
A Brain-Based Approach in a Daycare Context

How play, connection and co-regulation serve as anchors

Audience: Daycare Educators & Early Childhood Practitioners

Timeline: Professional Development Session — August 2026

Educator Name: _____

Directions: Please work independently to complete these core reflection questions regarding personal triggers and observations. Do not rush your answers; lean into past interactions.

PART ONE

Student Behaviour

A. Self-Reflection Questions

1. When students are dysregulated, how do I typically interpret their behavior?

2. What signals tell me a student is overwhelmed rather than oppositional?

Student Behaviour

A. Self-Reflection Questions (Continued)

3. How often do I focus on stopping behavior rather than understanding it?

Directions: Work through the individual relational mapping exercise below, then utilize your standalone printable worksheet packet when reaching the breakout indicator.

PART ONE

Student Behaviour

B. Individual Exercises

1. Relationship Inventory

List 1-2 students with whom maintaining an authentic connection feels most challenging.

- What specific triggers or moments make connection difficult?

- What is one small, positive micro-interaction (e.g., a specific custom greeting, noticing a favorite toy or interest) you can actively try tomorrow?

Breakout Exercise: Student Experience Mapping Worksheet

Directions: 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? What are the demands?
-  Where 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?



REFLECTION

Which part of the day would likely be the MOST difficult for this student? Why?

Which transitions 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:

Directions: Complete the personal reflection journal by applying a neuro-developmental lens to past experiences.

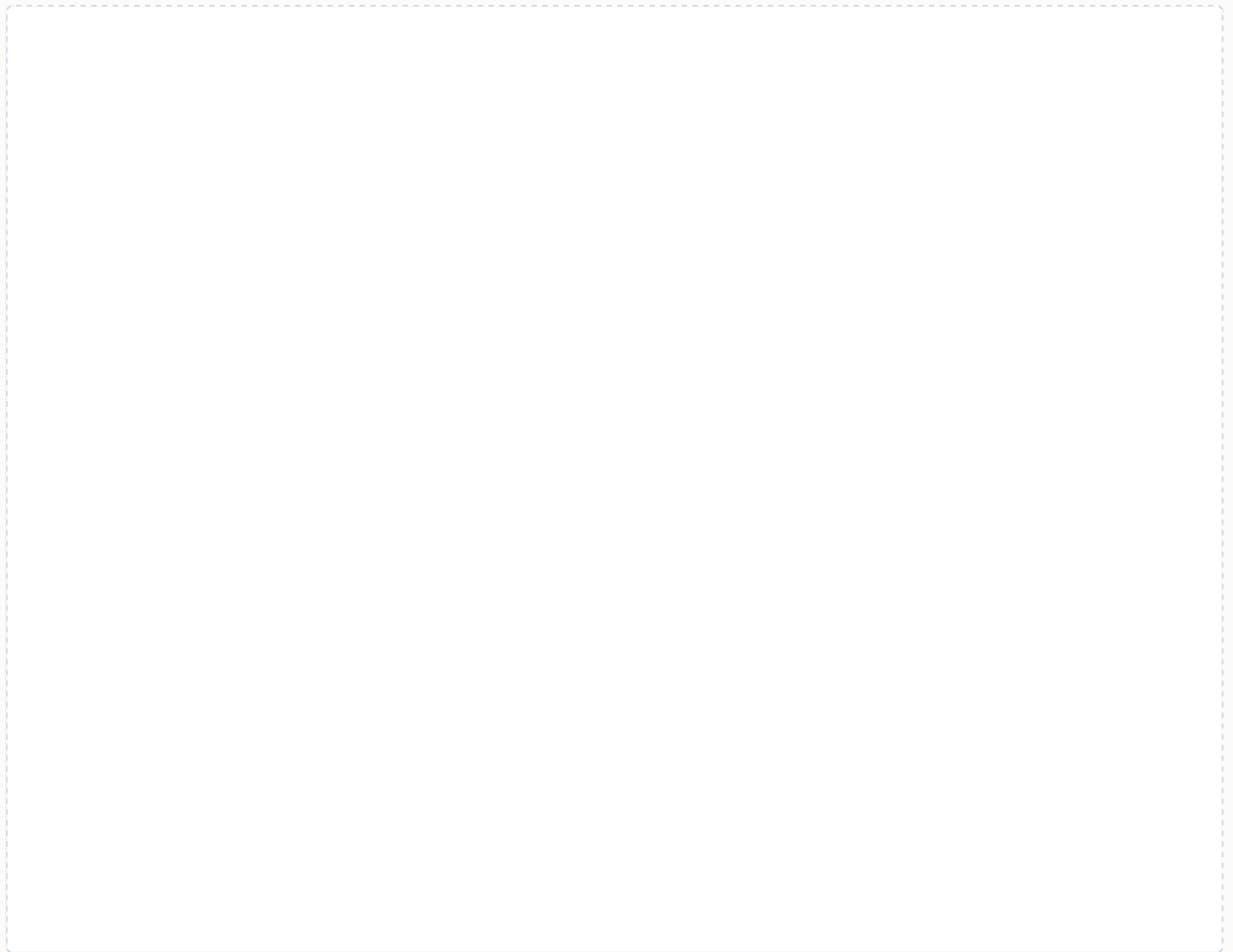
PART ONE

Student Behaviour

3. Personal Reflection Journal

Recall one recent challenging interaction. Re-write the story through a nervous-system lens instead of a traditional behavior lens.

JOURNAL WORKSPACE (EXPANDED):



Directions: Form small groups of 3-4 colleagues to process the neuro-developmental layout below using your supplementary resource pack.

PART ONE

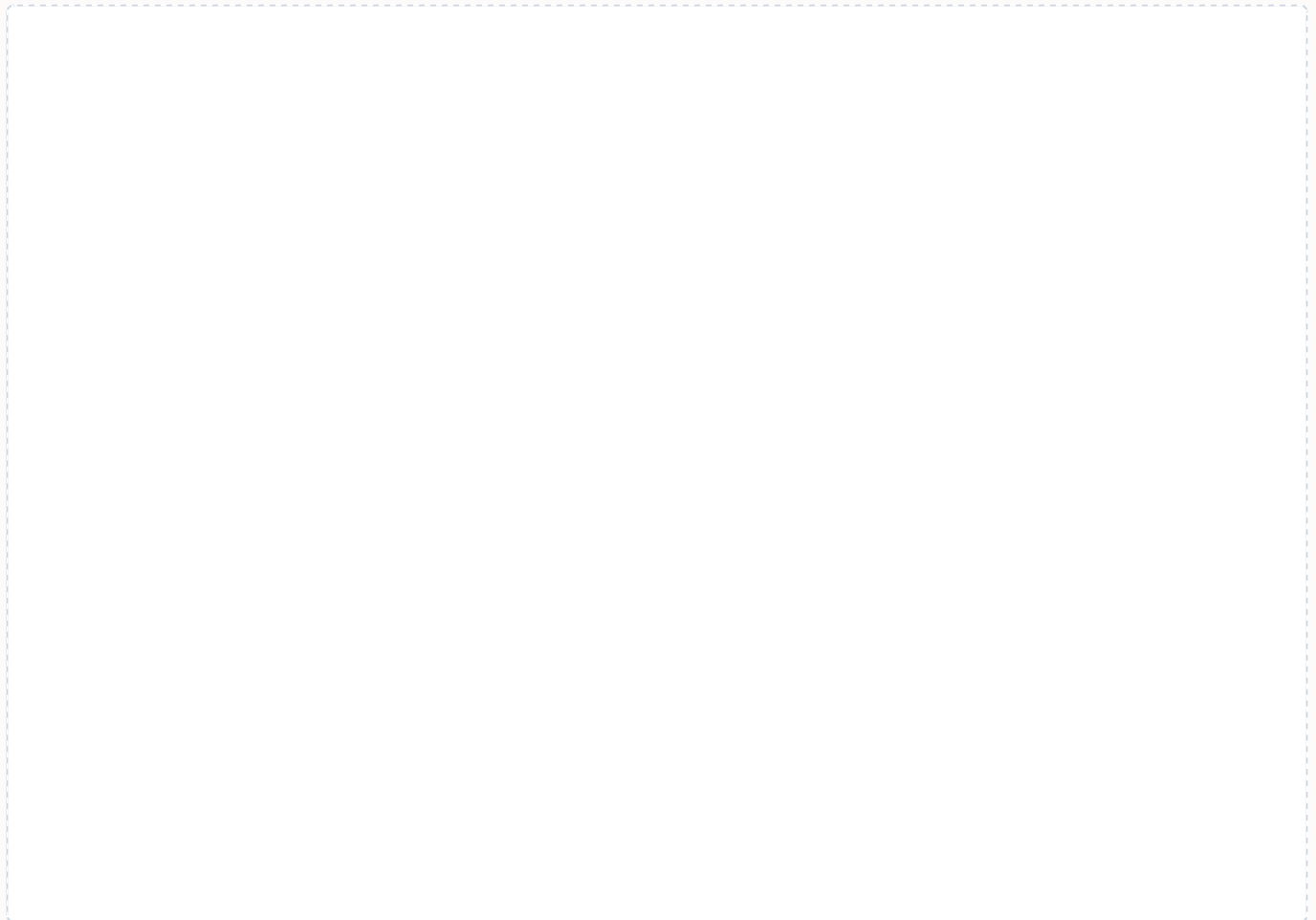
Student Behaviour

C. Group Activities (Part I)

Activity 1: Expectations vs. Biology Worksheet Breakout

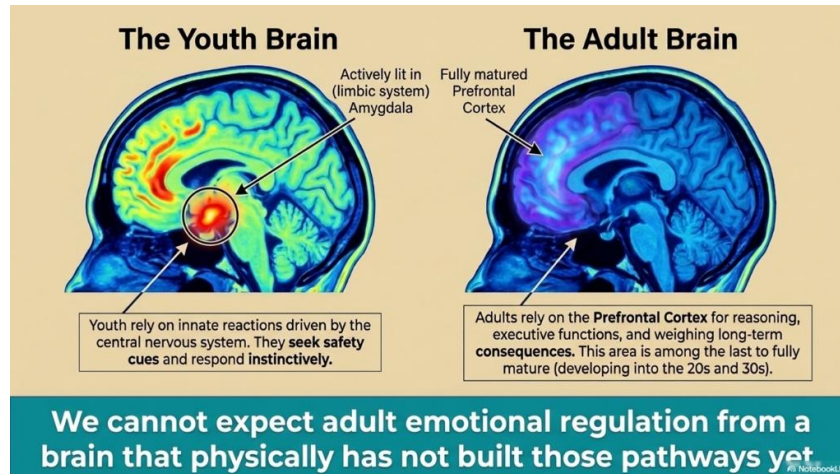
Directions: Refer to the brain scans of the "Youth Brain" (amygdala) next to the "Adult Brain" (prefrontal cortex). Have a group discussion about specific rules or expectations in your setting that might be demanding adult-level emotional regulation from brains that physically have not built those pathways yet.

GROUP DISCUSSION SUMMARY & STRUCTURAL BLIND SPOTS DISCOVERED:



Workshop Activity: Expectation & Neurodevelopment Mapping

Refer to the brain scans of the "Youth Brain" (amygdala) next to the "Adult Brain" (prefrontal cortex). Have a group discussion about specific rules or expectations in your setting that might be demanding adult-level emotional regulation from brains that physically have not built those pathways yet.



Group Discussion & Reflection Notes:



Directions: Collaboratively evaluate underlying messages beneath behaviors. Complete this table layout by reframing what a child's actions might be communicating.

PART ONE

Student Behaviour

C. Group Activities (Part II)

2. Behavior Reframing Activity

When observing surface behaviors like defiance, withdrawal, or constant interruptions, identify the underlying communications—such as sensory overload, fear, or unmet relational needs that might be missed.

Choose 5 challenging behaviors to reframe.

See the Behavior Reframing Matrix on the following page to comprehensively chart and reframe your selections.

Directions: Utilize this entire page to comprehensively chart and reframe challenging surface behaviors.

PART ONE

Student Behaviour

Behavior Reframing Matrix

CHALLENGING SURFACE BEHAVIOR	POSSIBLE UNMET NEED / UNDERLYING COMMUNICATION
1. Defiance / Active Refusal	
2. Hiding / Emotional Withdrawal	
3. Constant Interruptions	
4.	
5.	