Why Support Staff Matter in Co-Regulation

Support staff: A powerful presence in students' lives.

Support staff are often present during the moments when students **need co-regulation most**—transitions, unstructured times, frustration, conflict, escalation, recovery, and re-entry.

You Make a Difference ♡



Transitions



Unstructured Times



Frustration



Conflict



Escalation



Recovery



Re-entry

A steady presence can make a big difference. ♡



Support Staff can become a student's regulation anchor

THROUGH THEIR:

Presence
Being there. Showing you care.

Tone
A calm, steady voice.

Predictability
Consistent routines and expectations.

Relationship
Building trust and connection.

Response
Thoughtful, regulated reactions.

Traditional Classroom Management vs. Co-Regulation

TWO DIFFERENT PATHWAYS. TWO DIFFERENT OUTCOMES.

Traditional Classroom Management

FOCUS ON CONTROL & COMPLIANCE

Philosophy	Behaviour control and external compliance
View of behaviour	Something to correct or manage
Adult's role	Rule enforcer and behaviour manager
Primary question	*"What is wrong with this student?"*
Response to distress	Correct, redirect, or consequence
Understanding of stress	Students should control behaviour despite distress
Goal	Immediate behavioural change
Accountability	Through consequences

Typical outcome — Compliance in the moment, disconnection over time.

Co-Regulation

FOCUS ON CONNECTION & CAPACITY

Philosophy	Relational safety and development of internal regulation
View of behaviour	A form of communication and information
Adult's role	Regulation anchor and source of safety
Primary question	*"What is happening for this student?"*
Response to distress	Connect, regulate, then problem-solve
Understanding of stress	Stress affects access to reasoning and self-control
Goal	Long-term capacity for self-regulation
Accountability	Through reflection, repair, and restored connection

Typical outcome — Connection in the moment, self-regulation over time.

Co-regulation doesn't remove expectations—it creates the conditions where students can meet them.

The Role of Support Staff Across the Tiers

Tier 1 — Prevention

BUILDING THE CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

- Connection
- Predictable routines
- Clear expectations
- Transitions
- Noticing early signs of dysregulation



Tier 2 — Co-Regulation

CALMING, CONNECTING, SUPPORTING

- Reduce demands temporarily
- Provide proximity or space
- Use calm communication
- Support regulation
- Help the student reconnect



Tier 3 — Safety & Individualization

MORE INTENSIVE, TARGETED SUPPORTS

- Know the student's plan, triggers and regulation needs
- Maintain safety
- Follow agreed procedures
- Communicate with the team
- Implement the safety plan when necessary



The Adult Posture 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.

Connection Changes Lives.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Approx. 3–5 years

Young children rely on adults to help regulate their bodies, emotions, attention, and behavior.

Brain Development

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

Primary Need

Safety, comfort, connection, and predictable routines.

Adult's Primary Role

Nurturer and protector. Provide external regulation.

Student's Capacity

Limited ability to regulate emotions, attention, and behavior.

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

Language That Helps

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



Common Pitfalls

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

The Ultimate Goal

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

The Developmental Progression

I REGULATE FOR YOU. → WE REGULATE TOGETHER. → YOU REGULATE INDEPENDENTLY.

Relationships are the pathway. Skills are the destination.

The Unchanging Principles

- Connection comes before correction.
- Safety is the foundation for learning.
- Co-regulation today builds self-regulation tomorrow.
- Every child needs at least one trusted adult.
- Growth happens in relationship, not in isolation.

The Adult Posture 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.

Same foundation. Different stages.

ELEMENTARY

Approx. 6–11 years

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

Brain Development

Prefrontal cortex is developing.
Skills are emerging but inconsistent.

Primary Need

Belonging, competence, and guidance.

Adult's Primary Role

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

Student's Capacity

Developing awareness and skills.
Needs support to use tools.

What Co-Regulation Looks Like

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

Language That Helps

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

Common Pitfalls

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

The Ultimate Goal

Develop self-regulation skills through supported practice.



The Developmental Progression

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The Adult Posture 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.

Relationships build resilient futures.

ADOLESCENCE

Approx. 12–18 years

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

Brain Development

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

Primary Need

Respect, autonomy, identity, and meaningful connection.

Adult's Primary Role

Collaborator and mentor. Partner while preserving dignity and autonomy.

Student's Capacity

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

What Co-Regulation Looks Like

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

Language That Helps

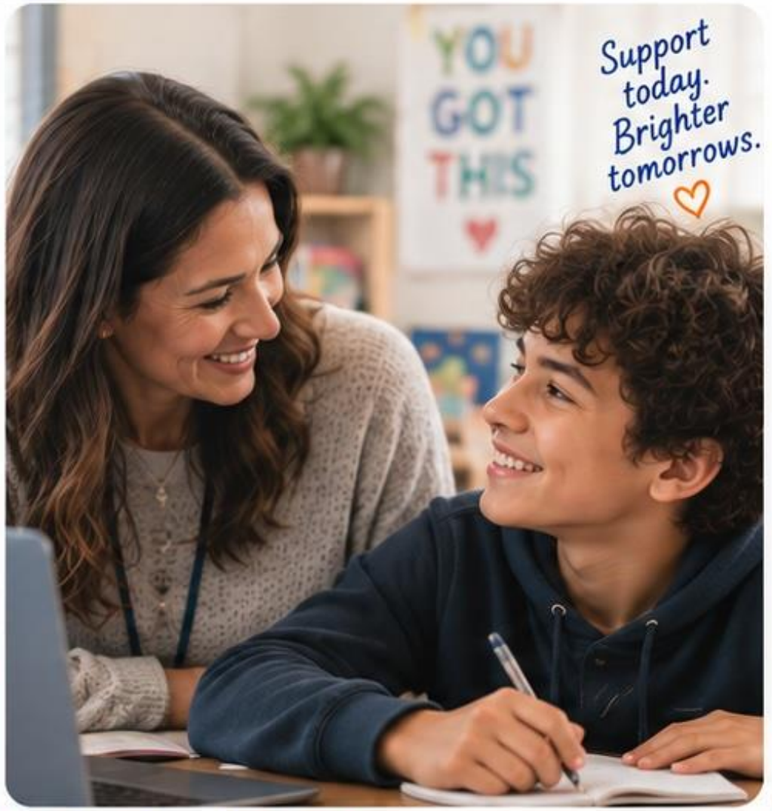
- "What do you think happened?"
- "How can I support you?"
- "What are your options?"
- "I trust you to make good choices."

Common Pitfalls

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

The Ultimate Goal

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



The Developmental Progression

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TIER 1: Universal Practices

The goal is to proactively support the nervous system before dysregulation occurs.



Support today.
Stronger tomorrows.

1



Predictable Routines

Consistency helps decrease anxiety. This includes morning meetings, daily check-in slides, and clearly posted visual schedules.

2



Safe Break Spaces

Non-punitive areas, such as “cozy corners” or “Focus Zones,” equipped with sensory tools like weighted pads or noise-reducing headphones where students can voluntarily go to settle their nervous systems.

3



Somatic Practices

Integrate movement and breathing exercises into the regular school day. Examples include finger tracing, box breathing, or scheduled movement breaks.

4



Check-In Tools

Use non-verbal methods, such as “Feeling Check-In” posters or the Zones of Regulation framework, to help students identify and name their emotional states.

5



Co-regulation Language

Explicitly teach and use supportive phrases such as, “Let’s take a breath together,” or “I’m staying right here while you have a hard time.”

TIER 2: Targeted Practices

The goal is to help students, who require additional support, in managing their emotions and building regulation skills beyond what is provided universally.



Targeted support today.
Greater confidence tomorrow.

1 Targeted Somatic Practices



Students might receive a little extra help during the week to practice specific calming strategies and build confidence in handling big feelings.

2 Strategic Scaffolding



Use pre-taught procedures for calming the brain, offering 2–3 specific choices (e.g., a two-minute stretch or using a quiet zone) to help students manage through a challenging moment without entering a power struggle.

3 Relational Coaching



During conflicts, use narrative coaching by talking through your own regulation process (e.g., "My body is getting tight; I'm going to take two breaths") to model the behaviour for the student in real time.

TIER 3: Intensive/Individualized Practices

The goal is to accompany students with complex needs with more highly individualized and often specialized supports.



More support today.
More possibilities tomorrow.

1

Individualized Regulation Plans

Often co-created with special education teachers and related service providers (e.g., OTs or SLPs) to address the specific sensory, communicative, or emotional roots of a student's behaviour.

2

Intensive Adult Presence

The adult provides full co-regulation, offering direct and consistent support because the child cannot yet regulate without active intervention.

3

Restorative Practices

When significant ruptures occur, the focus shifts to intensive repair and restorative conversations rather than punitive measures, helping the student re-establish safety and connection within the school community.

Student Preventive Action Plan

A proactive tool to support student success.

Identify needs
Understand triggers and challenges.

Plan ahead
Use proactive strategies and supports.

Promote success
Build safety, confidence, and independence.

www.cebm.ca

STUDENT ACTIVE PREVENTION/SAFETY PLAN (giving priority to prevention) – **in Elementary** TEMPLATE DOCUMENT

Student name: DOB:

School/Board: Grade Level: Homeroom Teacher:

Student's needs/challenges/triggers	Specific objectives* related to the needs/challenges/triggers	Best practices/approaches** related to the objectives	Selected tools/support measures related to the practices
Plan B for a difficult time or activity		**Plan B for a difficult day**	

* The objectives are meant to be anchored in the adult posture and the selected support measures to scaffold/compensate for the needs and challenges

** The practices are meant to be preventive/proactive rather than waiting for the problem to arise to intervene. The division of adult roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined

Prevent challenges. Build brighter days.

Same template. Greater possibilities.

Access the template here:
https://www.cebmmember.ca/tier-2-targeted-practices

Student Safety Plan

A proactive tool to support safety, regulation, and success.

Plan for success

Identify early signs and triggers.

Use proactive strategies

Support regulation before challenges escalate.

Keep it collaborative

Involve the student, family, and school team.

www.cebm.ca

STUDENT ACTIVE PREVENTION/SAFETY PLAN – in Elementary TEMPLATE DOCUMENT

Student name: DOB:

School/Board: Grade Level: Homeroom Teacher:

Student stress level	Observable signs	Adult posture and practices suggested	Adult posture and practices to avoid
When the student is regulated, **engaged**, and **receptive**			
When the student appears to be tense, **annoyed, or frustrated**			
When the student's stress response or frustration level is **activated and beginning to escalate**			
When the student's stress response has **fully escalated and** is disorganized. **No** longer receptive **towards the adult.**			
Post-intervention – following an acting-out episode			

Safety today. Brighter tomorrows.



Access the template here:
https://www.cebmmember.ca/tier-3-individualized-practices

Co-Regulation Is a Team Practice

CONSISTENT, COLLABORATIVE ADULTS CREATE GREATER SAFETY, REGULATION, AND SUCCESS.

Different roles. A shared goal.

When we work together, students feel safer, more regulated, and more supported.



Adults need to be on the same page regarding:

- What does this student need from us?
- What helps?
- What escalates the situation?
- What language are we using consistently?
- When should we step in?
- When should we step back?
- Who takes the lead?
- When should someone "tag out"?
- How do we communicate after an incident?

Same understanding. Stronger support. Better outcomes.

A Shared Ecosystem of Regulation

REGULATION IS EVERYONE'S JOB.

Families

The first and most enduring co-regulators. Co-architects of the ecosystem, not just an audience.

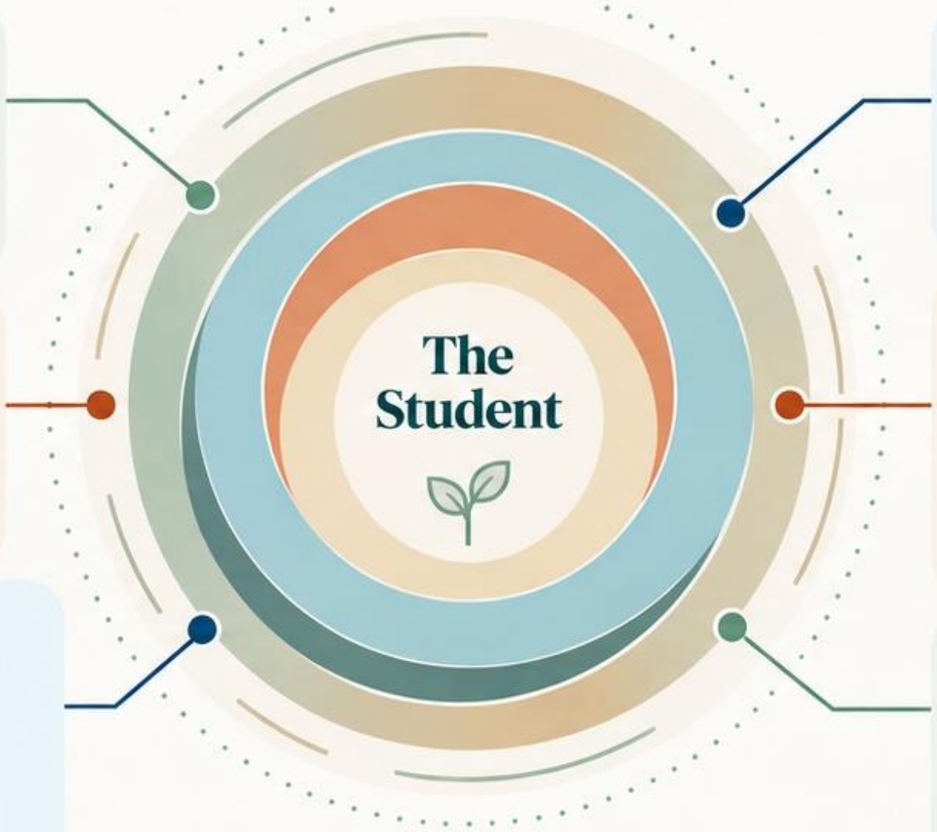
Administrators

Lead through modeling. Their response to adult stress sets the trauma-informed culture.

Other Key School Staff

(e.g., Office Staff, Custodians, Bus Drivers, Cafeteria Staff)

Ensure safety and consistency in less structured settings, extending the ecosystem beyond the classroom.



Teachers and Specialists

Set the emotional tone through routine, clarity, and relational consistency.

Special Ed & Providers (SLPs/OTs)

Embed individualized regulation tools and illuminate the sensory/communicative roots of behavior.

Support Staff

Offer daily continuity. Their proximity provides stabilizing support when it matters most.