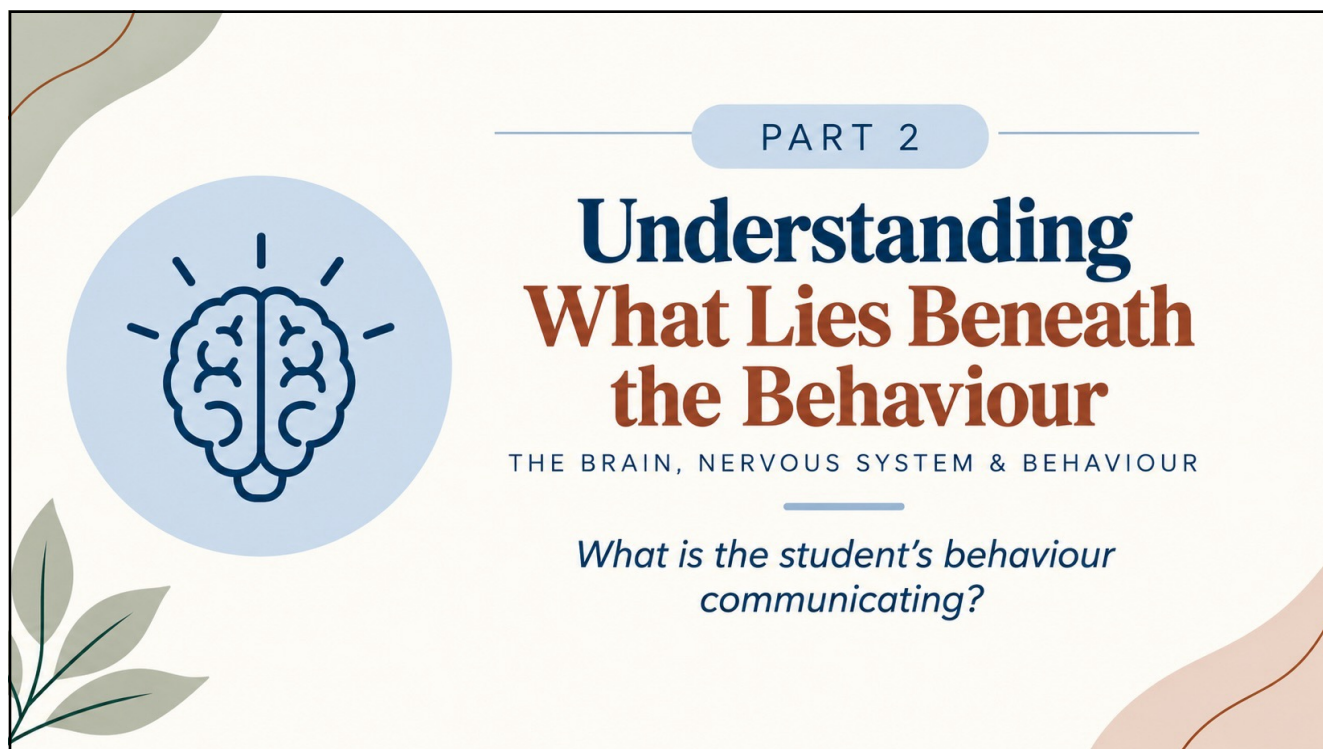
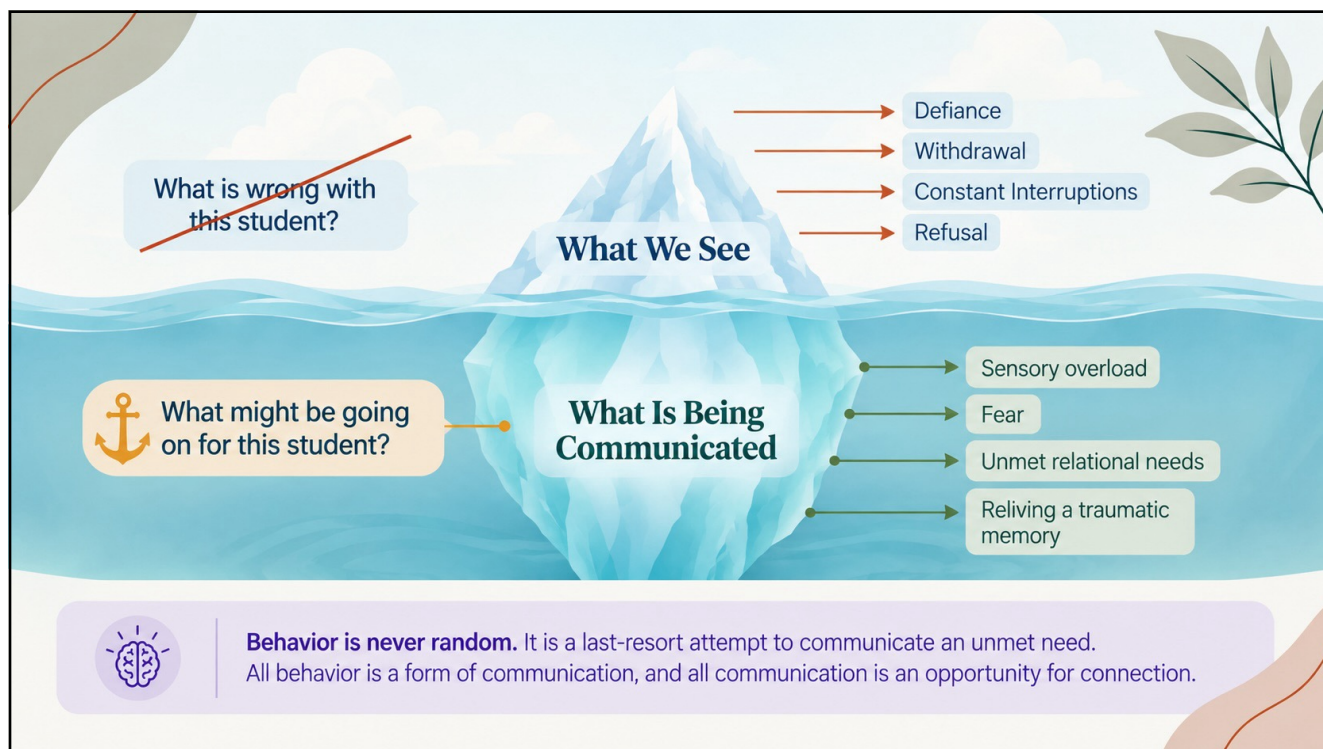




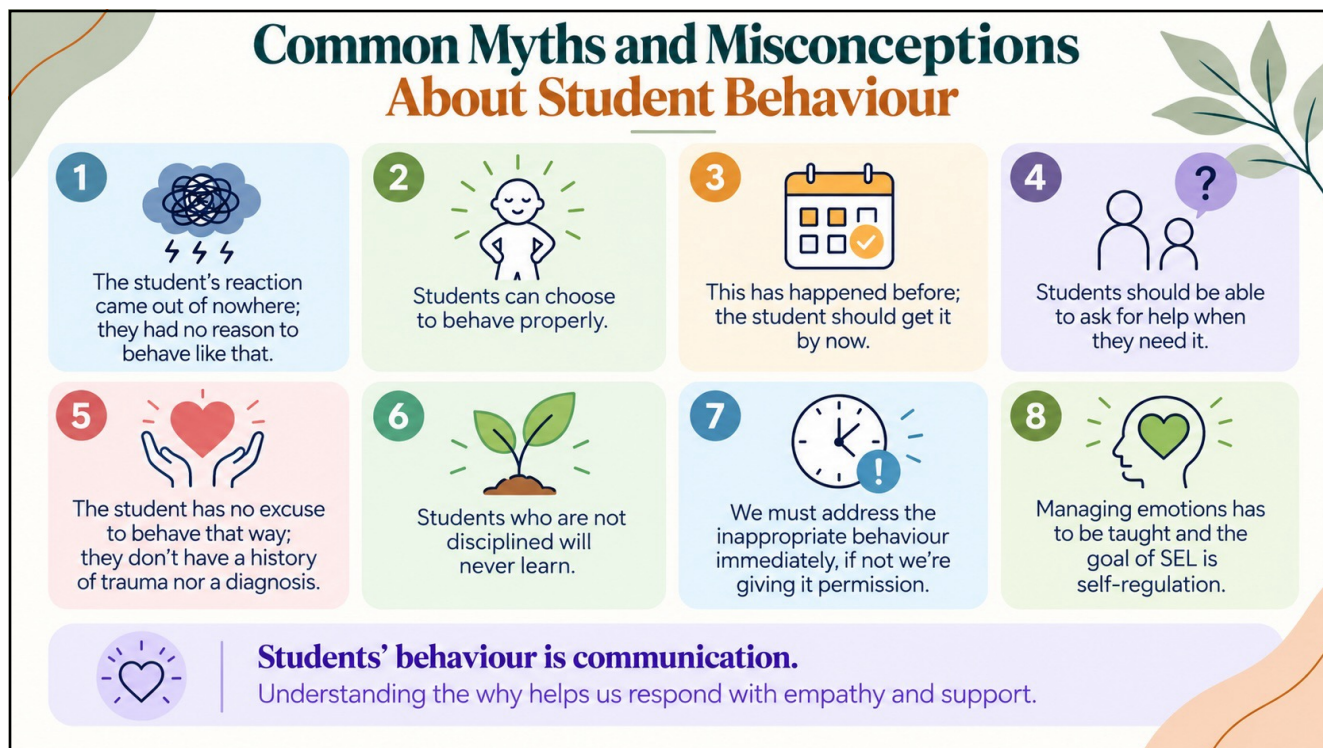
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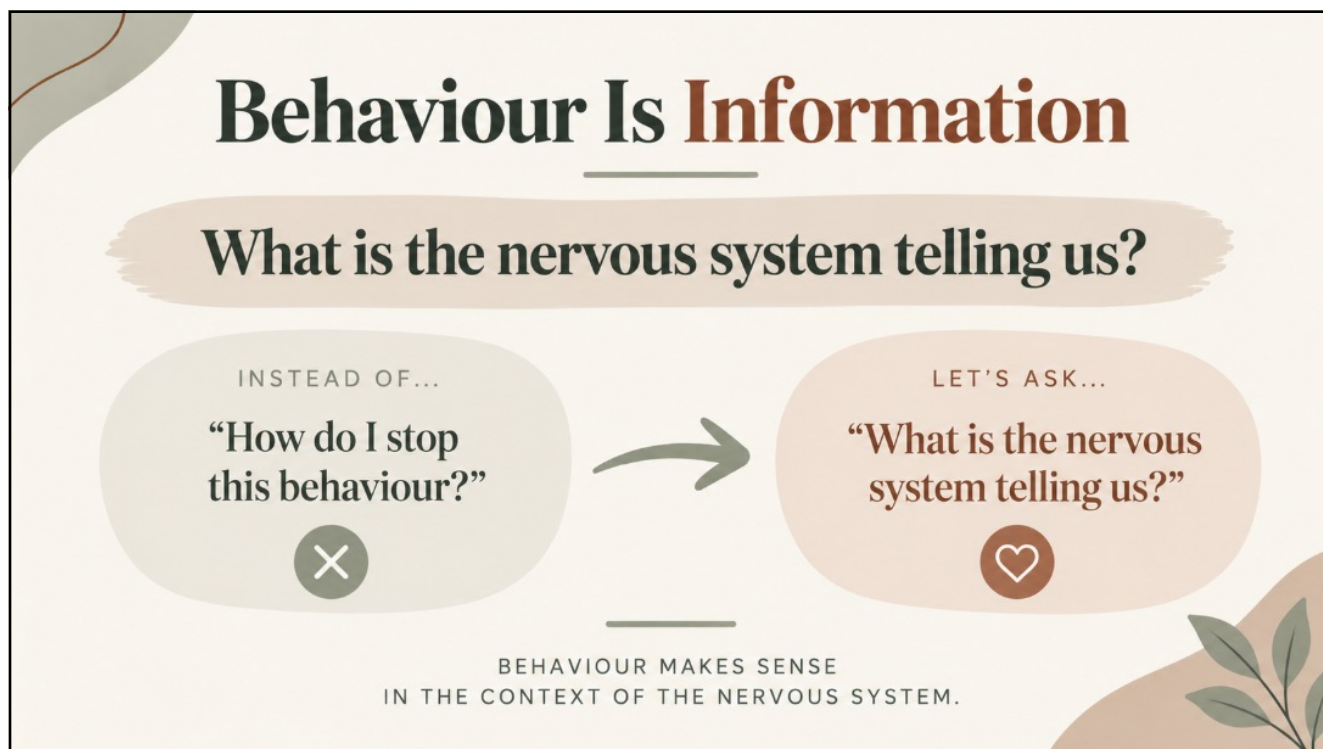
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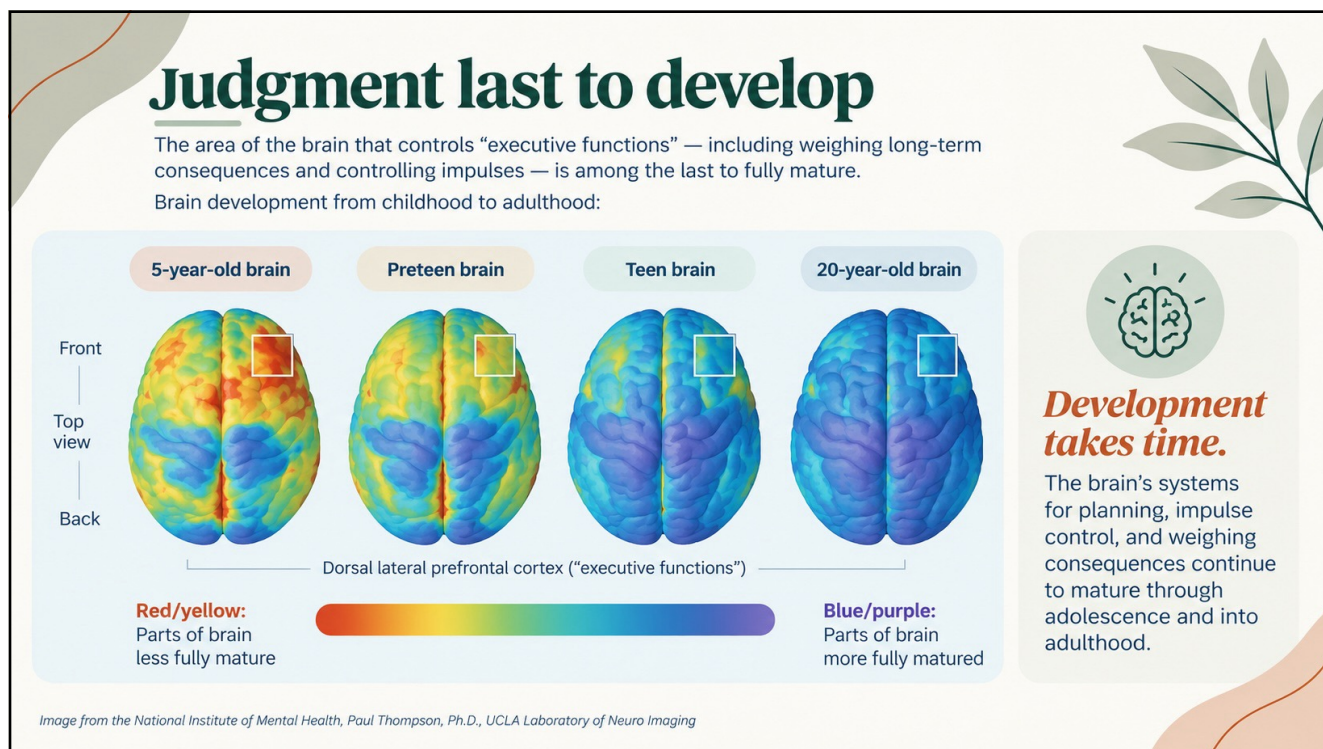
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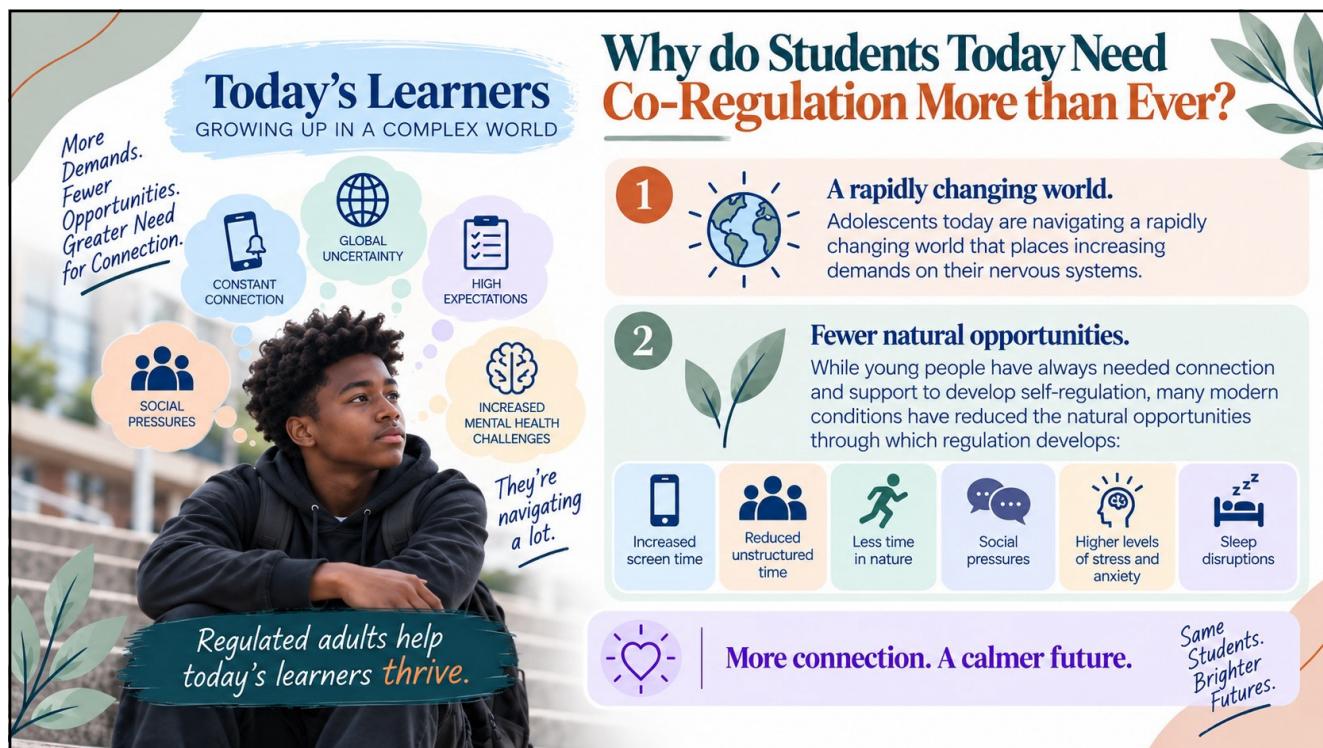
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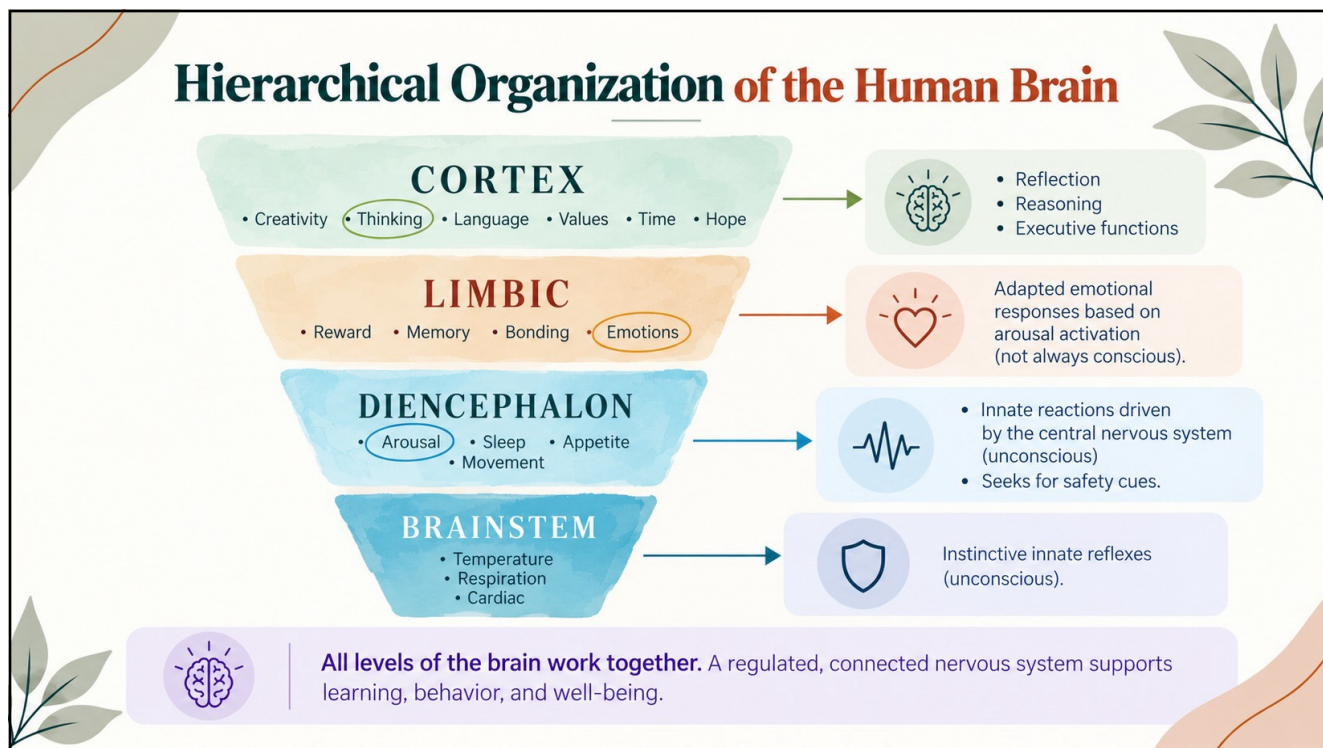
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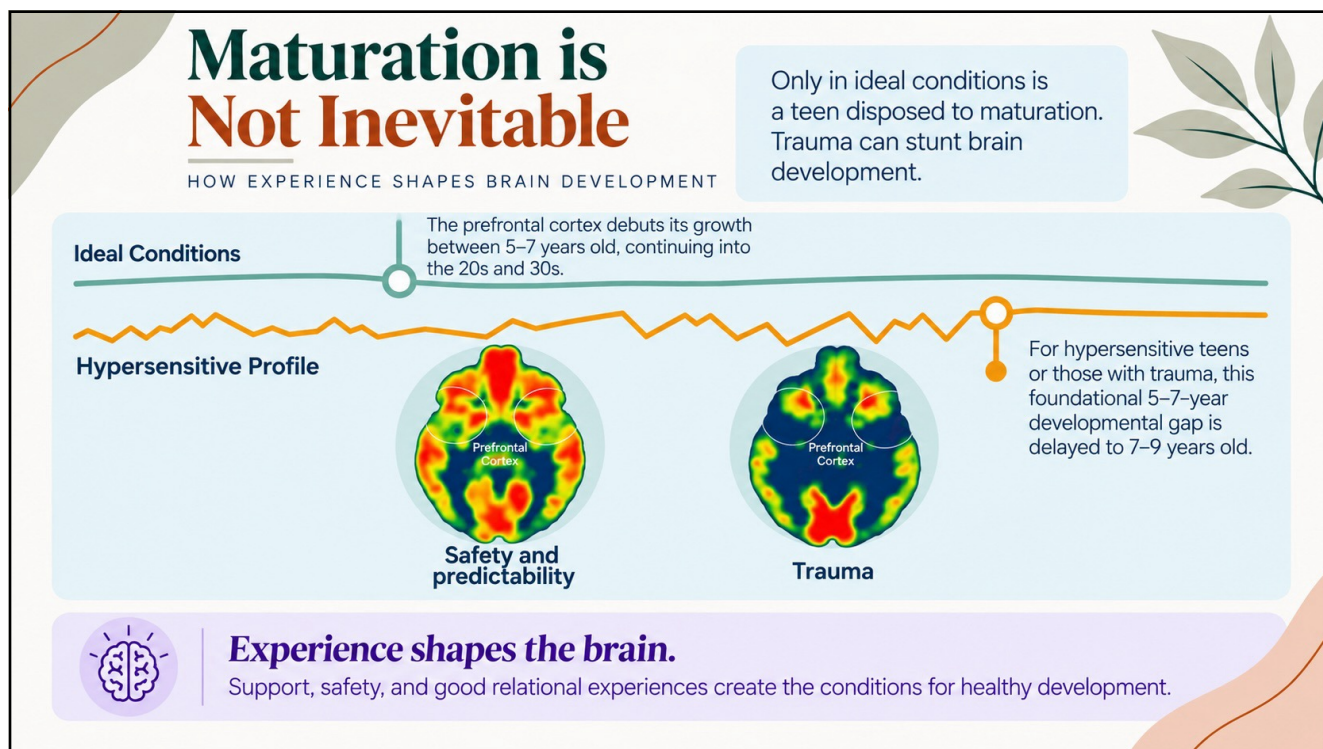
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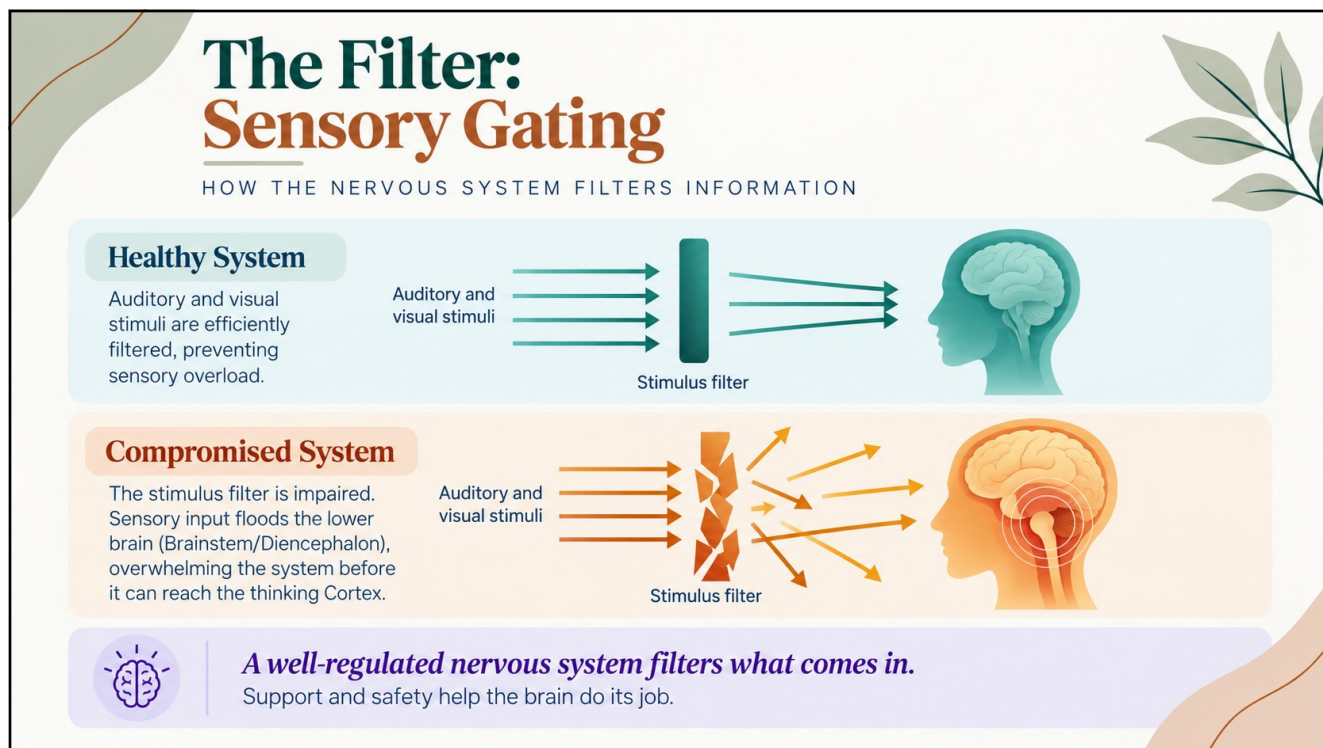
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11



12

The Brain Learns Best in a State of Safety

Safety Creates Possibility.

Research in neuroscience shows that the brain **prioritizes safety before learning.**

When students feel emotionally safe, more parts of the brain are available for thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and learning.

When students 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.

In a state of stress, students 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

Before students can fully engage in learning, they must first experience a sense of **emotional security.**

A regulated brain is a learning brain.

Calmer Students. Brighter Futures.

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

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Before Students Process Our Instructions, They Process Our Presence.

Connection Comes Before Compliance.

Be the Calm They Can Count On.

SEEN. HEARD. VALUED. MORE POSSIBLE.

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

Their nervous systems are constantly asking one important question:

- Am I safe?
- Can I trust this adult?
- Do I matter here?
- Will they stay with me when things become difficult?

When students feel safe, seen, and connected, they are more open to **learning, growth, and collaboration.**

Stronger Students. Brighter Futures.

14

Safety is Created Through Everyday Experiences.

Everyone Belongs Here.

SUPPORT. INCLUDE. RESPECT. BELONG.

Small Moments. Big Impact.

- 1**  **Safety isn't just for crises.**
A common 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.

Stronger Students. Brighter Futures.

15

Faulty Neuroception

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



Perceives danger where there is none.

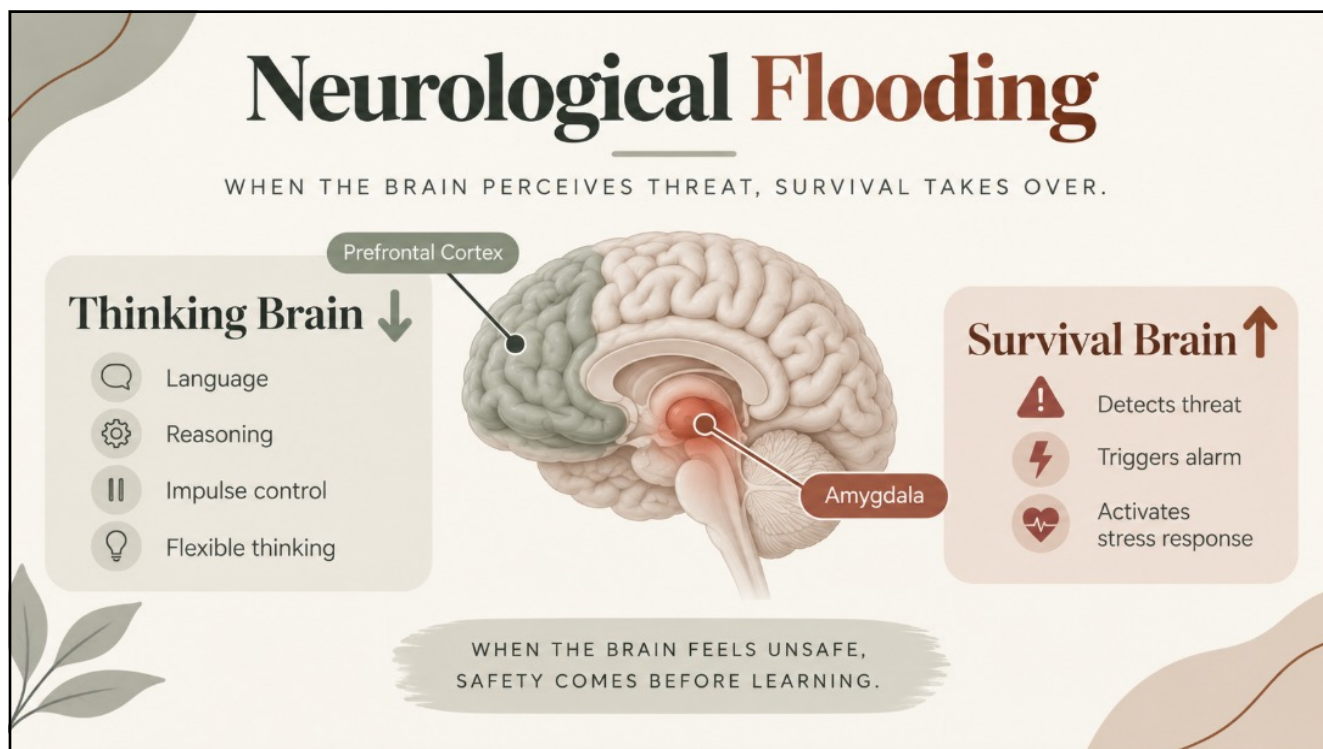


Triggers a stress response even in safe environments.

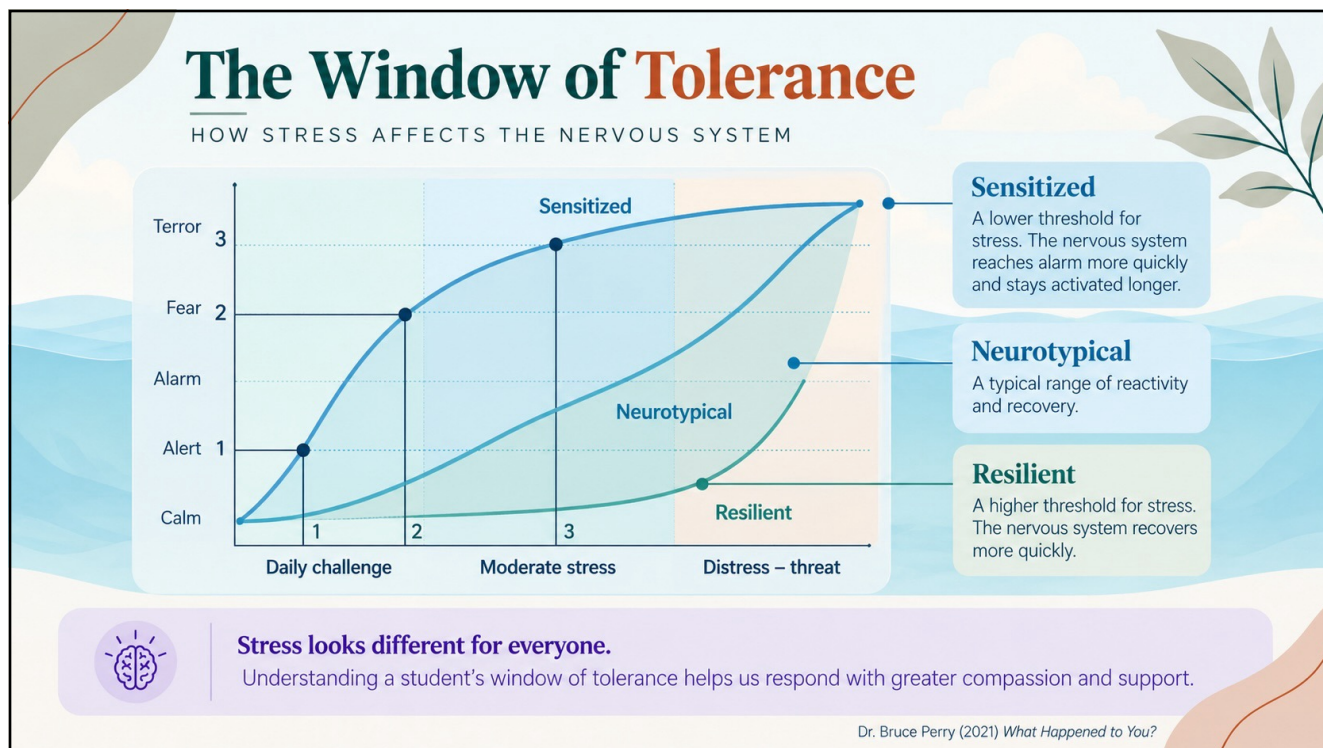


Can make it hard to access learning, connection and problem solving.

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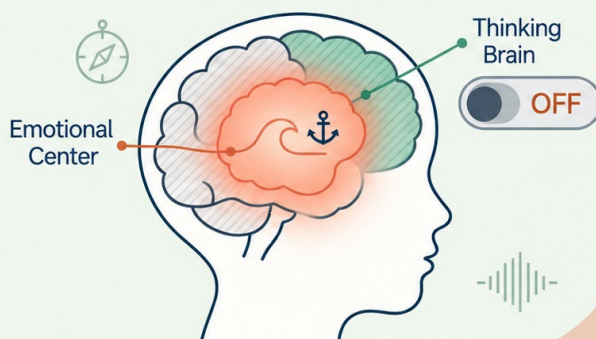
The thinking brain shuts down during emotional distress



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.

The Thinking Brain State Diagram



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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...

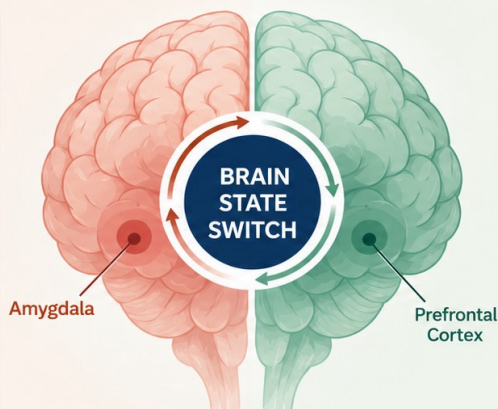


...shifting the brain from a "thinking" state into a "survival" state.

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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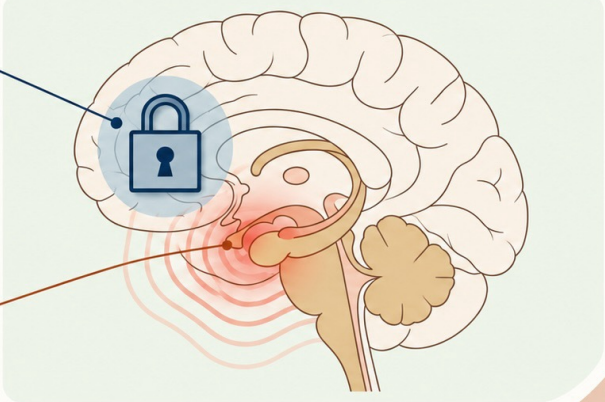
EDUCATOR'S FIELD GUIDE

You Cannot Reason with an Overwhelmed Brain



The Biological Reality

In moments of stress, frustration, or conflict, a student'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 student's nervous system.

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When dysregulation peaks, cognitive availability plummets.

THE COGNITIVE AVAILABILITY CURVE



Logic, ultimatums, and reasoning are completely inaccessible here.



The Core Reality

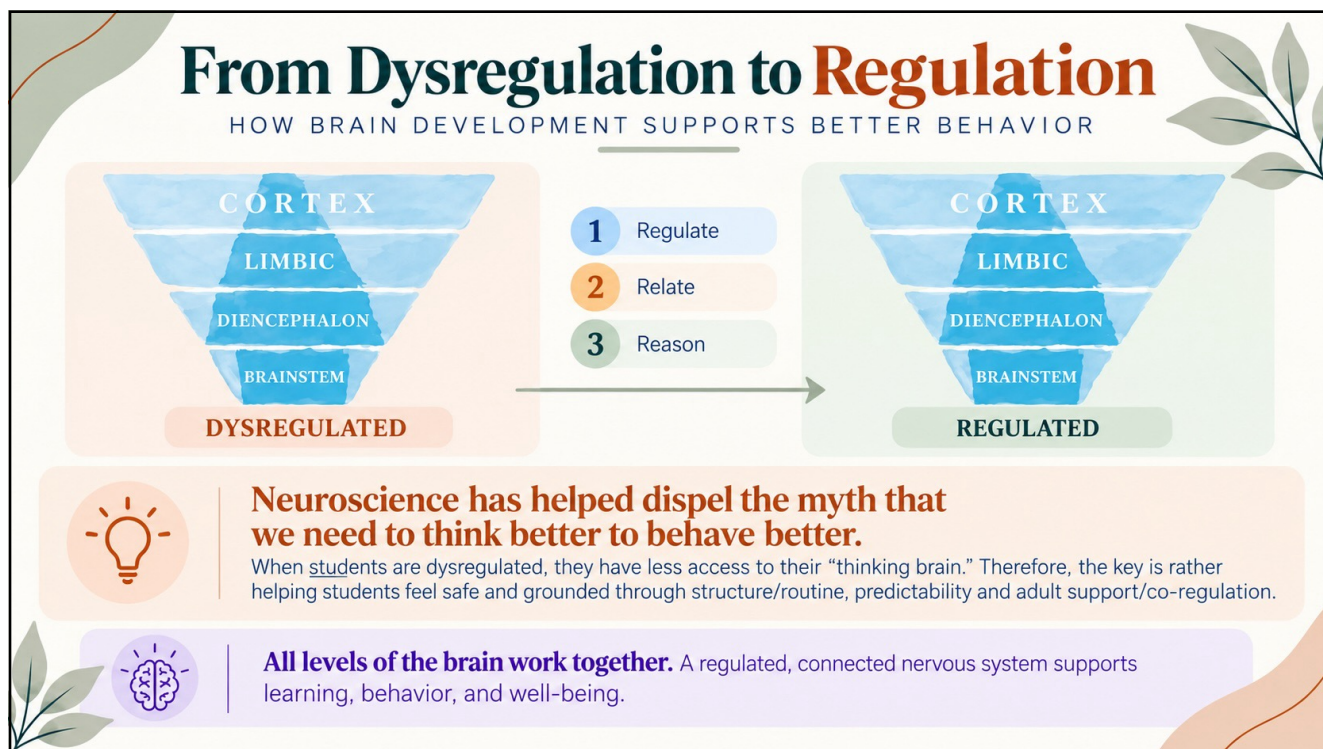
When a student at Tier 3 is triggered and dysregulated, they are not receptive to our interventions in the moment.



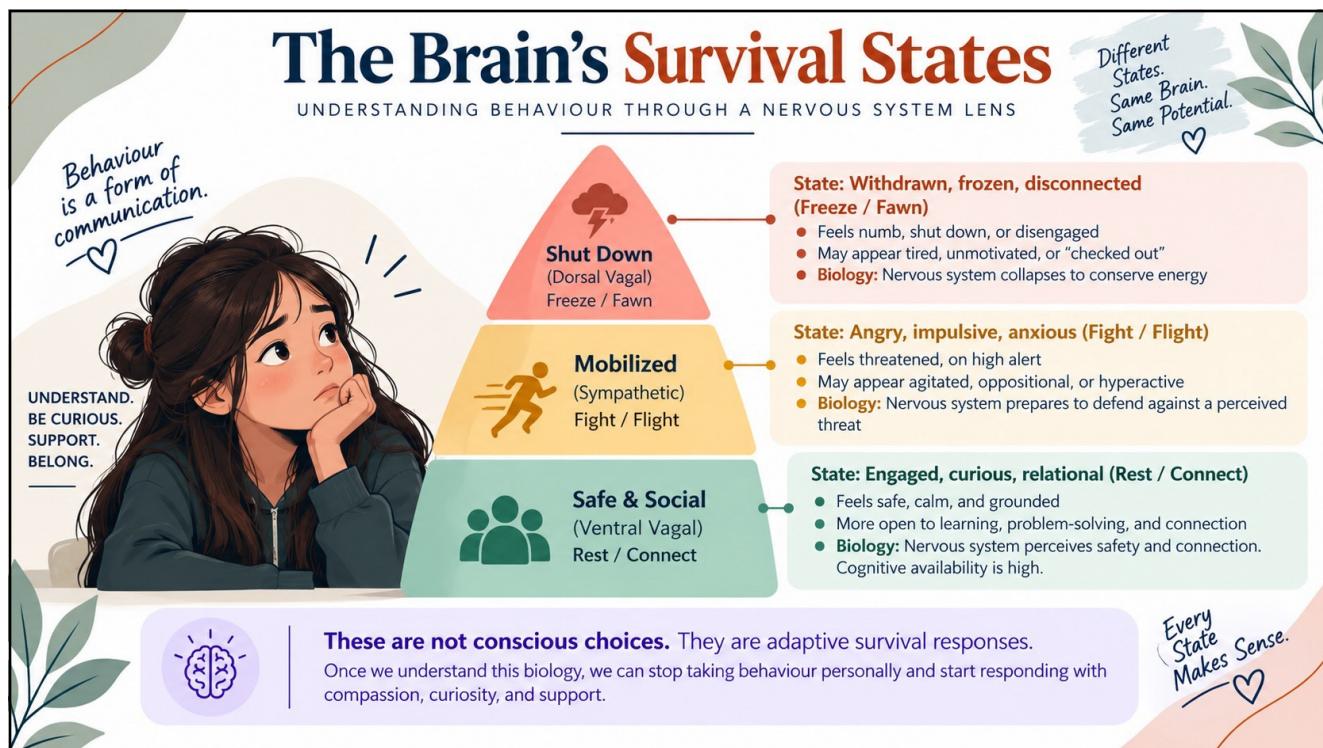
The Only Mandate

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

Student Experience Map

A Day in Their Shoes

1 ARRIVAL
(7:30-8:30 AM)

2 HOMEROOM
(8:30-9:00 AM)

3 PERIOD 1
(9:00-10:15 AM)

4 BREAK
(10:15-10:30 AM)

5 PERIOD 2
(10:30-11:45 AM)

6 LUNCH
(11:45 AM-12:30 PM)

7 PERIOD 3
(12:30-1:45 PM)

8 PERIOD 4
(1:45-3:00 PM)

9 AFTER SCHOOL
(3:00 PM+)

REFLECTION

What might be helpful to this student at different points in the day?

What barriers might they be facing?

What is one change I could make as an educator to better support this student?

People
Places
Routines
Expectations
Emotions
Make a difference.

Same school. Different perspective.

EMPATHY BUILDS STRONGER SCHOOLS.

A more inclusive school starts with understanding.

Experience Mapping Worksheet

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

Greater understanding today leads to more compassionate and supportive tomorrow.

People affect people.

BELONG • LEARN • GROW

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Considering all the elements involved

Student

+

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 student (engaged the student'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 student/adult dynamic (size)
- Possibly an escalation or a de-escalation in the student'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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