

# Emotional Regulation: Are We Truly Processing Emotions or Just Managing Them?



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# Michelle Fehlman

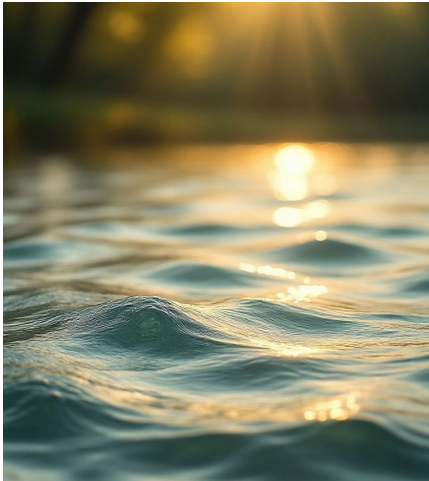
- Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist
- Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor
- 15 years in school setting
- Certified Health and Wellness Coach



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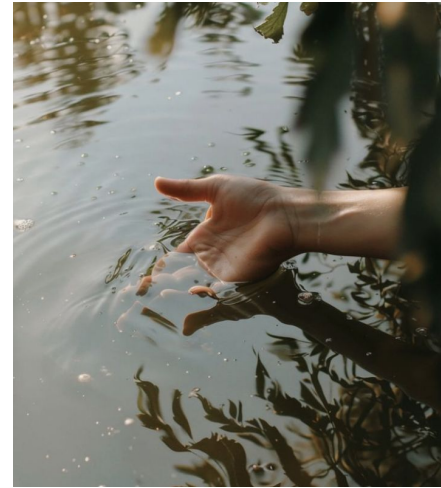
# Let's Check-in



**Calms the  
nervous system**



**Increases  
self-awareness**



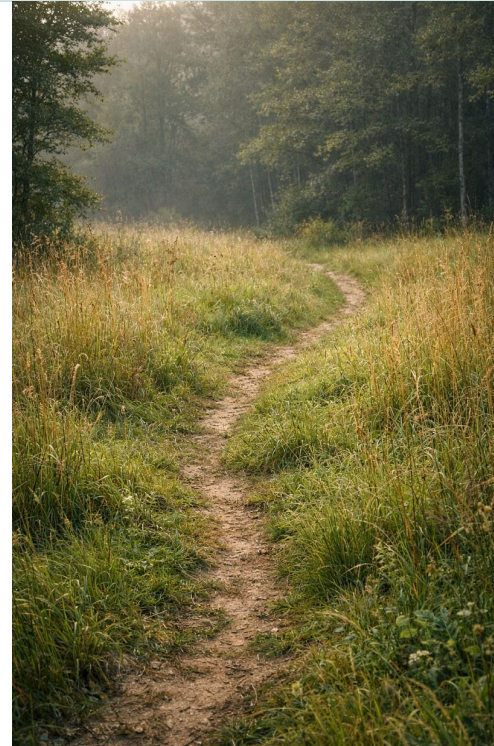
**More of you is present  
for connection**

**Who's in the room with us today?**

# Objectives

*By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:*

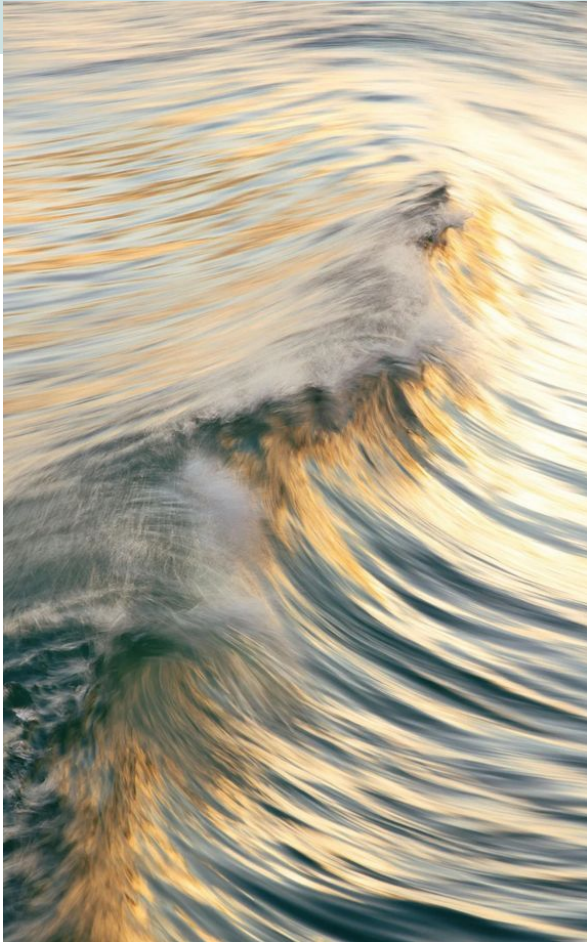
- Differentiate coping, regulation, and emotional processing through the three C's
- Apply the EPI framework in real moments
- Use presence and body awareness to support regulation



# The Reality

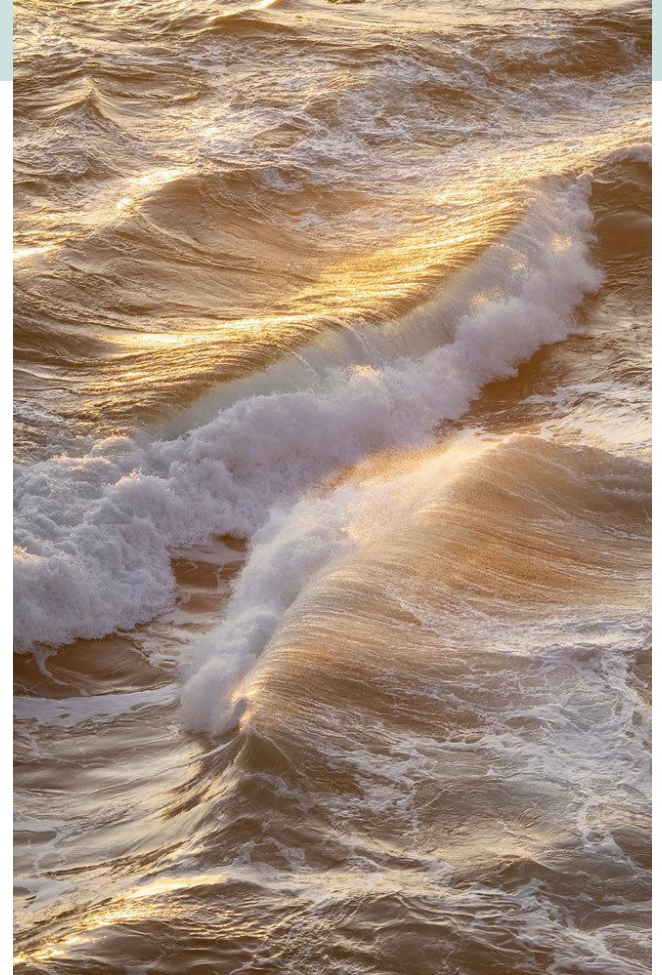
**We are working inside a rising tide of dysregulation**

- Fight, flight, freeze before the day begins
- Nervous systems carrying more than students can name
- Overwhelm disguised as defiance, avoidance, or collapse
- Schools restoring order while students seek safety
- Counselors as the emotional front line - often without time, support or guidance



# The Work No One Sees

- Holding emotional intensity
- Regulating multiple nervous systems (your own counts!)
- Making (millions of) decisions under pressure
- Doing this without pause



**Are we truly helping students process emotions . . .  
or just manage them enough to get through the day?**

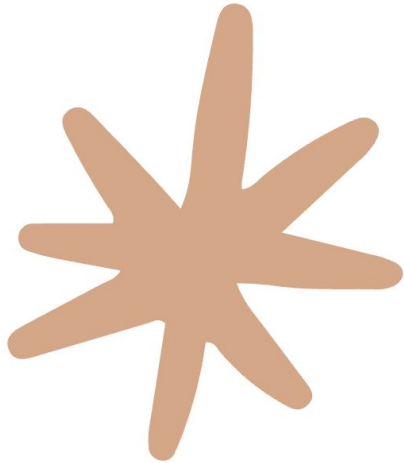
What's the **good news?**

*There is **nothing** for us to fix*

*When we try to fix feelings, **we bypass them.***

# Emotional Survival Strategies - 4 Cs

**Constrict**



**Control**



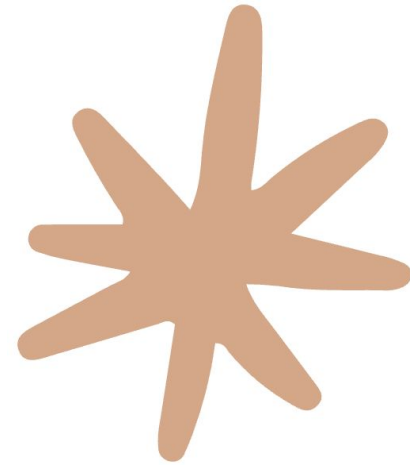
**Contain**



# Emotional Survival Strategies - 4 Cs

## Constrict

- Chronic holding of emotions
- No where for emotional energy to go
- Creates system dysregulation
- Increases internal pressure/anxiety



**Examples:** *jaw clenching, shoulder tightness, holding breath, etc.*

# Emotional Survival Strategies - 4 Cs

## Control

- Managed rather than lived
- Interferes with presence
- Disrupts relational connection
- Prioritizes performance/  
acceptance over authenticity



**Examples:** *masking, auto-pilot, relational distancing, toxic positivity*

# Emotional Survival Strategies - 4 Cs

## Contain

- Adaptive, Temporary
- Protective pause
- Self-support
- Not a permanent strategy



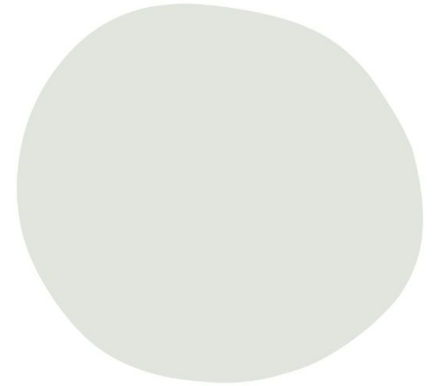
**Examples:** traditional “coping skills” - *distraction, breathing, etc.*

**Is there another way?**

# The Missing Phase

## Completion

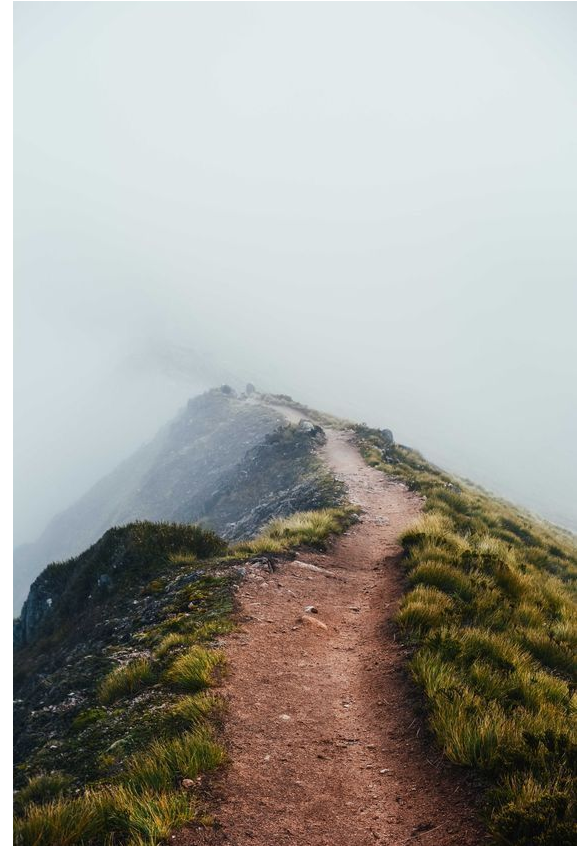
- The natural end of an emotional response
- When the body receives the message: "It's over now"
- A return to baseline regulation, not heightened expression



Healing happens when the body is allowed to finish what it started

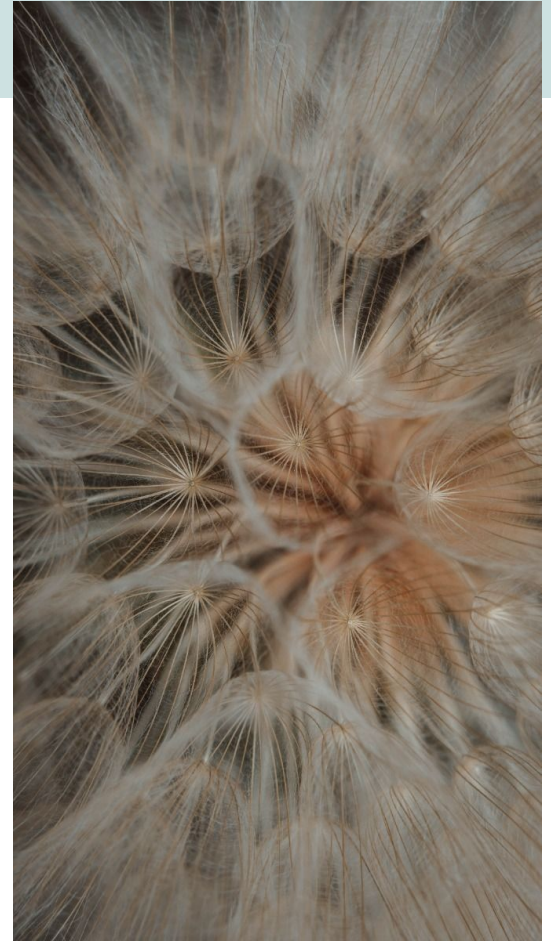
# Why Getting to Completion *Might* Feel Hard

- Fear of time
- Fear of losing control
- Fear of “making it worse”
- Fear of opening something we can't contain



# What Completion *Looks* Like

- Sighs, yawns, tears
- Shoulders dropping
- Breath deepening
- Softer eye contact
- Spontaneous grounding





Emotional expression is not meant to **linger unfinished** in the body. It is meant to **move**, to be **felt, expressed** and **completed**.



# EPI: Experiential Process & Integration

“EPI is a relational, embodied, experiential approach that helps students **reconnect with themselves, understand internal signals, and integrate overwhelming experiences in a safe relationship.**”

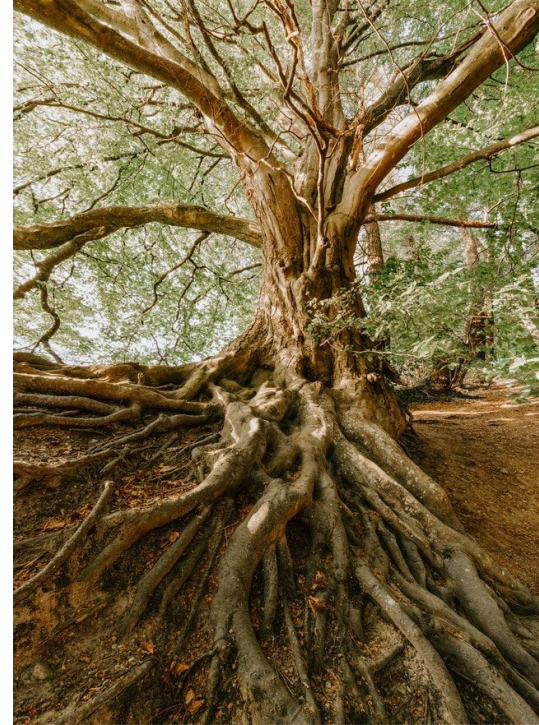
- Emotion is experienced in the body
- Healing happens in connection
- Completion happens through presence, not pressure

*EPI is organically trauma-informed care*



# How EPI is Different *(and why it works in schools)*

- Less talking **about** emotions
- More noticing **what's happening now**
- Small moments of **completion**, not **deep processing**
- Works in **minutes**, not **sessions**





*EPI is not therapy in a school setting. It's a posture and a set of **micro-interventions**.*

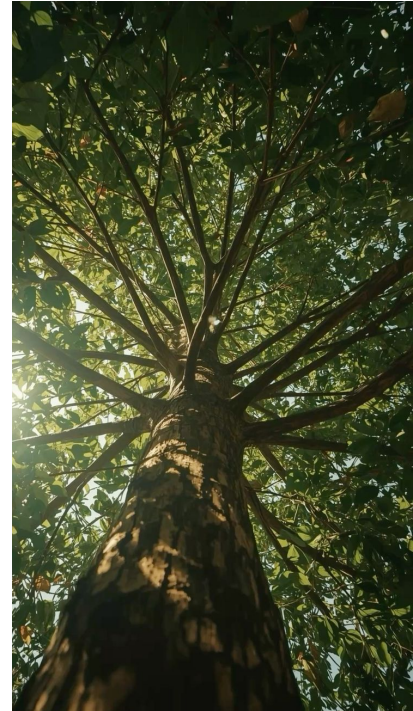


# The EPI Posture (*how you show up*)

EPI starts with how the counselor is present.

- Curious, not corrective
- Slow enough to notice the body
- Self-regulated
- Allowing emotion without pushing it

*“Your nervous system is the primary intervention.”*



# The EPI Flow

Experiential → Process → Integration

- *Slow down*
- **Notice**
- *Create safety*
- **Name**

- **Stay**
- *Allow*
- *Don't rush*

- *Finding Meaning*
- *Understanding*
- *Completion*
- **Integrate**

# The EPI Flow

## E - Experiential Awareness

### *Helping students notice what's happening inside*

Slowing down to help students check in with themselves

Building awareness of body sensations, emotions, stress signals

Creating safety through calm, consistent adult presence

Letting the student have the experience



# The EPI Flow

## E - Experiential Awareness

### Counselor Language:

- "What are you noticing in your body right now?"
- "Can you tell where you feel that?"
- "You're safe here. Let's take a moment and notice."



# The EPI Flow

## P - Processing

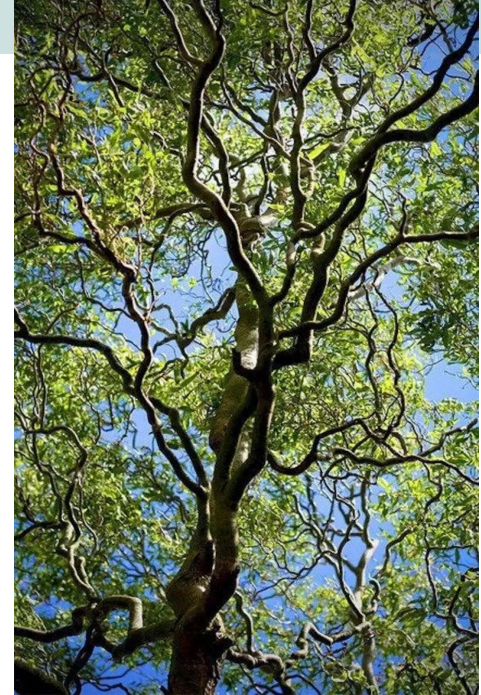
### *Staying with feelings instead of pushing them away*

Helping students stay with what they're feeling

Allowing appropriate expression (movement, tears, words, breath)

Reducing pressure to "fix it" or "move on" too quickly

Letting it take its full form rather than cutting it off

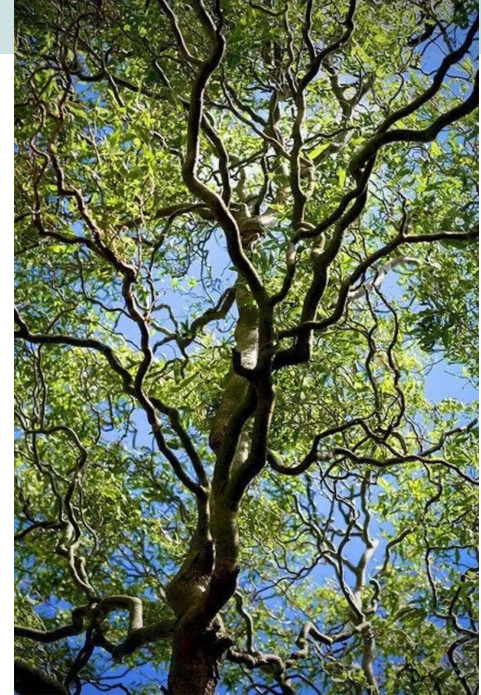


# The EPI Flow

## P - Processing

### Counselor Stance:

- Calm and regulated
- Curious and non-judgmental
- Emotionally attuned
- Patient and steady



# The EPI Flow

## I - Integration & Understanding

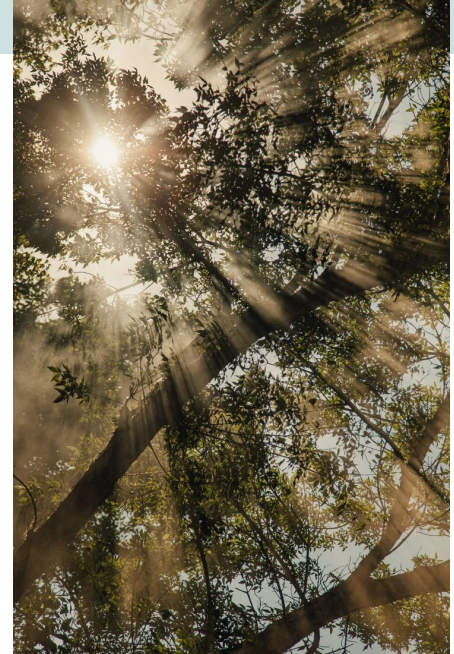
### ***Helping students make sense of their experience***

Naming emotions and patterns

Supporting insight and self-understanding

Helping students notice shifts and learn from experience

Fullness/Completeness - full cycle

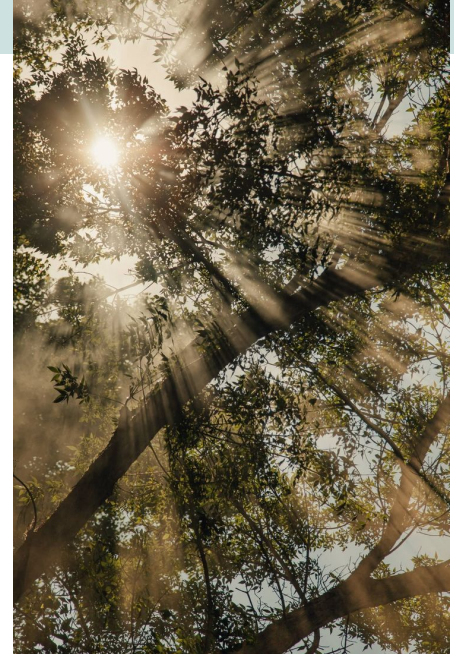


# The EPI Flow

## I - Integration & Understanding

### Counselor Language:

- “What feels different now compared to before?”
- “What did you learn about yourself just now?”
- “What might help next time you feel this way?”



# The EPI Cycle

1. **Notice** – “What’s happening right now?”
2. **Name** – Body sensations before story
3. **Stay** – Long enough for a shift
4. **Integrate** – Orient back to safety

# Putting EPI into Practice

Words are our  
superpower

## The EPI Cycle - *Putting it into Practice*

### 1. NOTICE

**"What's happening right now?"** - *Bringing attention to the present moment*

- "Let's pause for just a second - what's happening in your body?"
- "As you sit here with me, what are you noticing?"
- "What feels loudest in this moment?"
- "If we slow this down just a little, what do you notice first?"
- "What's your body doing right now?"

**Purpose:** Shift from narrative → present-moment awareness.

### 2. NAME

**Body sensations before the story** - *Gently moving out of explanation and into the body*

- "Where do you feel that in your body?"
- "Is it tight, heavy, buzzy, warm, or something else?"
- "If that feeling had a shape or texture, what would it be like?"
- "Does it feel more inside your chest, your stomach, or somewhere else?"
- "Can we just name the sensation without explaining it?"

**Purpose:** Help the nervous system organize sensation without activating cognition.

### 3. STAY

**Long enough for a shift** - *This is the completion window*

- "Let's stay with that for just a few more seconds."
- "You don't have to change it - just notice it."
- "I'm right here with you. We can go slowly."
- "See what happens if we give it a little space."
- "Just notice if it shifts, even a tiny bit."

**Purpose:** Allow the emotion to finish its natural arc without pushing or flooding.

### 4. INTEGRATE

**Orient back to safety** - *Helping the body register completion*

- "What do you notice now?"
- "Can you feel your feet on the floor for a moment?"
- "Take a look around and name one thing you see that feels okay."
- "Let's take one slow breath together."
- "Does anything feel even a little more settled?"

**Purpose:** Anchor the nervous system in *now* and re-establish regulation.



EPI supports **emotional regulation, resilience, and self-awareness** by helping students build a relationship with their internal experience - skills that directly support learning, behavior, and well-being.



# The Return to Connection

Students don't remember *interventions*; they remember how they felt in our *presence*



# Stay in Touch!

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# Stay Connected!

