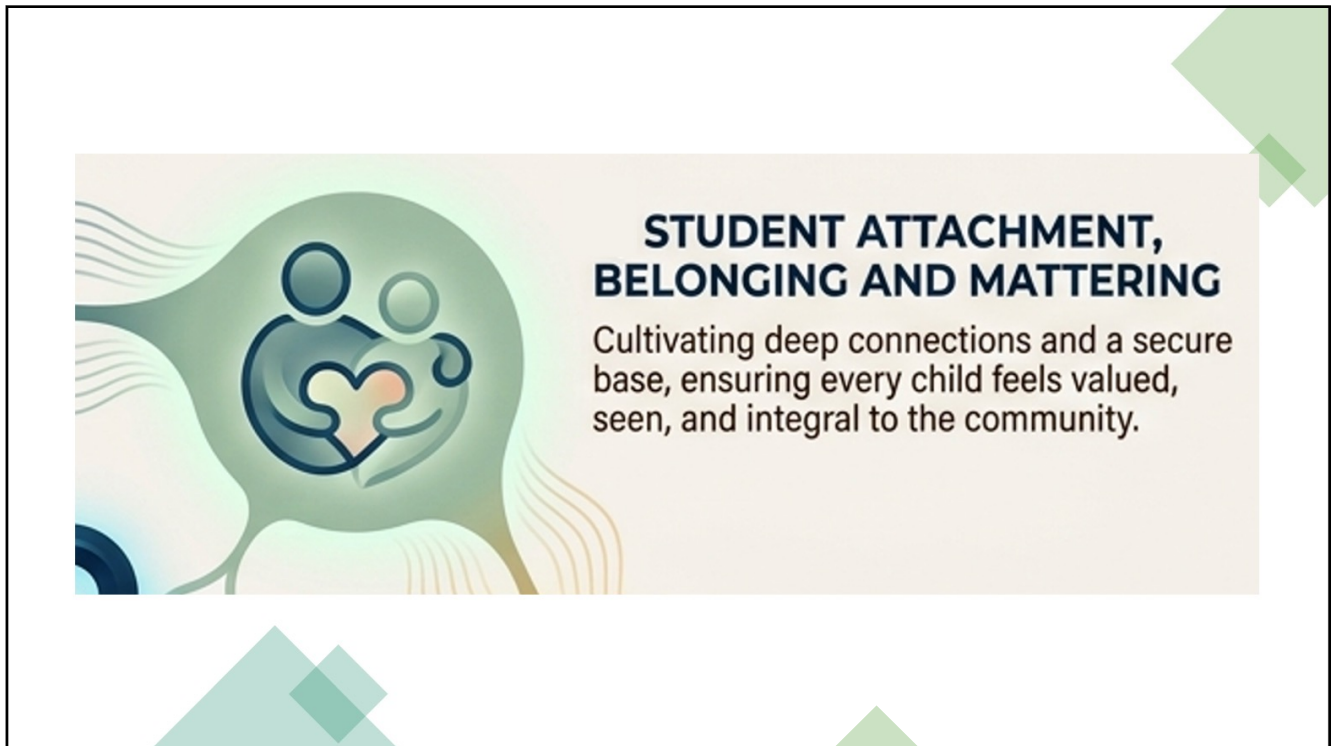
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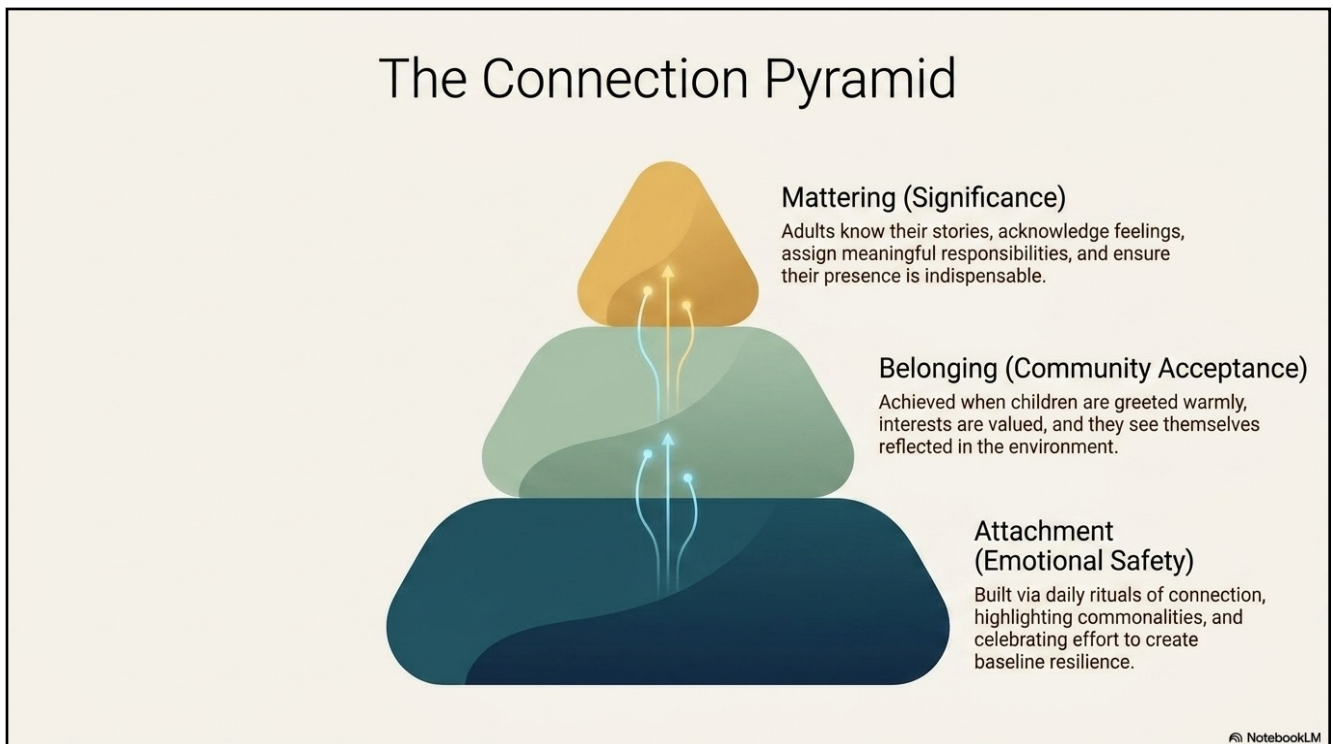
PART 4: KEY ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER

- Building attachment
- Value of play and emotional expression
- Prevention and intentionality
- Power of teamwork
- Family engagement

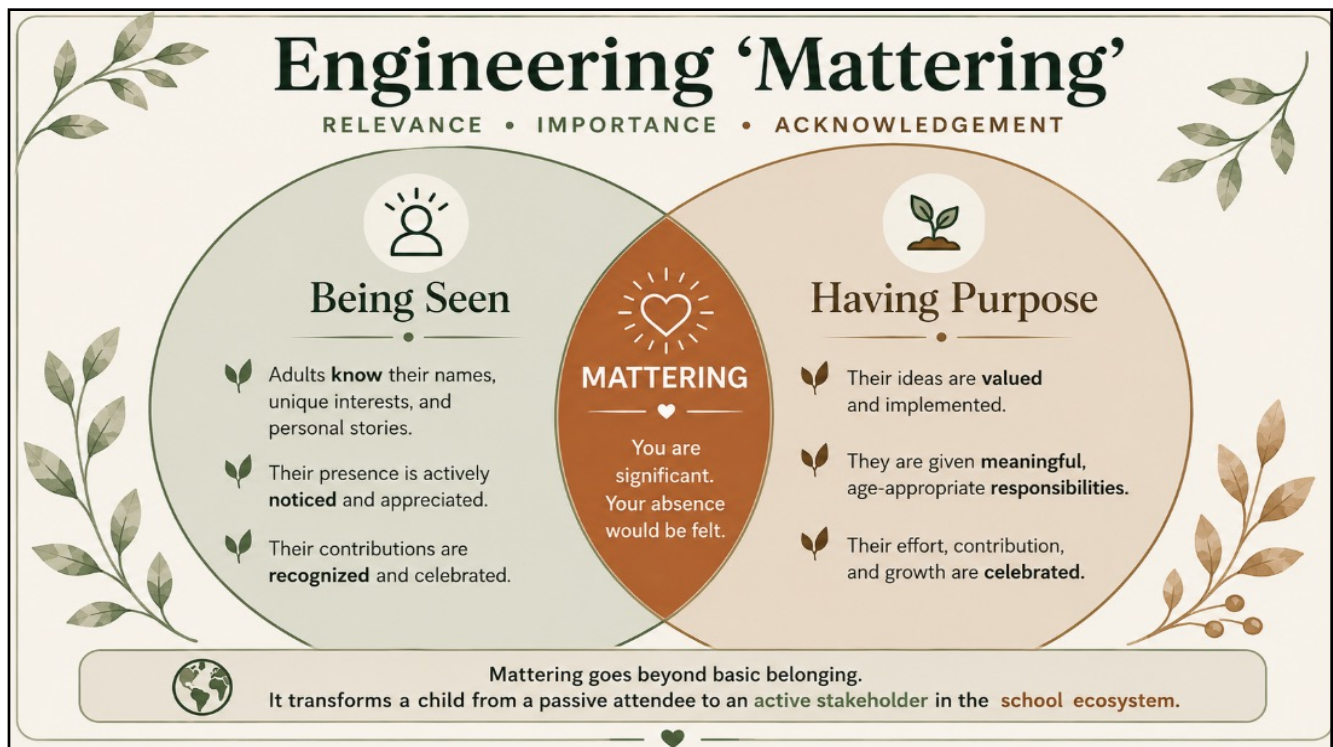
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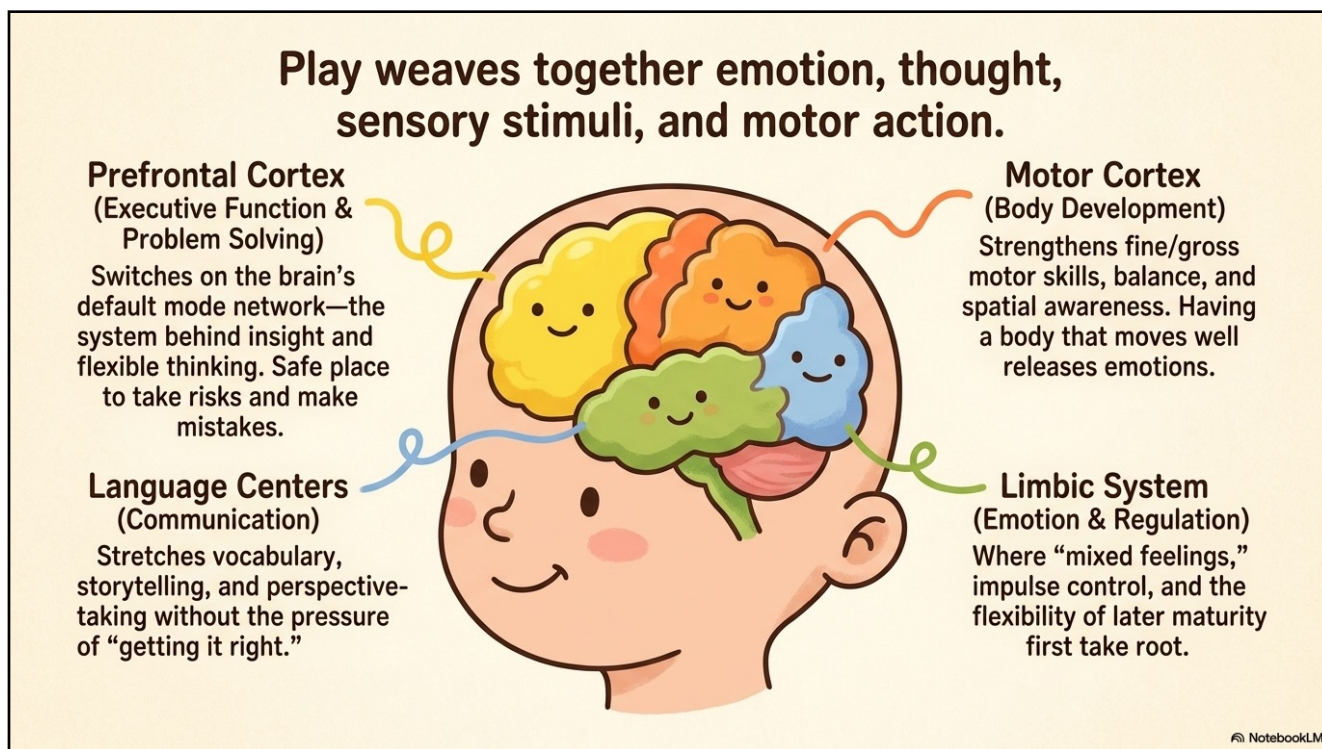
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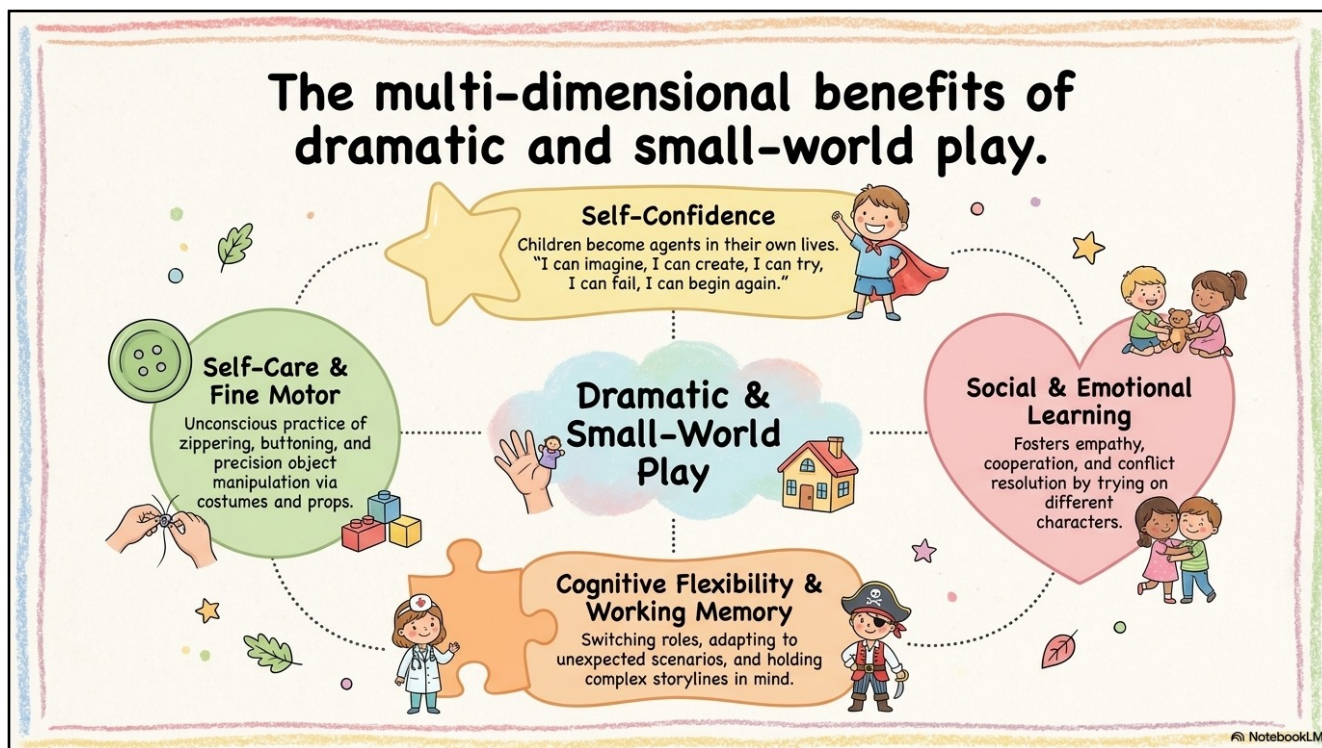
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The Danger of Suppression



The Expectation:
Perfect emotional containment.



The Reality: What happens when
emotions are SUPPRESSED?

When emotions are suppressed rather than processed, they emerge as tangled, challenging behaviors. Emotions demand to be released and expressed.

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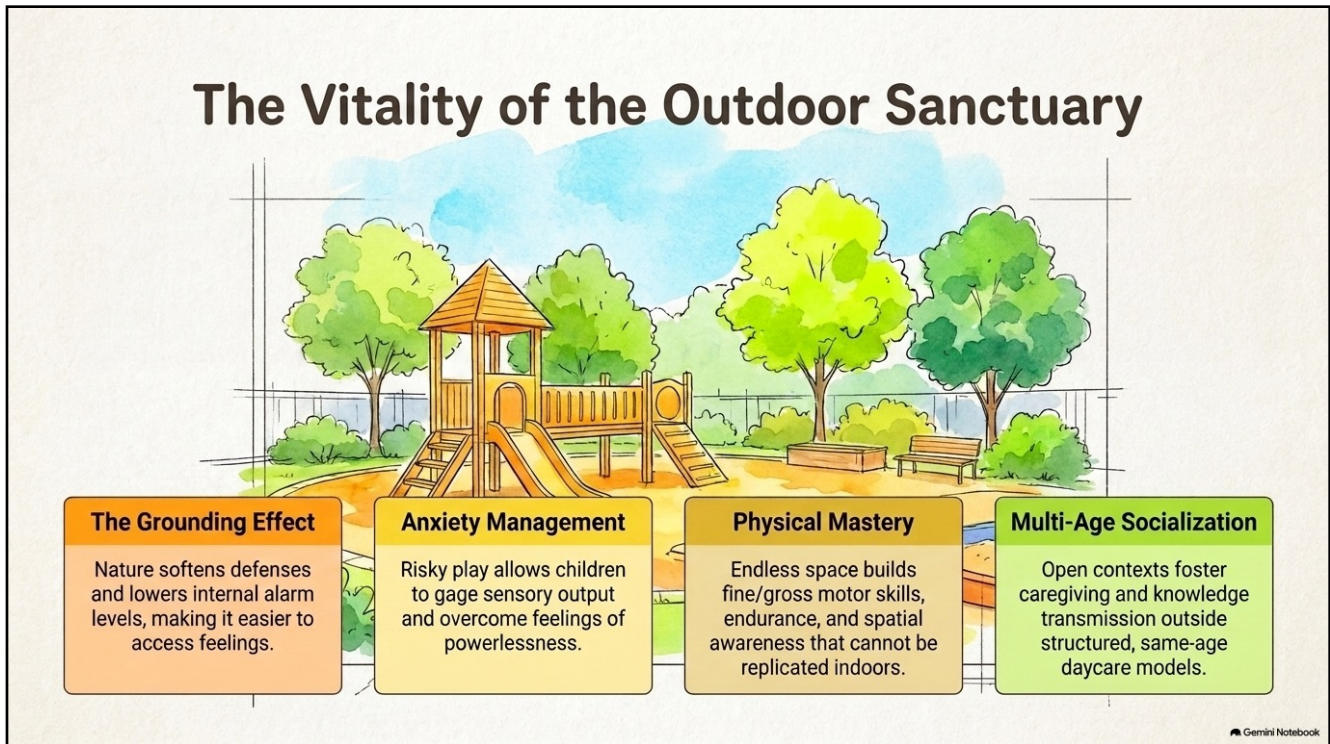
Play is the Release Valve

Unstructured play is not just "free time." It is the biological mechanism children use for playing out emotions.

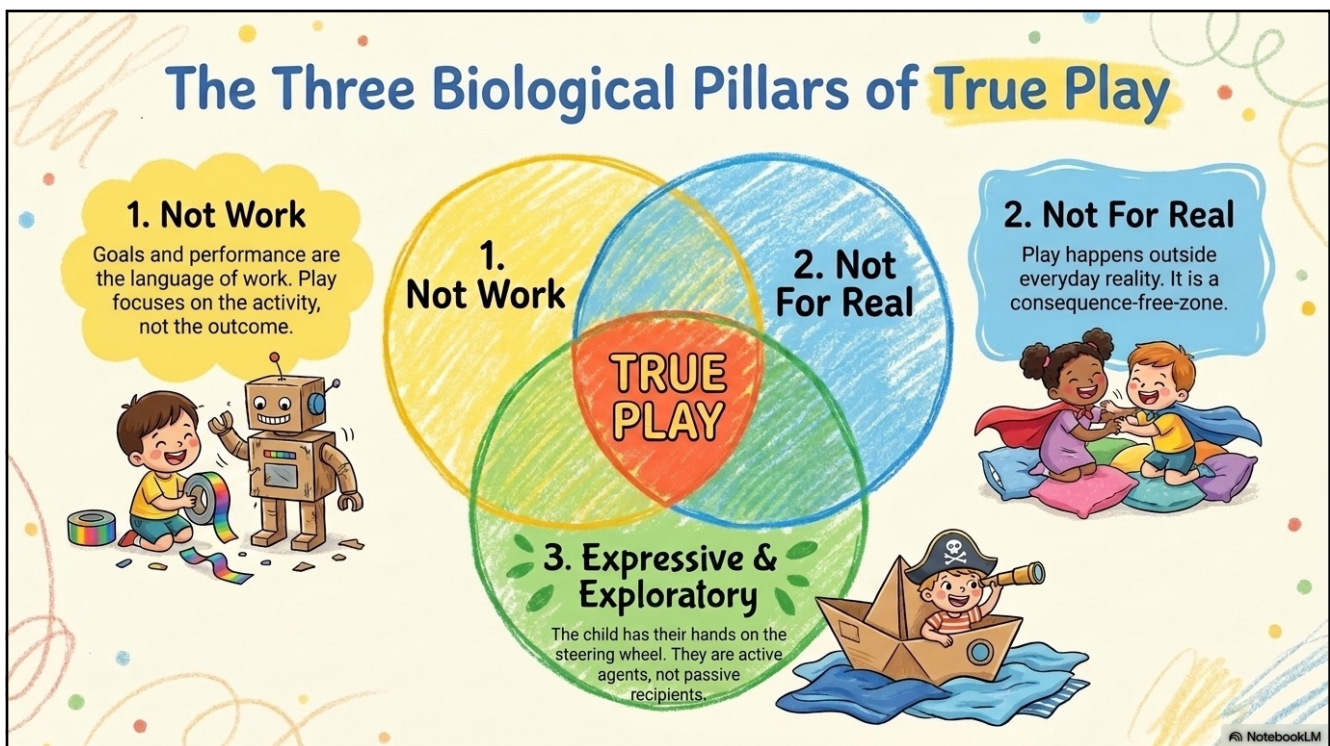
Key Insight: Play allows trapped emotional energy to safely move through and exit the nervous system.



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Structured vs. Unstructured Play: The Diagnostic Matrix

	Unstructured Play (Free Play)	Structured Play (Guided/Rule-Based)
Agency	Child-led and completely open-ended.	Adult-guided and bounded by rules.
Focus	Process-oriented (spontaneous, for its own sake).	Goal-oriented (focused on specific learning objectives or outcomes).
Material Use	Open-ended/non-traditional (e.g., using a block as a phone).	Prescribed (used as designed to complete a task).
Adult Role	Minimal; adult acts as a silent observer or stage manager.	High; adult controls the process and dictates the outcome.

NotebookLM

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Six “Emotional Playgrounds” that invite expression.



Music
Bypasses words; pulls feelings out through sound and vibration.



Dance
Unblocks physical tension; makes space for unguided movement without judgment.



Drama
Provides a veil of safety (props/puppets) to express scary things one step removed.



Stories
Draws us in and out; provides a safe connection to vulnerable feelings through characters.



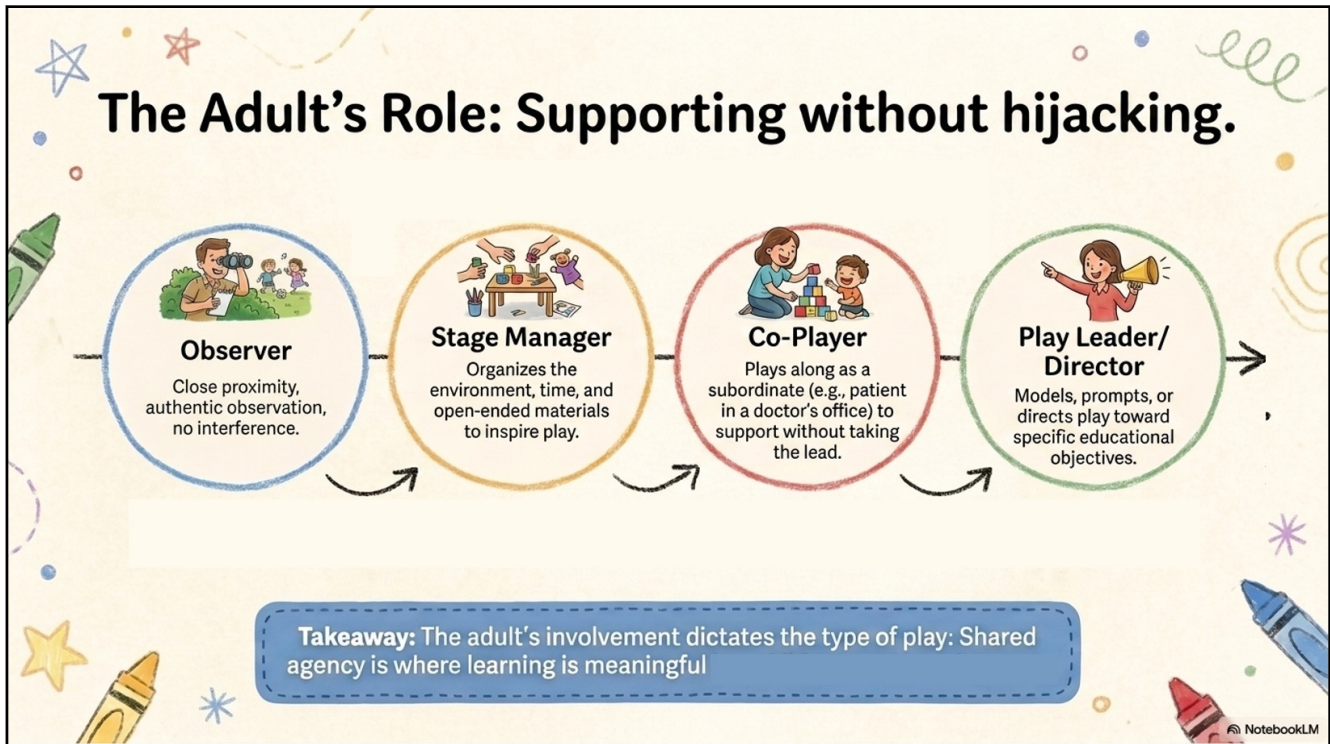
Art
Focuses entirely on process and inner expression, outward—zero focus on a final product.



Nature
Grounds the nervous system, softens alarm, and engages sensory awareness.

NotebookLM

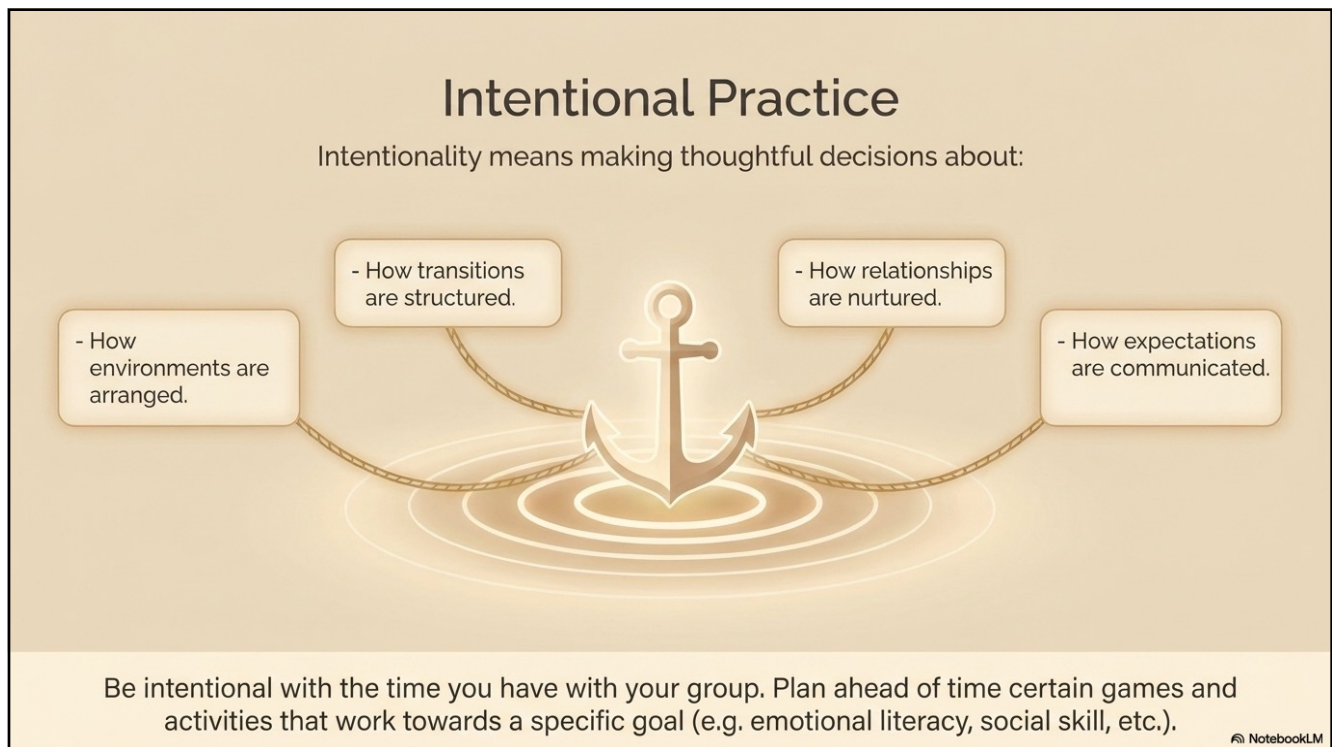
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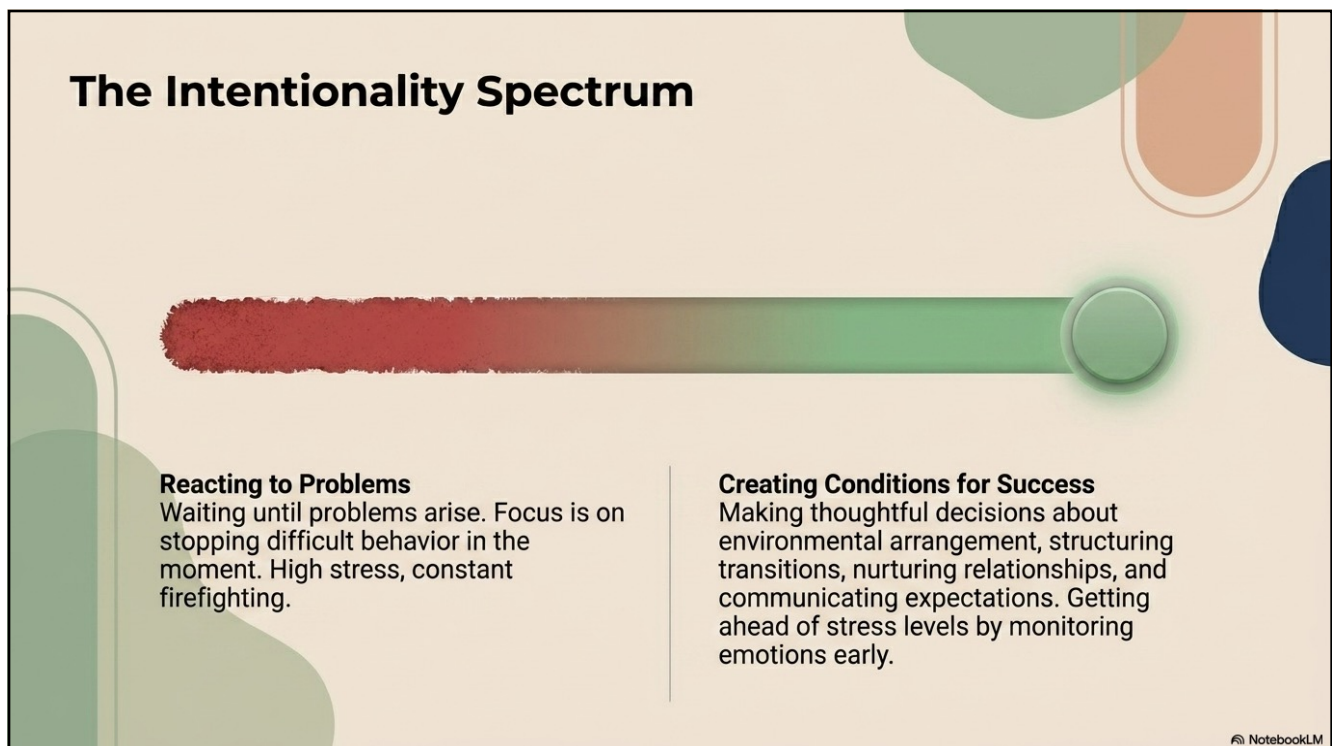
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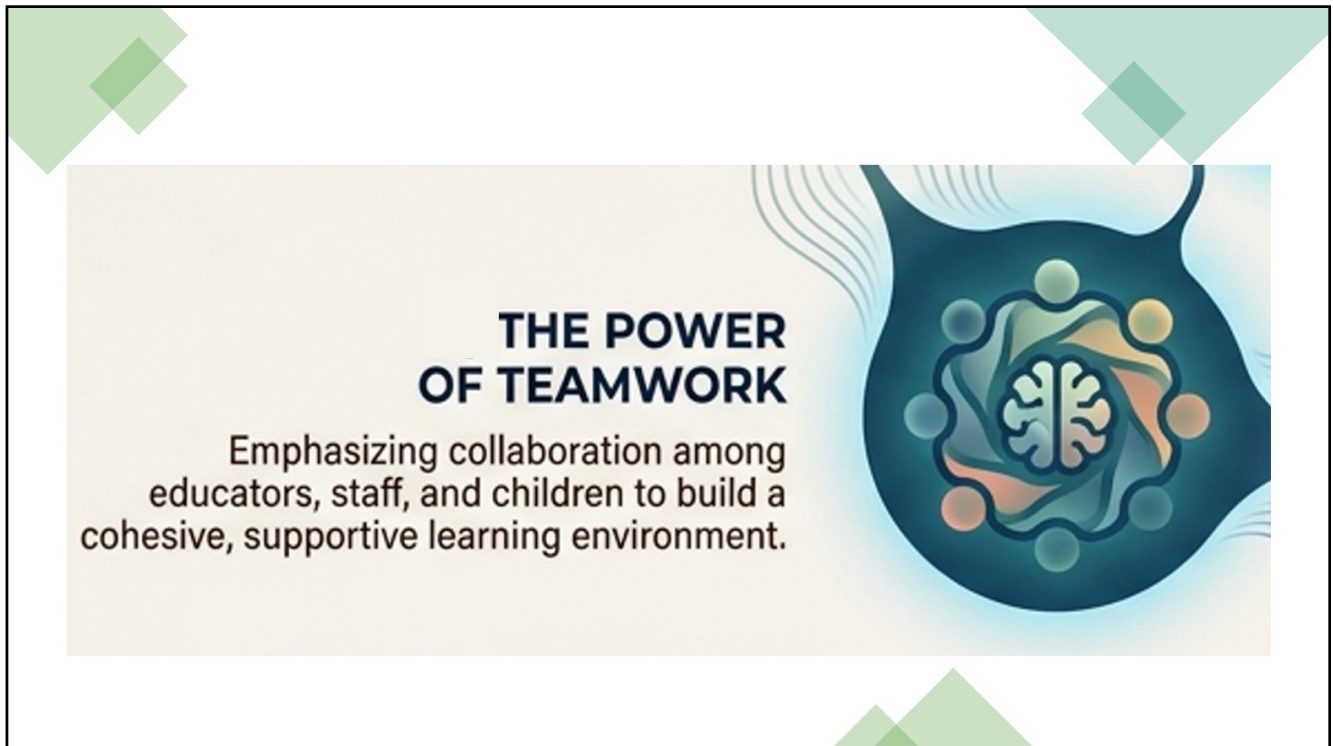
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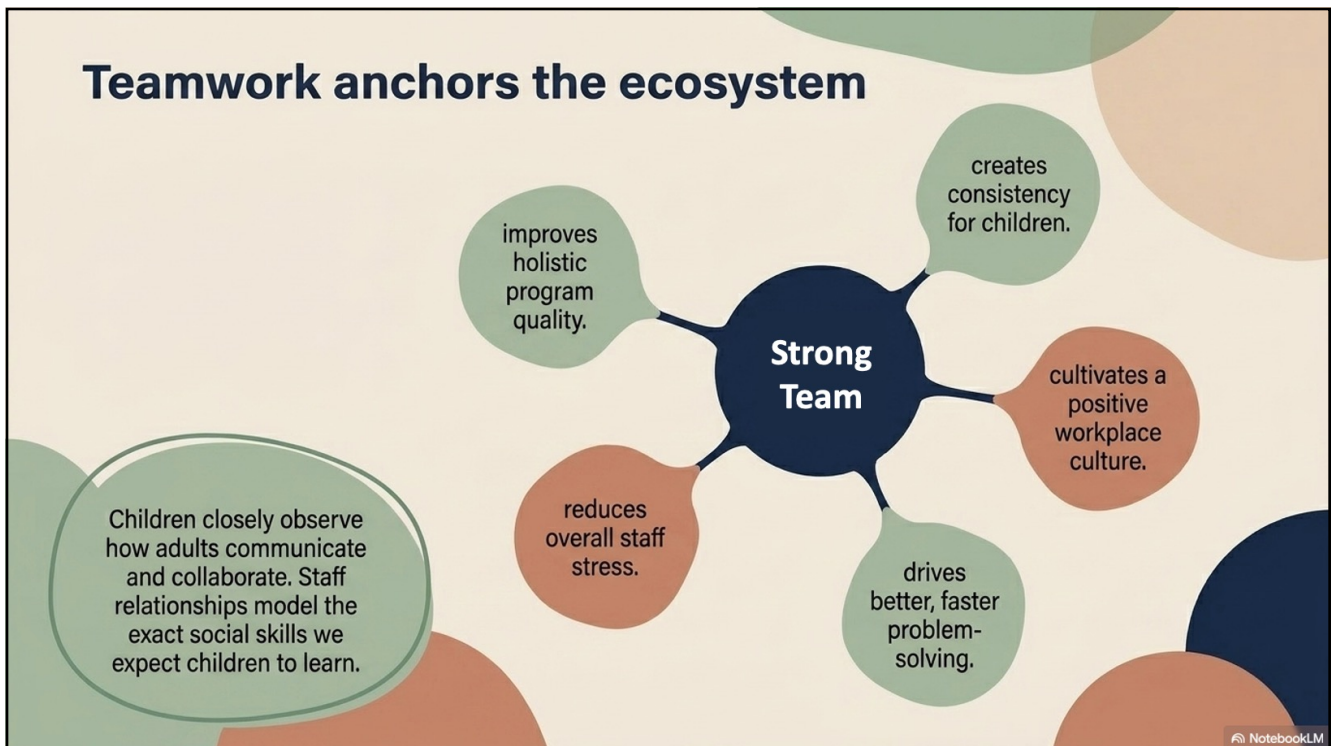
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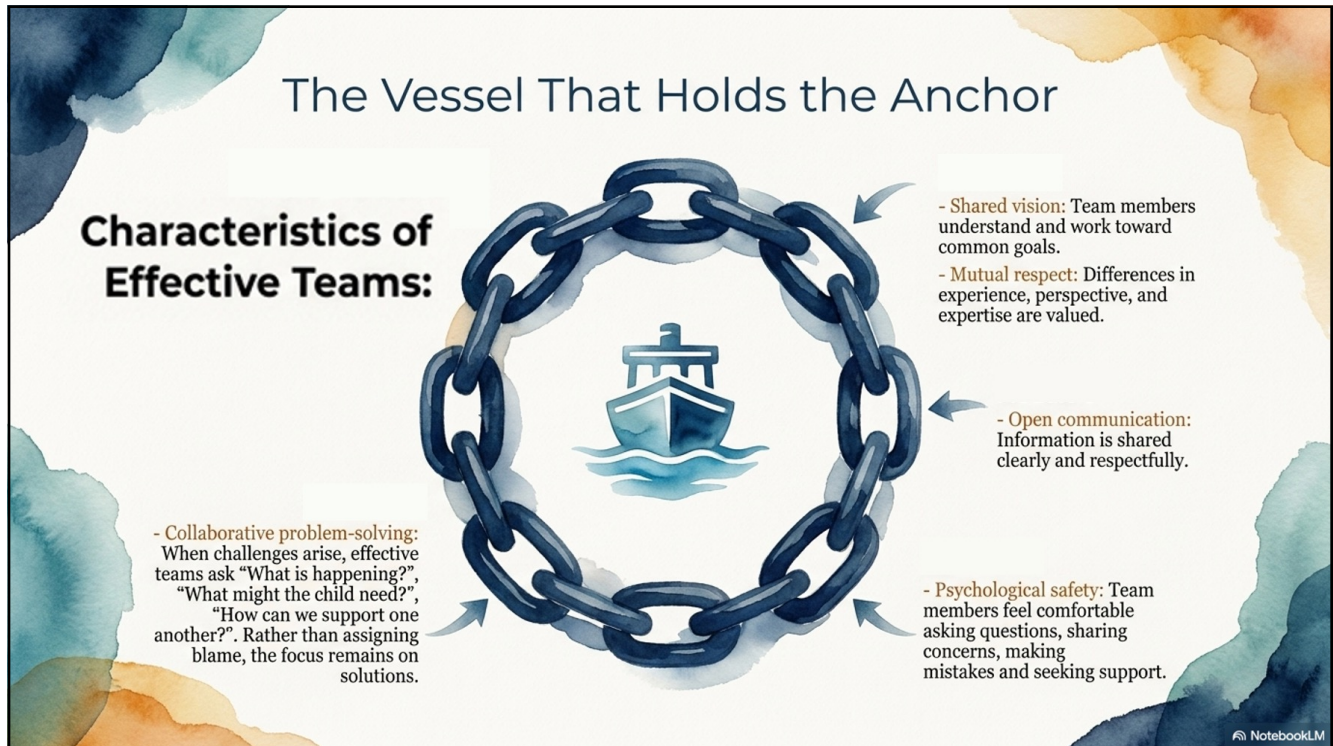
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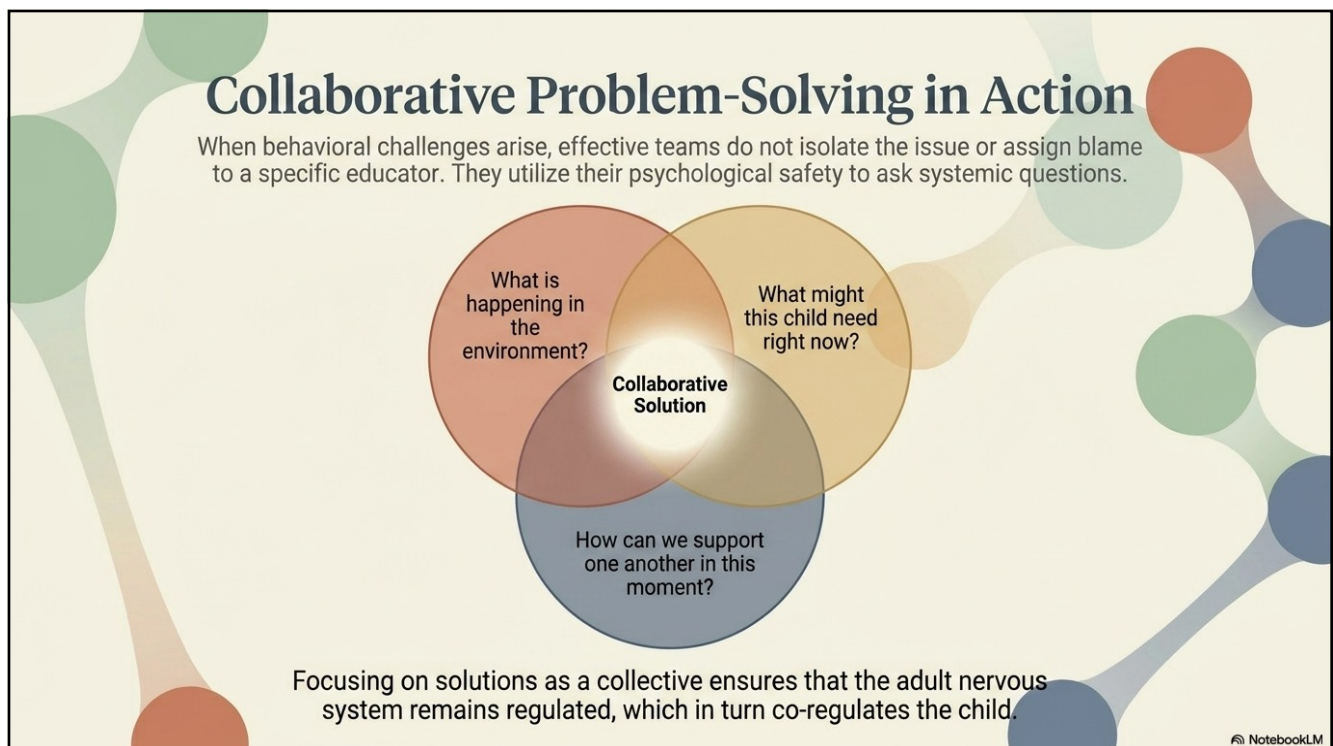
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The Strategic Tag Out



Permission to Pause

Finding the ability to regulate means knowing when you have reached your biological limit. Give yourself permission to pause the interaction and ask a colleague to step in.

Initiate Tag Out Protocol

The Protocol

Recognizing you are too stressed to co-regulate is not a weakness; it is a professional safeguard that prevents further escalation.

 NotebookLM

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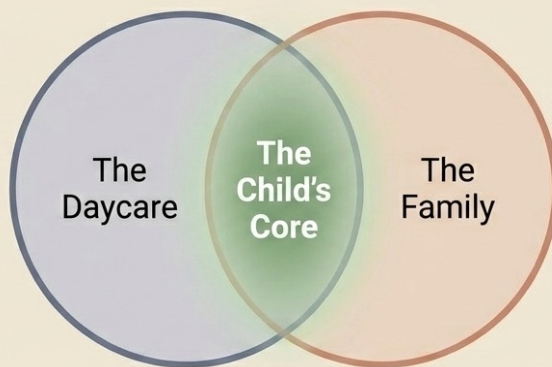
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

Establishing strong, transparent
partnerships with families,
bridging home and daycare for
holistic child development.



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Redefining family engagement



Meaningful partnerships go beyond communicating schedules, upcoming events, or behavioral incidents. True engagement requires building trust, sharing perspectives, and working collaboratively.

Core Action: Respecting diverse family structures and experiences while creating genuine opportunities for participation. Families are the child's first and most critical relationship.

NotebookLM

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Families as Collaborative Partners

Families are a child's first and most important relationships. True engagement requires moving beyond simple information sharing to build trust, share perspectives, and work collaboratively.



Information Sharing:
Schedules, Events, Incidents



True Engagement:
Trust, Partnerships, Collaboration

Transforming the Interaction:

- Greet families warmly each and every day.
- Share positive observations regularly, not just incidents.
- Actively invite family input and feedback on program decisions.
- Create meaningful opportunities for participation.
- Deeply respect diverse family structures and lived experiences.

NotebookLM

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Moving beyond information sharing

Information Sharing

One-way delivery of facts.

Primarily incidents, schedules, and logistics.

Interaction peaks during challenges or administrative needs.

True Engagement

Two-way dialogue that invites input and feedback.

Regular sharing of positive observations and shared developmental goals.

Relationships are built through everyday interactions before concerns ever arise.

NotebookLM

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Building the Family Bridge



Daycare

Navigating Difficulties:
Begin with strengths, stay curious,
and focus on shared goals.

Two-Way Communication: Inviting dialogue rather than delivering reports.



Family

Assume Positive Intent
Families do their best with available resources.

Build Early
Establish partnerships through daily positive observations.

Listen First
Value family knowledge, needs, and cultural practices.

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Navigating Difficult Conversations

When concerns inevitably arise, the foundational ecosystem you have built allows you to approach the conversation as an ally, not an adversary.



The Collaborative Mindset:

- 1. Begin with Strengths:** Anchor the conversation in what the child does well and where they are thriving.
- 2. Stay Curious:** Approach the behavior as a puzzle to solve together, rather than a judgment to deliver.
- 3. Focus on Shared Goals:** Realign both the educator and the family on the ultimate objective: the child's well-being and success.
- 4. Maintain Partnership:** Ensure the family leaves feeling equipped and supported, not blamed.

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Small group discussion (10 min)

Conversation prompts:

- Does our environment communicate that children belong here?
- Would every child in our program be able to identify an adult who knows them well and genuinely cares about them?
- Are we spending more energy responding to problems or creating conditions that reduce the likelihood of problems occurring?
- Do families feel like partners in our program, or simply recipients of information?

PART 4: Reflection exercise

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CEBM Resources

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Understanding Frustration Build-up



Riverside School Board Spring 2018

Understanding Frustration Build-up

Frustrations are a daily occurrence, here is a range of ideas, games and strategies that adults can use to help children express and manage themselves

This information is a collaborative collection of suggestions made by Daycare Technicians and Daycare Educators from Riverside School Board during a workshop facilitated by Martine Demers, Behavior Consultant, RSB

Playing with emotions

- Role play, Emotion charades
- Matching card games, Inside Our board game
- Emotions Bingo,
- Making puppets and creating skirts
- Drama, dress-up & acting
- Emotions Pictionary – draw faces and have others guess
- “Would you rather” game
- Create “Public Service Announcements” – video and play for other age groups

Respecting personal space

An ongoing challenge for some students, some activities which can help:

- Puppet shows on personal space
- Art activities - respecting areas/zones with different materials/colors
- Learning about different cultures
- Social dance, yoga, gymnastics, ‘Just Dance’ videos
- Creating different stations (work, quiet time and play)
- Hoola-hoops, skipping ropes, cushions for individual seating
- Badminton, relay races and relay games
- Board games that require two children to face each other (chess, checkers, connect four, etc.
- Tag games without touching – use of hoola hoop, Rabbit hole game, Waddle game
- Building games within a designated space – eg. Lego, Straws’n Connectors, K’Nex, Plus Plus Blocks
- Team sports – demonstration, support and reminders
- Needless to say... this is an ongoing process and for some this will be something to be addressed and supported throughout their elementary

The Way I Feel by Janan Cain

A fabulous resource to read with students and follow with discussion.

How Are You Peeling? By S.Freymann & J. Elfiers

Children will love this funny perspective with emotions and vegetables!

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Examples of de-escalation techniques



Examples of de-escalation techniques – Elementary

When in a situation where a student is upset/overwhelmed and escalating in their reaction:

- If the student displays a **freeze response** and tends to shut down and not respond to the adult, it is suggested to give them some space, not force them to interact beyond their ability, and honouring their rhythm.
- If the student displays a **flight response** and tends to run away and hide, it is suggested to set up a predetermined alternate safe space in the school where the student can go to and cocoon.
- If the student displays a **fight response** and externalizing/explosive behaviours (e.g. kicking, hitting, throwing objects, destroying property, etc.), it is suggested to remove any audience. If possible, taking the student, who is willing, for a walk or accompanying them to a safe and private space (being careful about not forcing them – taking them by the wrist when they are not willing to follow is considered to be a hold).
- Honouring the student's personal space – keeping a safe and respectful distance that feels comfortable for the student (needing to consider individual differences in terms of tolerance for physical proximity) – asking if you can sit next to them (if they say no, maintain a greater distance). No need to be in close proximity, however, must be able to see them well to ensure safety and supervision.
- Being mindful of being neutral and non-threatening in our verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal cues (e.g., triggering language, tone/volume of voice, speech rate, body positioning, facial expression, sudden gestures, walking fast towards the student, etc.)
- Being aware of our own level of stress, affect, emotional intensity, and type/level of energy reflected – remaining calm and reflective (having another adult help out if needed).
- Avoiding intense eye contact (this can feel quite threatening to some students). Sitting side-by-side or standing at an angle can help with this.
- Demonstrating active listening: reducing the amount of talking and allowing for moments of silence. Modeling deep breathing techniques, naming as something that helps you (no need to pressure them or put too much attention to it; students often mirror what we do).
- Being empathetic and non-judgmental; focusing on the emotion(s) experienced by the student rather than their behaviour.
- Offering support or a pause; trying to accommodate and reassure the student.
- If possible/available, providing a space for them to let off steam in a safe manner.
- Avoiding getting caught in a power struggle, anticipating potential refusal from the student and perceiving their challenging questions/comments as needing to vent.
- Moving away from trying to teach a lesson or reason with the student, especially when their behaviour appears erratic and irrational – waiting until a more appropriate time to address the situation (when the student is regulated/calm and receptive/open to the adult).
- Setting simple, concise, and realistic limits by offering options/alternatives in a supportive manner; being careful not to overload with too many directives. Offer options that are viable.
- Allowing time for decision making and choosing wisely what is insisted upon. Keeping conversation simple and clear, avoid overloading as this can be both confusing and frustrating.

Catherine Korah and Martine Demers, CEBM – <https://www.cebm.ca/> – November 2024

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Making sense of the preschooler

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/k4-k5-practices>

Developmentally appropriate Preschooler Traits at each Tier – K-5

Tier 1 universal practices	Tier 2 targeted practices	Tier 3 individualized practices
- Manages well in a whole group context with sufficient universal support measures in place - Curious and interested in exploring/learning new things - Playful (their job is to play – play is the foundation to learning) - Open-minded and easily amazed – has a good ability for imagination and believes in magic - Egocentric – still developing the ability to be considerate of others – fairness to them is they get most/all - May struggle to share with others at times, especially with an item of interest - Spontaneous and impulsive at times (even if they are skilled at verbalizing what they should be doing, sometimes they can't do better) – reacts instinctively - Can quickly switch from one emotion to the next (can only feel one emotion at a time) – may get frustrated when things don't work, but has a certain level of ability to verbalize their emotions - Potential for emotional outbursts depending on the circumstances, but can be easily regulated with the help of an adult - Need for attachment – difficulty with separation from home (Sept. and following time away from school, such as holidays)	- Benefits from blocks of time in a small-group context with structure, supervision, and targeted support measures in place in addition to the existing universal practices - Also displays some of the same traits observed at Tier 1 in terms of curiosity, playfulness, experiencing one emotion at a time, and egocentrism - May struggle to share with others (depends on the child and situation) - Can get overly excited and impulsive, especially in times of play related to their interests - Easily upset/frustrated – can put for a certain time – may have difficulty with verbalizing emotion - Can be triggered emotionally for a longer period of time (depends on the child and situation) - Requires support and accommodation through co-regulation when overwhelmed emotionally - Although they have a need for attachment, there may be a lack of trust towards the adult, and it may be difficult to achieve it – not easy with new adults	- Benefits from one-to-one intensive and personalized support measures in place in addition to the existing universal and targeted practices - Benefits from blocks of time spent outside of the classroom for additional movement or respite (some children at Tier 3 may also benefit from a part time schedule) - Also displays some of the same traits observed at Tier 1 in terms of curiosity, playfulness, experiencing one emotion at a time, and egocentrism - Struggles to share with others in general - Gets overly excited and impulsive on a regular basis – agitated restless energy that benefits from being discharged via outdoor active games - Gets highly reactive when things don't go their way - Frustration may be omnipresent with the child – difficult at times to get them out of it - Emotional triggering may lead to big outbursts/meltdowns that are difficult to get out of – child may recognize or not - Requires ongoing accompaniment when overwhelmed - Absent or fragile (challenging this is present)

Catherine Korah and Martine Demers, CEBM – Dec 2024

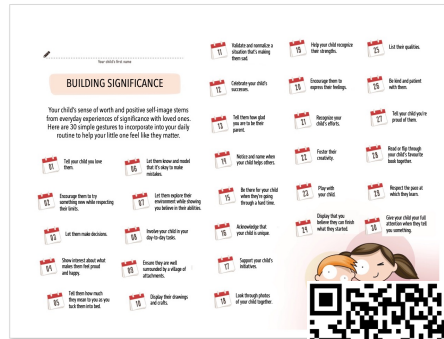
The differences and similarities between the 4 and 5-year-old

At 4 years old	At 5 years old
- Their prefrontal cortex has not yet started to develop – little or no sign of executive function abilities - Doesn't yet have a well-developed relationship with oneself - Has big raw emotions (only experience one emotion at a time), unable to regulate emotions, tears are very common, difficulty with verbalizing emotions - Doesn't yet learn from their mistakes and struggles to adapt in confronting situations - Their increasing imagination gives them the ability to anticipate and things happening to self or others (this triggers many fears but struggles to verbalize them) - Reacts on impulse with little or no filter - Is egocentric (doesn't yet have the ability to hold two perspectives at once, which impacts their consideration and empathy towards others) - Has little or no tolerance for separation (especially in a new environment or with new adults) – has not yet developed a good enough ability to hold on when apart - Has a short attention span (approx. 8-12 min.; this depends on the activity at hand and the child's interest), needs to move (high energy) - Needs to rest (may still be taking naps) - Mood often shifts when tired and/or hungry - Needs to play – their job is to play (may still parallel play) - Displays shyness around new adults and struggles with having to respond to several adults at once (they orient themselves towards one adult at a time) - Struggles with transitions and unstructured/unsupervised contexts – needs to know what comes next for reassurance - May have better fine motor and gross abilities - May have better language development	- Their prefrontal cortex development has barely begun (if the 'right' conditions are in place) – beginning stages of executive function abilities (may be easily eclipsed) - Still getting to know themselves (likes, dislikes, preferences, etc.) - Also, big raw emotions (only one at a time) – starting to verbalize emotions - Still developing the ability for adaptation - May have a better ability to play out fears and voice concerns - Has impulses with little filter depending on the day and emotion being triggered - Is still egocentric, although we may observe at times the beginning stages of consideration for others - May have some tolerance for separation (this will depend on the child and their ability to attach – when they feel vulnerable this will be altered) - May have a slight better attention span (but still short – approx. 12-15 min.; this depends on the activity at hand and the child's interest), also needs to move - Needs some respite/downtime - May be able to name when they are tired/hungry or have other needs that require to be fulfilled. Some seek it intuitively and others need for the adults to orchestrate it - Needs to play – their job is to play (may have a better ability to play with others) – Learning takes place through play - May display some shyness around new adults, may have a better ability to a few adults at a time if they have relationship with them - May do somewhat better with transitions they are consistent/predictable and limited in number; still struggles with unstructured/unsupervised contexts - May have better fine motor and gross abilities - May have better language development

Please note that the traits listed above are typically observed in children who have been in optimal life conditions (attachment, safety, basic needs met, etc.). Adversity and trauma impact on the development of some of these milestones. Hyperactivity, sensory or interoception/overwhelming emotions may also have an impact on delaying the unfolding of it.

Catherine Korah and Martine Demers, CEBM – Dec 2024

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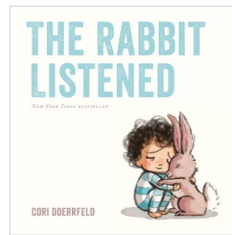


Emotional and social development activities



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K4-K5 Toolkit on emotional development PARENT COMPONENT



SOCK PUPPET ROLE-PLAYING

Inviting the parents to join their child in the classroom to assist them make a sock puppet (using socks, different arts and craft supplies).

The sock puppet can then be taken home, where the children can use it to act out their feelings. This activity might even be more fun and engaging if the adult has their own puppet to join in with!

** The teacher can model role-playing with the whole group in class to inspire parents and children with different ways to use the puppet.*

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/k4-k5-emotional-development>

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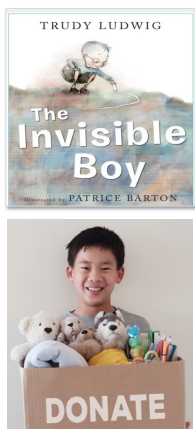
RESOURCES FOR PARENTS on emotional development



<https://www.cebmmember.ca/k4-k5-emotional-development>

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K4-K5 Toolkit on social development PARENT COMPONENT



ACTS OF KINDNESS

Parents are invited to assist their child in demonstrating an act of kindness through:

- donating a toy or a book
- participating in a food drive
- volunteering for a cause
- etc.

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/k4-k5-social-development>

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RESOURCES FOR PARENTS on social development



<https://www.cebmmember.ca/k4-k5-social-development>

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SUMMARY OF SURVEY FEEDBACK



Based on the survey responses by daycare educators, there are very clear themes emerging.

1 Emotional Regulation and Aggressive Behaviour

- Physical aggression (hitting, kicking, fighting)
- Difficulty coping with losing
- Emotional outbursts, explosive anger
- Students becoming dysregulated and unable to regain control
- Escalation during games and competitive activities



2 Peer Conflict, Friendship Skills, and Relational Aggression

- Friendship drama
- Exclusion from play
- Mean behaviour
- Poor sportsmanship
- Lack of empathy
- Conflict resolution difficulties



3 Need for CPI / Crisis Intervention Training

- CPI training
- De-escalation and crisis response
- Support when students become unsafe
- Procedures for recess and outdoor supervision



4 Supporting Neurodivergent Learners

- Autism
- Emotional regulation difficulties
- Transition challenges
- Social communication difficulties
- Behaviour linked to developmental needs



5 Challenging Transitions and Executive Functioning

- Arrival and separation from parents
- Going home at the end of the day
- Entering the classroom
- Lining up
- Moving between activities



6 Attention-Seeking and Defiant Behaviour

- Refuse instructions
- Challenge authority
- Constantly seek attention
- Influence peers negatively



7 Mental Health Awareness



Self-harm statements



Severe emotional distress



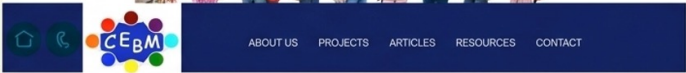
School refusal

These themes highlight the areas where educators need the most support, resources and professional development.



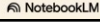

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Your Anchor: Ongoing Support

The Centre of Excellence for Behaviour Management (CEBM) supports school boards and staff in finding effective, developmentally friendly interventions for behavioral challenges.

Visit: www.cebm.ca
Resource Center: <https://www.cebmmember.ca/>



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