



Emotional Regulation

@characterstrong



Darian Jones, Ph.D

 **Program Implementation Specialist**

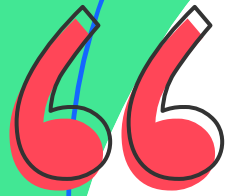


Rachelle Finck

 **Director of School Support**

Resourcing and Settling Practice





You can't teach a drowning child to swim while they're drowning. And yet every day, we expect dysregulated students to learn without first helping them breathe.



 **Adapted Educator**



“

A child's behavior is a story—*not a problem*—and every story needs a calm, curious reader.

 **Lori Desautels**

”



Session Outcomes

- Understand why emotional regulation matters more than ever
- Clarify what emotional regulation really is
- Learn 7 practical strategies to apply in your school
- Reflect on how adult regulation influences student behavior

From the Body, Not Just the Brain

~ Resmaa Menakem

Emotional regulation is not about compliance—
It's about helping students (and adults) *feel safe in
their own bodies again.*

What rituals, rhythms, or spaces help your school
move from reaction to regulation?

**“When it comes to
emotional regulation in
your school, which feels
most true right now?”**



Avoiding



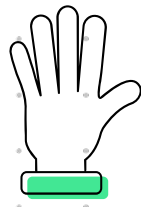
Drowning



Trying



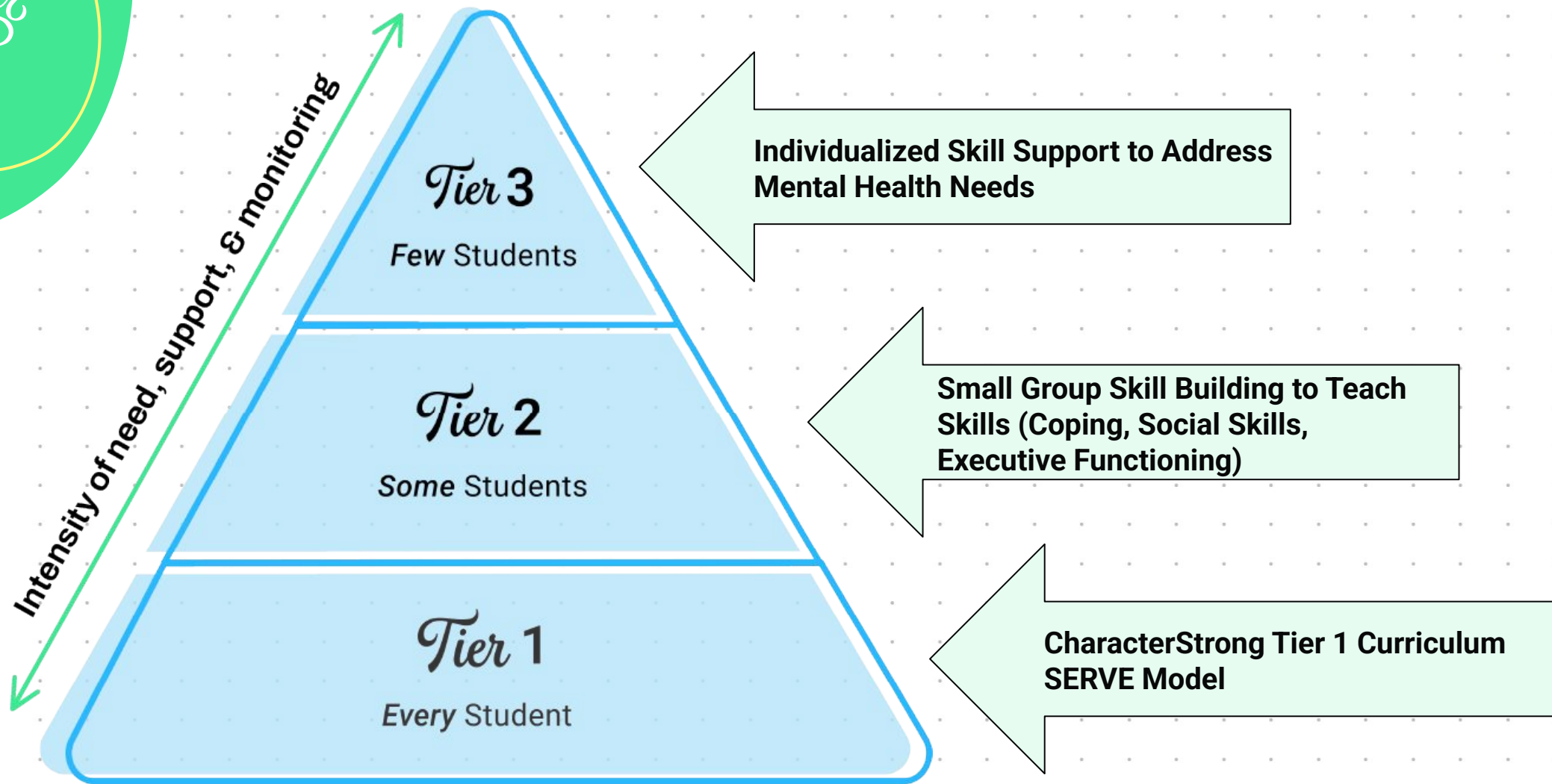
Beginning



Thriving

Temperature

Check



Well-Being & Skills

“In 2023, 42% of high school students reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and over 29% said their mental health was poor most or all of the time.”

— CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey

“In 2023, 1 in 4 elementary school teachers reported daily disruptions due to student dysregulation—and 3 out of 5 said they feel unprepared to respond in the moment.”

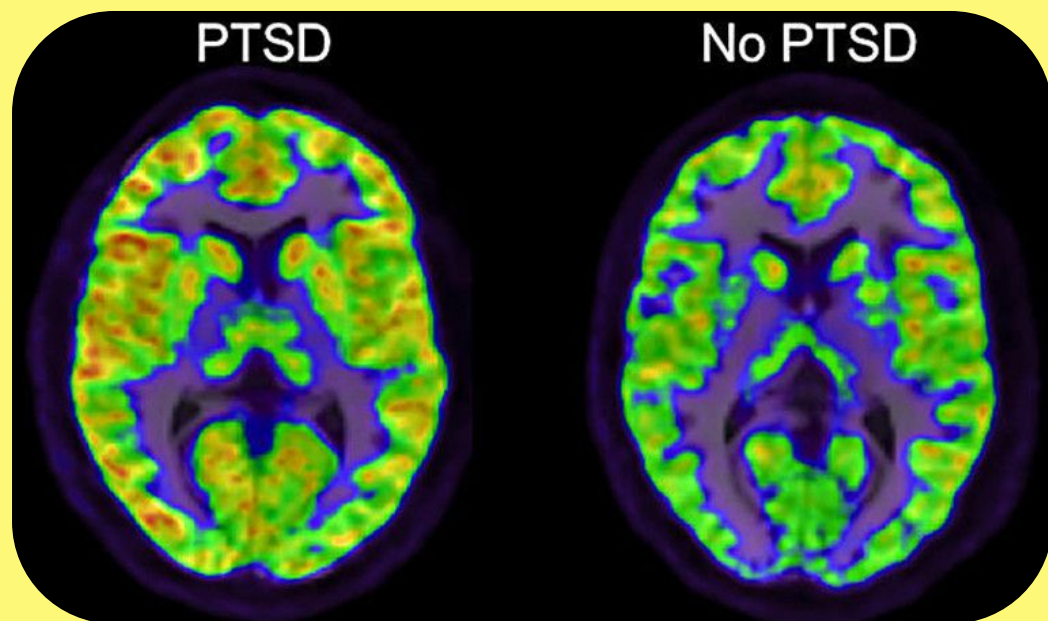
— National Education Association & EAB Teacher Wellbeing Survey

Guiding the Storm: Emotional Regulation in a Dysregulated World

Icebreaker: Pick Your Storm

Which one describes you when you're dysregulated?

- ☐ **Quiet Withdrawer** – Shuts down, pulls away, and avoids conflict or connection.
- ☐ **Big Exploder** – Reacts loudly and immediately, often with strong emotion or anger.
- ☐ **Fast Fixer** – Rushes to smooth things over quickly, often to avoid discomfort.
- ☐ **Bottled-Up Slow Burner** – Holds it in until it builds up and eventually boils over.



*Students with a background of trauma need **neutralizing** routines.*

“Trauma is not what happens to you. Trauma is what happens inside your body as a result of what happens to you.”

Emotional regulation **must be somatic**, not just cognitive. Regulation **rituals, check-ins, and emotional rehearsals** aren't just SEL fluff—they're **nervous system healing practices**.

 Resmaa Menakem

Why?



What?



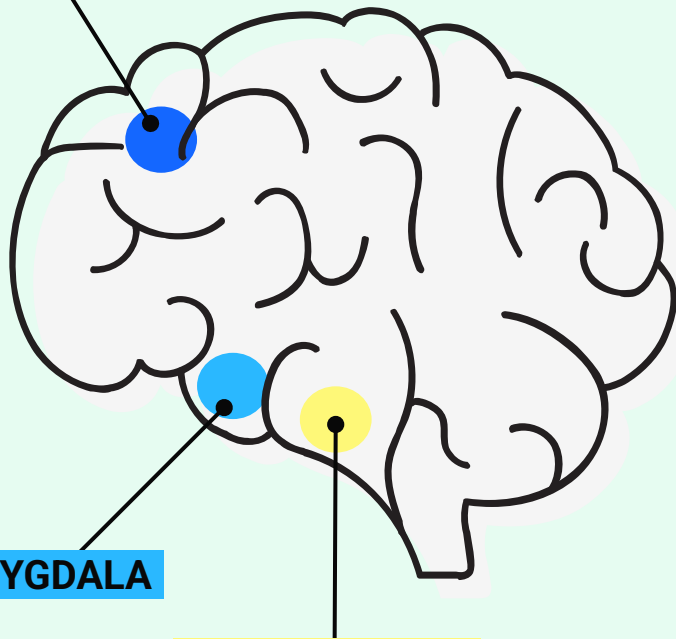
How?

The **Why**

PREFRONTAL CORTEX

AMYGDALA

HIPPOCAMPUS



Understanding the Brain in Dysregulation

When the body is dysregulated, the thinking brain goes offline. We can't expect logic from a brain that's fighting to survive.



Key Brain Regions in Stress Response

Prefrontal Cortex (PFC)



"The Thinking Brain"

Role: Decision-making, impulse control, empathy, reflection.

Status during stress:
Offline during dysregulation.

Amygdala



"The Alarm System"

Role: Detects threats, triggers fight/flight/freeze.

Status during stress:
Overactive during stress.

Hippocampus



"The Memory Translator"

Role: Links experiences to memory, helps make sense of situations.

Status during stress:
Disrupted under trauma.

Prefrontal
Cortex



Color-Coded Brain Regions

Amygdala

Activated during stress

Functional label: "Fight or Flight,
Freeze, or Fawn"

Prefrontal Cortex

Needs calm to work effectively

Functional label: "Calm + Focus"

Hippocampus

Bridge between thought and
emotion

Functional label: "Emotional
Memory"

Dr. Dan Siegel's "Hand Brain Model"

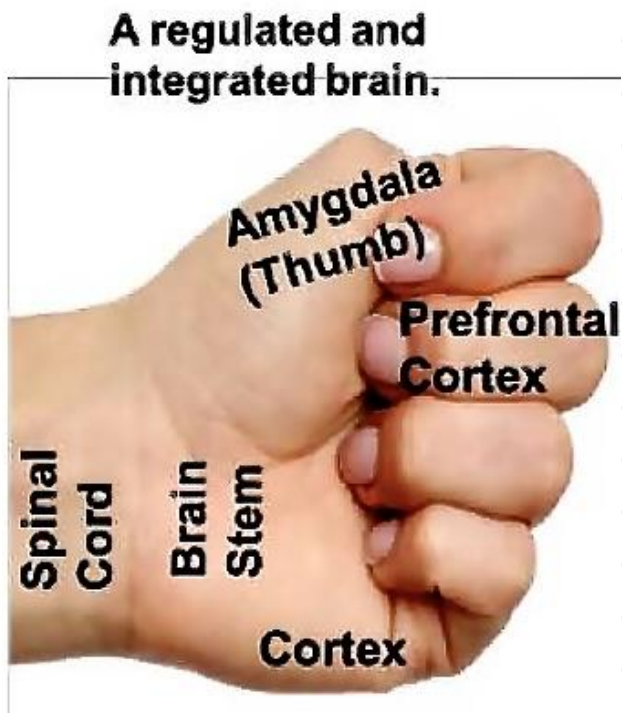


The Hand-Brain Model

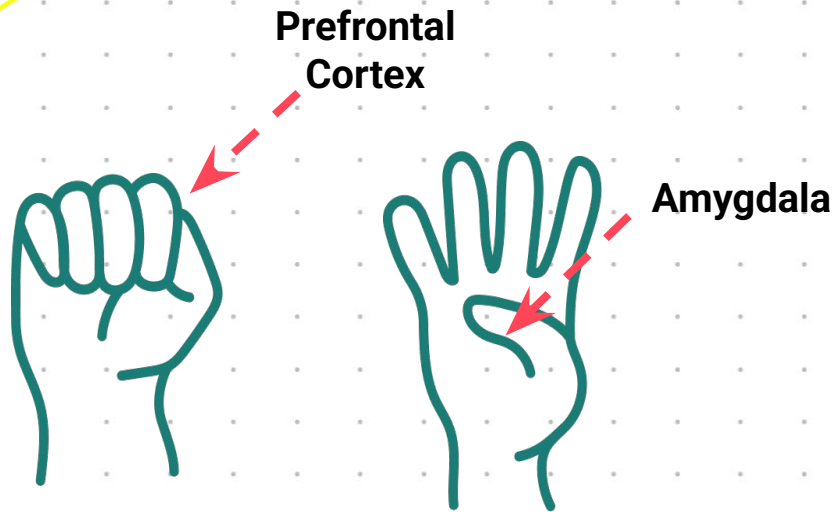
Used by Resmaa and many trauma educators for live demonstrations

- Curl your thumb in and wrap fingers over it
- Fingers = Prefrontal Cortex
- Thumb = Amygdala
- Palm = Brainstem

Great for visual, somatic learners and can be done in groups.



"Flipping Your Lid" Demonstration



When We "Flip Our Lid"

Open hand = "flipping your lid"

- PFC goes offline
- Amygdala takes over
- Rational thinking becomes difficult
- Survival responses dominate

When the body is dysregulated, the thinking brain goes offline. We can't expect logic from a brain that's fighting to survive.

The Brain Under Stress

Threat Detected

Amygdala identifies potential danger in the environment

Alarm Activated

Amygdala becomes overactive, triggering stress response

PFC Shutdown

Prefrontal Cortex goes offline during dysregulation

Memory Disruption

Hippocampus function becomes disrupted under trauma

Brain Functions: Normal vs. Dysregulated States

Brain Region	Normal State	Dysregulated State
Prefrontal Cortex (PFC)	Decision-making, impulse control, empathy, reflection	Offline, unable to perform executive functions
Amygdala	Normal threat detection and response	Overactive, triggering fight/flight/freeze/fawn responses
Hippocampus	Links experiences to memory, helps make sense of situations	Disrupted, difficulty processing and storing memories

Practical Applications

For Educators

Use the hand-brain model to help students understand their emotional responses

Recognize when students are dysregulated and need calming before learning

For Therapists

Explain brain function to clients to normalize stress responses

Use color-coded brain illustrations to make concepts accessible

For Self-Regulation

Recognize your own "lid-flipping" moments

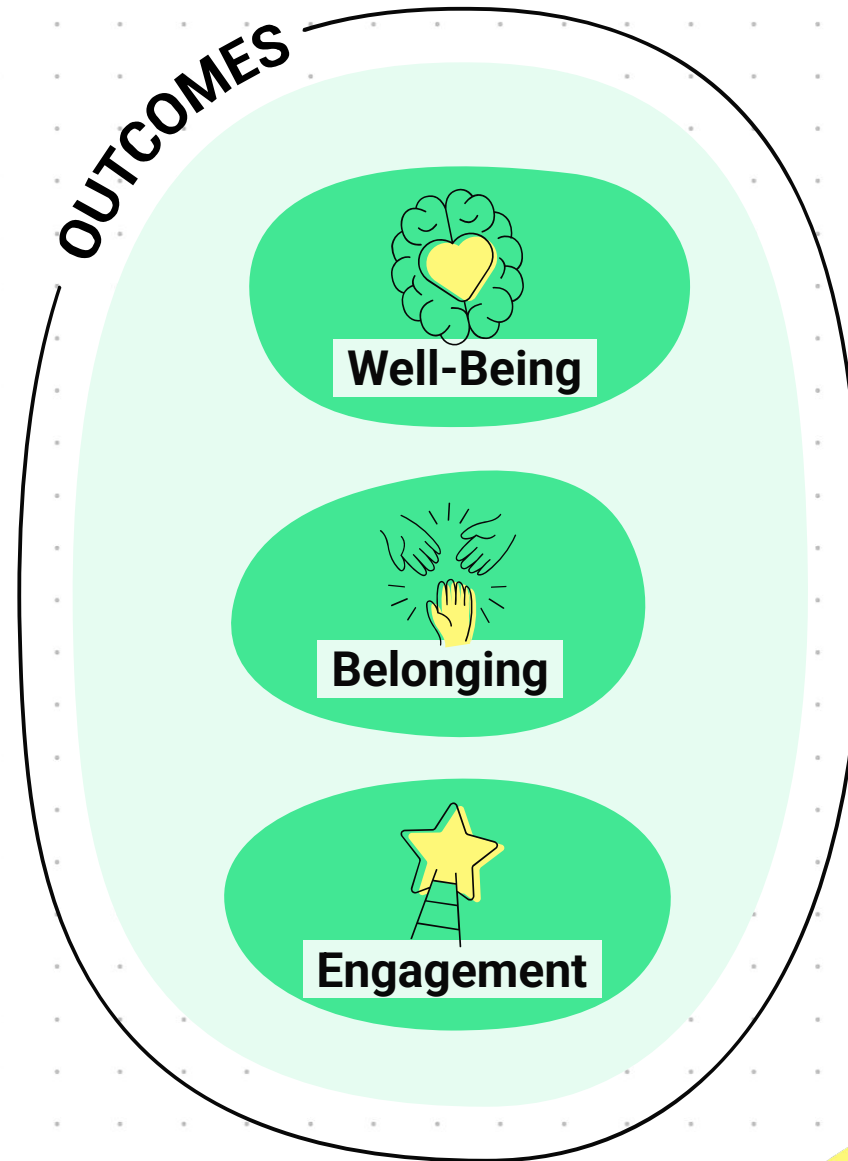
Practice techniques to calm the amygdala and bring the PFC back online

"When the body is dysregulated, the thinking brain goes offline. We can't expect logic from a brain that's fighting to survive."



Many Educators Feel Outmatched to Address
Student Behavior & Mental Health

Good things happen
when these **3 outcomes**
are in place for
educators and students





Nurturing & Predictable Environments: “Students thrive within nurturing and predictable environments. However, it is hard to cultivate nurturing & predictable environments when the adults aren’t doing well.”

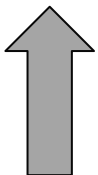


Promote Psychological Safety



“Psychological Safety occurs when there is trust between individuals in an organization and reflects the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up or admitting mistakes.”

— Dr. Amy Edmonson

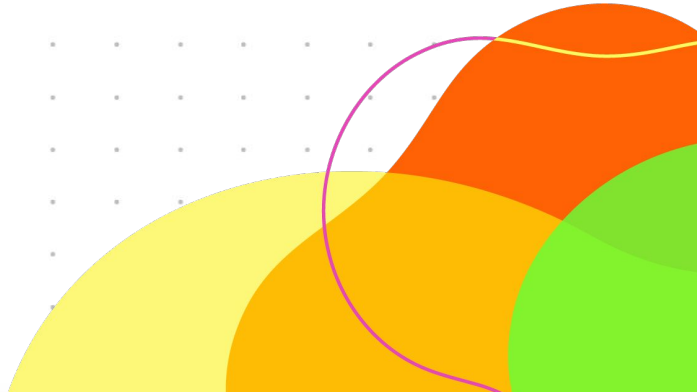


Belonging

Collaboration

Learning & Improvement

WHY: The Post-Pandemic Landscape

- We're in the most dysregulated moment in recent history
 - Pandemic > Social disconnection > Academic gaps > Emotional instability
 - Staff burnout, rising behaviors, safety concerns
- 
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Why: A Snapshot



73% of educators say student emotional dysregulation is at an all-time high.

— *National Education Association, 2023*



29% of students said their mental health was poor most or all of the time during the school year.

— *CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2023*



Over 50% of elementary teachers report daily behavior disruptions due to dysregulation.

— *EAB Teacher Wellbeing Survey, 2023*



1 in 3 teachers say student behavior is the top reason they've considered leaving the profession.

— *RAND Corporation, 2022*



Why: A Snapshot 2.0



Discipline referrals for K–5 students have increased by over 25% in many districts post-pandemic.

– *Learning Policy Institute, 2022*



Only 17% of districts report having a comprehensive SEL or regulation plan implemented with fidelity.

– *CASEL State of SEL Report, 2023*



7.14 million students attend a school with a police officer but no school psychologist, nurse, or social worker.

– *ACLU “Cops and No Counselors” Report, 2021*



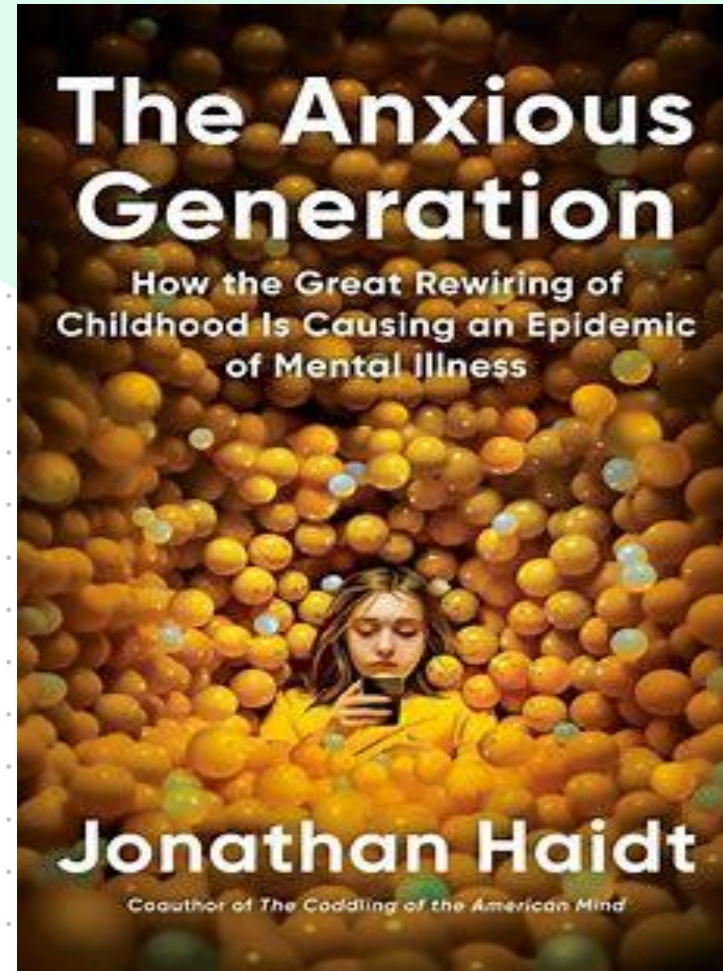
Play-Based Childhood vs. Phone-Based Childhood

Discover mode – Behavior Activation System (BAS) – Detect Opportunities

- Independent thinking
- Excitement for opportunities
- Growth-mindset

Defend mode – Behavior Inhibition System (BIS) – Detect Threats

- Anxiety
- Defensiveness
- Scarcity mindset



Why Emotional Regulation Matters

“Emotional regulation is not a soft skill—it’s a survival skill. Without it, the brain cannot access learning, problem-solving, or relationship-building.”

— Dr. Bruce Perry, neuroscientist and trauma expert

“A regulated nervous system is the foundation for executive functioning, attention, and memory—skills necessary for academic success.”

— Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University

In the bottom right corner, there are several overlapping organic shapes in shades of orange, yellow, and green, adding a decorative touch to the slide.






Turn & Talk

**What stood out to you most from
the data or quote—and why?**

**What are the implications for your
role, your team, or your classroom
this upcoming year?**



The What

WHAT: Defining Emotional Regulation

Recognizing + Understanding + Managing Emotions

Recognize: "I feel off"

Understand: "This is frustration"

Manage: "I can take a breath before I respond"

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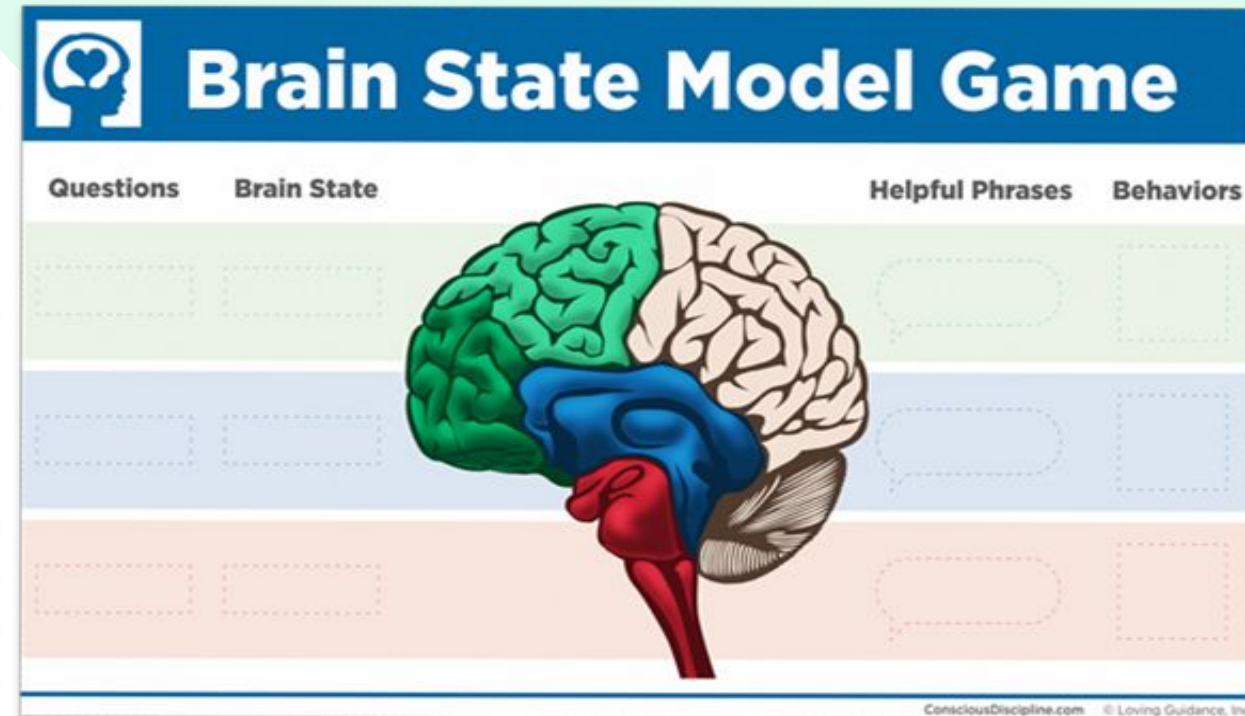
The Brain Behind It

Three Brain States:

Survival Brain (Red): Fight, Flight, Freeze

Emotional Brain (Yellow): React, Feel

Thinking Brain (Green): Reflect, Solve



Adult Behavior Drives Student Behavior

You can't teach regulation from dysregulation

Regulated adults help regulate students

Modeling > Managing



The How



The Strategies

Healing must be communal.

~ Resmaa Menakem

Strategy 1: Co-Regulation First (K–12)

Calm is contagious

**Sit beside, mirror tone,
breathe together**

Strategy 3: The 90-Second Rule (6–12)

**Emotions last ~90
seconds chemically**

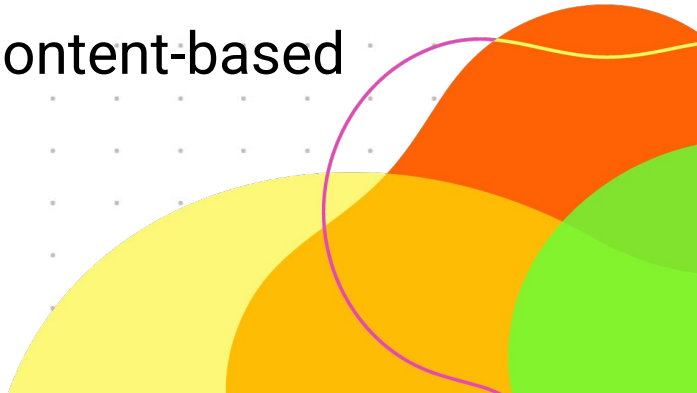
Teach pause, breath, wait

Strategy 4: Regulation Corners or Calm Kits (K–5)

**Visual cues, stress
tools, soft seating**

**Normalize: It's a tool, not
punishment**

Strategy 5: Emotional Rehearsals (Grades 6–12)

- Use “**What if...**” **scenarios** to help students practice responses *before* the heat of the moment
 - Normalize emotional curveballs as part of life, not personal failures
 - Build student scripts and confidence to respond—not just react
 - Make it routine: advisory circles, SEL check-ins, or content-based discussion
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Strategy 6: Storytelling for Emotional Literacy (K–5)

- **Books like *The Invisible Boy***

Prompt: “When have you ever felt unseen like Brian?”

- **Books like *My Many Colored Days***

Pause: “What color is your day today? Why?”

- **Books like *Listening with My Heart***

Prompt: “What would it sound like if the character spoke kindly to themselves?”

Pause & Predict: “How do they feel now?” → before turning the page

Emoji Sorting: Match emoji cards to characters at different plot points

Rewrite the Ending: “How might the story change if someone used PRD?”

Role Play Freeze Frames: Act out scenes and freeze to discuss feelings

Draw & Share: Illustrate the character’s heart at the beginning vs. end



Regulation & Discipline

Reframe discipline from punishment to a learning experience

Every behavior is communication—respond with skill, not reaction

Regulation is the foundation for accountability, not a replacement for it





Turn & Talk

Staff Self-Regulation: Mirror Moments

**What do students see when you're
stressed?**

Who do you become?

A yellow squiggle, resembling a stylized 'Z' or a series of connected loops, is located at the bottom left of the central grey area.

Your Next Move...

What is one specific regulation skill your students or staff are missing—and what will you do differently to help build it?

Where in your daily or weekly schedule can you intentionally build in space for emotional regulation—starting next week?



“If you do what you’ve always done, your students will get what they’ve always gotten. What will they feel tomorrow that they didn’t feel today?”

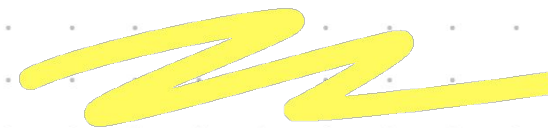


Final Charge:
Be the Calm,
Be the Constant

“You can’t calm the storm, so stop trying. What you can do is calm yourself. The storm will pass.”
—Timber Hawkeye

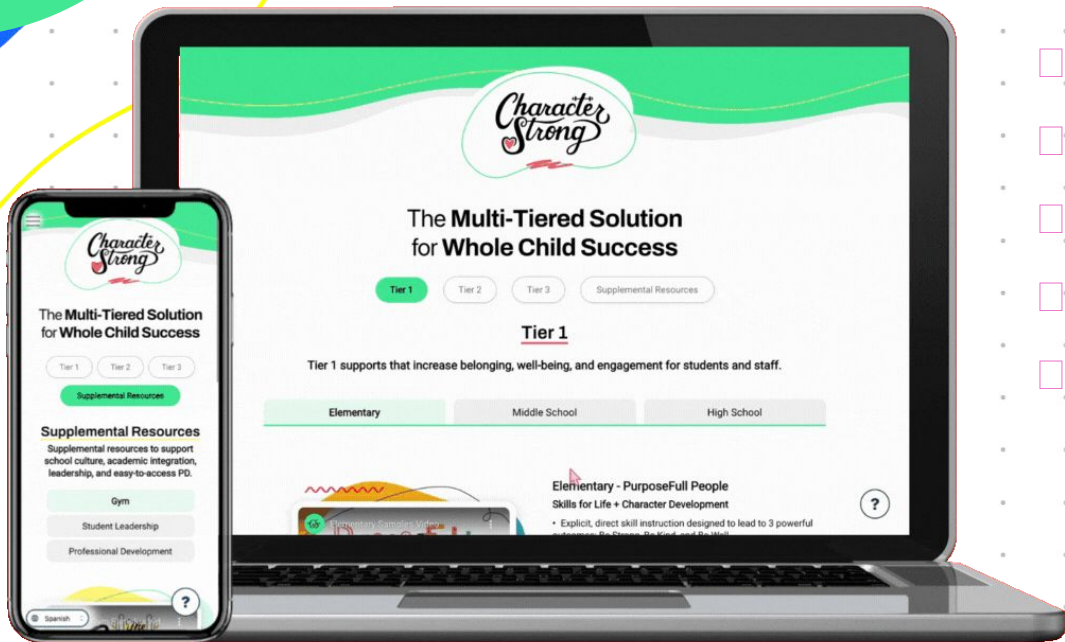


60 Second Feedback





Tier 1 Curriculum



- PreK - 12th Grade Vertically Aligned Curriculum
- Designed by Educators for Educators
- Every lesson is unique and does not repeat
- Research-Based Lessons
- Plug and Play Resources

Scan to
Learn More



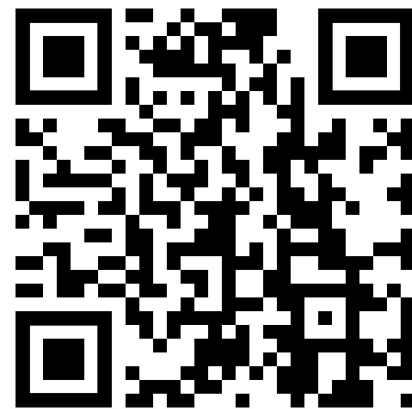
Tier 2 Solution

Tier 2

- Elementary, Middle, or High School Level Curricula
- 6 Evidence-Based Interventions
- Screening and Intervention Matching Tool
- Progress Monitoring and Intervention Fidelity Tools
- Monthly Professional Learning & Coaching Access
- Library of On Demand Training and Resources



Scan to Learn More:



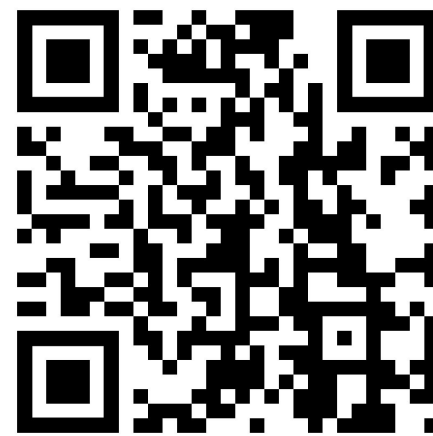
Tier 3 Solution

Tier 3



- Elementary, Middle, or High School Level Curricula
- 6 Evidence-Based Interventions
- Screening and Intervention Matching Tool
- Progress Monitoring and Intervention Fidelity Tools
- Monthly Professional Learning & Coaching Access
- Library of On Demand Training and Resources

Scan to
Learn More:



Character Strong

Brain and Behavior Training



When and Where?

Creating a Culture of Academic Engagement and Effective Classroom Management

A 1-day training on our research-backed instructional framework to equip educators with easy-to-use tools that impact student behavior and school culture.

