



Examples of a *Strong Adult Posture* at Tier 1



Tier 1 universal practices

Proactive, preventative practices that create safe, predictable, and inclusive learning environments for all.



1



Providing a caring leadership posture (warm, confident, taking the lead, taking responsibility, setting clear limits, being consistent with expectations while remaining flexible, being calm and grounded before responding).

2



Intentionally building relationships without befriending students (they need that natural healthy hierarchy to feel safe and taken care of).

3



Approaching students with authenticity, curiosity and interest, rather than with judgment.

4



Relying on the key elements to effect change: structures, routines, etc. (these are preventive/proactive at Tier 1 and establish a predictable foundation).

5



Conveying explicitly what is expected of them (with the help of visuals if needed) and establishing coherent and concrete limits and boundaries (without getting upset if the student's push back).

6



Speaking clearly, giving information and instructions in a concise and clear manner (they may get lost in lengthy explanations)

7



Managing the circumstances and the environment rather than trying to directly control student behaviour (relying on **co-regulation** and **de-escalation strategies** if needed).

8



Adjusting when things don't go as planned (making it look like as if it was your plan all along) and ensuring to have a backup plan as an alternative solution.

9



Honouring the student's personal space and providing enough time for them to assimilate and complete the task at their own pace.

10



Actively engaging the student in communicating their needs and where they are at in their emotional regulation process.

11



Being mindful that the adult expectations may vary depending on the student's profile, maturity level and individual differences.



A strong adult posture is grounded in **connection, consistency, and compassion**.

It's not about perfect responses, but about a **purposeful presence**.



SAFETY
Create physical and emotional safety.



RELATIONSHIP
Build trusting relationships and a sense of belonging.



STRUCTURE
Use predictable routines and clear expectations.



REGULATION
Support co-regulation and self-regulation.



BELONGING
Foster inclusion, respect and connection for all.

CO-REGULATION 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.



ELEMENTARY

Approx. 6–11 years

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



ADOLESCENCE

Approx. 12–18 years

Teens seek independence while still needing supportive relationships to navigate big emotions and challenges.



ADULT PROVIDES

I regulate for you.



ADULT SCAFFOLDS

We regulate together.



ADULT PARTNERS

You regulate—with my support.



Brain Development

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

Prefrontal cortex is developing. Skills are emerging but inconsistent.

Brain continues maturing into mid-20s. Emotions are intense; impulse control still developing.



Primary Need

Safety, comfort, connection, and predictable routines.

Belonging, competence, and guidance.

Respect, autonomy, identity, and meaningful connection.



Adult's Primary Role

Nurturer and protector. Provide external regulation.

Coach and teacher. Scaffold skills and problem-solve together.

Collaborator and mentor. Partner while preserving dignity and autonomy.



Student's Capacity Capacity

Limited ability to regulate emotions, attention, and behavior.

Developing awareness and skills. Needs support to use tools.

Growing self-awareness and self-control. Needs support for complex situations.



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

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

- Active listening and validation
- Collaborative problem-solving
- Choices and shared decision-making
- Respectful boundaries and natural consequences
- Restorative conversations



Language That Helps

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

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

"What do you think happened?"
"How can I support you?"
"What are your options?"
"I trust you to make good choices."



Common Pitfalls

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

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

- Power struggles and ultimatums
- Public correction and shaming
- Discounting emotions as "drama"
- Confusing independence with isolation



The Ultimate Goal

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

Develop self-regulation skills through supported practice.

Foster resilient, self-aware, autonomous young people who can self-regulate.

WHAT DOES CO-REGULATION LOOK LIKE DURING A LESSON?

A Teacher's At-a-Glance Guide



Co-regulation is not something we “stop teaching” to do. It is how we teach. Every interaction either increases or decreases students’ capacity to engage, think, and learn.



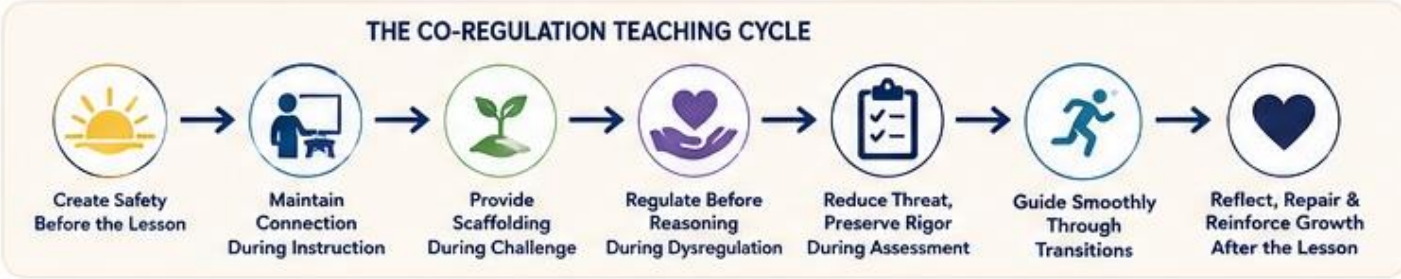
WHAT STUDENTS MAY BE EXPERIENCING 	• Anxiety about the day • Difficulty transitioning • Social concerns • Fatigue • Sensory overload • Uncertainty about expectations	• Fear of making mistakes • Cognitive overload • Embarrassment • Frustration • Confusion • Self-doubt	• Overwhelm • Perfectionism • Avoidance • Difficulty initiating tasks • Executive functioning challenges	• Social anxiety • Conflict • Fear of rejection • Unequal participation • Frustration	• Test anxiety • Fear of failure • Perfectionism • Comparison with peers	• Difficulty shifting tasks • Anxiety about change • Disappointment • Sensory overload	• Need for belonging • Uncertainty about progress • Emotional residue from the day • Desire to feel successful
WHAT THE EDUCATOR CAN DO 	• Greet students warmly by name • Make eye contact • Display agenda and expectations • Share the plan • Use calming routines • Offer brief movement • Normalize feelings	• Speak calmly and at an appropriate pace • Pause for processing • Check for understanding • Model mistakes • Think aloud • Normalize uncertainty • Invite questions	• Break tasks into steps • Provide visual checklists • Offer quiet encouragement • Help students organize • Reinforce effort • Notice early signs of frustration	• Establish norms • Assign meaningful roles • Model respectful disagreement • Coach conflict resolution • Reinforce listening • Ensure every voice is heard	• Clearly explain expectations • Allow time and breaks • Normalize mistakes • Emphasize growth • Maintain a calm environment	• Provide countdowns • Use visual schedules • Give advance warnings • Create routines • Incorporate movement • Use consistent cues	• Celebrate effort • Reflect on learning and strategies • Invite student voice • Normalize challenges • End with encouragement • Repair when needed
SAMPLE LANGUAGE THAT HELPS 	“I’m glad you’re here.” “Let’s get ready together.” “You don’t have to be perfect—just begin.” “What do you need to be ready?”	“It’s okay not to know yet.” “Learning means your brain is growing.” “Let’s figure this out together.” “What questions do you have?”	“Let’s start with the first step.” “Show me where you’re stuck.” “You’ve solved difficult problems before.” “Take your time.”	“Let’s hear everyone’s ideas.” “Different perspectives help us learn.” “Can someone build on that idea?” “How can we solve this together?”	“This assessment is information, not a judgment.” “Do your best with what you know today.” “One mistake does not define your ability.”	“In two minutes we’ll switch activities.” “Let’s finish this together.” “Here’s what comes next.”	“What helped you learn today?” “What was challenging?” “What are you proud of?” “What might help tomorrow?”

ACROSS EVERY PHASE, STUDENTS ASK THEMSELVES:

- Am I safe?
- Do I belong?
- Can I do this?
- Will someone help me if I struggle?
- Do I matter here?

EDUCATORS CAN ANSWER THROUGH THEIR POSTURE:

- ✓ You are safe.
- ✓ You belong.
- ✓ We will figure this out together.
- ✓ Mistakes are part of learning.
- ✓ You matter here.



THE CORE PRINCIPLE Co-regulation is not a pause in teaching. It is the relational process that makes teaching and learning possible. The most effective classrooms are not those in which students never struggle. They are classrooms in which students know that when they struggle, they will encounter calm, attuned, and trustworthy adults who help them remain engaged until they can move forward on their own.

Relationship is the Pathway to Learning.

What Adult Posture Looks Like in Practice



During Emotional Upset: From Control to Co-Regulation



When children experience emotional overwhelm, they need **presence more than instruction**.

Their nervous system is not ready for reasoning or correction; it is seeking safety and regulation.



This subtle shift is powerful.

"Calm down" often feels dismissive or demanding, so a child who is already overwhelmed. It signals that emotional expression is unacceptable.



In contrast, "I'm here" communicates **steadiness, safety, and support**.



INSTEAD OF:
a directive such as:

"Calm down."



AN ATTUNED ADULT
might say:

"You're having a hard time right now.
I'm here."



**In these moments,
the adult posture
focuses on:**



Staying
physically and
emotionally
grounded



Reducing
stimulation and
pressure



Naming the
emotional
experience



Offering calm
presence rather
than immediate
solutions



Denies the
individual's
internal reality.

Stop crying.
You're fine.
Calm down.



Validates the
present emotional
state without trying
to immediately
fix it.

You're having a
hard time right now.
I'm here.

Radical proximity.
Safety is
established
through presence,
not solutions.

Invites collaboration
to solve the root
cause of the
behavior.



The goal is not to rush the child out of **their emotion**,
but to help them **move through it safely**.

The adult becomes an
emotional anchor until the child can regain regulation.



What Adult Posture Looks Like in Practice



During Mistakes: From Correction to Learning Opportunity



Mistakes are a natural and essential part of learning.

However, the way adults respond to mistakes shapes whether children associate error with **shame** or with **growth**.



THIS RESPONSE DOES SEVERAL IMPORTANT THINGS:



It removes judgment from the learning process.



It separates the child's identity from the outcome.



It normalizes struggle as part of learning.



It invites persistence and exploration.

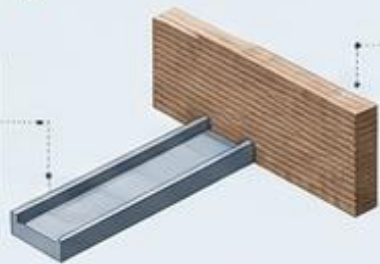


INSTEAD OF:

That's wrong.

JUDGMENT

Focuses on the person, not the process.



Finality.
The interaction ends in failure.



AN EDUCATOR MIGHT SAY:

You haven't figured it out yet.
Let's try another way.

PROCESS-ORIENTATION



Focuses cognitive energy on the process, not the person.

Anatomy of a Script:
The Growth Mindset Trigger
Transforms a permanent failure into a temporary step in the learning process.



Over time, they begin to internalize the idea:

"I can learn, even when I don't get it right the first time."



This is a foundation for *lifelong learning* and *resilience*.



When adults respond with curiosity, compassion, and calm leadership, *children feel safe, supported, and able to regulate.*

What Adult Posture Looks Like in Practice



During Challenging Behaviour: From Judgment to Understanding



Challenging behaviour can easily trigger frustration in adults, especially when it disrupts learning or impacts others.

However, an adult posture grounded in **curiosity** and **connection** reframes behaviour as **communication** rather than **character**.



INSTEAD OF:



AN EDUCATOR MIGHT SAY:

BLAME

Forces the nervous system into immediate defense mode.



What's wrong with you?

CURIOSITY



Something seems difficult for you right now. Let's see what you need.

Anatomy of a Script: Re-frames reactive behavior as an unmet need or a lack of skill, not a character flaw.

Anatomy of a Script: Invites collaboration to solve the root cause of the behavior.



From there, the adult can explore:



What the child might be feeling



What need is not being met



What skill is still developing



What support might help in the moment



This does not remove expectations or boundaries. Instead, it changes the pathway to addressing behaviour—from punishment and correction toward **support and skill-building**.



Children are far more likely to cooperate *when they feel understood rather than judged.*



What Adult Posture Looks Like in Practice



DURING CONFLICT: From Separation to Guided Problem-Solving



THIS SHIFT COMMUNICATES SEVERAL IMPORTANT MESSAGES:



The relationship matters.



Conflict is not something to avoid or abandon.



Children are not left alone in difficult social moments.



Adults are present to guide, not to punish or withdraw.

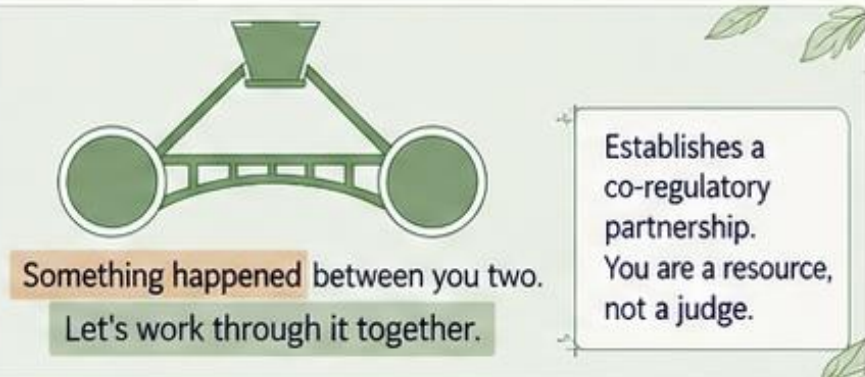
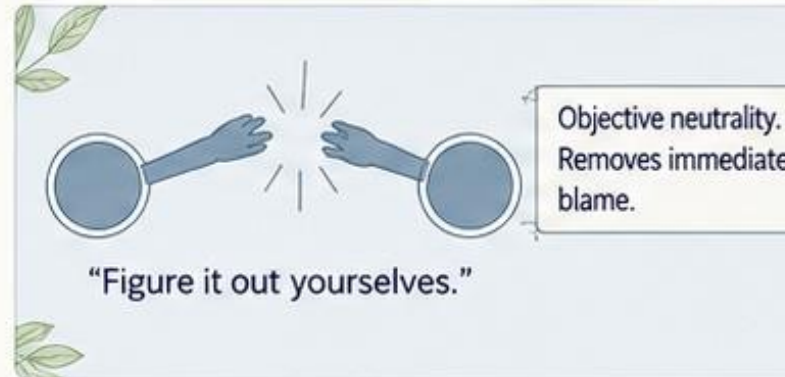
INSTEAD OF
A DISTANCING RESPONSE
SUCH AS:

“Figure it out
yourselves.”



AN EDUCATOR WITH A
RELATIONAL POSTURE
MIGHT SAY:

“Something happened
between you two. Let’s
work through it together.”



In practice, this might involve helping each child share their perspective, naming emotions, slowing the interaction down, and supporting repair. The adult becomes a facilitator of connection rather than a referee or judge.



Over time, children learn that conflict is **not a threat to belonging, but an opportunity for understanding and growth.**