PART 2 | Understanding What Lies Beneath Behaviour

The brain, nervous system, stress responses, and the interaction of student, context, adult, and outcome.

The behaviour iceberg

Individual exercise • *Suggested time: 12 minutes*



Choose one behaviour you frequently encounter (withdrawal, argument, leaving, freezing, or escalation). Write the visible behaviour, then possible unseen influences. Treat these as hypotheses, not diagnoses.

Visible behaviour: What would an observer see?	
Possible stressors, **unmet needs**, skills still developing, or environmental demands?	
What information would help me avoid jumping to conclusions?	

Observe without interpreting

Pairs • Suggested time: 10 minutes

Rewrite the statement “She is being manipulative and attention-seeking” using only observable information. Then identify a respectful question to investigate.

1. What is the neutral observation?

2. When, where, with whom, and during which demands does it happen?

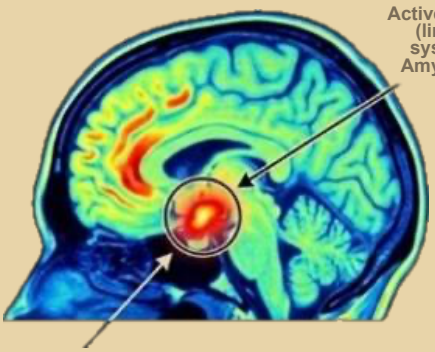
3. What might help the student feel safer or more capable?

Refer to the ‘**Expectation & Neurodevelopment Mapping**’ document below to help you adjust your expectations depending on the student’s profile and individual differences.

Expectation & Neurodevelopment Mapping

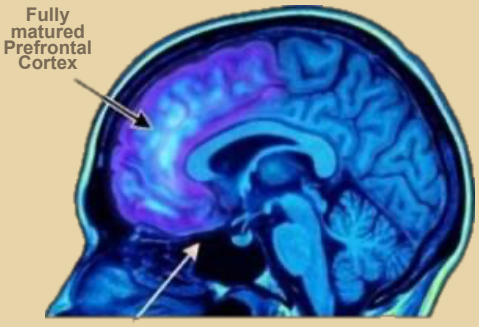
Refer to the brain scans below of the "Youth Brain" (which relies mostly on the amygdala – the emotion center of the brain) next to the "Adult Brain" (which has better access to the prefrontal cortex – the judgment center of the brain). Based on this information, explore whether certain adult expectations in your setting may be demanding an adult-level emotional regulation from brains that have not yet built those neurological pathways.

The Youth Brain



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

The Adult Brain



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

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

Discussion & Reflection Notes:

Stress response scenario

Small-group case discussion • Suggested time: 12 minutes

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.

A student becomes silent and motionless when asked to present; another student starts arguing loudly when the room becomes noisy. Consider different stress responses without assuming intent.

1. What signs of activation or shutdown might be present?

2. What immediate adult actions might reduce demand or threat?

3. When would you seek additional team support?