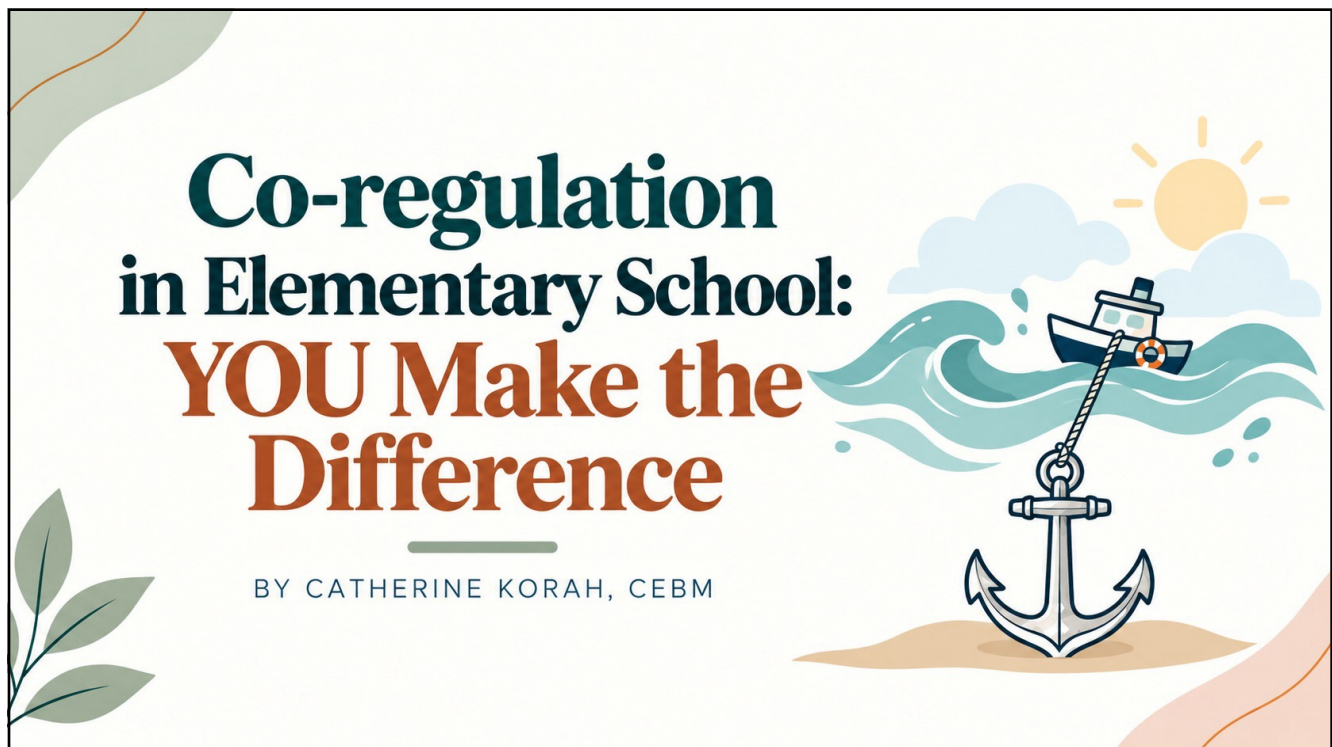
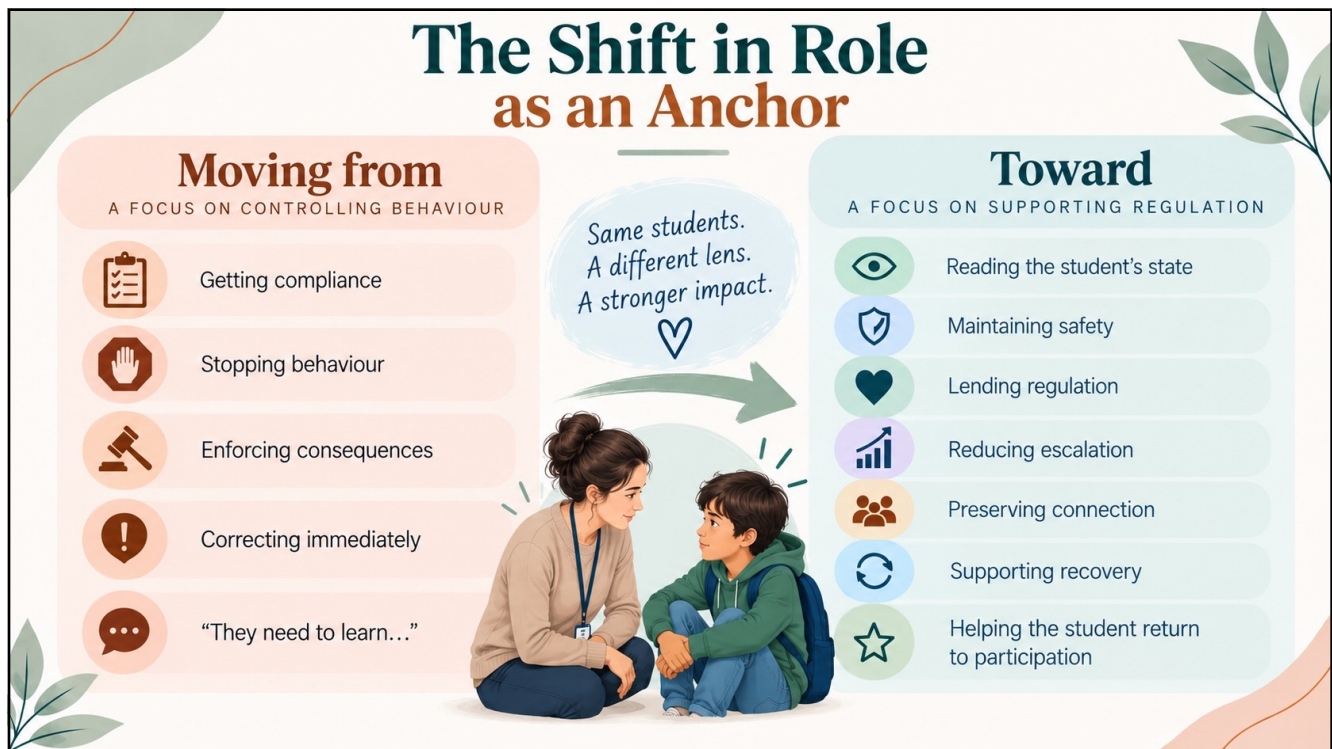




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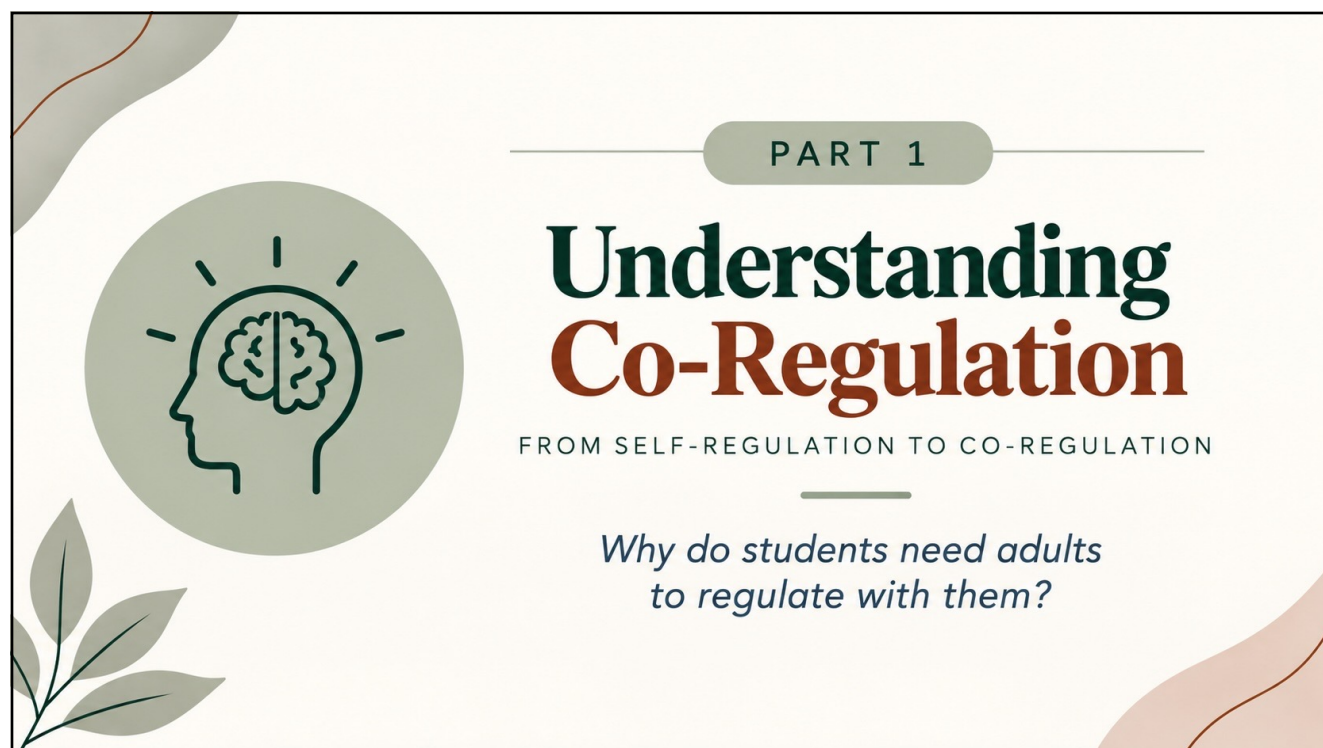
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Table of Contents

A JOURNEY FROM UNDERSTANDING TO ACTION

1. UNDERSTANDING CO-REGULATION	2. UNDERSTANDING WHAT LIES BENEATH BEHAVIOUR	3. THE ADULT AS THE REGULATION ANCHOR	4. CO-REGULATION IN PRACTICE	5. FROM CO-REGULATION TO SELF-REGULATION
FROM SELF-REGULATION TO CO-REGULATION	THE BRAIN, NERVOUS SYSTEM & BEHAVIOUR	ADULT POSTURE, PRESENCE & RELATIONAL SAFETY	ENVIRONMENT, RESPONSE, LANGUAGE & DE-ESCALATION	REPAIR, REFLECTION & BUILDING LONG-TERM CAPACITY
1 Explore what co-regulation is and why it matters. 2 Understand why self-regulation develops in relationship. 3 Recognize the shift from behaviour management to nervous system awareness.	4 Learn how the brain and nervous system respond to stress. 5 Understand what dysregulation looks like and what behaviour is communicating. 6 Consider the many factors that influence behaviour (child, context, adult, outcome).	7 Increase awareness of our own nervous system. 8 Identify personal triggers and early signs of activation. 9 Build skills for a calm, consistent, and responsive adult posture.	10 Use everyday co-regulation strategies throughout the day. 11 Apply supportive language and responses in real-time. 12 Create environments, routines, and prevention strategies that promote regulation.	13 Explore how repeated experiences of co-regulation build self-regulation over time. 14 Learn how to reconnect, reflect, and repair after dysregulation. 15 Consider adult well-being and sustainability to continue making a difference.

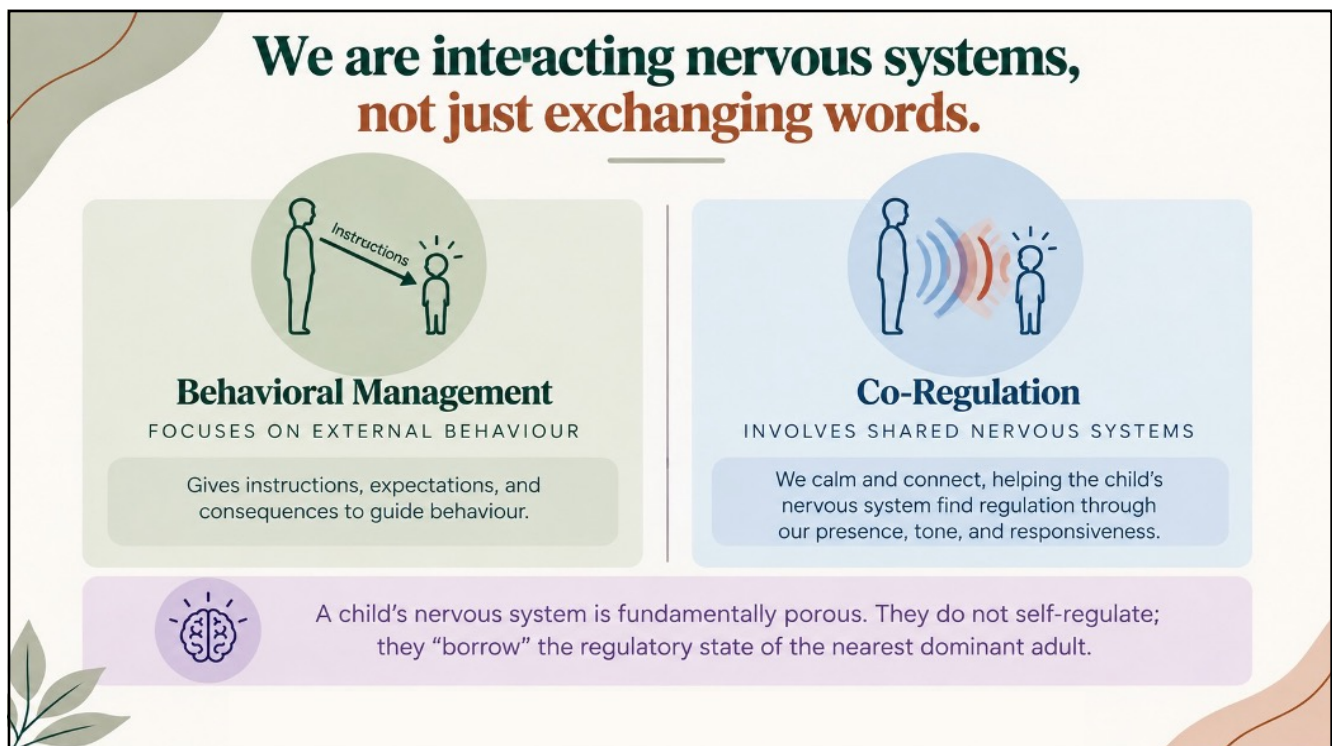
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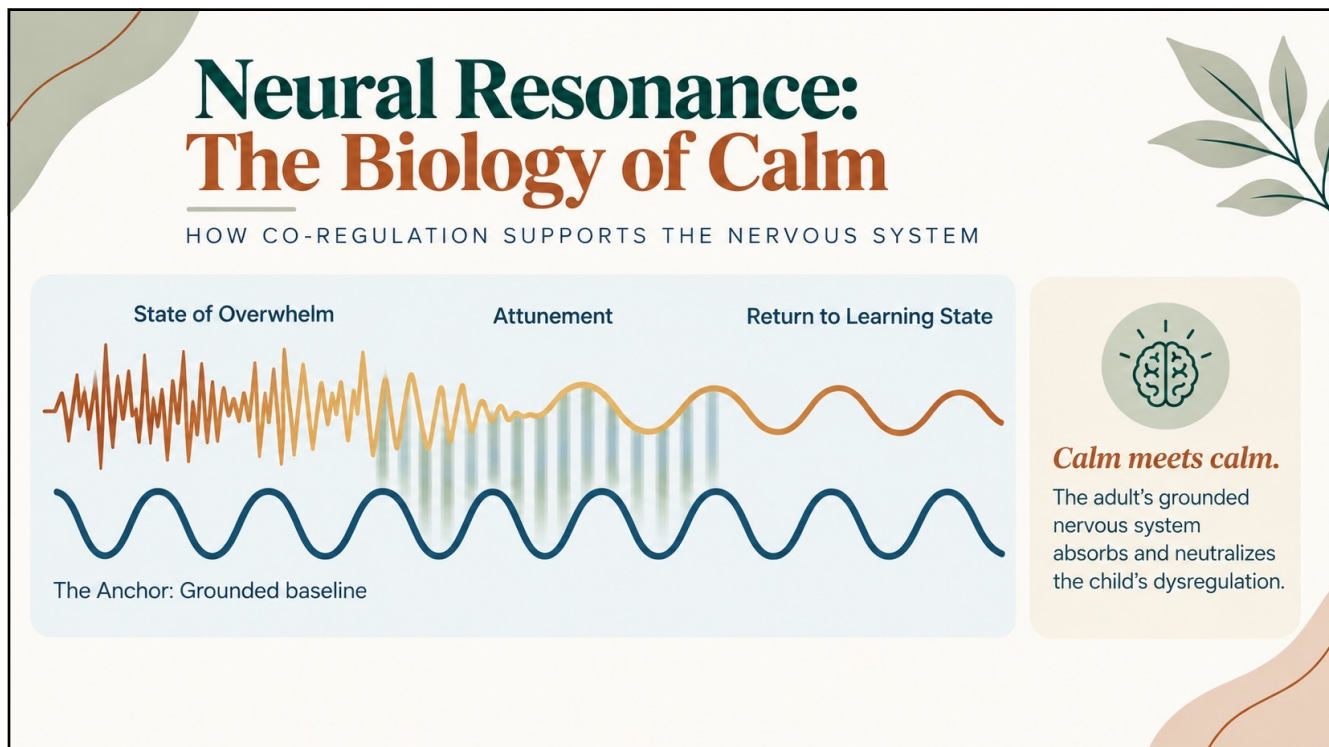
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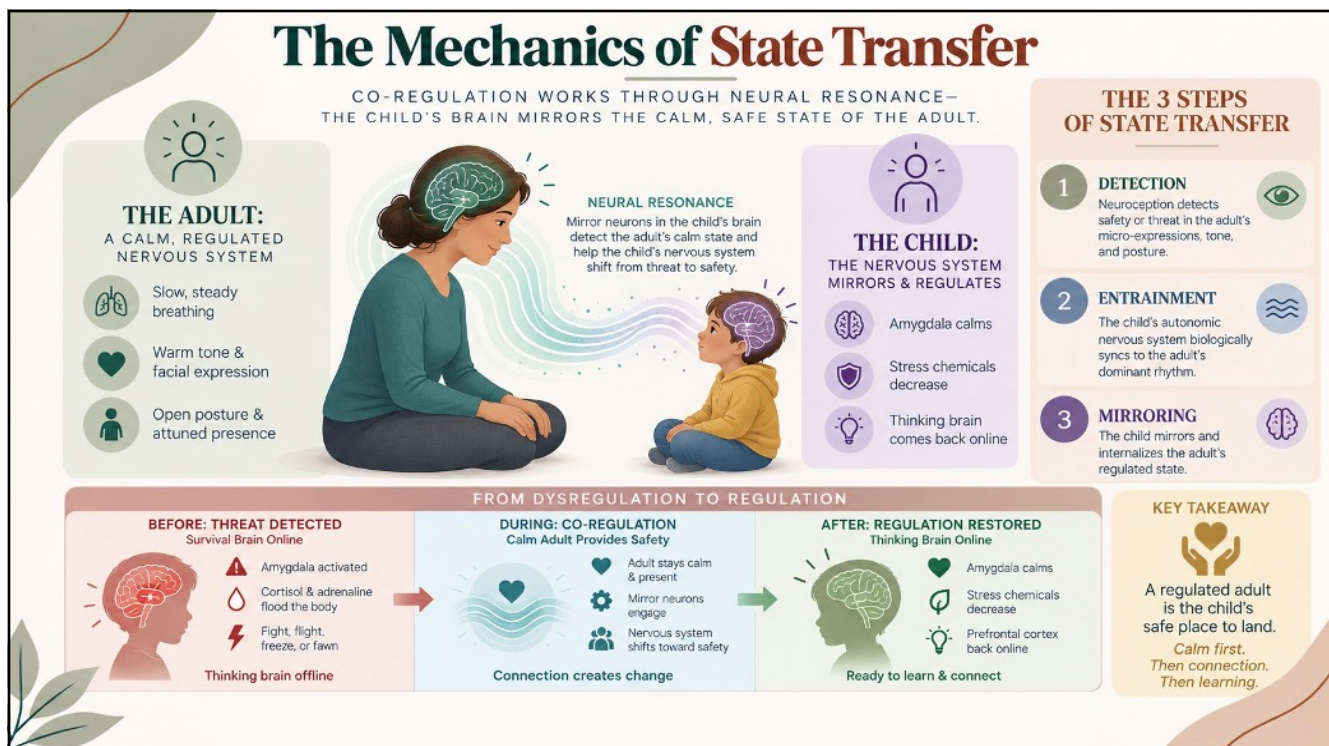
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Co-Regulation Isn't a Trick or Technique. It's a Relationship.



Together, calmer futures are possible.

- 1 A neurobiological and relational process:**
 A regulated adult uses their own nervous system to help support and stabilize a dysregulated student.
- 2 An interactive and collaborative approach:**
 Which is grounded in the adult's sensitivity, responsiveness, and attunement to the student's cues, signals, and internal emotional state.

11

The Role of Co-regulation

A SUPPORTIVE PROCESS FOR GROWTH, CONNECTION, AND RESILIENCE



WHAT IS CO-REGULATION?

Co-regulation is a supportive process where one person helps another manage their emotions, behavior, and physical responses through warm, connected interactions.

This shared experience helps individuals gradually develop self-regulation skills, making it easier to handle life's challenges on their own.





WHY IT MATTERS

WARM, CONNECTED RELATIONSHIPS BUILD STRONGER BRAINS AND BRIGHTER FUTURES.

- Helps calm the nervous system during times of stress.
- Provides a model for healthy emotional and behavioral responses.
- Builds a sense of safety, connection, and belonging.
- Supports the gradual development of independent self-regulation.

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The Adult is the Intervention.



People Matter Here

Connection today,
brighter tomorrows.

- 1**  **In education, we often focus on what adults *should* do—** the strategies they implement, the language they use, or the interventions they apply.
- 2**  **While these practices matter,** they are secondary to something even more fundamental: how **students experience the adults around them.**

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The goal of co-regulation is **NOT** to stop your child's emotions, but to connect with them in a way that helps their emotions **come**, **flow**, and **pass** in a way that feels safe and manageable.

15

The Danger of **Suppression**

WHEN EMOTIONS ARE SUPPRESSED, NOT PROCESSED



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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Co-Regulation Is Not the Same as **Permissiveness**



Supporting children through emotions does not mean allowing all behaviours.
An effective adult posture combines empathy with leadership.

For example:

"I can see that you're angry
because it's time to stop playing.
It's okay to be angry.
I won't let you hit."



The adult accepts the emotion
while maintaining the boundary.



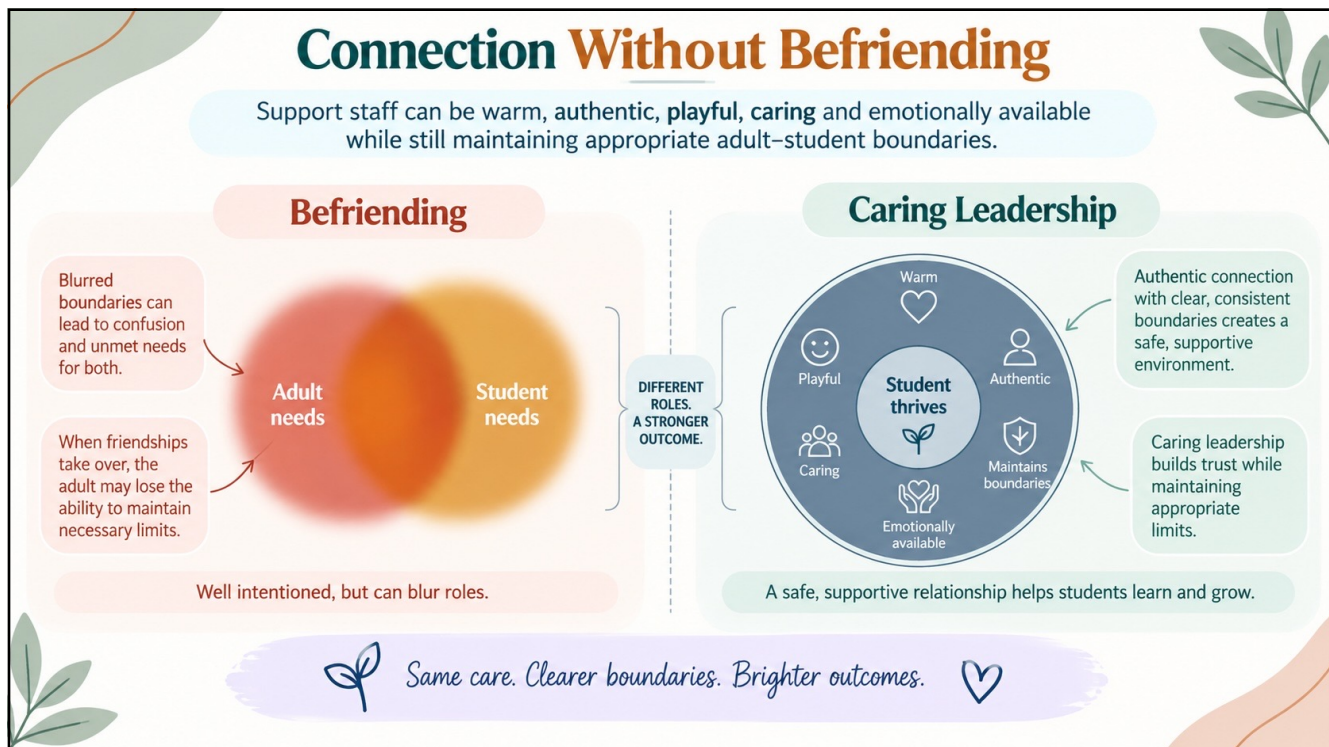
Children need both:

- Acceptance of their feelings
- Guidance around their actions

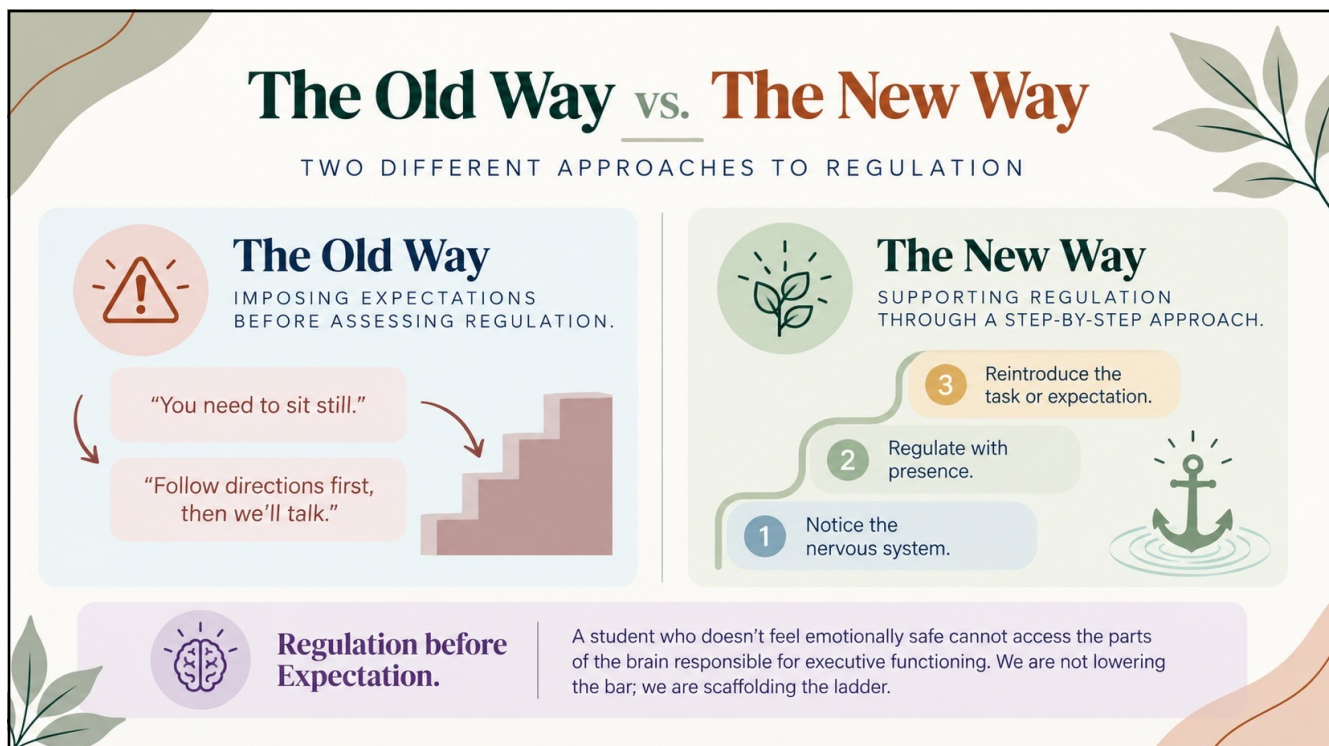


This balance helps children learn that
all emotions are acceptable, even
when some behaviours are not.

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Traditional Classroom Management vs. Co-Regulation

TWO DIFFERENT PATHWAYS. TWO DIFFERENT OUTCOMES.

Traditional Classroom Management		Co-Regulation	
FOCUS ON CONTROL & COMPLIANCE		FOCUS ON CONNECTION & CAPACITY	
Philosophy	Behaviour control and external compliance	Philosophy	Relational safety and development of internal regulation
View of behaviour	Something to correct or manage	View of behaviour	A form of communication and information
Adult's role	Rule enforcer and behaviour manager	Adult's role	Regulation anchor and source of safety
Primary question	"What is wrong with this student?"	Primary question	"What is happening for this student?"
Response to distress	Correct, redirect, or consequence	Response to distress	Connect, regulate, then problem-solve
Understanding of stress	Students should control behaviour despite distress	Understanding of stress	Stress affects access to reasoning and self-control
Goal	Immediate behavioural change	Goal	Long-term capacity for self-regulation
Accountability	Through consequences	Accountability	Through reflection, repair, and restored connection
Typical outcome	Compliance in the moment, disconnection over time.	Typical outcome	Connection in the moment, self-regulation over time.


 Co-regulation doesn't remove expectations—it creates the conditions where students can meet them.

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Co-regulation needs to come **FIRST**

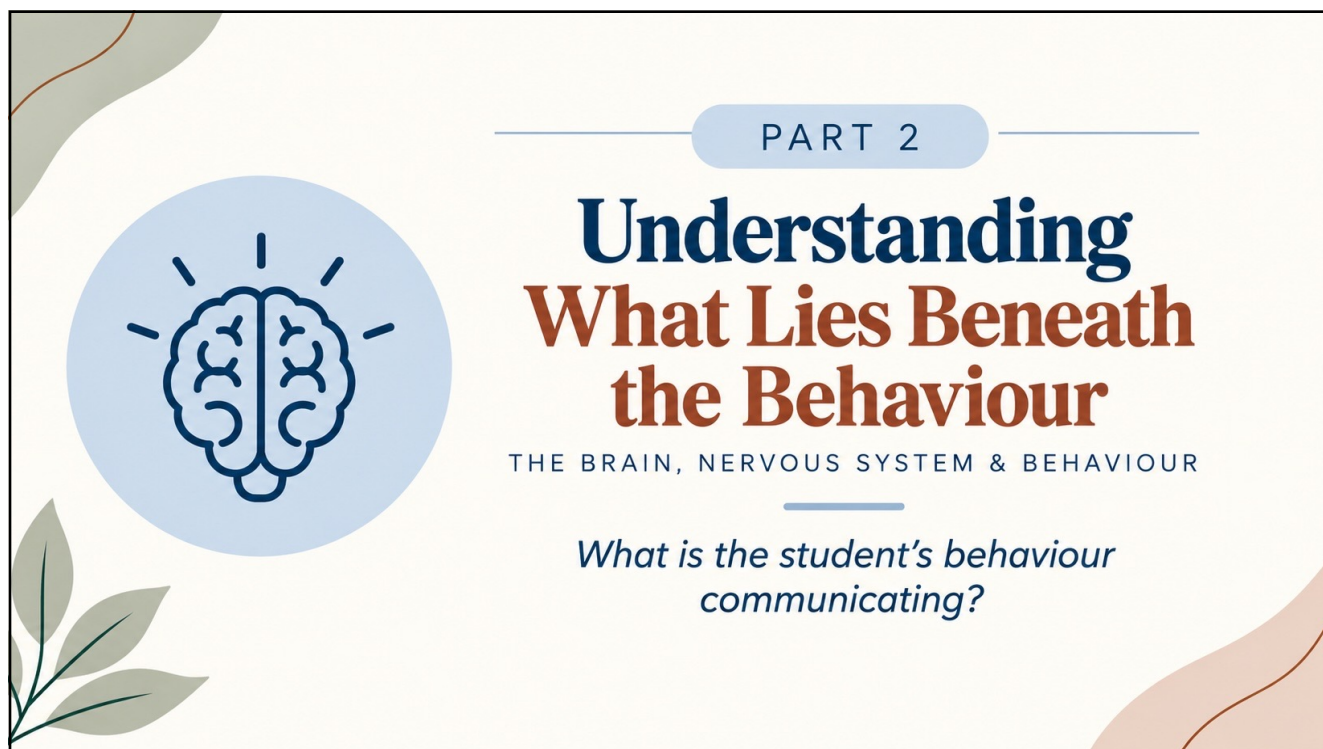


We often respond to dysregulation after it's already escalated, instead of creating environments that proactively support regulation.



We need to prepare the adults in becoming co-regulators, rather than train them in compliance-based discipline.

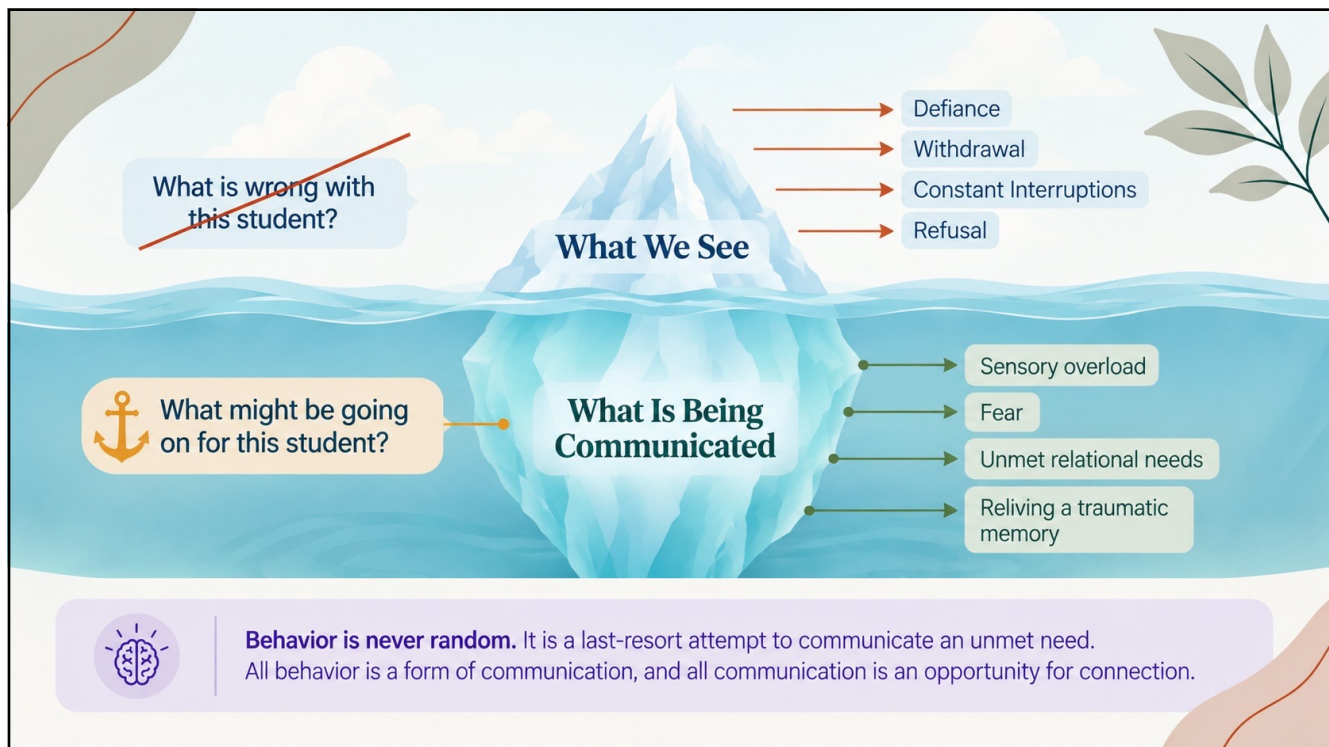
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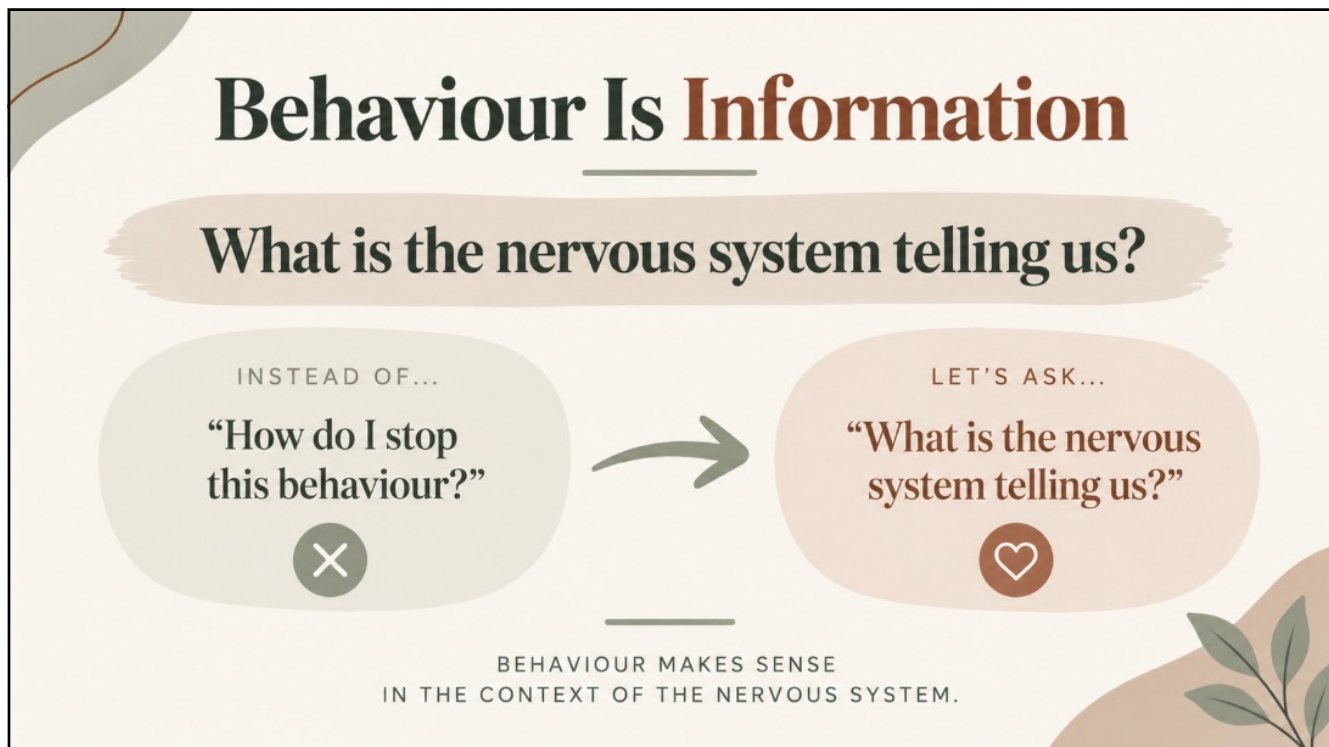
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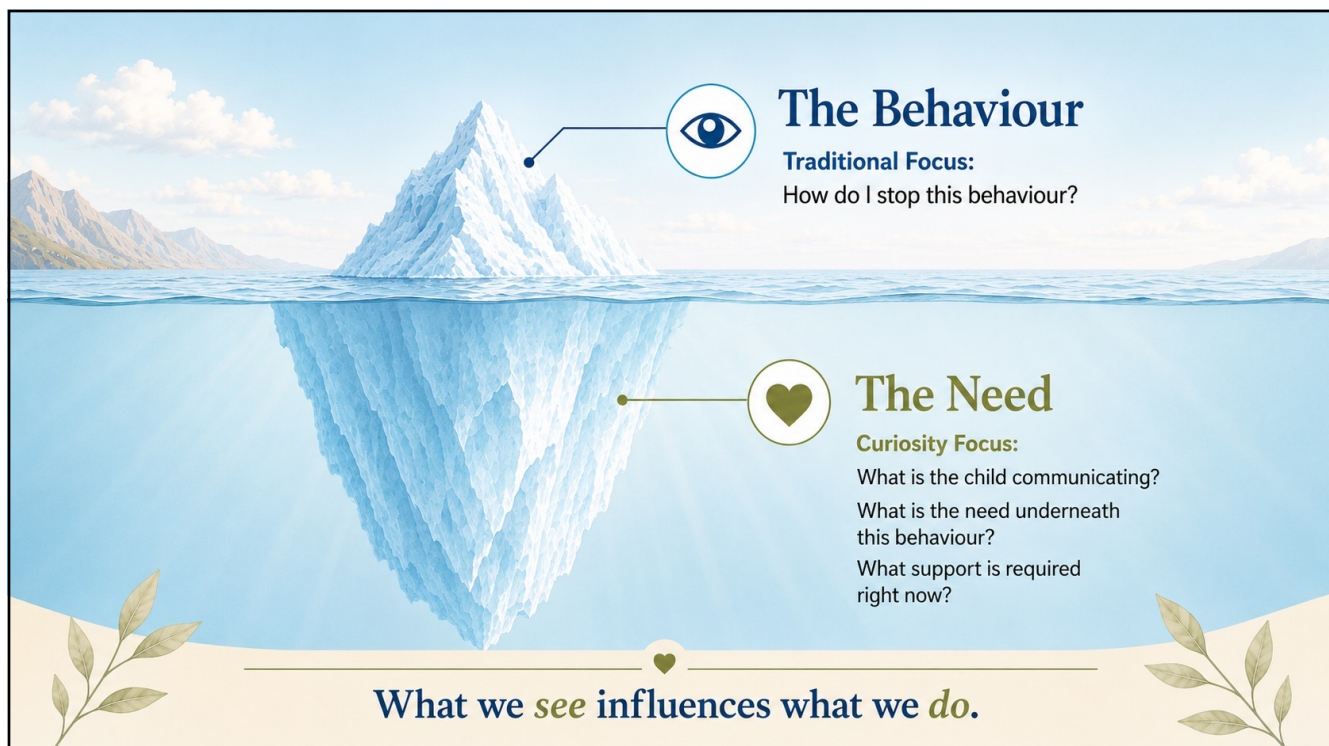
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Judgment last to develop

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:

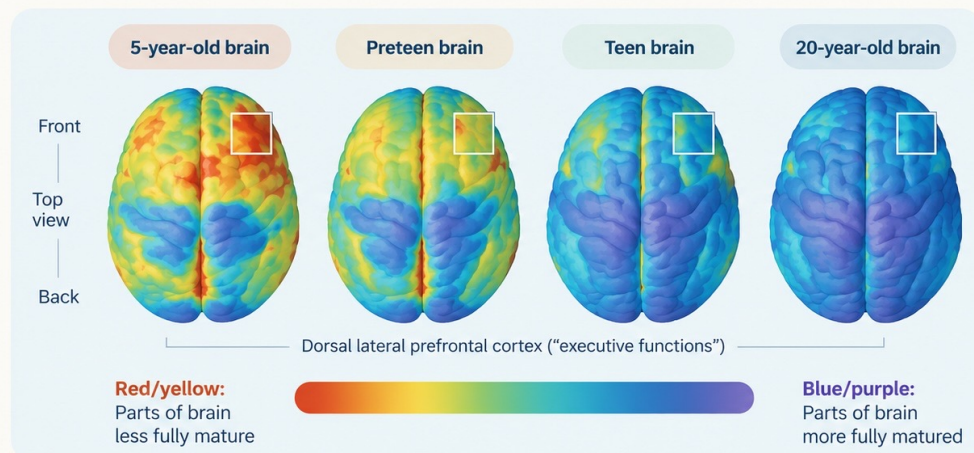


Image from the National Institute of Mental Health, Paul Thompson, Ph.D., UCLA Laboratory of Neuro Imaging



Development takes time.

The brain's systems for planning, impulse control, and weighing consequences continue to mature through adolescence and into adulthood.

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Why do Students Today Need Co-Regulation More than Ever?



Today's Learners

Growing Up in a Complex World



1



A rapidly changing world.

Children and adolescents today are navigating a rapidly changing world that places increasing demands on their nervous systems.

2



Fewer natural opportunities.

While children have always needed connection and support to develop self-regulation, many modern conditions have reduced the natural opportunities through which regulation develops:



Play



Creativity



Movement



Connection



Unstructured time

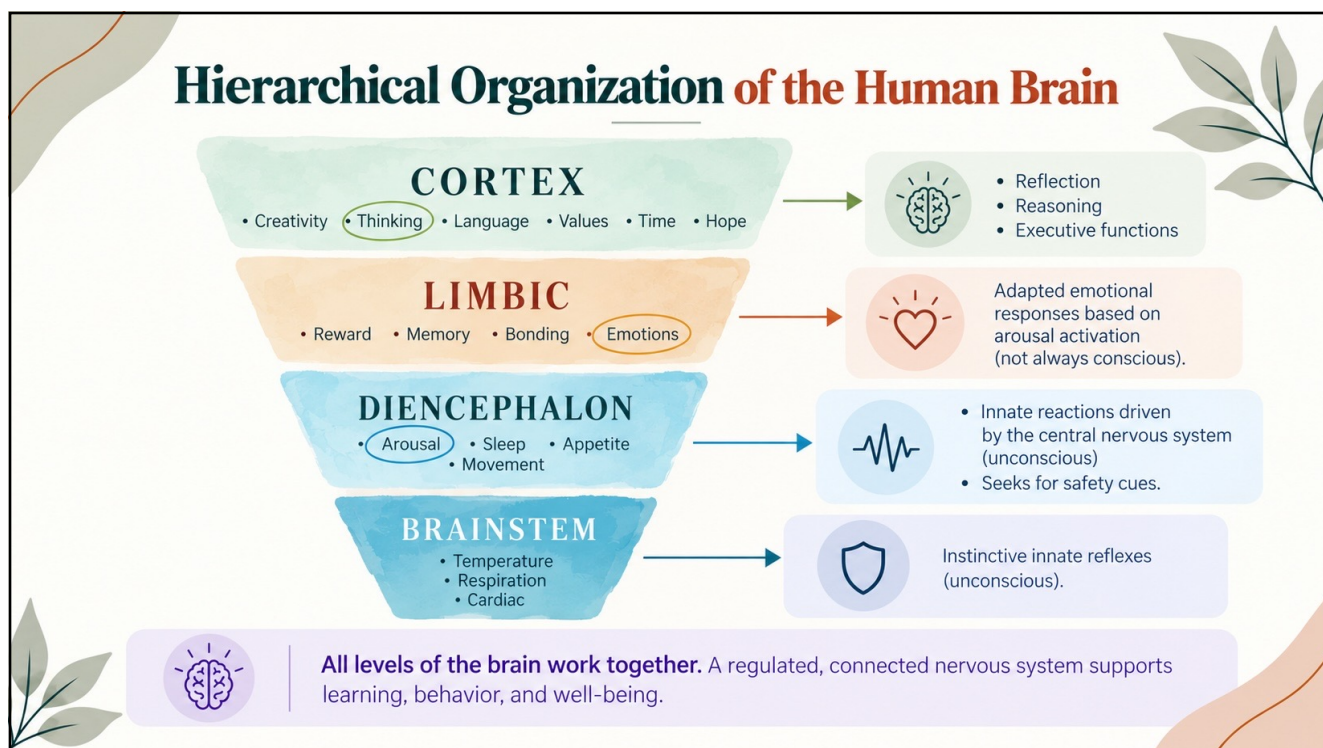


More connection. A calmer future.

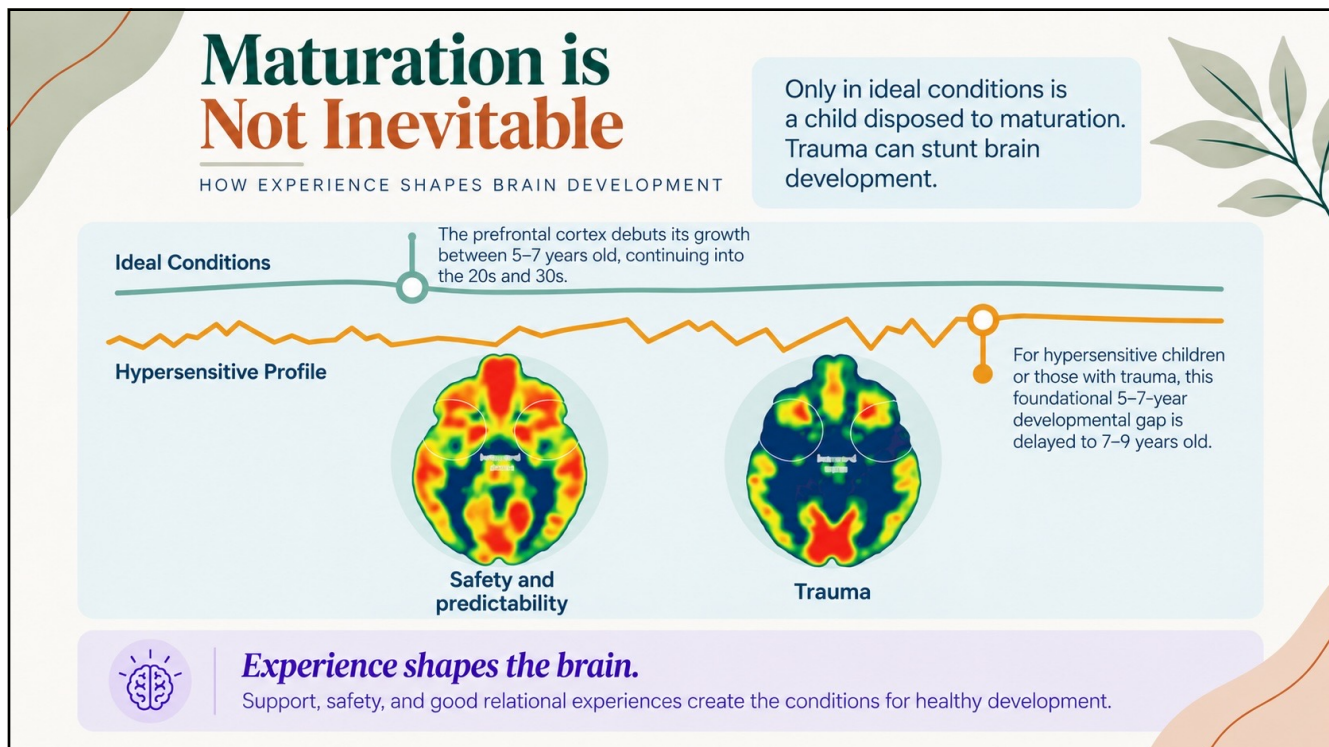
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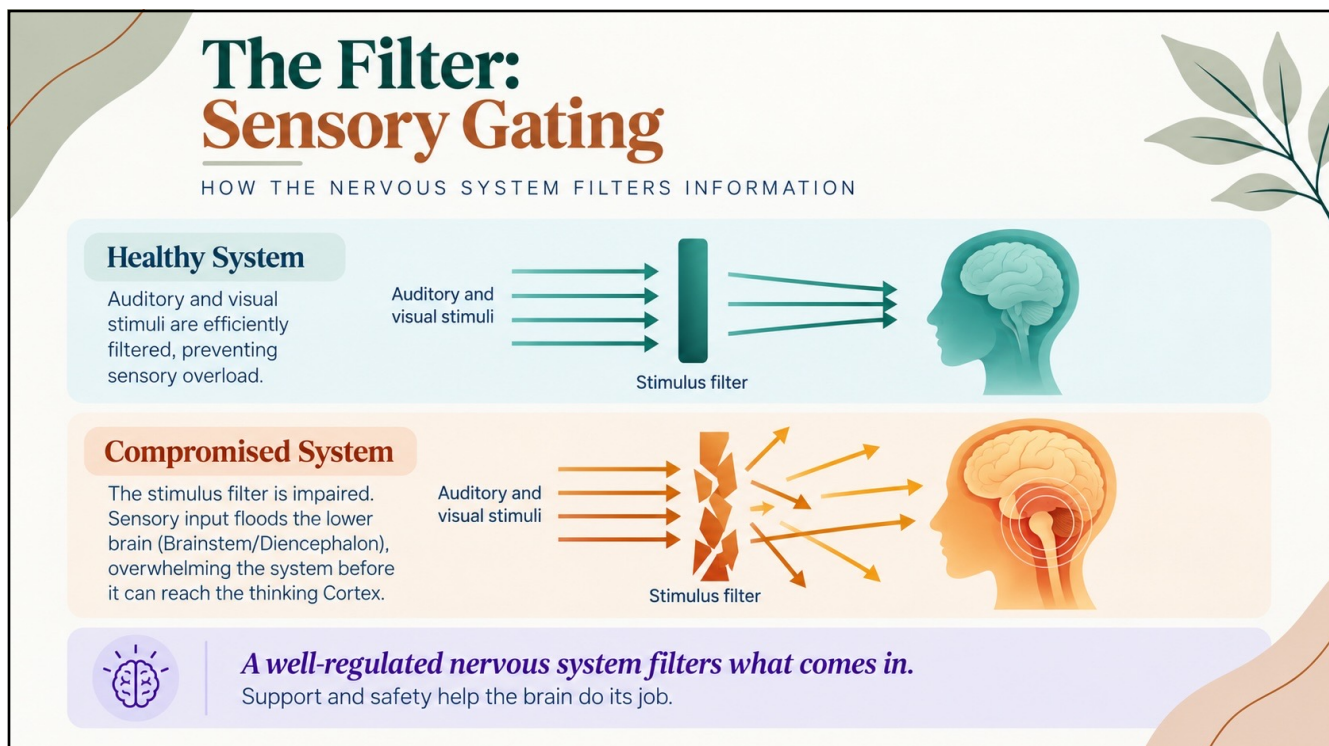
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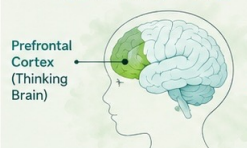
The Brain Learns Best *in a State of Safety*

Research in neuroscience has shown that children's brains are designed to **prioritize safety before learning**.

When children feel **emotionally safe**, the parts of the brain responsible for thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and learning are more accessible.

When children feel **threatened, overwhelmed, or disconnected**, the brain shifts into **survival mode**.

Safe & Connected LEARNING MODE



Prefrontal Cortex (Thinking Brain)

Calm. Curious. Open.
Ready to learn.

Threatened & Stressed SURVIVAL MODE



Amygdala (Survival Brain)

Alert. Defensive. Overwhelmed.
Focused on staying safe.

↔

This means that before children can fully engage in learning, they must first experience a sense of **emotional security**.

In a state of stress, children are more likely to:

-  Become reactive or impulsive
-  Have difficulty concentrating
-  Struggle to follow directions
-  Experience emotional outbursts
-  Withdraw from participation
-  Have difficulty retaining new information





A child who feels safe is far more available for learning than a child who is focused on managing anxiety, uncertainty, or fear.

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Before Children Process Our Instructions, They Process Our Presence.



 Before they interpret our words, they interpret our tone, facial expression, posture, pace, and emotional availability.

 Their nervous systems are constantly asking:

 Am I safe?

 Can I trust this adult?

 Do I matter here?



 Will they stay with me when things become difficult?

Connection comes before compliance.

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Safety is Created Through Everyday Experiences.



*Everyday interactions build a sense of **safety**.*

- 1**  **Safety isn't just for crises.**
 One misconception is that safety is created only during crises. In reality, students decide whether school feels safe through hundreds of small, daily interactions.
- 2** **Examples of everyday experiences that build safety:**

 Predictable routines	 Consistent responses	 Warm greetings	 Humour	 Being remembered
 Respectful correction	 Opportunities for choice	 Emotional availability	 Adults repairing mistakes	 Seeing peers treated with dignity

These experiences communicate:
"This is a place where I can relax enough to learn."

Safety is therefore not an event.
It is a culture.

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Faulty Neuroception

The brain's tendency to misinterpret safe situations as threatening.



Perceives danger where there is none.



Triggers a stress response even in safe environments.

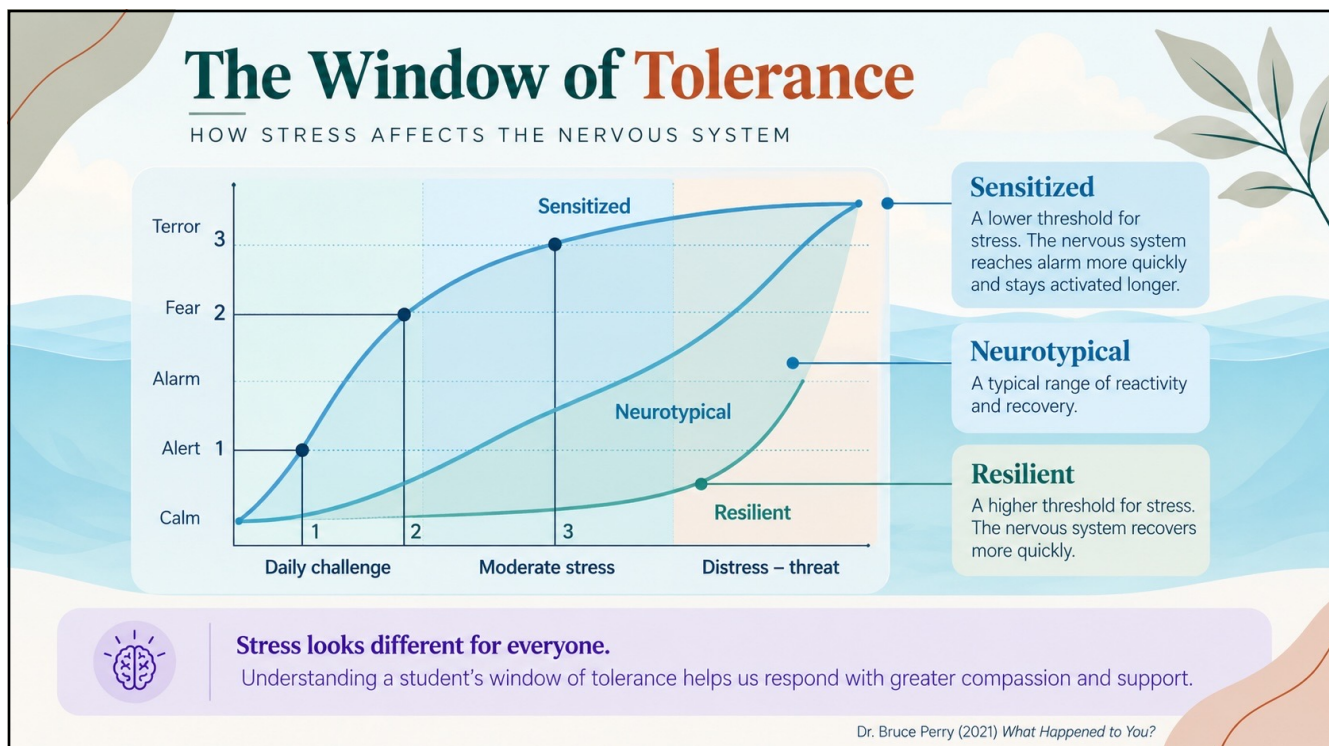


Can make it hard to access learning, connection and problem solving.

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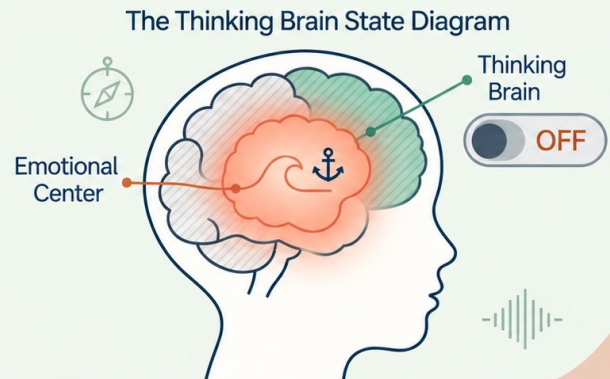
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The thinking brain shuts down during emotional distress



The Thinking Brain Shuts Down

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



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When a Student Perceives a Threat...



Whether it is a genuine safety concern or a perceived social threat (like public correction)...



The amygdala triggers a stress response, flooding the body with cortisol and adrenaline...

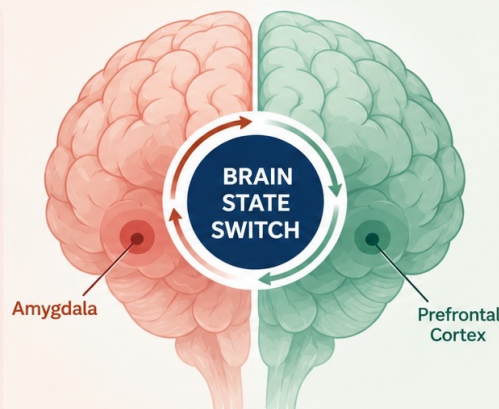


...shifting the brain from a "thinking" state into a "survival" state.

Survival State (Dysregulation)

Fight • Flight • Freeze

- ✗ Amygdala is activated
- ✗ Stress hormones flood the body
- ✗ Thinking brain (prefrontal cortex) goes "offline"
- ✗ Biologically impossible to process logic, follow instructions, or answer complex questions



Safe & Social State (Regulated)

Connection • Calm • Engagement

- ✓ Ventral vagal system is active
- ✓ Student feels safe and connected
- ✓ Prefrontal cortex is online
- ✓ Engaged, curious, relational, and able to learn

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EDUCATOR'S FIELD GUIDE

You Cannot Reason with an Overwhelmed Brain

The Biological Reality
In moments of stress, frustration, or conflict, a child's "thinking brain" becomes less accessible. They are operating entirely from emotional overwhelm.

The Intervention Failure
Because the reasoning centers are offline, lectures, consequences, and logical reasoning processes are mere noise to the child's nervous system.

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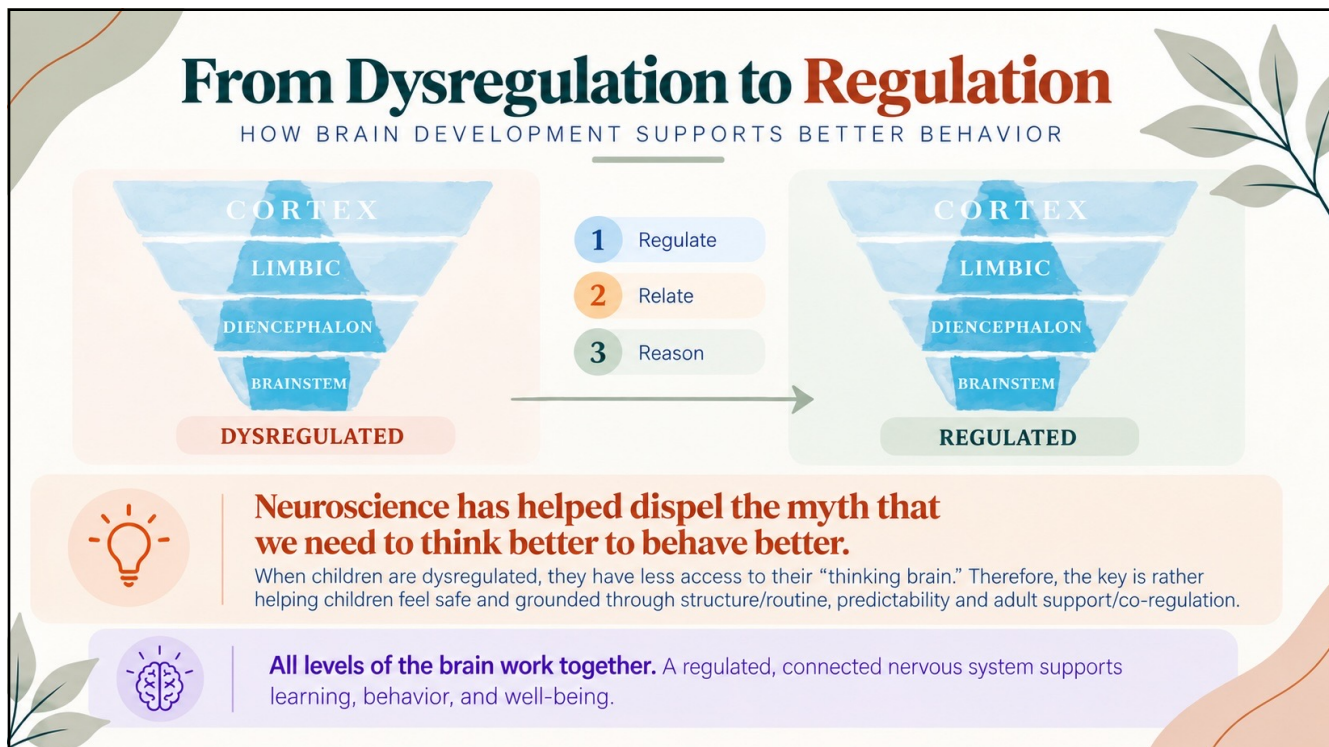
When dysregulation peaks, cognitive availability plummets.

THE COGNITIVE AVAILABILITY CURVE

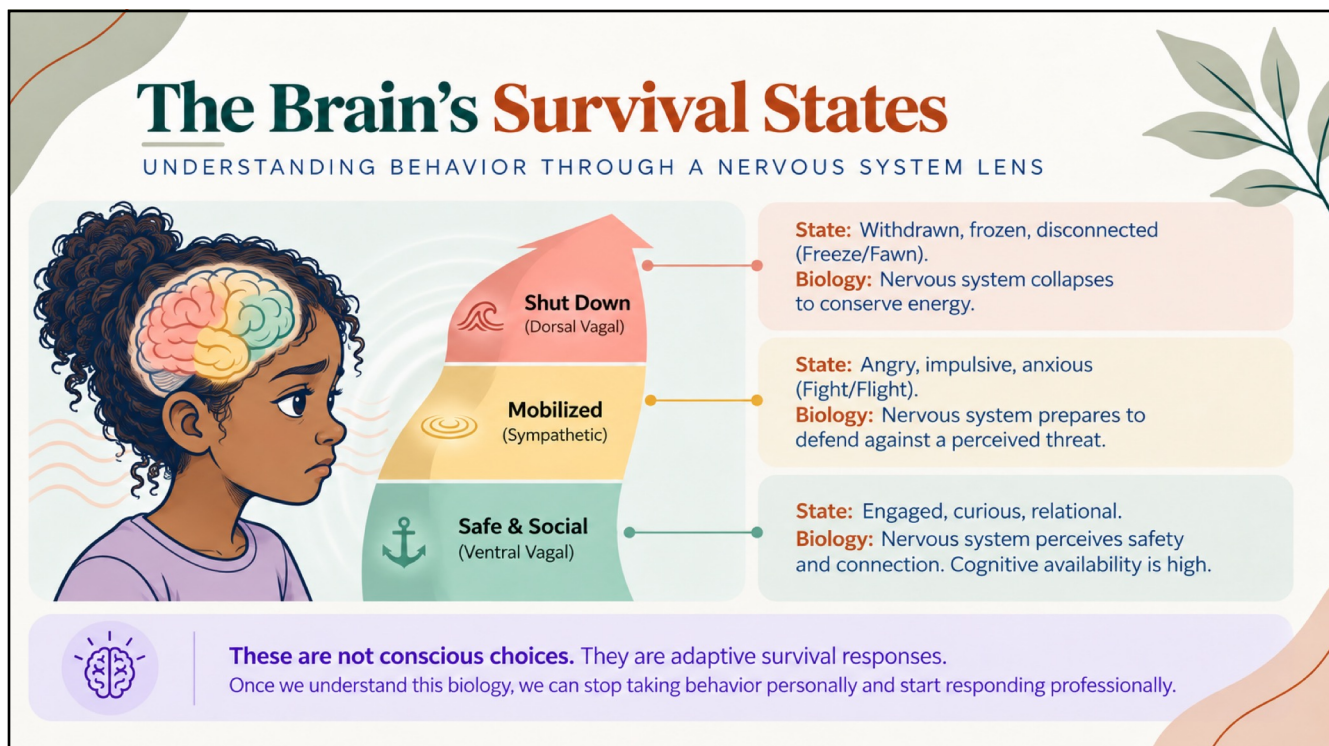
The Core Reality
When a student at Tier 3 is triggered and dysregulated, they are not receptive to our interventions in the moment.

The Only Mandate
Adults must focus on establishing safety for all first.

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Nervous System Diagnostic Guide

State		Student Presentation	Underlying Response
Fight		Aggression, yelling, controlling behavior	Defending against a perceived threat.
Flight		Avoidance, running away, anxious movement	Attempting to escape discomfort.
Freeze		Withdrawal, non-response, shut-down	Nervous system overwhelm.
Fawn		People-pleasing, self-erasure, excessive compliance	Seeking safety through appeasement.



Understanding these patterns allows us to stop taking behavior personally and start responding professionally.

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Individual Reflection Question



Reframing Challenging Behaviour

Think of a recent challenging student behavior. Deconstruct it through a curiosity lens:

- 1 Visible Student Behaviour**
(What did you see/hear?) [Describe the raw physical indicators...]
- 2 Possible Unmet Needs**
(What might they be communicating?) [Physiological, relational, safety, or sensory needs...]
- 3 My Initial Response**
(What did you do or feel tempted to do?) [Triggers, frustration, impulse to control...]
- 4 Alternative Curious Response**
(What could you say with a relational posture?) [Validating emotions, open-ended question, slowing down...]

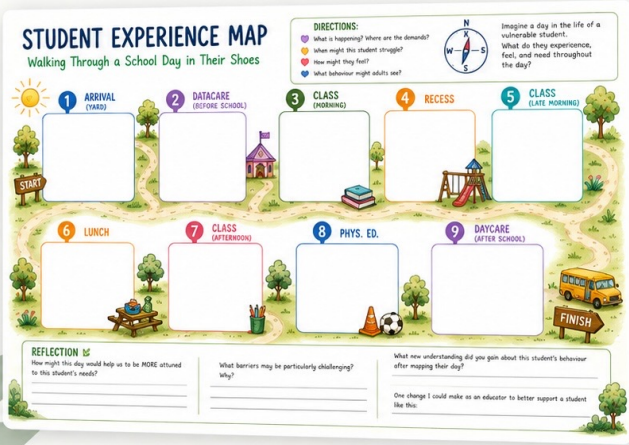
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Individual Reflective Exercise

Experience Mapping Worksheet

Imagine a full school day from the perspective of a vulnerable student, taking into account how their environment impacts them.



STUDENT EXPERIENCE MAP
Walking Through a School Day in Their Shoes

DIRECTIONS:

- What is happening? Where are the demands?
- When might this student struggle?
- How might they feel?
- What behaviour might adults see?

Imagine a day in the life of a vulnerable student. What do they experience, feel, and need throughout the day?

1 ARRIVAL (MORNING) **2 DAYCARE (BEFORE SCHOOL)** **3 CLASS (MORNING)** **4 RECESS** **5 CLASS (LATE MORNING)**

6 LUNCH **7 CLASS (AFTERNOON)** **8 PHYS. ED.** **9 DAYCARE (AFTER SCHOOL)**

REFLECTION IS

How might this day would help us to be MORE attuned to this student's needs?

What barriers may be particularly challenging? Why?

What new understanding did you gain about this student's behaviour after mapping their day?

One change I could make as an educator to better support a student like this:



Greater understanding today leads to more compassionate and supportive tomorrow.

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Considering all the elements involved



Child

+



Context

+



Adult

=



Outcome

- Chronological age
- Brain maturation
- Neurodiversity/ Sensitivity
- Level of emotional and social development
- Family history (trauma)
- Stuck or guarded emotionally
- Etc.

- Impact of the physical space (size of the room, space to move, etc.)
- Sensory input
- Type of activity going on
- Level of structure/ predictability
- Social impact (makeup of the group, dynamics with peers)
- Support measures in place
- Support from other staff

- Relationship with the child (engaged the child's attachment)
- Adult posture
- 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.)

- Shift in child/adult dynamic
- Possibly an escalation or a de-escalation in the child's behaviour
- Outcome becomes problematic or is resolved
- Debrief/follow-up?



Understanding all of these elements helps us stop taking behavior personally and start responding professionally.

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PART 3

The Adult as the Regulation Anchor

ADULT POSTURE, PRESENCE & RELATIONAL SAFETY

What am I bringing into this interaction?

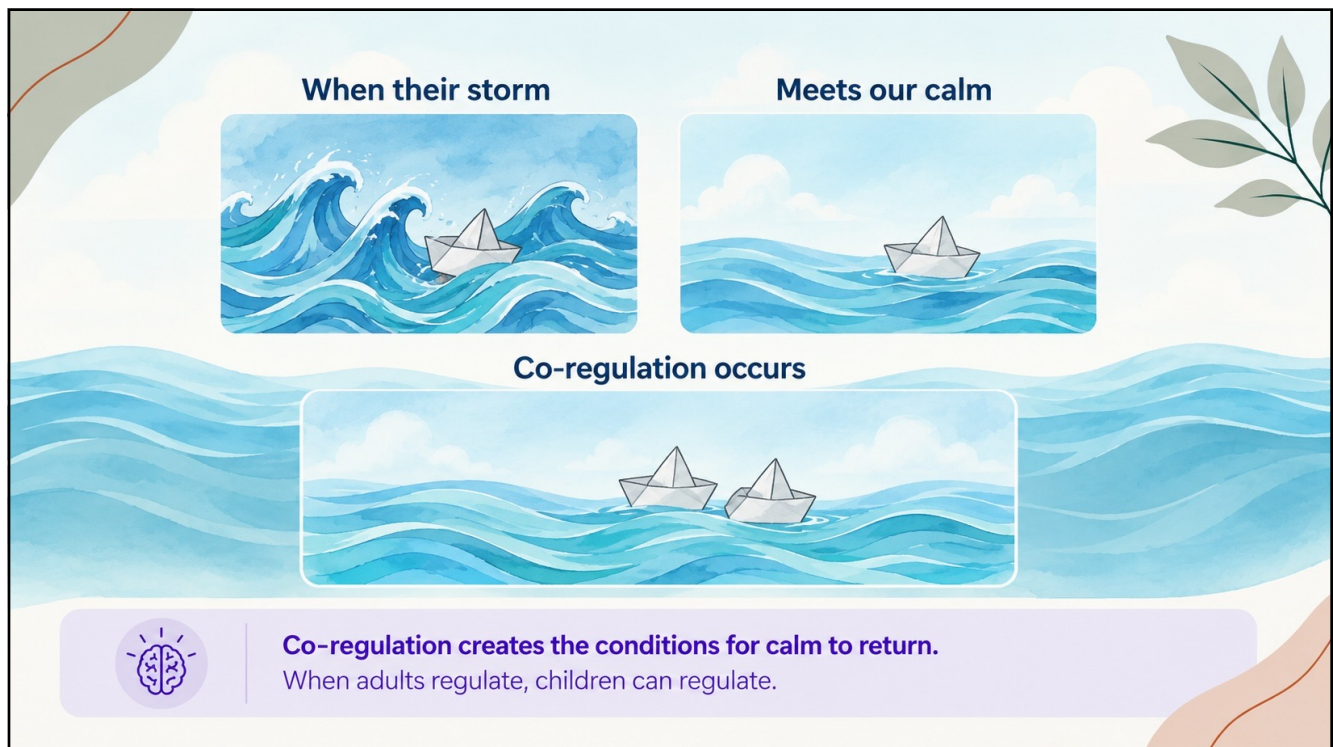
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Co-Regulation Is a Way of Being

Students don't only borrow our calm during crisis. They experience our nervous system all day long.



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Adults Serve as Emotional Anchors.



Steady adults help students feel safe again.

1 

Children look to trusted adults.

Children naturally look to trusted adults to help interpret situations and determine how to respond. During moments of stress, students often rely on the emotional stability of the adults around them.

For example, when a child becomes frustrated after making a mistake, an adult's response can either intensify distress or help restore safety.

Reactive Response

"You need to stop crying and get back to work."

May communicate that emotions are inconvenient or unacceptable.

Regulated Response

"This feels frustrating right now. Let's figure it out together."

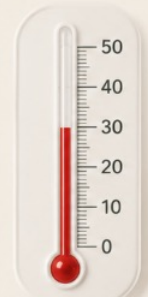
Communicates safety, support, and confidence in the child's ability to cope.

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Moving Away from Thermometer to Thermostat

Thermometer

Measures what is happening right now.



REACTIONS

→

Thermostat

Helps us influence the environment over time.



PREVENTION AND REGULATION

SAME GOAL • A MORE REGULATED ENVIRONMENT

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The diagnostic matrix: Are you a Thermometer or a Thermostat?

	 Traditional Coercive Management (The Thermometer) Reacts to the room's temperature.	 Co-Regulation (The Thermostat) Sets the room's temperature.
Primary Goal	Immediate compliance and control.	Relational safety and nervous system stabilization.
Focus	Fixing external behavior symptoms.	Addressing the underlying biological state.
Reaction to Hostility	Retaliates. Gets caught in a toxic serve and return power struggle.	Absorbs and drains off negativity. Models deep breaths and open posture.
Response to Crisis	Relies on reasoning, demands, and imposing consequences in the heat of the moment.	Regulates first. Saves reasoning and repair for after the body is calm.

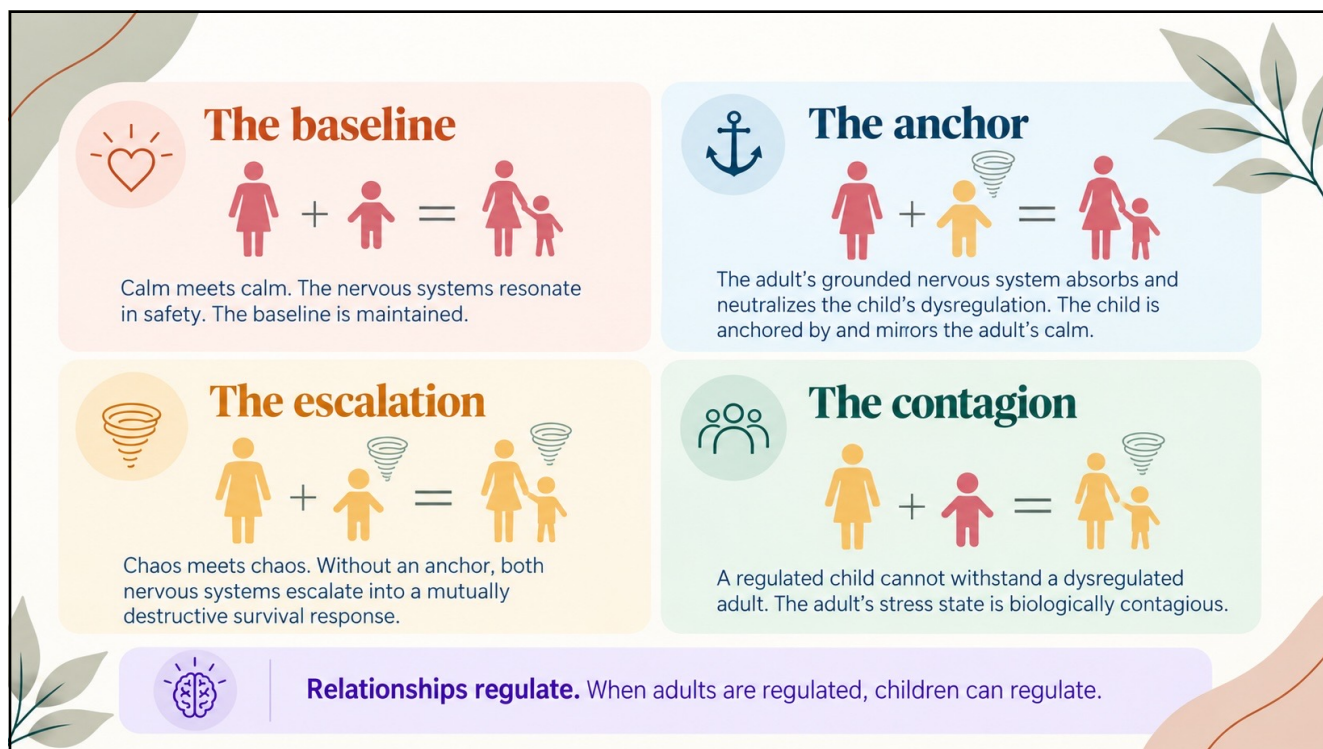

Co-regulation creates the conditions for self-regulation to develop.
When adults regulate, children can co-regulate.

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 The Thermometer Adult (COERCIVE REGULATION)  Awareness Focuses entirely on the child's behavior; ignores own sensations.  Tone Loud, aggressive, escalates to stop the behavior.  Reaction Retaliates to hostility. Gets caught in a toxic "serve and return" power struggle. Brain state rises and falls with the student.	 The Thermostat Adult (CO-REGULATION)  Awareness Willing to regulate own brain before disciplining. Senses own body.  Tone Assertive, soothing. Uses prosody as a tool to drain off negativity.  Response Absorbs hostility. Models deep breaths or pulse-taking. Holds a steady emotional temperature regardless of the room's chaos.
--	--


A Thermometer reacts to the room. A Thermostat sets the temperature.
When adults regulate, children can regulate.

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What Happens in **YOUR** Body?

What tells you that you're becoming activated?



Jaw
(clenched)



Shoulders
(tight)



Heart rate
(faster)



Voice
(shifts)



Breathing
(shallower)



Urge to react
(stronger)



TAKE A MOMENT TO REFLECT...
What are your early warning signs?
How can you notice them sooner?

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My Regulation Roadmap.

We cannot co-regulate a student unless we are regulated ourselves. Co-regulation starts with self-awareness of our own physiological triggers and our warning signs of activation. Outline your physiological profile below so you can catch your activation early:

1  **My Personal Classroom Triggers**
(e.g., screaming, backtalk, eye-rolling)

2  **My Warning Signs**
(e.g., shallow breath, racing heart, clenching jaw)

3  **My In-the-Moment Regulation Strategies**
(e.g., deep breath, pausing, physical step back)

Individual Reflection Question

A regulated adult can support a dysregulated child.

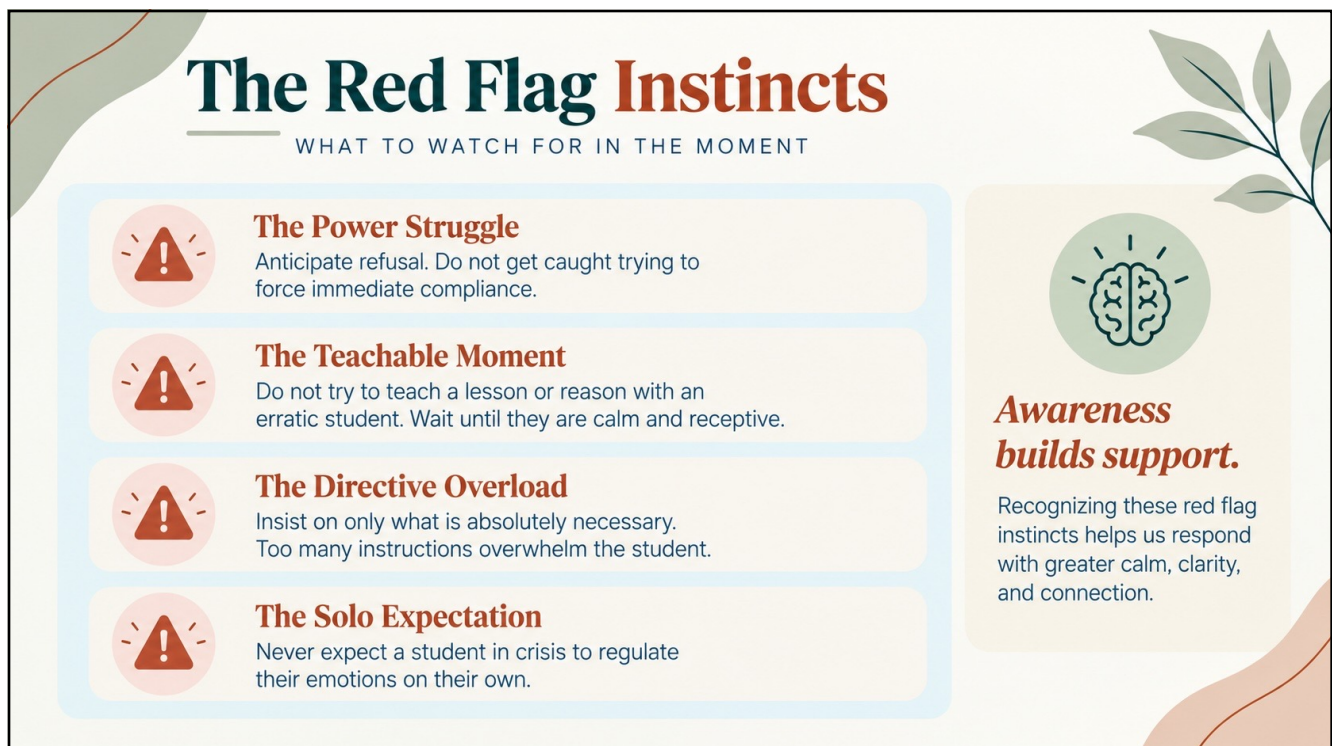
A dysregulated adult can unintentionally escalate a child's dysregulation.

Regulate yourself first, so you can be there for them.

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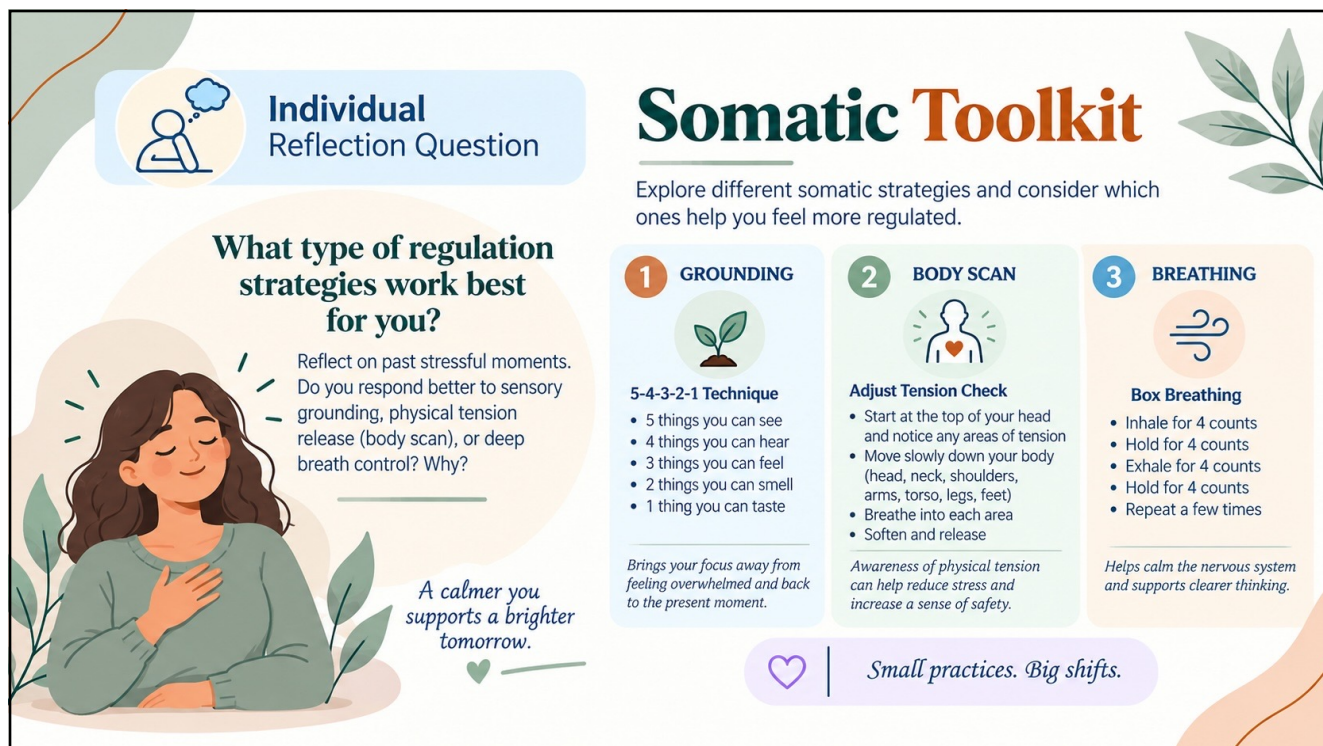
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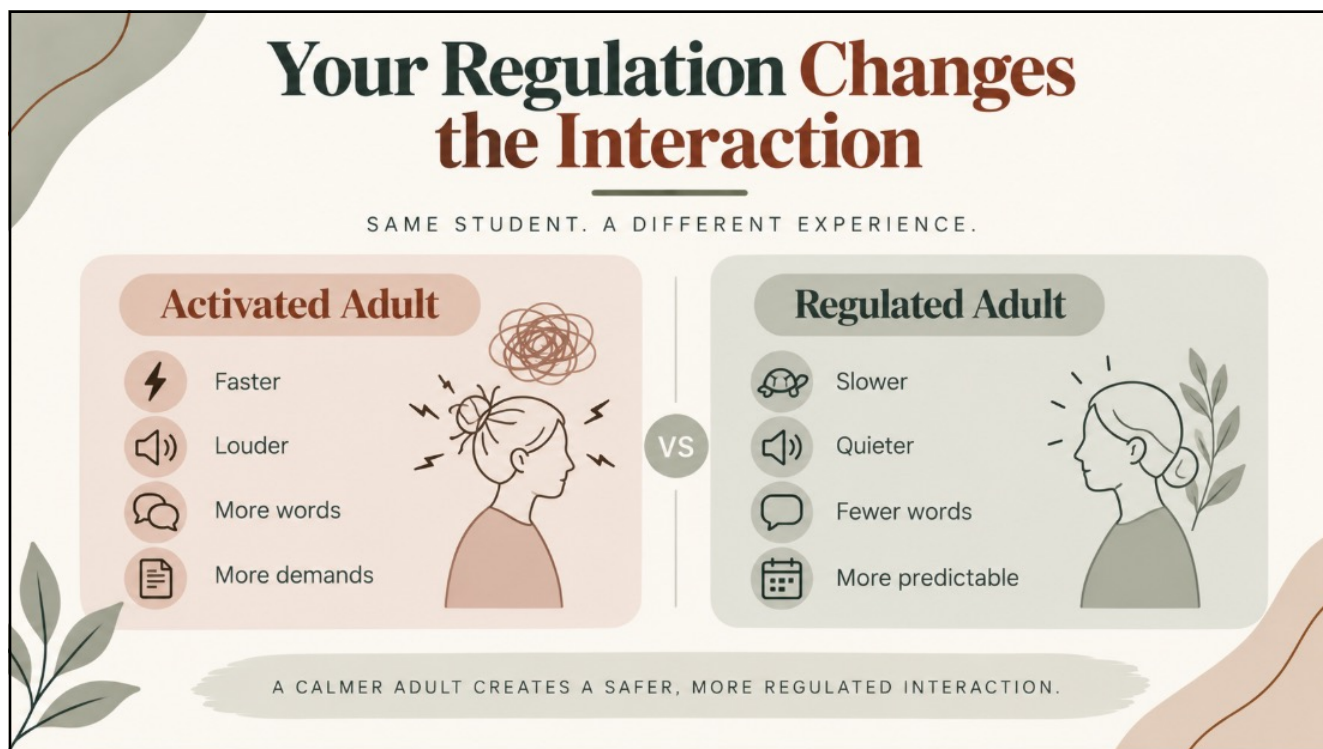
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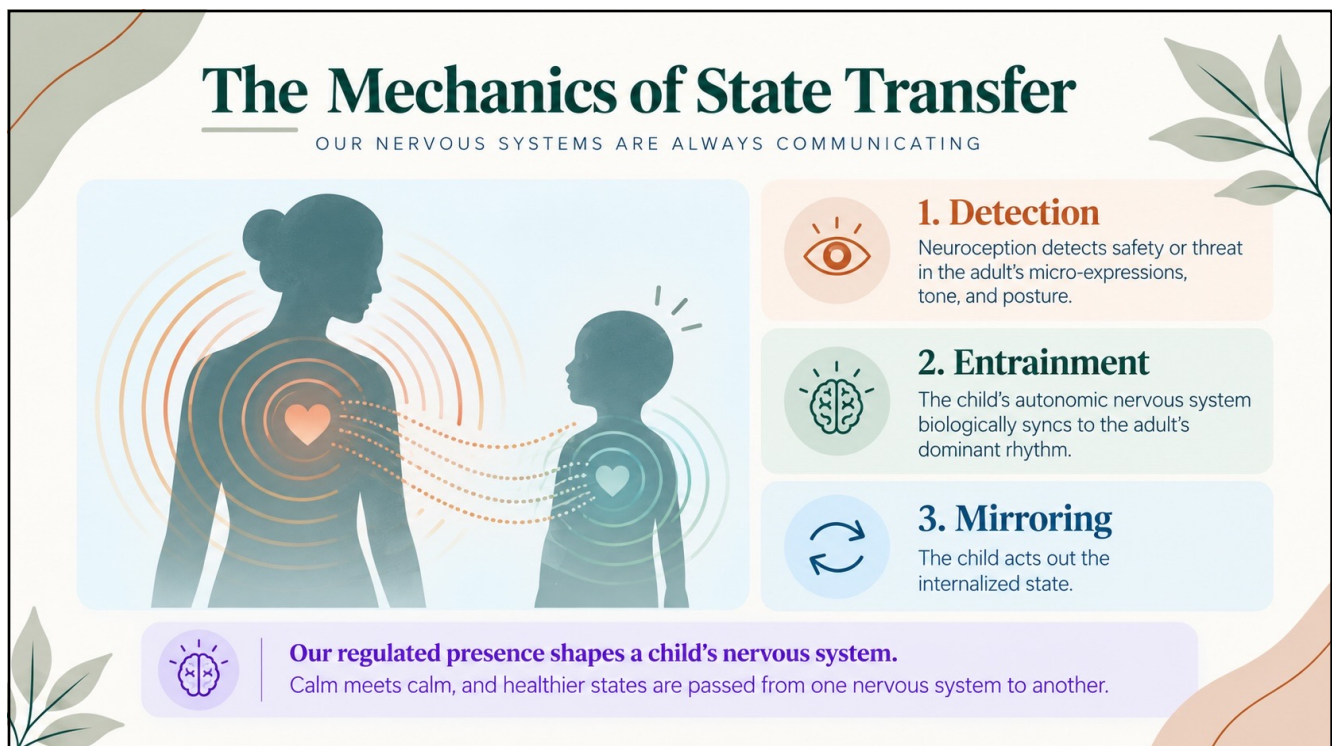
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Co-Regulation Do's and Don'ts

PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT A CALM, CONNECTED BRAIN

DO THIS

-  Speak slowly and warmly to guide their pace.
-  Offer calm presence without pressure to “perform” regulation.
-  Hold boundaries with compassion.
-  Validate emotions even when behavior must be redirected.

NOT THAT

-  Match the student's volume or aggressive tone.
-  Demand immediate compliance from a dysregulated nervous system.
-  Shame, isolate, or use retaliatory consequences.
-  Attempt to teach a lesson or correct behavior while the child is still upset.



The difference between reacting and responding is everything.
Reaction centers control. Response centers connection.

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The Small Stuff Matters



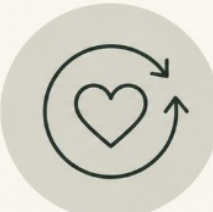
How we give a direction matters.



How we correct matters.

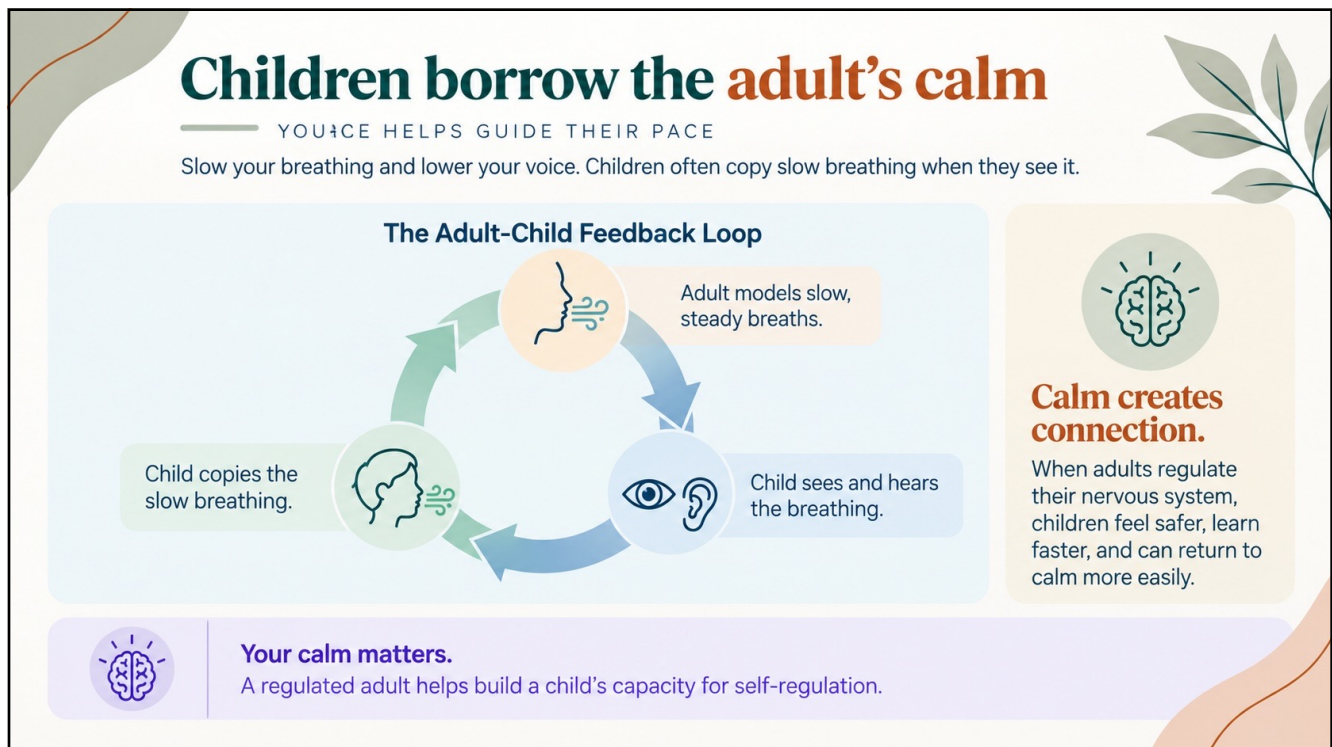


How we respond to mistakes matters.

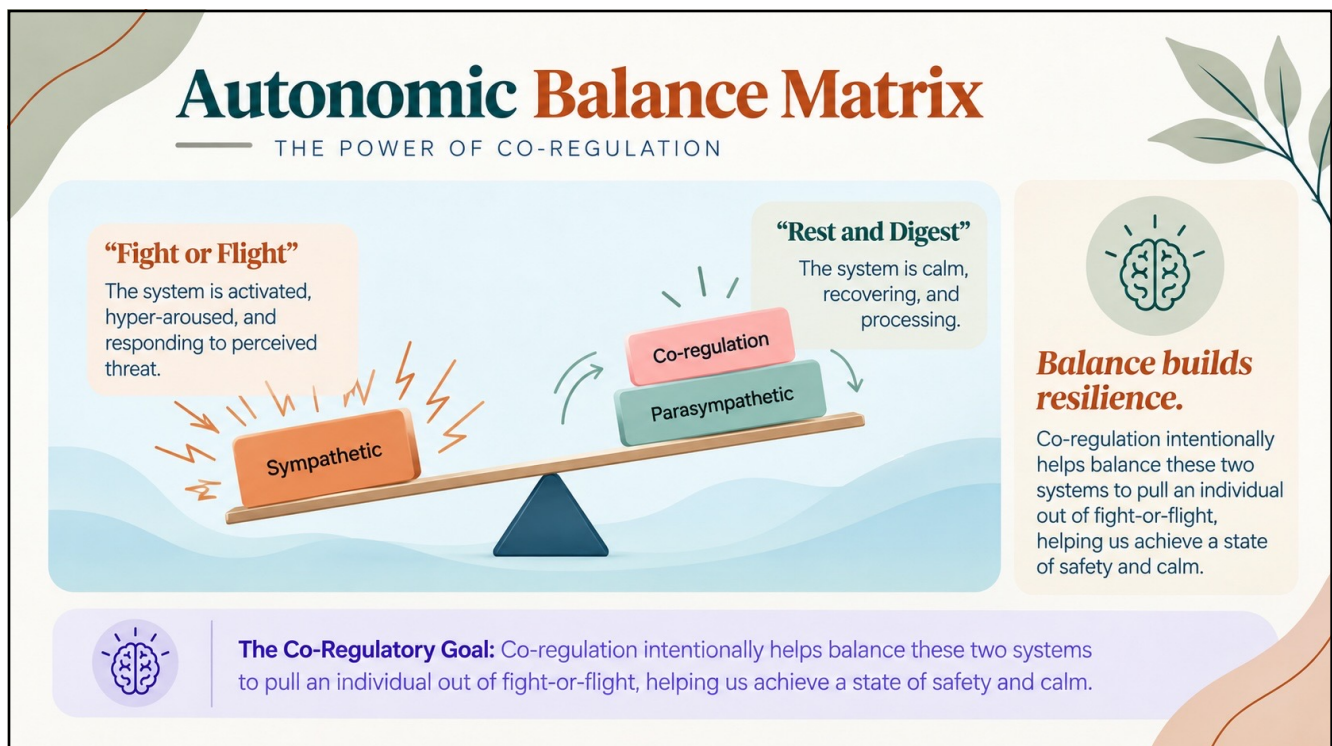


How we repair matters.

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PART 4

Co-Regulation in Practice

ENVIRONMENT, RESPONSE, LANGUAGE & DE-ESCALATION

*What does co-regulation
actually look and sound like?*



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Co-Regulation is a Daily Practice.



Co-regulation is a **daily practice**. It is not intended to be used only when a child or adolescent is already dysregulated.

When applied effectively, it is an ongoing, **proactive** process that supports the management of everyday stressors.

By consistently providing attuned, responsive interactions, adults help build a foundation of emotional stability that reduces the likelihood and intensity of future dysregulation.

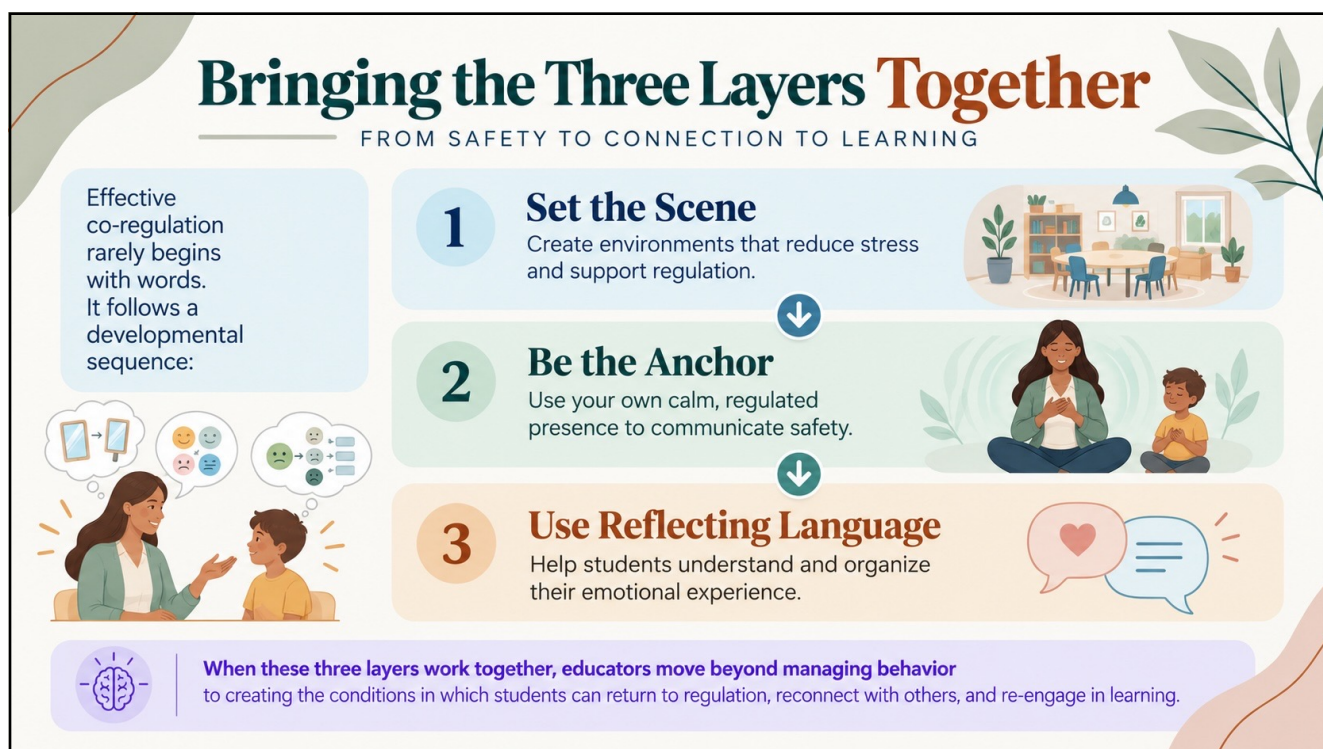
To do this well, adults must be:

-  **Self-aware:** Able to recognize their own dysregulation cues.
-  **Reflective:** Willing to explore what might be happening for a student.
-  **Intentional:** Using their body, breath, tone, and language as regulation tools.

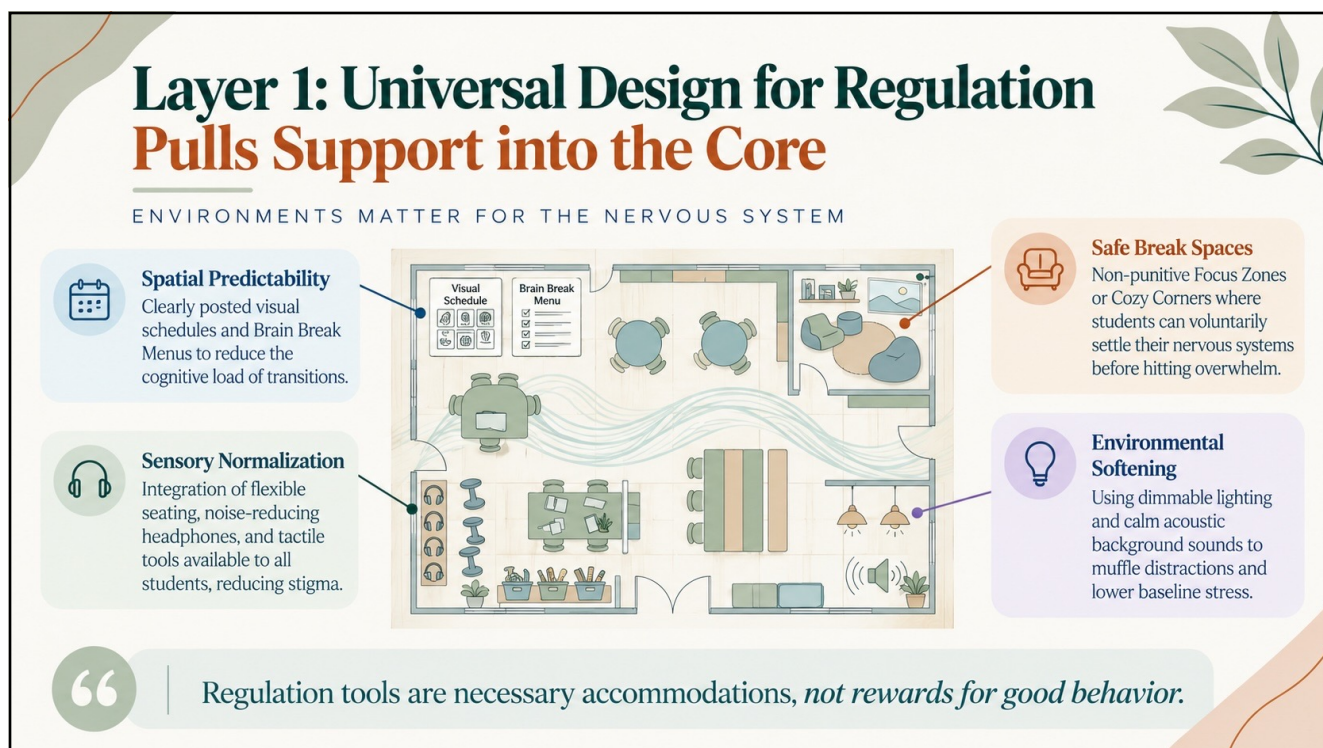


When these qualities come together, educators move beyond managing behavior to creating the conditions in which students can return to regulation, reconnect with others, and re-engage in learning.

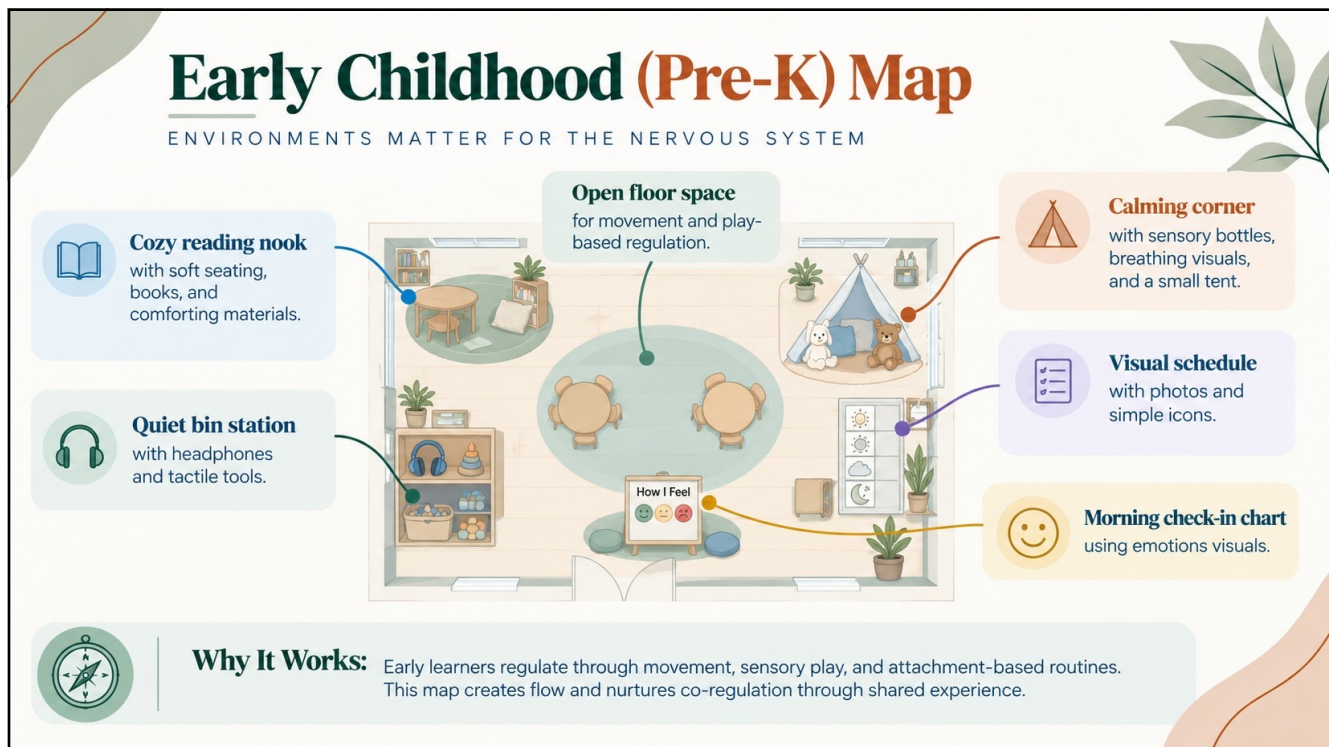
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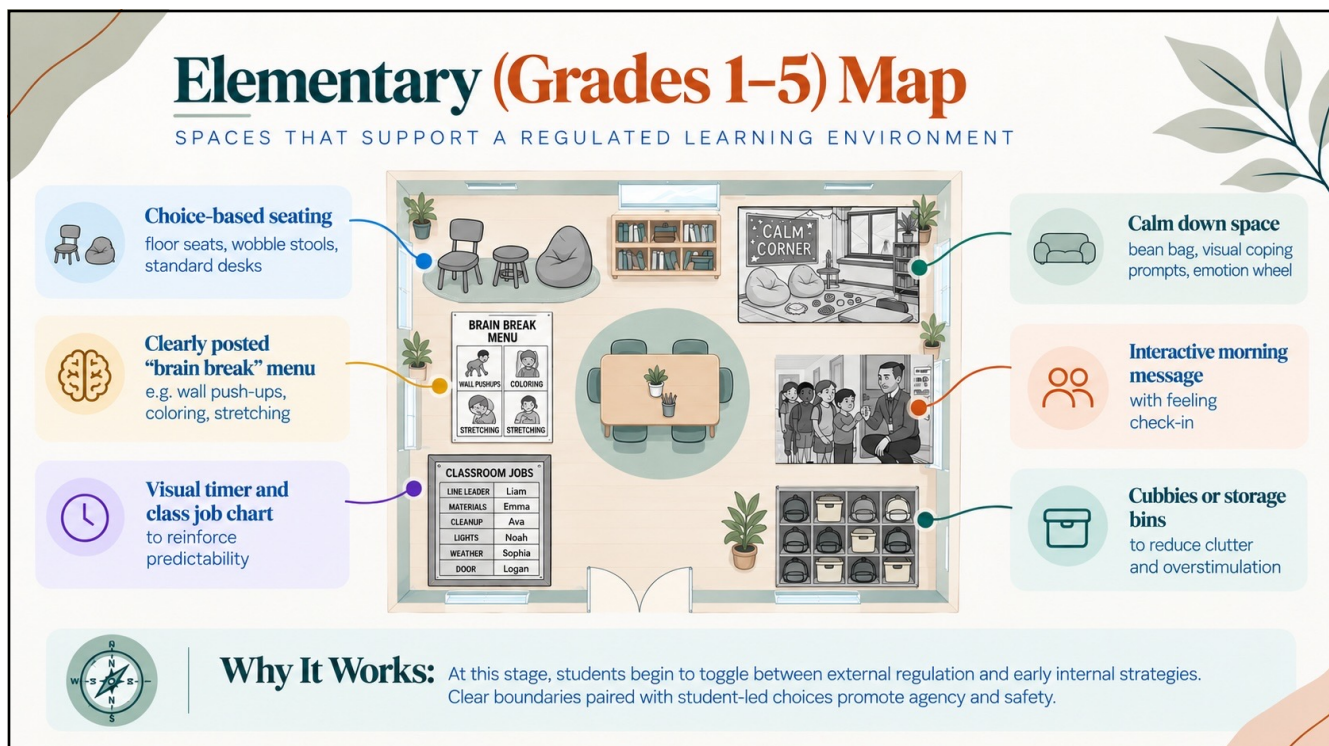
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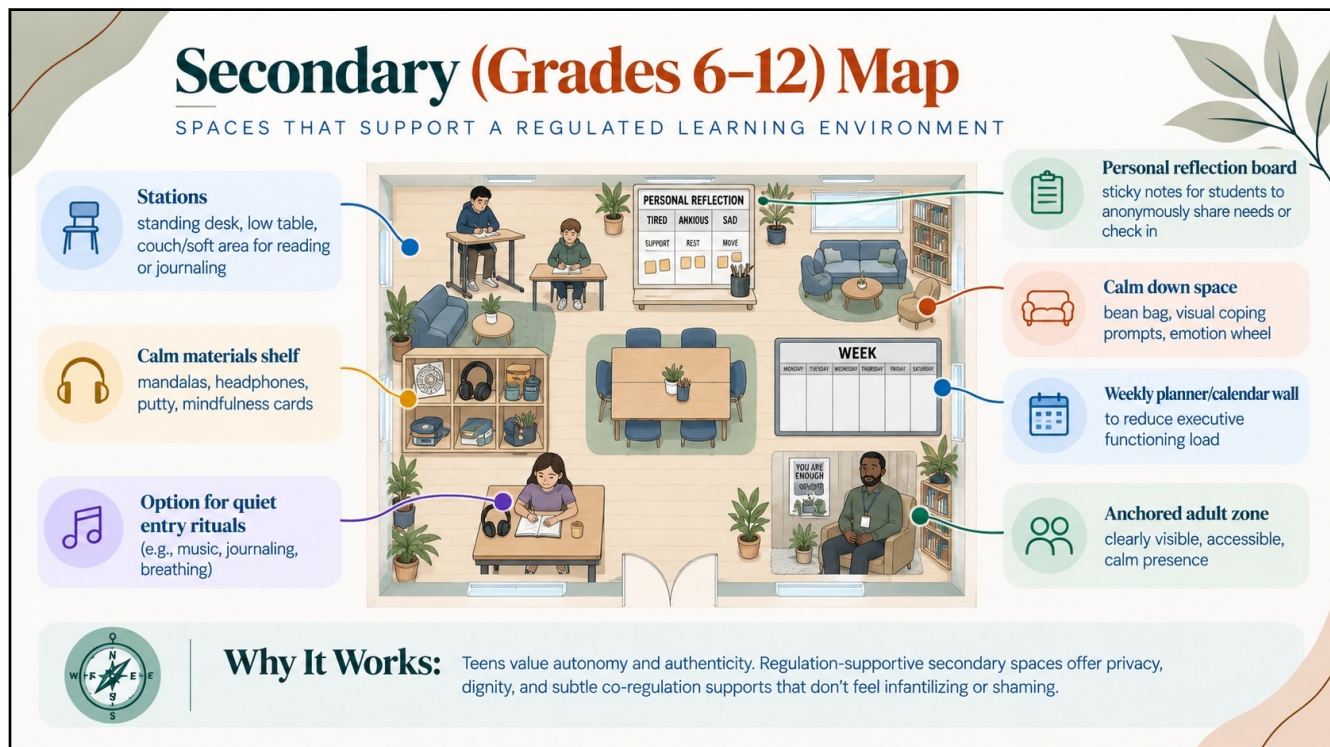
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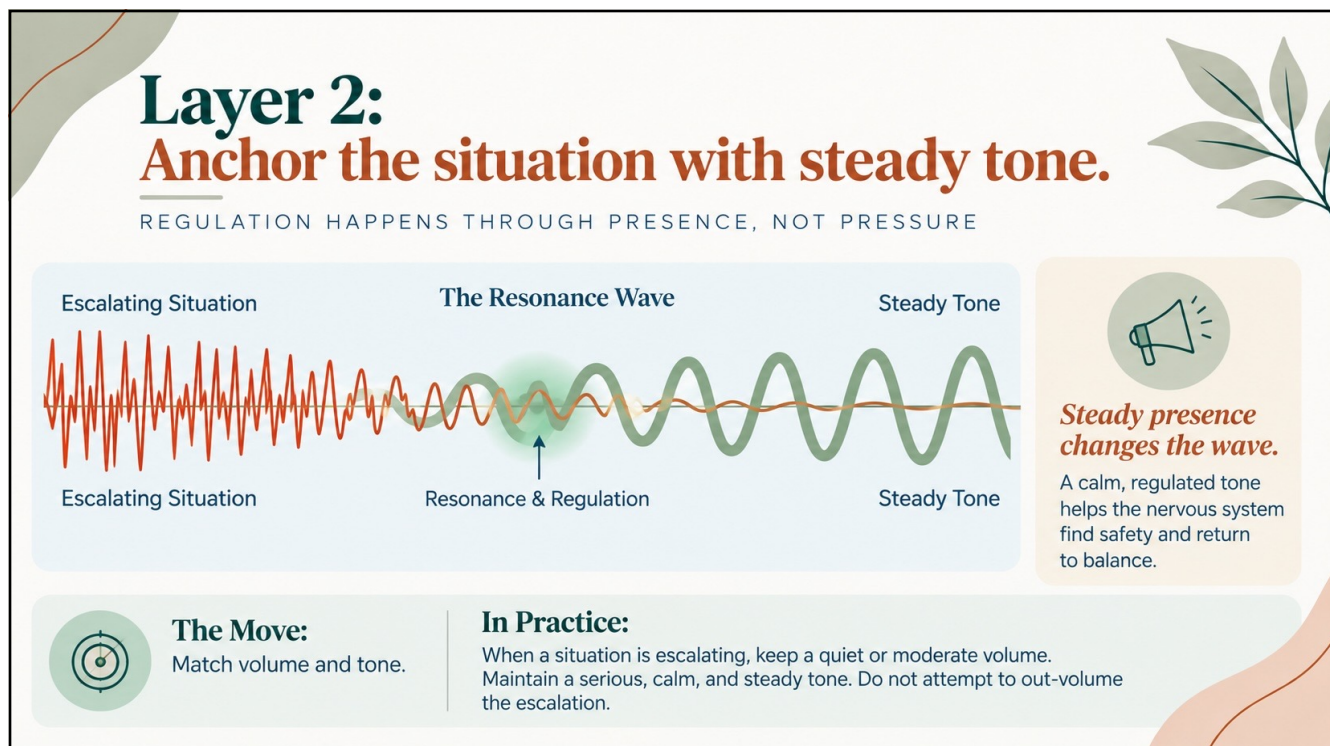
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81

Attunement Versus Technique

IT'S THE RELATIONSHIP, NOT THE SCRIPT



Attunement means **accurately noticing** and responding to another person's emotional state while remaining **grounded** ourselves.



It is different from simply following a protocol.



One statement may feel deeply **comforting**.

Two adults may say exactly the same words:

"I can see that you're upset."



The difference is not the script—it is the **relationship** and the **authenticity** behind it.



The other may feel **dismissive** or **mechanical**.

Attuned adults:

-  notice subtle changes in behaviour
-  adjust their expectations to the student's current state
-  remain flexible
-  communicate genuine curiosity
-  respond rather than react

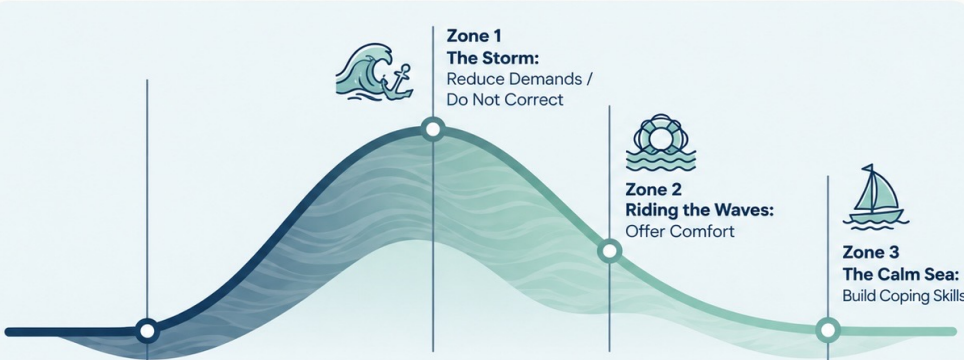


Students do not need perfect adults.
They need adults who are emotionally present enough to notice them.

82

Mapping the Emotional Storm

YOU CANNOT TEACH A CHILD WHILE THE STORM RAGES
 Your goal is to survive the peak and wait for the calm.



Zone 1
The Storm:
 Reduce Demands /
 Do Not Correct

Zone 2
Riding the Waves:
 Offer Comfort

Zone 3
The Calm Sea:
 Build Coping Skills

The Emotional Wave Chart



Calm meets calm.
 The adult's grounded nervous system absorbs and neutralizes the child's dysregulation.

83

Regulation Before Expectation

SUPPORT THE NERVOUS SYSTEM BEFORE RAISING THE BAR

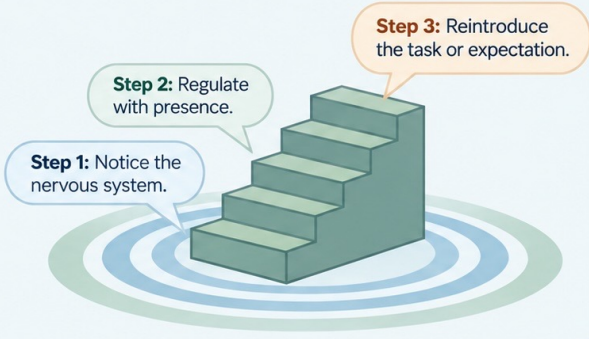
The Trap: Traditional Sequence



```

graph TD
    A[Demand] --> B[Increased Distress]
    B --> C[Escalation]
    C --> D[Consequence]
  
```

The Scaffold: Trauma-Informed Sequence



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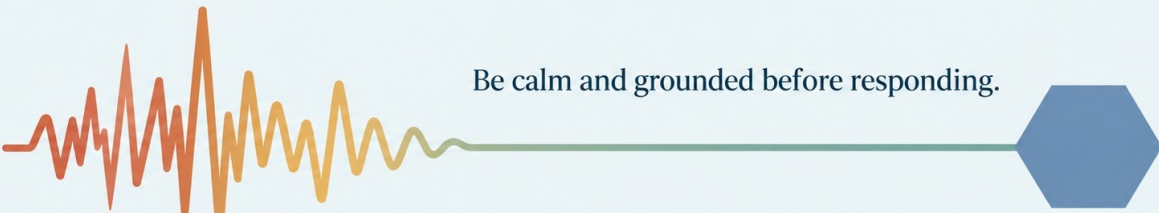
graph TD
    A[Step 1: Notice the nervous system.] --> B[Step 2: Regulate with presence.]
    B --> C[Step 3: Reintroduce the task or expectation.]
  
```



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

84

The Pre-Response Pause



Be calm and grounded before responding.



You cannot co-regulate a student if you are dysregulated.
The deliberate pause is where the strong posture is maintained.

85

The Educator's Pause: A Diagnostic Tool

WHEN CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR OCCURS, HIT PAUSE AND ASK YOURSELF:

- 1 What might this child be **communicating** through this behaviour?
- 2 Is this child giving me a **hard time**, or having a hard time?
- 3 What **need, emotion, or skill deficit** might be contributing to this situation?
- 4 How can I maintain the **boundary** while strictly preserving the relationship?
- 5 What **specific support** does this child need to be successful right now?

Pause to respond with purpose.

86

The Anatomy of a Regulated Presence

AWARENESS, CALM, AND CONNECTION IN ACTION



- Mind (Awareness):** Self-reflective. Willing to explore what might be happening rather than jumping to consequences.
- Body (Posture):** Soft posture, relaxed shoulders. Non-threatening proximity.
- Lungs (Breath):** Slow, steady breathing. (Children borrow the adult's calm.)
- Face (Expression):** Receptive, relaxed facial muscles. (Students constantly scan environments for cues of safety.)
- Voice (Tone):** Speaking slowly and warmly. Tone of voice is often more powerful than the words chosen.

Co-regulation doesn't happen in a manual.
It happens in the hallway, the classroom, the cafeteria line.

87

Processing Non-Verbal “Cues of Safety”

MIRROR NEURONS SCAN FOR NON-VERBAL “NEUROCEPTIVE” CUES.
These cues of safety help a student’s nervous system feel safe enough to regulate.

1 AUDIBLE BREATHING

Making breathing visible and audible gives mirror neurons a rhythmic pattern to lock onto.

- Slow, visible inhales and audible exhales signal safety.
- Rhythmic breathing helps the nervous system downregulate.
- Your calm breath becomes contagious calm.

2 OPEN BODY LANGUAGE

Relaxed facial muscles, a warm tone of voice, and an open posture signal safety to be mirrored.

- Relaxed face and soft eyes
- Warm, calm tone of voice
- Open posture (unclenched, unthreatening)
- Friendly, approachable presence

These non-verbal cues are biological signals of safety that the student’s brain can mirror.

3 PROXIMITY & POSTURE

Kneeling beside a student or using parallel regulation communicates support, not threat.

- Sit or kneel beside (not across) to reduce power imbalance.
- Parallel regulation (side-by-side) feels safer than face-to-face.
- Proximity communicates: “I’m here with you.”

Mirror neurons are always watching.
Your non-verbal cues of safety help the student’s brain know: “I am safe.”
When they feel safe, their thinking brain can come back online.

88

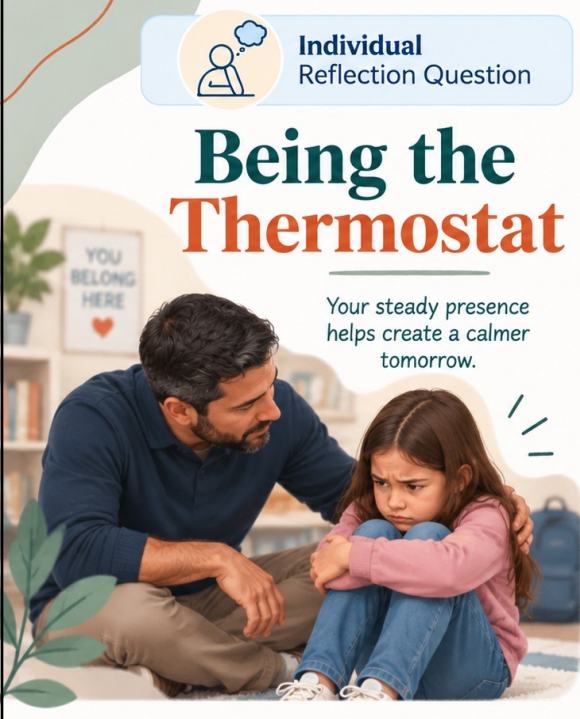
The Grounded Pushback Response

Establish concrete limits without getting upset if the student pushes back.

Pushback is a data point, not a personal attack.
Manage the environment through co-regulation rather than emotional reaction.

You cannot co-regulate a student if you are dysregulated.
The deliberate pause is where the strong posture is maintained.

89



Individual Reflection Question

Being the Thermostat

Your steady presence helps create a calmer tomorrow.

The Thermometer



A **thermometer** reflects the room's temperature (it reacts to the student's emotional state).

The Thermostat



A **thermostat** sets the temperature (brings a calming presence to defuse stress).

Your Reflection:
Describe a situation where a student's emotional temperature was high, but you successfully remained the thermostat.

- 1 What happened?
- 2 How did you keep your posture intact?

90

Redefining your Role during a dysregulation

It is **not** to investigate, lecture, determine consequences, or force accountability in the moment.



Investigate
"What happened?
Who started it?"



Lecture
"You should have....
You need to..."



Determine consequences
"There will be a consequence."



Force accountability
"You need to take responsibility now."

Different timing.
A different purpose.
A better outcome.
♥

During escalation: Focus on safety, regulation, and connection.



Safety
Ensure safety for everyone.



Regulation
Help the student calm and co-regulate.



Connection
Maintain or rebuild connection.



Regulate first.
The rest can wait.
♥

Later: Once regulated, it's the time to reflect, repair, and support growth.



Reflection
Explore what happened (without blame).



Repair
Rebuild trust and strengthen the relationship.



Accountability
Support the student to take responsibility when ready.



Learning
Identify strategies for next time.



A calm conversation today builds a stronger tomorrow.
♥

91

Clear the decks by removing all demands

Take away instructions, questions, and pressure until the child settles.

Instructions

Questions

Pressure

Crucial Rule:
Do not teach or correct the child while they are upset.

92

Layer 2: The Anchor Protocol for in-the-moment crisis.

- 1 Stop & Regulate Self**

You are the anchor. Take three slow breaths, drop your shoulders, and unclench your jaw before you intervene.
- 2 Reduce Demands**

The thinking brain is offline. Immediately remove instructions, questions, and pressure.
- 3 Match & Slow Breathing**

Model steady breaths audibly. Lower your voice and speak in a steady, warm, and moderate tone.
- 4 Stay Close (With Choice)**

Use a proximity slider approach. Offer comfort (space, parallel presence, or a physical tool) but do not force it. Kneel to balance power.
- 5 Name the State**

Wait for their body to calm. Validate the physiological state without judging the external behavior.

Co-regulation creates the conditions for calm to return.
When adults regulate, children can regulate.

93

The Three Nervous System Responses

DIFFERENT SURVIVAL STRATEGIES. THE SAME NEED FOR SAFETY.

FIGHT

When a threat feels unsafe and needs to be confronted.

HOW IT MAY LOOK

- yelling
- arguing
- aggression
- throwing objects
- verbal refusal

WHAT THE NERVOUS SYSTEM NEEDS

- reduced threat
- emotional containment
- calm leadership
- physical and emotional safety

HELPFUL RESPONSES

- Speak slowly and quietly.
- Give the student appropriate personal space.
- Reduce the audience whenever possible.
- Acknowledge the emotion without escalating.
- Maintain clear, respectful boundaries.

“I can see you’re really angry. I’m here, and we’ll work through this together.”

FLIGHT

When a threat feels overwhelming and escape seems like the only option.

HOW IT MAY LOOK

- leaving the room
- hiding
- avoiding work
- frequent bathroom requests
- shutting down through escape

WHAT THE NERVOUS SYSTEM NEEDS

- a sense of safety
- reduced pressure
- opportunities for movement
- gradual re-engagement

HELPFUL RESPONSES

- Offer a calm break before distress escalates.
- Provide access to a designated regulation space.
- Walk alongside rather than directing from a distance.
- Reduce demands until regulation improves.
- Offer structured choices instead of ultimatums.

“Would it help to take a short movement break before we continue?”

FREEZE

When a threat feels inescapable and the body shuts down.

HOW IT MAY LOOK

- silence
- staring
- inability to respond
- emotional numbness
- appearing “checked out”

WHAT THE NERVOUS SYSTEM NEEDS

- patience
- connection
- gentle reassurance
- minimal demands

HELPFUL RESPONSES

- Sit quietly nearby.
- Avoid repeated questioning.
- Use grounding strategies.
- Allow additional processing time.
- Reassure the student that they are safe.

“You don’t have to talk right now. I’ll stay with you.”

Different behaviors. The same biology.
All behavior is a form of communication, and all behavior is an opportunity for connection.

94

The De-Escalation Architecture

A FOUR-PHASE PATH TO CALM AND LEARNING

Phase 1: Assess

Identify Freeze, Flight, or Fight. Diagnose the nervous system state before acting.

Phase 2: Anchor

Establish your baseline. Regulate your own physical geometry, energy, and affect.

Phase 3: Intervene

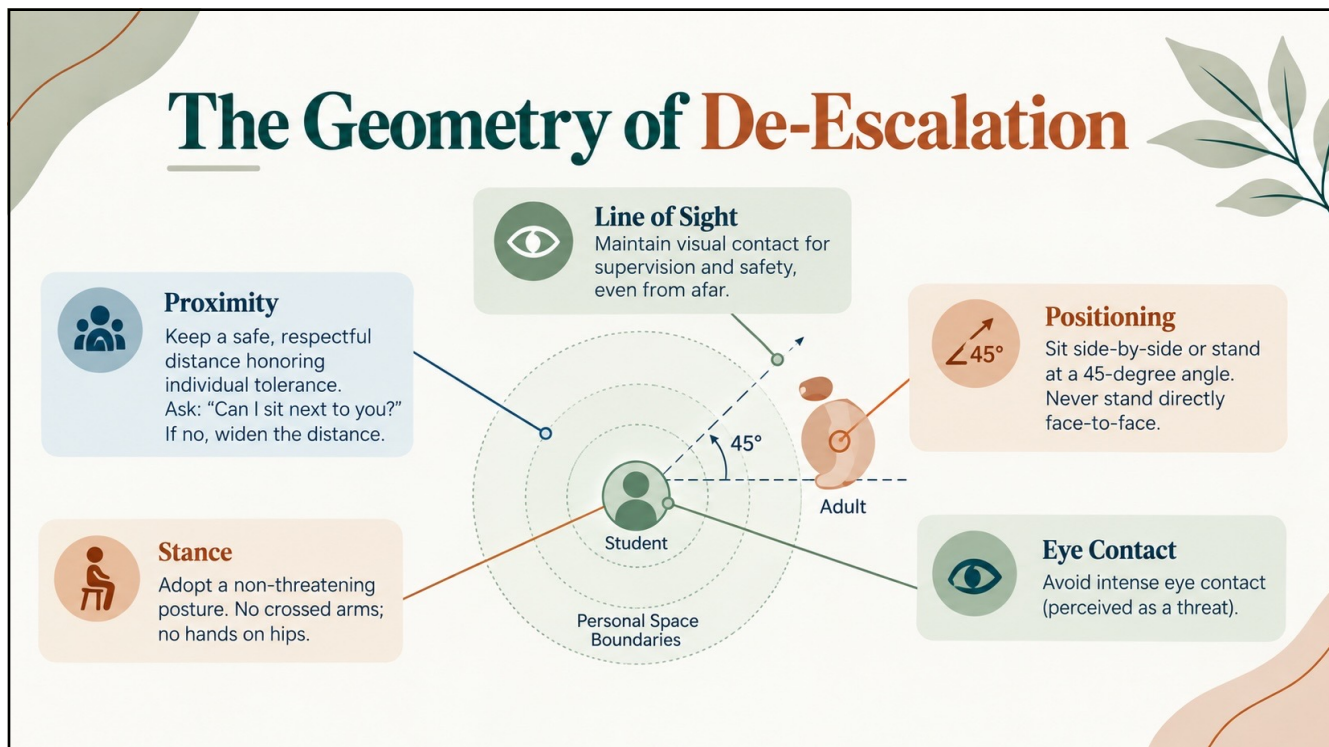
Deploy active listening, strategic silence, and safe options to co-regulate the student.

Phase 4: Resolve

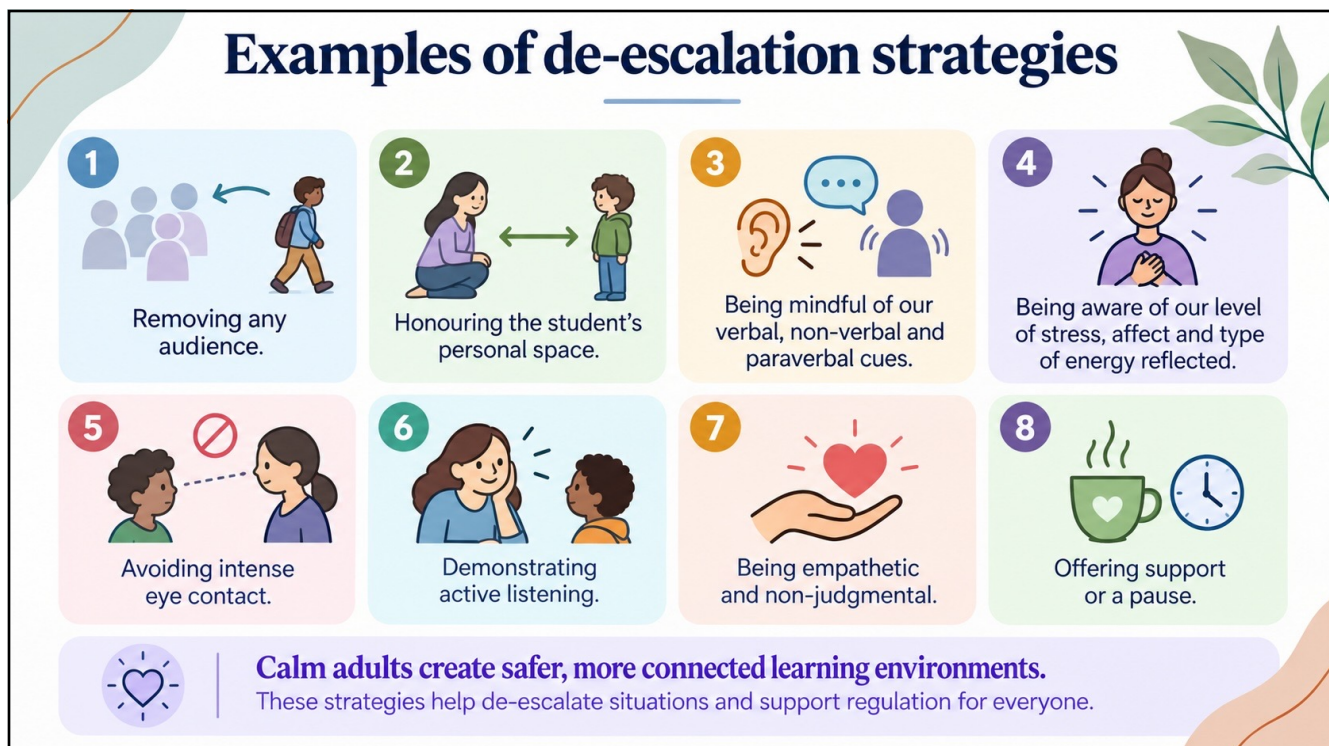
Debrief, review tier-specific guidelines, and update safety plans for continuous improvement.

Calm adults create the conditions for calm to return.
When adults regulate, children can regulate.

95



96



97

Examples of de-escalation strategies

1



Avoiding getting caught in a power struggle.

2



Moving away from trying to teach a lesson or reason with the student.

3



Setting simple, concise, and realistic limits.

4



Allowing time/space for decision making (not pressuring for an immediate response).

5



Coming alongside the student's frustration, by naming and validating it.

6



Not taking it personally; being careful to not overreact.

7



Having another adult support or step in if the situation is not defusing. It's okay for the adult to tap out if they are being triggered.



Calm adults create safer, more connected learning environments.

These strategies help de-escalate situations and support regulation for everyone.

98

Emergency Protocol Caveat



Physical holds are strictly a control measure of absolute last resort.

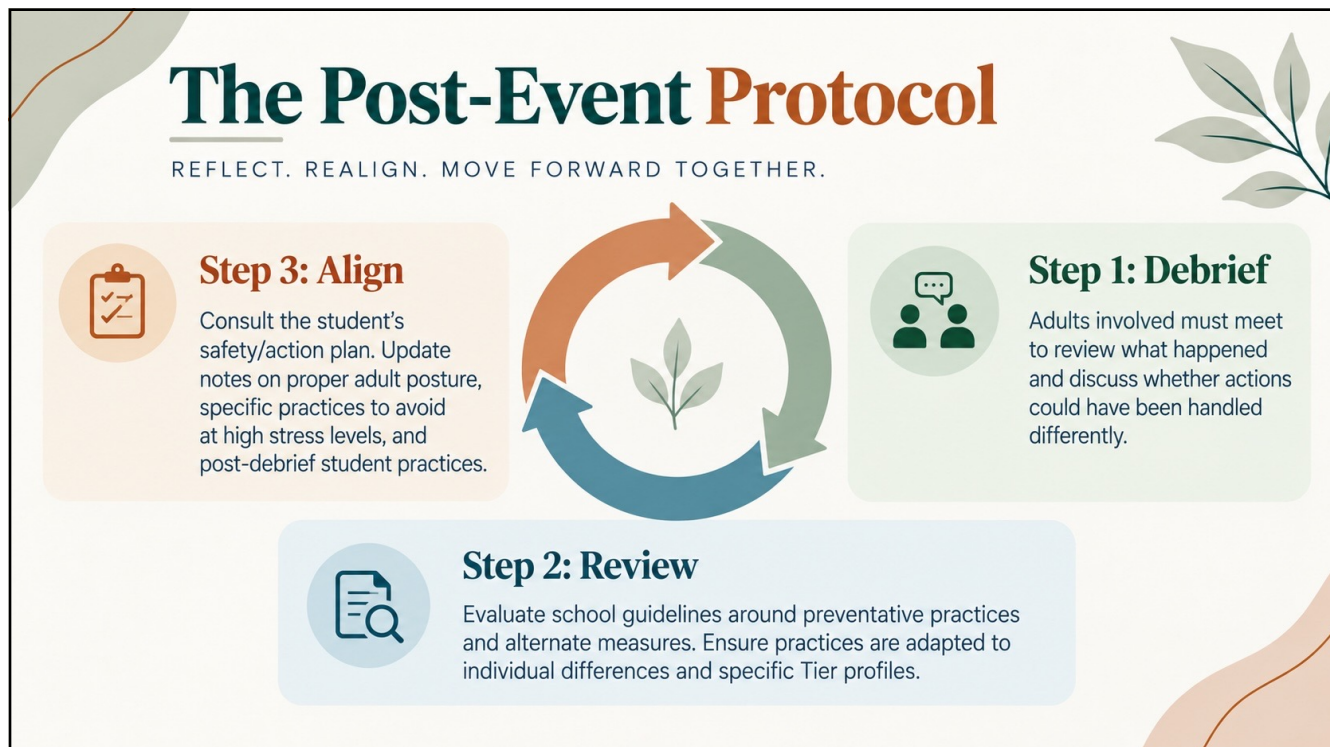
Resorting to a hold is only permissible for safety purposes in a situation of eminent danger. If a hold is utilized, staff must immediately and rigorously follow the specific steps listed in the school board's protocol on control measures.



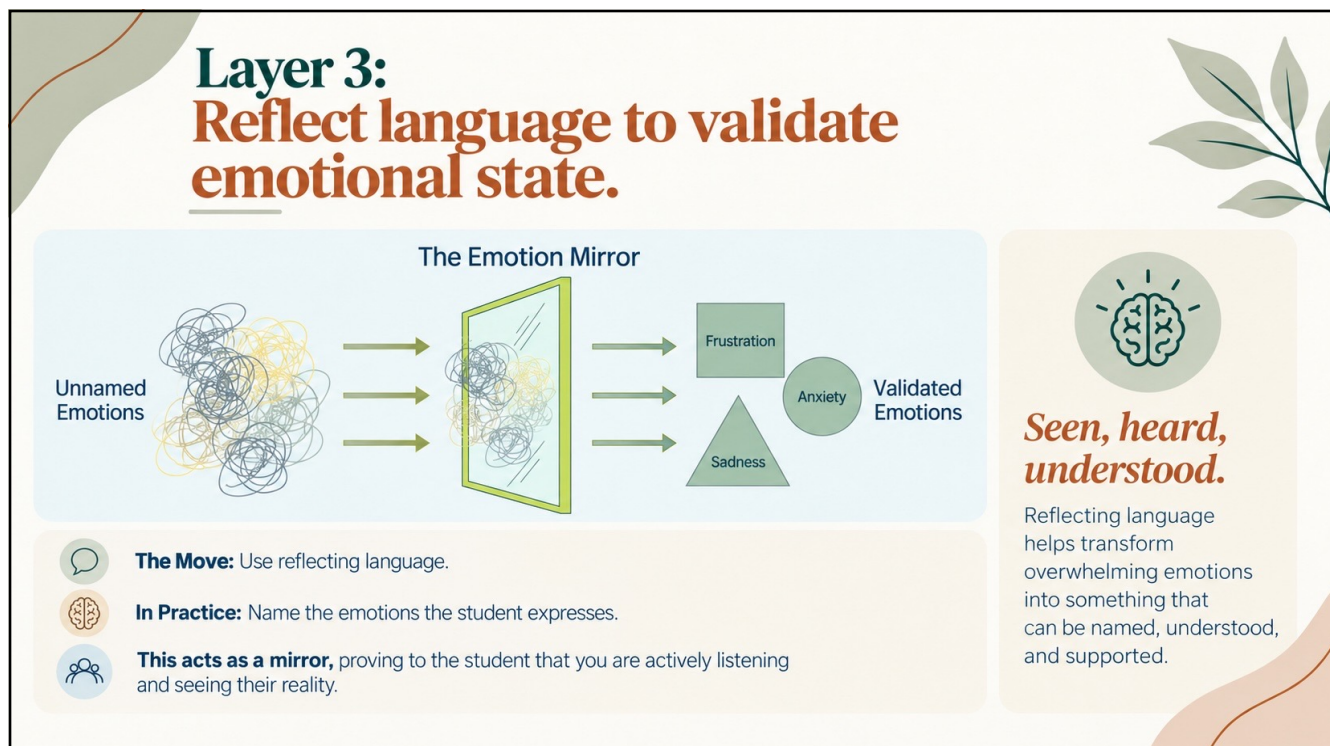
Safety first. Always.

Careful, consistent adherence to protocol protects both students and staff.

99



100

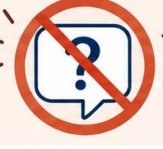


101

Narrate, Don't Interrogate.



*Different words.
A calmer tomorrow.*

- 1** 
During dysregulation, avoid questions that require reflection or explanation.
 Questions like “Why did you do that?” can increase pressure and escalate distress.
- 2** 
Instead, try narrating what you observe:
 - “I can see your body is working really hard right now.”
 - “Something feels really overwhelming.”
- 3** 
Observation reduces pressure while communicating understanding.

102

Name the emotional state, not the external behavior

Speak slowly and simply. Short sentences work best. Naming the feeling helps them feel understood.



Focusing on Behavior

- Stop yelling
- Calm down right now
- Why are you doing this?



Naming the State

- You are feeling overwhelmed.
- This feels too much for your body.



Feelings make sense.

When we name emotions, we help students feel seen, heard, and supported.

103

Validate the Emotion.



All feelings are welcome here.

1 Validate the Emotion.
Validation tells students: *"Your feelings make sense."*
Examples include:

- "That was really disappointing."
- "I can understand why you're frustrated."
- "Anyone might feel overwhelmed in that situation."

! Validation does not mean approving inappropriate behaviour.
It simply acknowledges the emotional experience before teaching alternative responses.

2 Help Students Find Words.
Many children experience emotions before they can describe them. Adults can gently help by saying:

- "It sounds like you felt left out."
- "I wonder if that felt unfair."
- "Your body looks frustrated."

 Naming emotions helps organize the nervous system.

104

Separate Feelings from Behaviour.



*Big feelings.
Better choices.
Brighter futures.*

1 All emotions are acceptable.
Children need to hear that all emotions are okay, even the difficult ones (e.g., anger, sadness, frustration).

2 Set clear limits on behaviour.
"It's okay to feel angry. I'll help you express that feeling. It isn't okay though to hurt someone when you're angry. So instead, let's..."

3 This distinction reduces shame
while maintaining clear expectations and teaching more appropriate ways to express emotions.

105

The language we use matters.

The words we choose can either escalate distress or support connection, safety, and co-regulation.

Language shapes safety.
Calm, respectful, and curious words help the nervous system feel seen, heard, and supported.

Instead of:	Try:
"You need to calm down."	"I'm here with you. Let's take a breath and figure this out together."
"That's not appropriate."	"Let's talk about a different way to handle this."
"You're being disruptive."	"It seems like something's up. Do you want to talk or take a break?"

106

Offer Grounding Statements.

Simple words can make a big difference.

"I'm here."
"You're safe."
"We'll figure this out together."
"I'm staying with you."
"Take your time."
"We'll solve this when your body is ready."

- 1 Use simple, calming statements.**
During moments of distress, fewer words are often more effective.
- 2 These brief statements communicate safety**
more effectively than lengthy explanations.

107

The language we use matters

WORDS THAT SUPPORT CO-REGULATION

Moment	Co-Regulation Language
 Student throws item	"You're having a hard time. Let's pause. I'm staying right here."
 Student refuses to participate	"You don't have to talk right now. I'll be here when you're ready."
 Student shuts down completely	"It's okay to need some quiet. I'm going to sit near you for a bit."
 Student begins to escalate	"Let's take a few breaths together. We can handle this."
 After a dysregulation moment	"That was a lot. I'm proud of you for getting through it. Let's talk."

 **Calm words create safety.** Compassionate, clear, and curious language helps the nervous system feel seen, heard, and supported.

108

Firm Care



Boundary

"The answer is still no."

"You can't have the iPad right now."

"That language is not okay."

"You need to stay in the classroom."



Regulation

"I'm going to help you through the no."

"I know it's hard to wait. I'm here with you until it's time."

"I won't let you use that language. Let's find a calmer way to say it."

"I see that you don't want to go. I'll walk with you and help you get started."

109

TIER 1: Universal Practices

The goal is to proactively support the nervous system before dysregulation occurs.



*Support today.
Stronger tomorrow.*

1



Predictable Routines

Consistency helps decrease anxiety. This includes morning meetings, daily check-in slides, and clearly posted visual schedules.

2



Safe Break Spaces

Non-punitive areas, such as “cozy corners” or “Focus Zones,” equipped with sensory tools like weighted pads or noise-reducing headphones where students can voluntarily go to settle their nervous systems.

3



Somatic Practices

Integrate movement and breathing exercises into the regular school day. Examples include finger tracing, box breathing, or scheduled movement breaks.

4



Check-In Tools

Use non-verbal methods, such as “Feeling Check-In” posters or the Zones of Regulation framework, to help students identify and name their emotional states.

5



Co-regulation Language

Explicitly teach and use supportive phrases such as, “Let’s take a breath together,” or “I’m staying right here while you have a hard time.”

110

TIER 2: Targeted Practices

The goal is to help students, who require additional support, in managing their emotions and building regulation skills beyond what is provided universally.



*Targeted support today.
Greater confidence tomorrow.*

1



Targeted Somatic Practices

Students might receive a little extra help during the week to practice specific calming strategies and build confidence in handling big feelings.

2



Strategic Scaffolding

Use pre-taught procedures for calming the brain, offering 2–3 specific choices (e.g., a two-minute stretch or using a quiet zone) to help students manage through a challenging moment without entering a power struggle.

3



Relational Coaching

During conflicts, use narrative coaching by talking through your own regulation process (e.g., “My body is getting tight; I’m going to take two breaths”) to model the behaviour for the student in real time.

111

Tier 2: When a Student Becomes Emotionally Overwhelmed

The priority immediately shifts to re-establishing safety.



Regulated
Able to cope and engage.

When stress builds...



Overwhelmed
Emotional overload results in behavioural manifestations.



The adult must be calm and grounded before responding.
Your regulated presence helps calm the nervous system.



Approach with authenticity, curiosity, and interest — never judgment.
Stay present, listen, and focus on understanding.



Use proactive supports.
Preventative elements, such as routines, scheduling, respite, and smooth transitions, are essential tools.



Support in the moment. Stronger tomorrow.

112

Student Preventive Action Plan

A proactive tool to support student success.

Identify needs
Understand triggers and challenges.

Plan ahead
Use proactive strategies and supports.

Promote success
Build safety, confidence, and independence.

STUDENT ACTIVE PREVENTION/SAFETY PLAN (giving priority to prevention) – in Elementary

Student name: _____ DOB: _____
 School/Board: _____ Grade Level: _____ Homeroom Teacher: _____

Student's needs/challenges/triggers	Specific objectives* related to the needs/challenges/triggers	Best practices/approaches** related to the objectives	Selected tools/support measures related to the practices
Plan B for a difficult time or activity		Plan B for a difficult day	

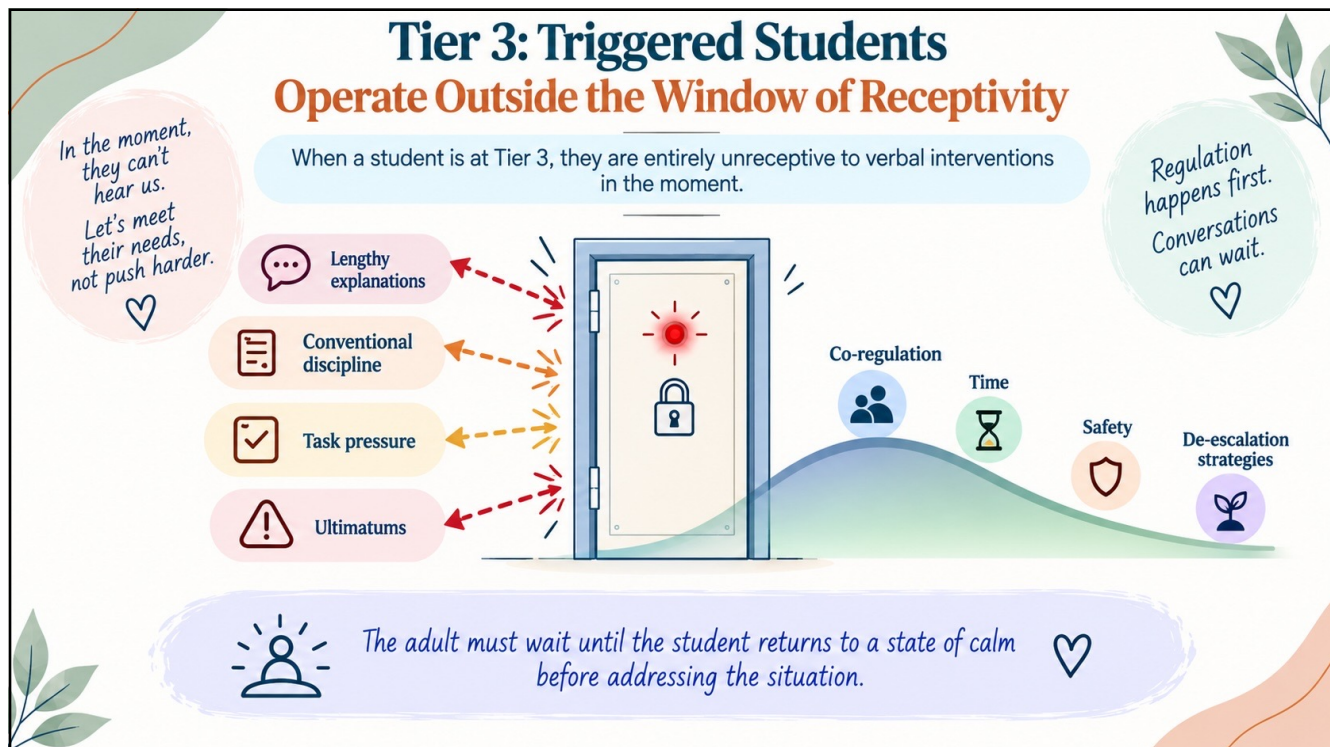
* The objectives are meant to be anchored in the adult posture and the selected support measures to scaffold/compensate for the needs and challenges
 ** The practices are meant to be preventive/proactive rather than waiting for the problem to arise to intervene. The division of adult roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined

Prevent challenges. Build brighter days.

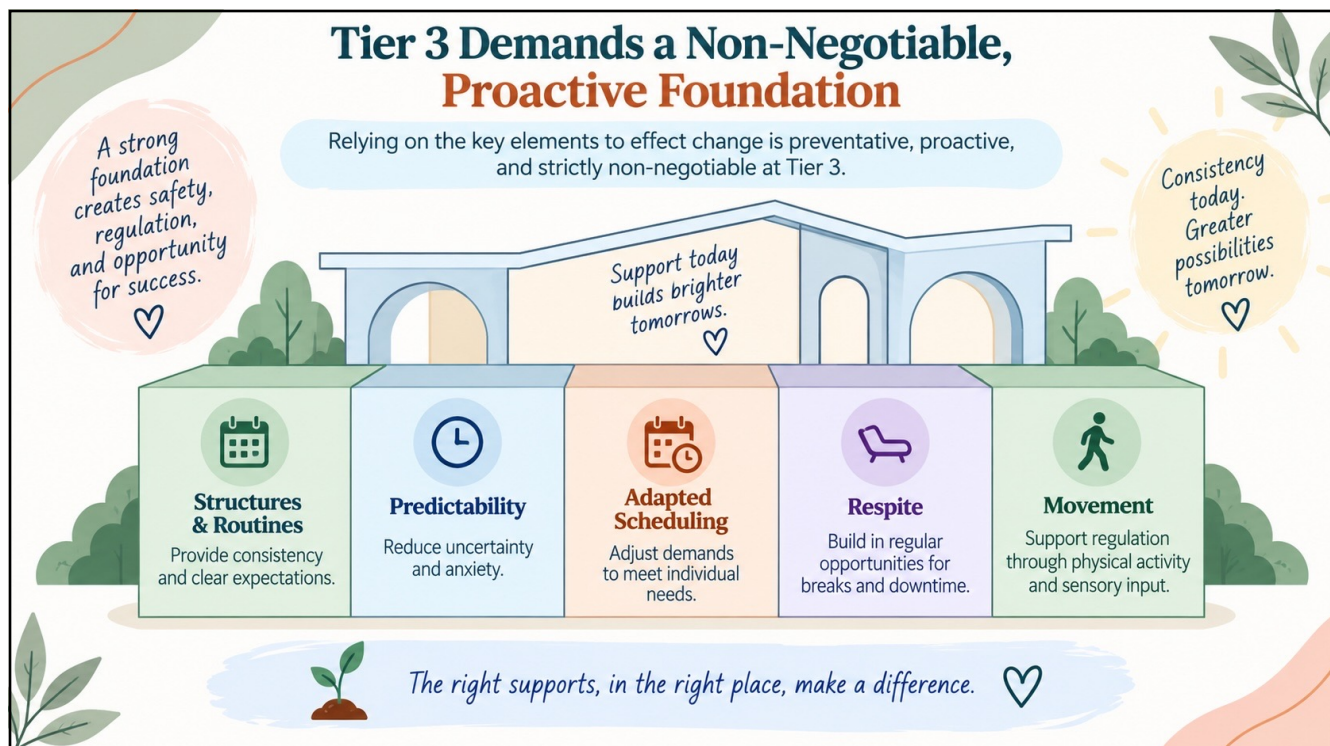
Same template. Greater possibilities.

Access the template here:
<https://www.cebmmember.ca/tier-2-targeted-practices>

113



114



115

TIER 3: Intensive/Individualized Practices

The goal is to accompany students with complex needs with more highly individualized and often specialized supports.

Every child belongs

Team Work Matters

More support today.
More possibilities tomorrow.

- 1

Individualized Regulation Plans

Often co-created with special education teachers and related service providers (e.g., OTs or SLPs) to address the specific sensory, communicative, or emotional roots of a student's behaviour.
- 2

Intensive Adult Presence

The adult provides full co-regulation, offering direct and consistent support because the child cannot yet regulate without active intervention.
- 3

Restorative Practices

When significant ruptures occur, the focus shifts to intensive repair and restorative conversations rather than punitive measures, helping the student re-establish safety and connection within the school community.

116

Student Safety Plan

A proactive tool to support safety, regulation, and success.

Plan for success
Identify early signs and triggers.

Use proactive strategies
Support regulation before challenges escalate.

Keep it collaborative
Involve the student, family, and school team.

www.cebm.ca

STUDENT ACTIVE PREVENTION/SAFETY PLAN – in Elementary

Student name: _____ DOB: _____

School/Board: _____ Grade Level: _____

Homeroom Teacher: _____

TEMPLATE DOCUMENT

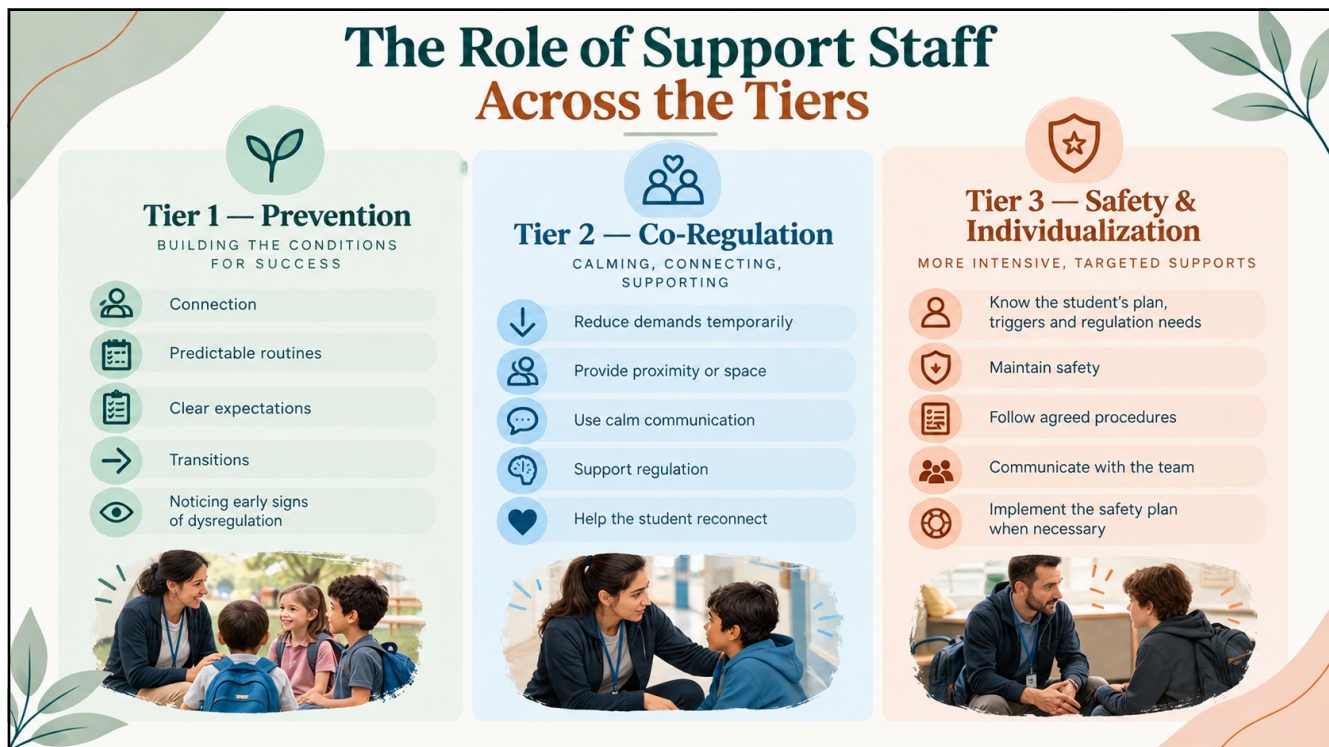
Student stress level	Observable signs	Adult posture and practices <i>suggested</i>	Adult posture and practices <i>to avoid</i>
When the student is regulated, engaged, and receptive			
When the student appears to be tense, annoyed, or frustrated			
When the student's stress response or frustration level is activated and beginning to escalate			
When the student's stress response has fully escalated and is disorganized. No longer receptive towards the adult.			
Post-intervention – following an acting-out episode			

Safety today.
Brighter tomorrows.

Support growth at every stage.

Access the template here:
<https://www.cebmmember.ca/tier-3-individualized-practices>

117



118



119

The Self-Regulation Fallacy



Children are born with the ability to manage frustration and control impulses.

Meltdowns are a choice or a manipulation.





The brain systems responsible for emotional regulation and impulse control are still under construction.

Dysregulation is not a choice; it is an experience of a system overload.





Children are not choosing to be dysregulated; they are experiencing dysregulation.

120

Expecting Self-Regulation vs. Providing Co-Regulation

A SHIFT FROM CONTROL TO CONNECTION

EXPECTING SELF-REGULATION	PROVIDING CO-REGULATION
 Focusing on external elements to fix/control the problem.	 Being aware of the adult's own emotional state and stress response as a priority.
 Focusing on the student's behavior (what they've done wrong) and their intention to correct it.	 Focusing on the student's sense of safety, sensations and feelings, as well as the adult-student dynamic.
 When escalating, looking to stop the inappropriate behavior through the adult's authoritative posture and tone.	 When escalating, helping the student regulate through the adult's own soothing posture and tone.
 Upping the ante when the student is hostile to attempt to shut it down. Acting like a THERMOMETER that reacts to the rise of the student's behavior.	 Supporting the student in their dysregulation even when hostile (adapting the circumstances accordingly). Acting like a THERMOSTAT to hold a steady temperature.
 Focusing on the outcome and how to achieve it (e.g. by applying consequences).	 Meeting the student's needs through the application of specific support measures and emotion regulation strategies.
 Intervening when an incident occurs. No specific plan for debrief or follow up beyond the incident.	 Providing a debrief and follow up. Working proactively around the incidents by creating a preventative plan of action.

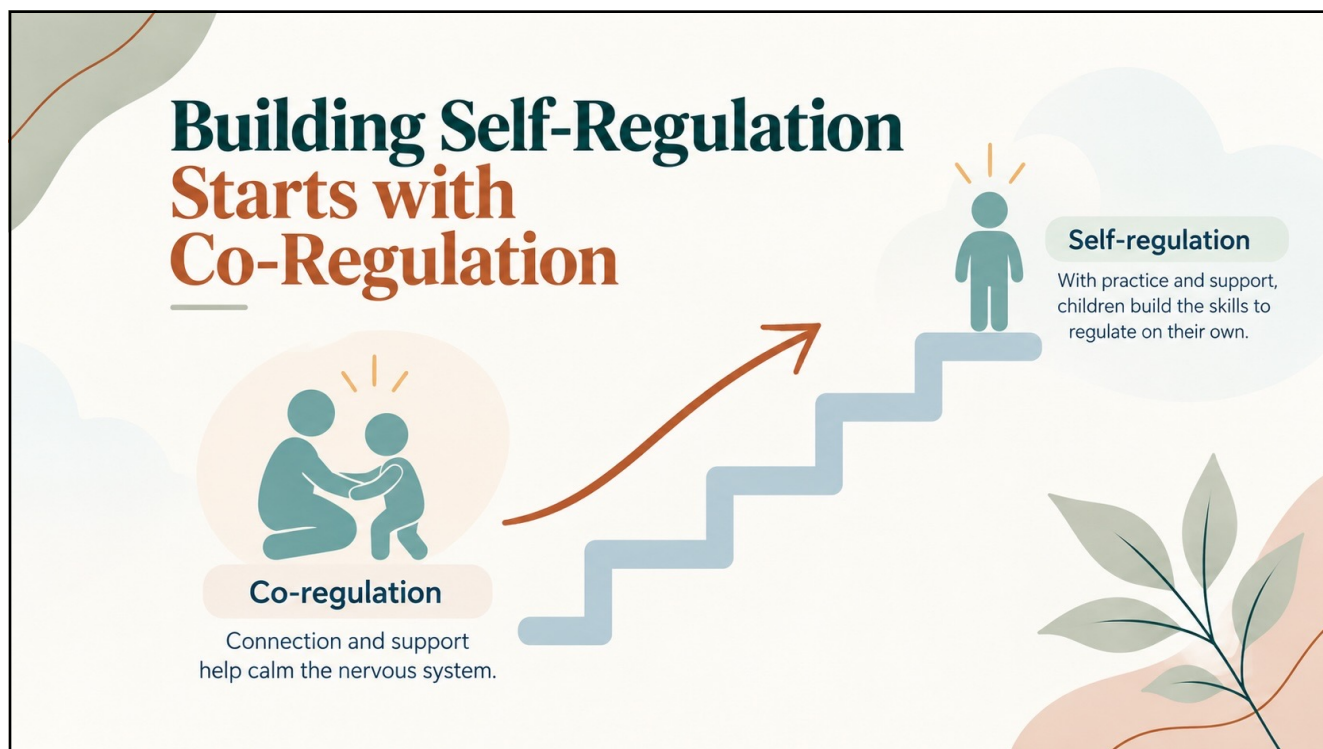


Connection builds capacity.
Regulation grows through safety, not control.

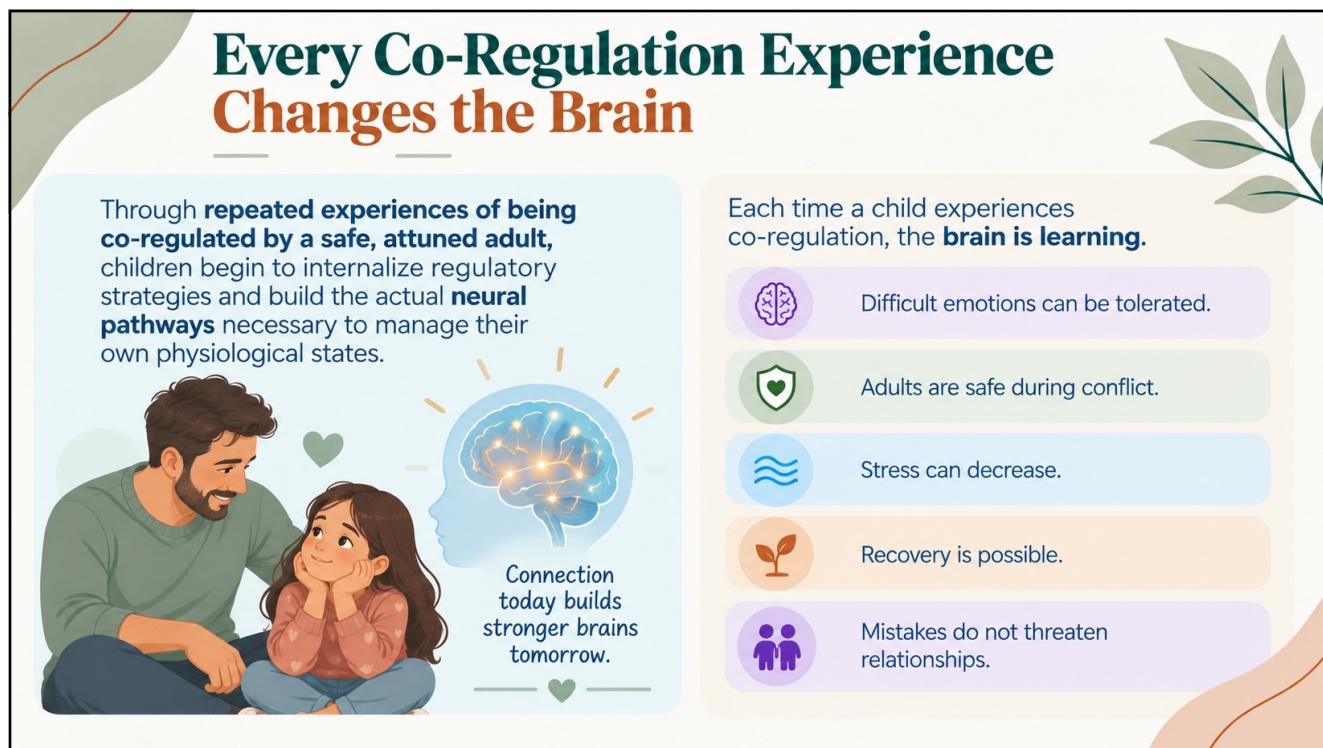


Support today. Greater independence tomorrow.
Co-regulation lays the foundation for lasting self-regulation.

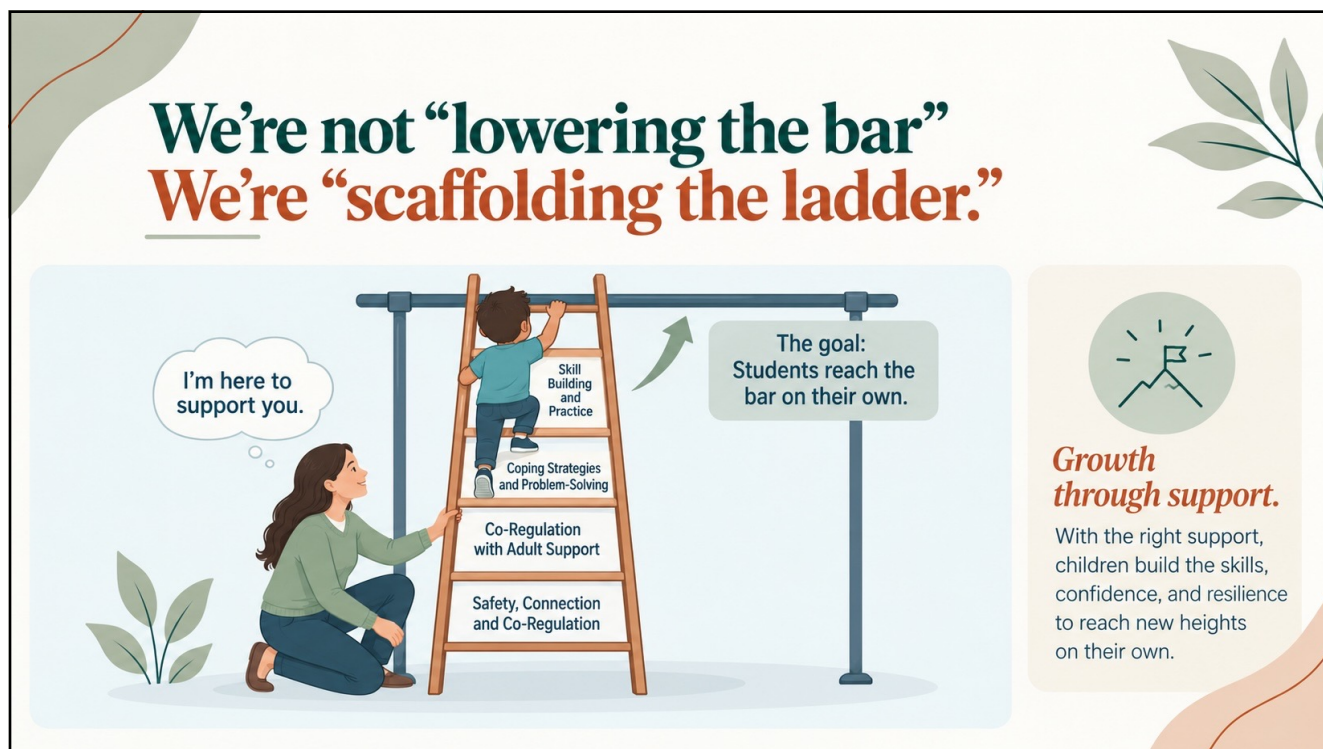
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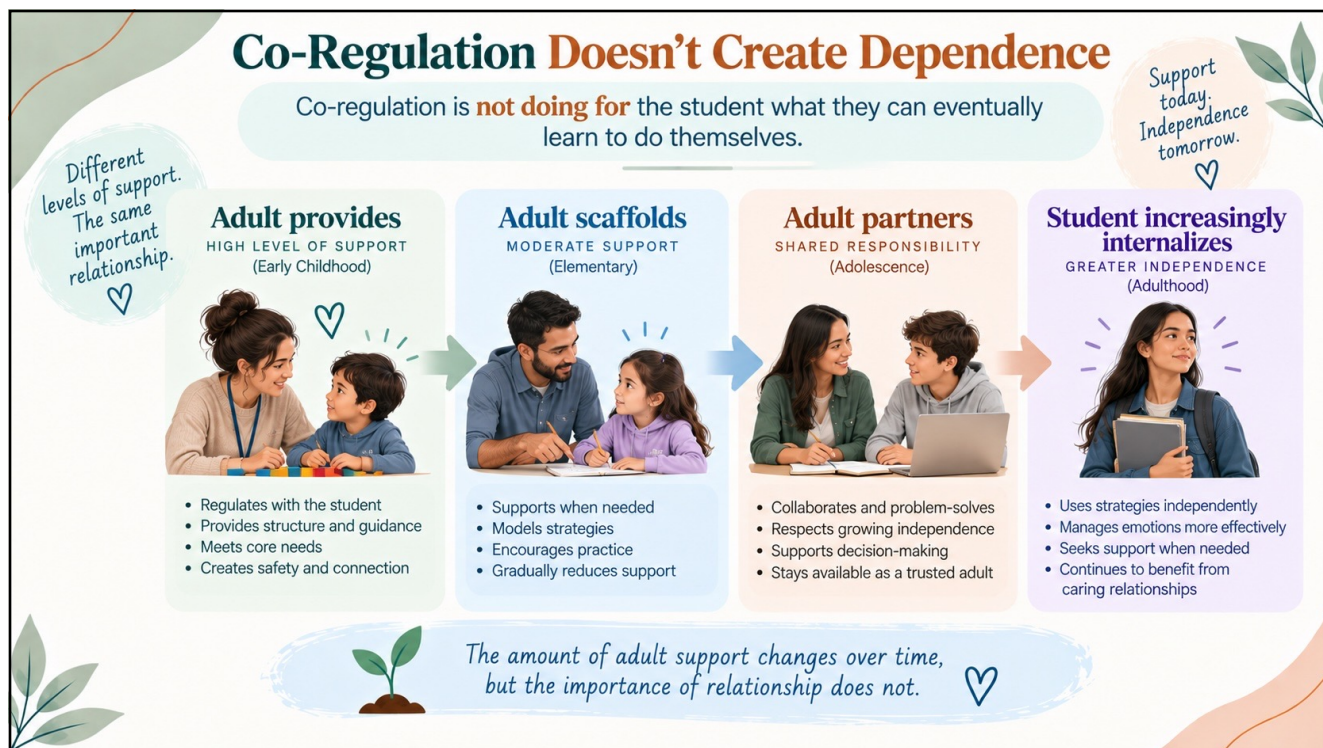
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123



124



125

The Adult Posture Across the Developmental Continuum

The amount of adult support changes over time, but the importance of relationship does not.
Development is the gradual internalization of capacities that were first experienced within supportive relationships.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Approx. 3–5 years

Young children rely on adults to help regulate their bodies, emotions, attention, and behavior.

Brain Development
Rapid brain growth. Regulatory systems are immature. Emotion drives behavior.

Primary Need
Safety, comfort, connection, and predictable routines.

Adult's Primary Role
Nurturer and protector. Provide external regulation.

Student's Capacity
Limited ability to regulate emotions, attention, and behavior.

What Co-Regulation Looks Like

- Soothing voice and calm presence
- Physical proximity and comfort
- Simple language and repetition
- Sensory and movement supports
- Consistent routines and transitions

Language That Helps

- "I'm here with you."
- "You are safe."
- "Let's take a deep breath together."
- "You can do hard things."

Common Pitfalls

- Expecting independence too soon
- Using too many words during overwhelm
- Inconsistency with routines
- Overstimulation and chaotic environments

The Ultimate Goal
Build a secure foundation of trust and safety so the child can explore and learn.

You belong here

Big feelings. Brighter tomorrows.

The Developmental Progression

I REGULATE FOR YOU.
→
WE REGULATE TOGETHER.
→
YOU REGULATE INDEPENDENTLY.

Relationships are the pathway. Skills are the destination.

The Unchanging Principles

Connection comes before correction.

Safety is the foundation for learning.

Co-regulation today builds self-regulation tomorrow.

Every child needs at least one trusted adult.

Growth happens in relationship, not in isolation.

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The Adult Posture Across the Developmental Continuum

The amount of adult support changes over time, but the importance of relationship does not.
Development is the gradual internalization of capacities that were first experienced within supportive relationships.

ELEMENTARY

Approx. 6–11 years

Children develop skills with adult guidance, practice, and support. They are learning to regulate.

Brain Development
Prefrontal cortex is developing. Skills are emerging but inconsistent.

Primary Need
Belonging, competence, and guidance.

Adult's Primary Role
Coach and teacher. Scaffold skills and problem-solve together.

Student's Capacity
Developing awareness and skills. Needs support to use tools.

What Co-Regulation Looks Like

- Emotion coaching and naming feelings
- Teaching strategies and coping tools
- Guided practice and modeling
- Visual supports and reminders
- Problem-solving conversations

Language That Helps

- "What are you feeling?"
- "What might help right now?"
- "What could you try next?"
- "Let's figure this out together."

Common Pitfalls

- Assuming skills are mastered
- Over-directing or over-correcting
- Focusing on behavior instead of skill-building
- Ignoring the need for movement

The Ultimate Goal
Develop self-regulation skills through supported practice.

You CAN DO THIS

Guidance today. Greater independence tomorrow.

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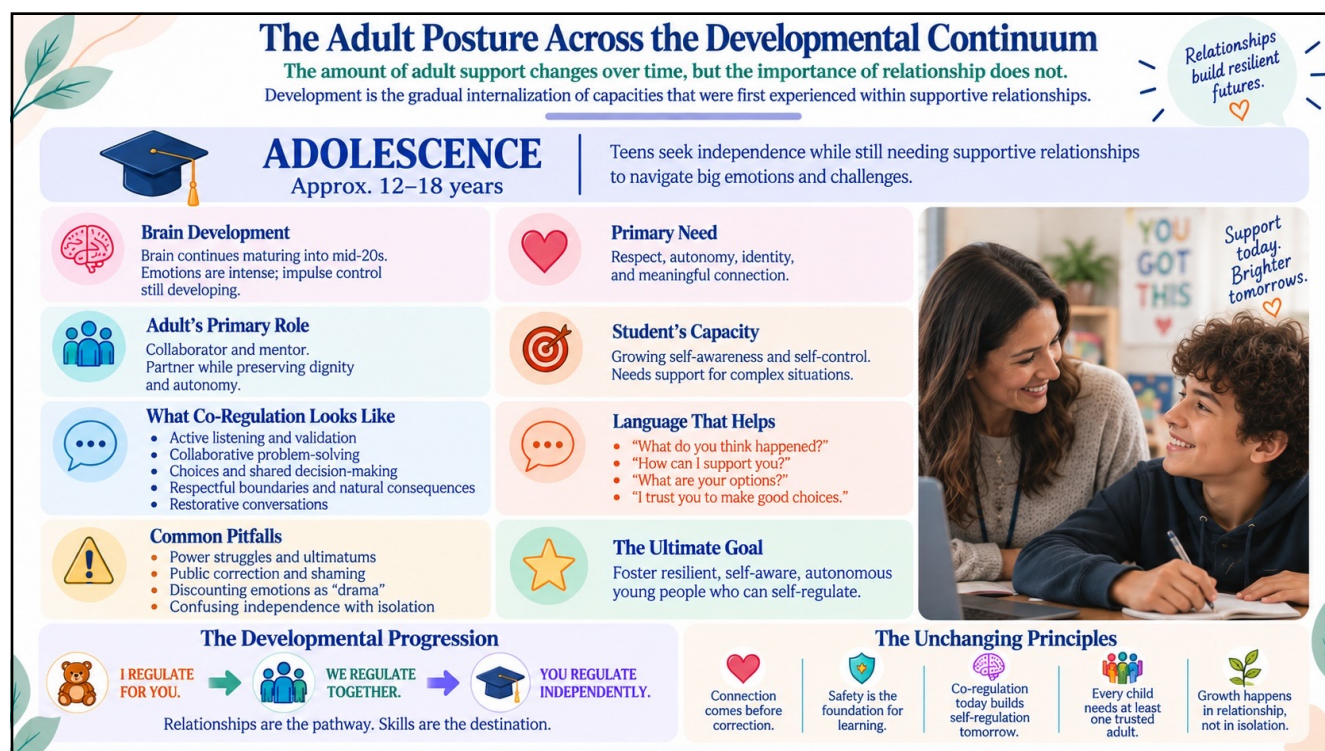
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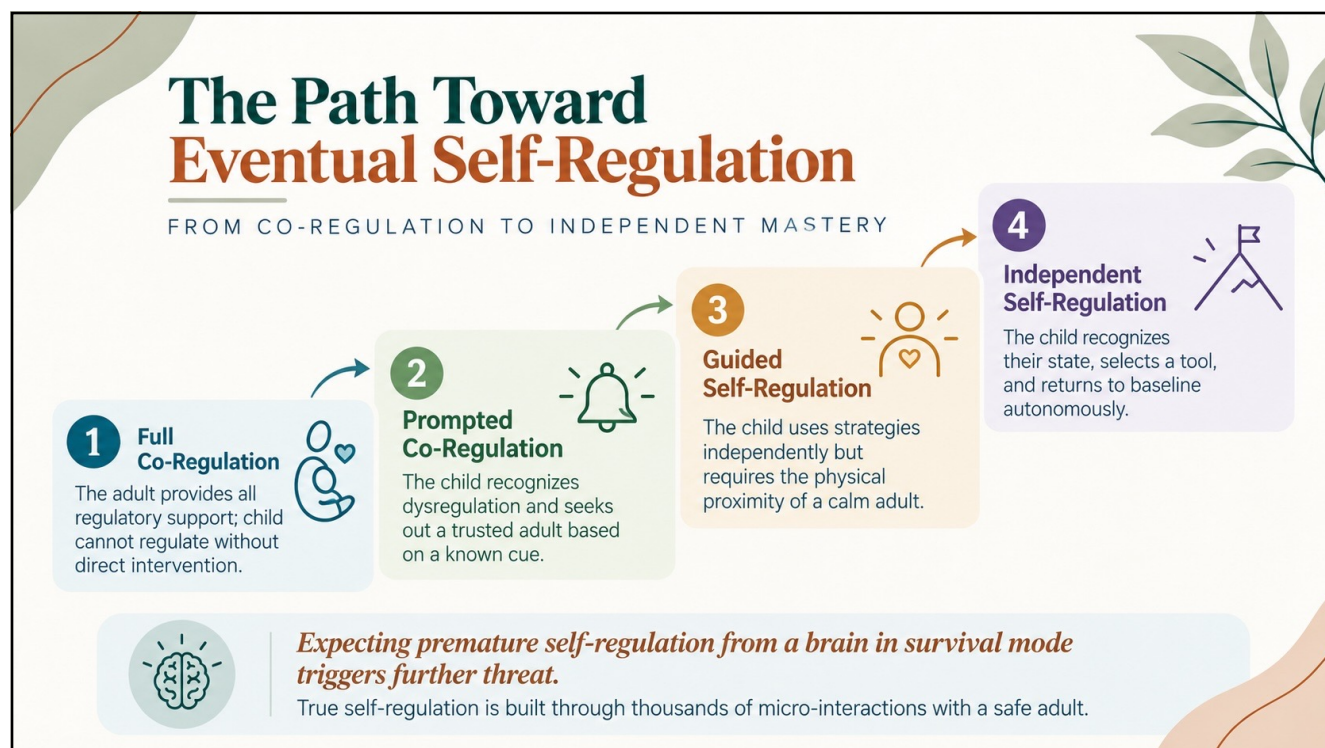
Growth happens in relationship, not in isolation.

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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."



Connection builds capacity.

Repair teaches that relationships can survive hard moments—and grow stronger because of them.

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Being a regulating presence doesn't mean being perfect

Regulation doesn't mean we are always calm. It means:

- 

Being self-aware enough to pause, reset, and repair.
- 

Showing up with intention.
- 

Modeling how to stay connected even when the connection has been strained.

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Restorative Practices and Co-Regulation

CONNECTION TODAY BUILDS TOMORROW

A critical component of restorative practices and co-regulation is the **repair conversation**, which occurs only after the student has returned to a regulated state.



1. Reestablishing safety and connection

Focus on drawing the student back in rather than pushing them away through exclusionary discipline.
"I'm still here, and we'll figure it out together."



2. Revisiting the incident without blame

Move away from "Who started it?" or "What rule was broken?" to "What happened?"



3. Building metacognitive awareness

Help the student identify their own physiological patterns and triggers to plan for future regulation.



4. Differentiating from punishment

While a consequence may eventually be necessary, the restorative process is distinct; its goal is building capacity and understanding, not issuing a penalty.



Restorative Prompts

- What happened?
- Who was affected?
- What do you need to make it right?

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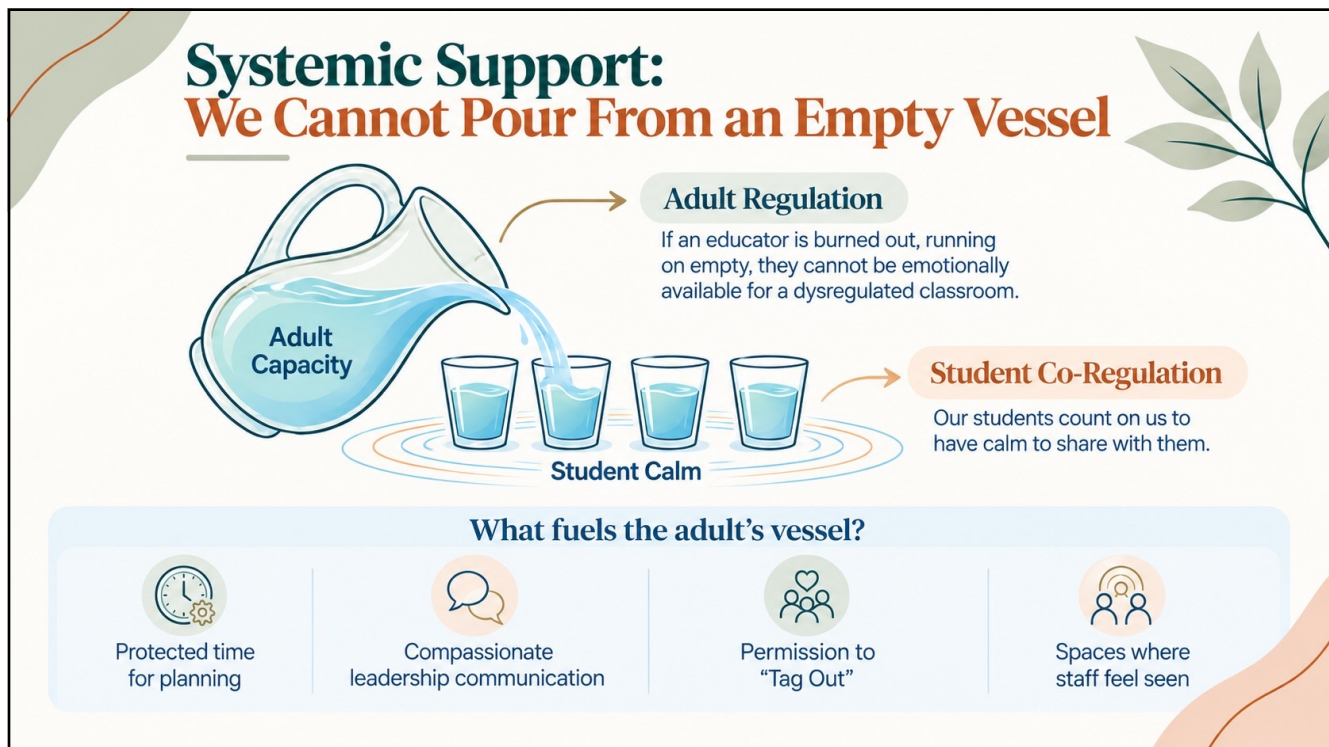
The First Law of Emotional Math



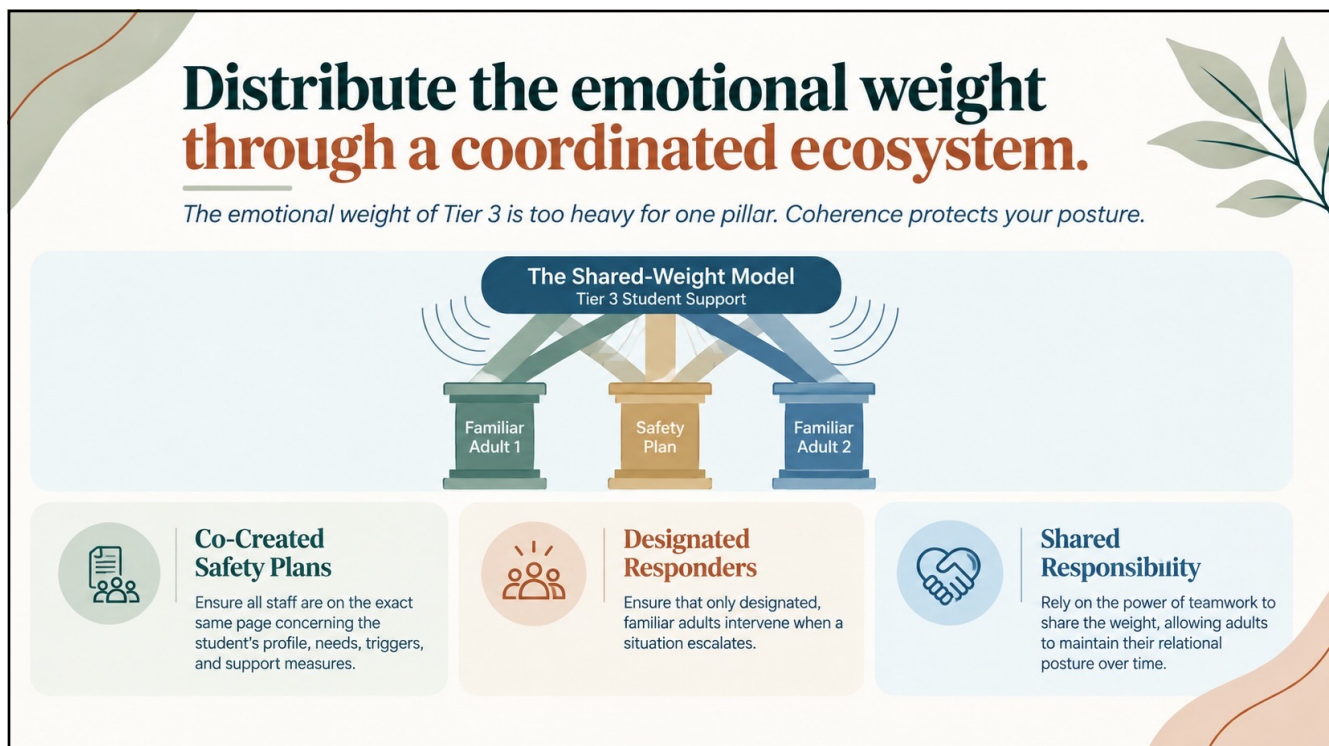
**You cannot regulate
a child's nervous system
using a dysregulated one
of your own.**

Before you attempt to manage their behavior,
you must first secure your baseline.
Be the anchor, not the storm.

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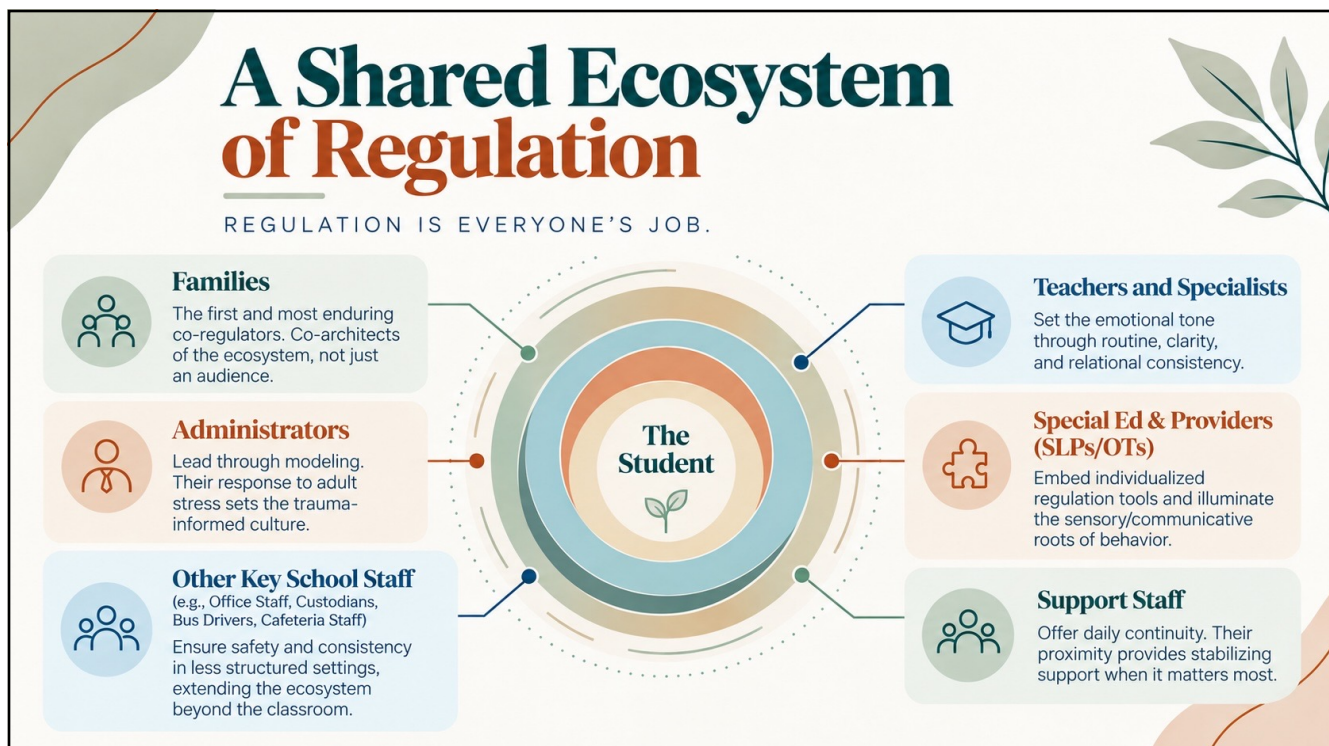
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Regulation is not a soft skill. It is the baseline.

FOCUS ON
CONNECTION
OVER COMPLIANCE.
BE THE ANCHOR.



“ Before we teach reading, writing, or math, we teach what it feels like to be safe. Because until students feel safe, nothing else sticks.” ”

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Supporting
Quebec's English
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Also visit the CEBM Resource Center

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