



From Storm to C.A.L.M.: A Neuro-Affirming Co-Regulation Framework for ERMHS Professionals

2026 Riverside County SELPA
Mental Health Symposium

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The Reality of the Storm & Biology Over Behavior

The "Storm" is a physiological event, not a behavior. Traditional behavioral interventions—charts, rewards, and consequences—fail during a survival response. We must reframe our primary goal: **from seeking compliance to seeking stabilization.**

- **Polyvagal Theory & The Window of Tolerance:** Dysregulation is often a functional survival response to an environment that feels unsafe to a neurodivergent nervous system.
- **Brain States:** The Survival Brain (brain stem) takes over. The Social Brain (prefrontal cortex) goes completely offline.
- **Biological Reality:** "Talking it out" during a storm is impossible.

Reflection: Think of a recent high-acuity crisis where traditional behavioral tools failed. Write down what you saw, and how your own body felt in that moment. _____

Are You Reflecting the Room or Setting the Temperature?

In a high-acuity crisis, the practitioner's nervous system is the most powerful clinical tool available.

- **The Thermometer:** Reflects the temperature. Gets dysregulated because the student is dysregulated.
- **The Thermostat:** Sets the temperature. Remains the biological anchor in the room.

Partner Discussion: Share a recent moment when you felt like a thermometer. What does it take to shift back into being a thermostat?

The C.A.L.M. Framework & Relational Anchors

Co-regulation is a biological imperative: Humans cannot self-regulate until they have been effectively co-regulated.

The Shift: Move from asking "What are you doing?" to communicating "I am here with you."

C.A.L.M. Application Notes:

Step	ClinicalAction
Center	Center Yourself First. You cannot co-regulate if you are dysregulated.
Affirm	Affirm the Storm You See in Front of You. Acknowledge the reality of their state.
Lead	Lead with Calm and Connection. Conscious proximity,lowered vocal tone, and offering a "Nervous System Handshake" (a safe, non-threatening presence).
Meet	Meet the Pressing Need. Provide the required sensory or environmental support.

Assessing the State & Lowering the Temperature

Look for micro-signs of **Hyper-Arousal** (Fight/Flight) or **Hypo-Arousal** (Shutdown/Freeze).

- **The Clinical Question:** Is this a 'can't' or a 'won't'?
- **Spoiler for ERMHS:** In the middle of the storm, it is almost always a 'can't.'
- **Sensory & Environment Leveling:** In a storm, the cognitive load must drop to *absolute zero*. Drastically reduce noise, light, and verbal input to signal safety to the survival brain.
- **Neuro-Affirming Accommodation:** Meet the nervous system exactly where it is in the moment, not where the IEP says it 'should' be.

Observation Notes: List physiological micro-cues you observe right before a student enters fight, flight, or freeze:

Presence & Co-Regulating the Co-Regulators

- **Embodying Regulation:** If the provider isn't regulated, the student cannot be.
- **The Truth Protocol:** Handle survival-based lying or aggression without taking it personally. Adopt the 'Not about me' mindset.
- **Anchoring the Adults:** Support exhausted teachers and school staff so they can remain C.A.L.M. in the storm. Help staff transition from reactive thermometers to classroom thermostats.

Partner Discussion: What is one practical way you can use the C.A.L.M. framework to support a dysregulated teacher this week? _____

Workshop: Entering “The Room”

Work in small groups to map the specific clinical steps onto the provided Tier 3 case study. Consider: What state are you assessing? What is your relational anchor? How are you modeling presence? What demands are you lowering?

Scenario A: The Freeze State

A student with a significant trauma history has entered a profound “freeze” state, shutting down completely, becoming non-verbal, and refusing to leave the corner of the room. _____

Scenario B: Hyper-Arousal Meltdown

A neurodivergent student is experiencing a full sensory meltdown, displaying hyper-arousal, pacing aggressively, and knocking over desks. _____

Post-Storm Recovery & Addressing the Realities

The Danger Zone: Moving too fast risks re-triggering the survival brain. Re-introduce cognitive demands slowly, only after biological safety is established.

Hierarchy: Biological Safety → Sensory Integration → Relational Engagement → Academic Demands

Navigating the "Yes, but...":

- Reconciling nervous-system-first approaches with strict legal compliance, IEP mandates, and severe time constraints.
 - Ensuring physical safety while avoiding punitive behavioral consequences.
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Implementation Notes (Integrating C.A.L.M. into your existing framework):

The Biological Anchor Challenge

You are not just a service provider; you are a biological anchor for the students and staff you serve. **The Challenge: Go back to your schools and be the Thermostat.**

Final Reflections & Key Takeaways:
