



The Hidden Curriculum

A field guide to the neurobiology and practice
of adult posture in the classroom.

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The Power of Adult Posture

Benefits of a Strong and Confident Adult Posture in the Classroom ♡



A calm, confident adult is one of the most powerful influences on a child's emotional regulation, behaviour, and learning.

✿ A strong adult posture is not about being authoritarian. ✿

It is about being calm, emotionally regulated, relationally connected, and confidently in charge.



1 Creates Emotional Safety



A calm, predictable adult communicates:

"You are safe."
"I can handle this."
"You don't have to manage my emotions."

Benefits

- Reduced anxiety
- Greater sense of security
- Increased engagement
- Improved regulation

2 Supports Co-Regulation



Students borrow regulation from regulated adults before they can regulate themselves.

Benefits

- Faster de-escalation
- Fewer power struggles
- Reduced intensity
- Long-term self-regulation

3 Strengthens Relationships



A confident, caring adult communicates:

"I'm here."
"I can help."
"I won't abandon you."

Benefits

- Stronger relationships
- Greater cooperation
- Increased trust
- Higher engagement

4 Reduces Challenging Behaviour



Consistent emotional leadership reduces the need for students to test limits.

Benefits

- Fewer behavioural incidents
- Reduced conflict
- Less oppositional behaviour
- Greater classroom stability

5 Builds Student Confidence



Confident adults provide support without rescuing or taking over.

Benefits

- Increased resilience
- Greater persistence
- Improved problem-solving
- Higher self-efficacy

6 Improves Learning



The brain learns best when it is regulated and feels safe.

Benefits

- Increased attention
- Better executive functioning
- Improved performance
- Greater participation

7 Models Emotional Regulation



Students learn by watching how adults respond to stress, mistakes, and conflict.

Benefits

- Increased emotional intelligence
- Improved conflict resolution
- Better peer relationships
- Stronger SEL skills

8 Creates Consistency & Predictability



Predictable adults help students feel secure and conserve mental energy for learning.

Benefits

- Reduced anxiety
- Increased independence
- Improved transitions
- Greater classroom responsibility

10 Protects Adult Well-Being



Strong posture helps educators stay grounded, set boundaries, and respond rather than react.

Benefits

- Less burnout
- Reduced compassion fatigue
- Greater job satisfaction
- Increased professional confidence



KEY TAKEAWAY

A strong adult posture is not about being the loudest, strictest, or most controlling person in the room. It is about becoming the calmest, safest, and most emotionally grounded presence.



THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF ADULT POSTURE



Emotional Climate

Students feel safe, calm, and supported.



Relationships

Trust, belonging, and cooperation increase.



Behaviour

Fewer power struggles and more proactive problem solving.



Learning

Greater engagement, attention, and academic success.



Self-Regulation

Students gradually internalize regulation skills.



Culture

Increased respect, empathy, and psychological safety.



Well-Being

Reduced stress and greater resilience for educators.



When educators consistently embody this posture, they become a source of stability from which students can explore, learn, take risks, recover from mistakes, and develop the capacities needed for lifelong success."





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.



Examples of a *Strong Adult Posture* at Tier 2

Tier 2 targeted practices

Intentional, responsive strategies for students who need some extra support to feel safe, regulated and successful.



1  **Understanding** that when a student at **Tier 2** is overwhelmed emotionally, which results in behavioural manifestations, the first step and priority of the adult should be to re-establish a sense of **safety for the student** (whether by managing the circumstances and environment, or by **co-regulating** with the student).

2  **Relying on the key elements to effect change:** structures, routines, predictability, respite, movement, being preventive/proactive, etc., including adapted scheduling if needed (these are **essential at Tier 2**).

3  Being careful with **applying pressure** towards a task accomplishment, which could be triggering the student.

4  Being **calm and grounded** before responding to an upset student, and not taking their behaviour personally.

5  Being mindful about displaying **neutral/gentle** facial expressions, a non-threatening stance, a stable voice volume, tone, speech rate, or talking too much.

6  When a student is upset, **waiting until a more appropriate time** to address the situation (when the student has returned to a regulated state and is open and receptive) – Relying on **co-regulation**, as well as **de-escalation strategies**, if needed, to defuse the situation.

7  **Conveying to other students** that you are aware the student in question is upset, that you are handling the situation, and they can focus on their own task at hand.

8  Actively engaging the student in **communicating their needs** and where they are at in their emotional regulation process, while understanding students at **Tier 2** may require **co-regulation support** to do so.

9  **'Bridging'** by making the **relationship** (not the behaviour) the bottom line and restoring the connection following any fallouts.

10  **Reassuring** the student that you are there for them and they can always come to you for help.



A strong adult posture is grounded in **connection, consistency and compassion**.
*It's not about perfect responses, but about a **purposeful presence**.*





Examples of a *Strong Adult Posture* at Tier 3



Tier 3 individualized practices

Intensive, individualized practices that prioritize **safety, connection, and collaboration** to meet complex needs.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



SAFETY FIRST
Always prioritize safety for all.



RELATIONSHIP DRIVEN
Connection is the foundation.



NEURODEVELOPMENTAL LENS
Understand behaviour as communication.



COLLABORATIVE
Work together for consistent support.



STRENGTHS BASED
Focus on abilities, build on strengths.

- 1  **Understanding** that when a student at Tier 3 is triggered and dysregulated, they are not receptive to our interventions in the moment (must focus on establishing safety for all first).
- 2  **Relying on the key elements** to effect change: structures, routines, predictability, respite, movement, being preventive/proactive, etc., including adapted scheduling if needed (these are **non-negotiable** at Tier 3).
- 3  **Being familiar** with the student's profile, needs and triggers to avoid unnecessary blowouts.
- 4  **Not being alienated** by their behaviour and keeping the posture of a nurturing provider.
- 5  **Being neutral, steady, and grounded** when intervening and keeping the students' wellbeing in mind.
- 6  **Backing away from conventional discipline** (in attempt to negatively punish or forcefully control the behaviour) and ultimatums, which may trigger the student further.
- 7  **Relying on co-regulation**, as well as **de-escalation strategies** if needed to defuse the situation. Keeping a safe and respectful distance that feels comfortable for the student (being attuned to the student's non-verbal shifts in facial expressions and demeanour).

- 8  **Ensuring** that all staff working with the student are on the same page concerning the student's profile, needs, triggers, and support measures in place (making the time to co-create a **Student Action Plan/Safety Plan** in order to share best practices and to increase a more coherent approach).
- 9  **Ensuring that the designated adults** familiar with the student's case are the ones who are intervening with them when the situation has escalated.
- 10  **Relying on the power of teamwork** to share the weight and responsibilities (this will help adults keep their posture intact).
- 11  **Implementing the safety plan** when needed. All students need to feel safe and taken care of.
- 12  **Conveying to other students** that you are aware the student in question is upset, that you are handling the situation, and they can focus on their own task at hand.
- 13  **Actively engaging the student** in communicating their needs (keep in mind they may not be self-aware or available to do so) and where they are at in their emotional regulation process, while understanding students at Tier 3 rely on ongoing **co-regulation support**.
- 14  **'Bridging'** by making the relationship (not the behaviour) the bottom line and restoring the connection following any fallouts.
- 15  **Reassuring** the student that you are there for them and they can always come to you for help.



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.



PREDICTABILITY
Use routines, structure, and predictability.



REGULATION
Support co-regulation and self-regulation.



CONNECTION
Build trusting relationships.



TEAMWORK
Share the weight. Support one another.



PLANNING
Plan ahead. Implement safety plans.



BELONGING
Foster inclusion, respect and dignity.

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 CO-REGULATION TEACHING CYCLE



Create Safety Before the Lesson



Maintain Connection During Instruction



Provide Scaffolding During Challenge



Regulate Before Reasoning During Dysregulation



Reduce Threat, Preserve Rigor During Assessment



Guide Smoothly Through Transitions



Reflect, Repair & Reinforce Growth After the Lesson



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 CONFLICT: From Separation to Guided Problem-Solving



Conflict between children is inevitable and developmentally important. It is often where children learn negotiation, empathy, perspective-taking, and emotional regulation. However, the adult response can either shut down learning or transform the moment into a powerful teaching opportunity.

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**.

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.

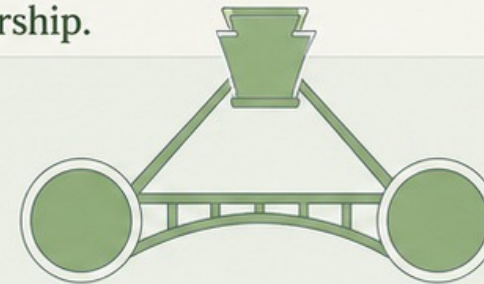
Scenario 01: Navigating Conflict.

The Shift: Isolation → Partnership.



“Figure it out yourselves.”

Objective neutrality.
Removes immediate
blame.



Something happened between you two.

Let’s work through it together.

Establishes a
**co-regulatory
partnership.**
You are a resource,
not a judge.

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.



INSTEAD OF

a directive such as:

"Calm down."



AN ATTUNED ADULT might say:

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



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.

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



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.



Scenario 02: Emotional Upset.

The Shift: Dismissal → Validation.

DISMISSAL



Denies the individual's internal reality.

Stop crying.
You're fine.
Calm down.

VALIDATION



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.

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**.



INSTEAD OF:

"That's wrong."



AN EDUCATOR MIGHT SAY:

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



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.



WHEN CHILDREN CONSISTENTLY EXPERIENCE MISTAKES AS OPPORTUNITIES RATHER THAN FAILURES, THEY DEVELOP:



Persistence



Curiosity



Confidence in problem-solving



Willingness to take academic risks



Over time, they begin to internalize the idea:

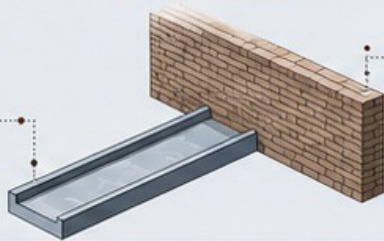
"I can learn, even when I don't get it right the first time."

Scenario 03: Managing Mistakes The Shift: Judgment → Process-Oriented

JUDGMENT

That's wrong.

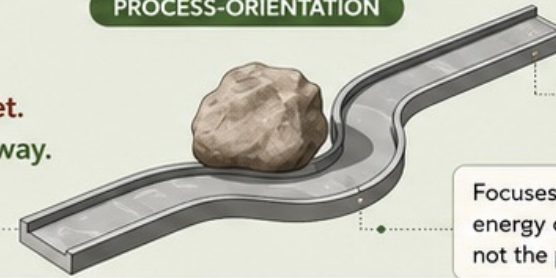
Focuses on the person, not the process.



Finality.
The interaction ends in failure.

PROCESS-ORIENTATION

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



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.



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:

"What's wrong with you?"



AN EDUCATOR MIGHT SAY:

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



This subtle shift is powerful.

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



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



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



Scenario 04: Challenging Behavior.

The Shift: **Blame** → **Curiosity**.

BLAME

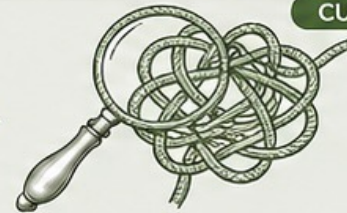


Forces the nervous system into immediate defense mode.

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.



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.





Examples of de-escalation strategies



Removing any audience. If possible, taking the student for a walk or accompanying them to a safe and private space.



Honouring the student's personal space (needing to consider individual differences in terms of tolerance for physical proximity).



Being mindful of 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 level of stress, affect, emotional intensity, and type/level of energy reflected.



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.



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.



Examples of de-escalation strategies



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.



Setting simple, concise, and realistic limits by offering options/alternatives in a supportive manner; being careful to not overload with too many directives.



Allowing time/space for decision making (not pressuring for an immediate response) and choosing wisely what is insisted upon.



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



Sometimes, using humour, when appropriate, can be helpful to diffuse the situation.



Not taking it personally; being careful to not overreact (lenses and mirrors).



Ensuring that adults passing by don't step in and impose themselves in an ongoing intervention.



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.

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THE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT (CEBM)

As a support to the 10 English School Boards of Quebec, the CEBM aims to help boards and their staff to find effective and developmentally friendly interventions for working with students who experience significant behavioural challenges in the school setting.

Also visit the CEBM Resource Center

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/>