

SAVE THE DATE!

WIN *Fest* '26

**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2026
JUNCTION CITY HIGH SCHOOL**



**Behavior Is Communication:
Understanding Trauma in the Classroom**

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USD 475 Strategic Plan Connection

- **Goal 1:** Equitably support the academic learning all students.
- **Goal 2:** Equitably address the social emotional needs of all students.
- **Goal 3:** Create opportunities to enhance family and community engagement in an equitable manner that allows for participation for all.
- **Goal 4:** Develop a plan to recruit, retain, and support high quality staff that reflects our community.



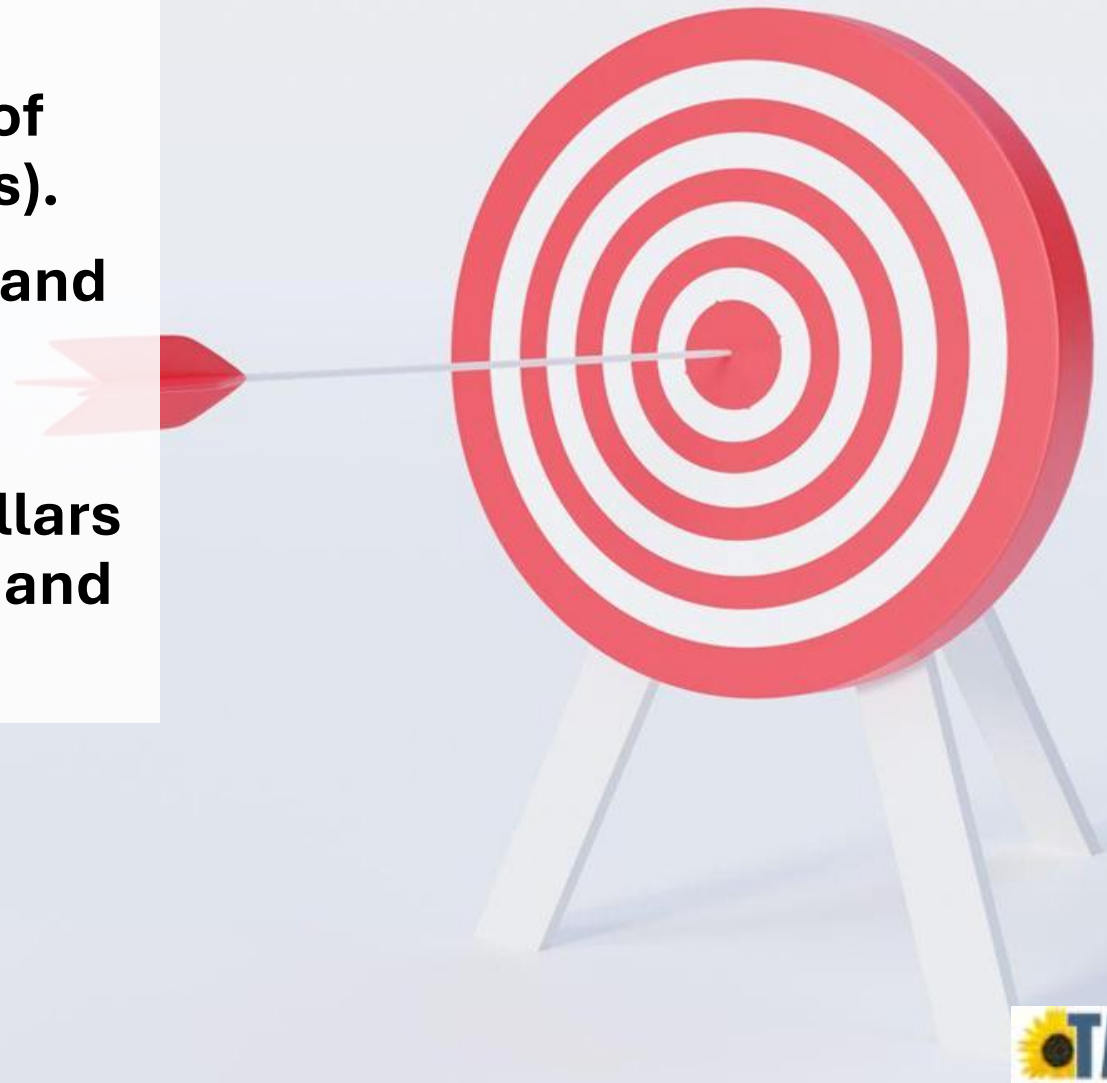
CHAMPS

- Conversations: Be respectful when engaging in conversations
- Help: Feel free to raise your hand if you have a question
- Activity: Engage in active listening
- Movement: Take care of your needs with minimal distractions
- Participate: Participate in activities and discussions
- Success: Strategies and success for all

Behavior Is Communication: Understanding Trauma in the Classroom

Learning Targets

- **Define the term “trauma”.**
- **Articulate the prevalence and nature of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).**
- **Describe the stress response system and how the brain responds to stress or a potential threat.**
- **Awareness and application of the 4 Pillars of Applied Educational Neuroscience and other Co-Regulation practices.**



A Definition of Trauma

Trauma refers to an **event**, series of events, or set of circumstances that is **experienced** by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has **lasting adverse effects**.^{9,10}

Traumatic *events* come in many forms, and range from one-time incidents, such as

- An accident
- A natural disaster
- Loss of a caregiver or peer
- Single experience of violence

to experiences that are chronic or even generational, such as

- Abuse
- Neglect
- Chronic bullying
- Exposure to caregiver or community violence
- Cumulative and historical impact of poverty, racism, or discrimination

Adverse Childhood Experiences^{47,48,49,*50}

Dr. Nadine Burke Harris

The CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study is one of the largest investigations to date on the relationship between childhood abuse and neglect to health and well-being in later-life.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

- Physical, emotional, sexual abuse
- Emotional and physical neglect
- Household substance abuse
- Household mental illness
- Domestic violence
- Parent separation or divorce
- Incarceration of a household member

ACEs are very common – almost two thirds of study participants reported at least one ACE, and one in five adults report having had three or more adverse experiences as children/youth.

There is a dose-response correlation – children/youth exposed to more adverse childhood experiences, have a greater risk for negative outcomes

Death

Conception



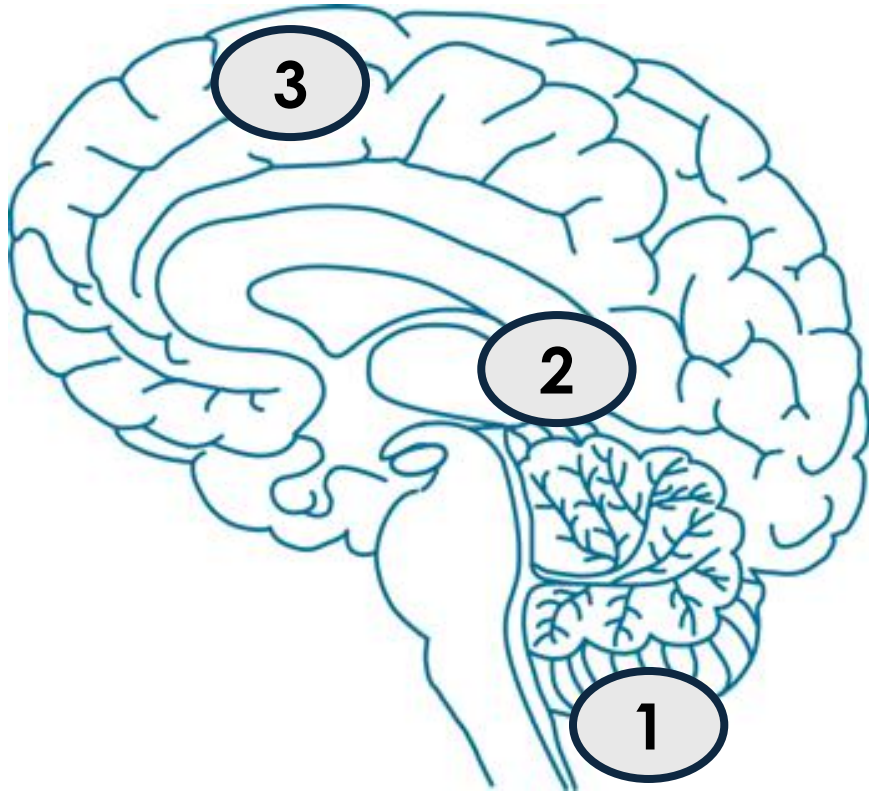
Brain Development

- The brain develops from the bottom up starting with the brainstem, then the limbic system, and finally the neocortex.
- Early childhood is the period of greatest growth.
- Early childhood through adolescence is a period of heightened brain plasticity.
- “We are sensing and feeling creatures who think.” – Dr. Lori Desautels



The Stress Response System

The brain has a built-in alarm system that is designed to detect potential threats and help the body respond quickly and effectively to keep us safe.^{52,53,54,55,56}



1. The **brainstem**, controls major systems needed to live and prepares the body systems for reaction to a threatening situation.
2. The **limbic system**, the emotional control center of the brain, determines feelings about an experience, looks out for danger, and reacts accordingly
 - The **amygdala** detects potential threats and notifies the hypothalamus.
 - The **hypothalamus** receives notification of the threat and communicates it to the rest of the body so it can respond accordingly.
1. The **neocortex** is responsible for reasoning, planning, problem-solving, making meaning of experiences, and regulating emotions and behaviors.
 - When faced with a threat, the neocortex helps an individual decide if the threat is real and helps return them to a state of calm after it has passed.
 - If the neocortex confirms the threat is real, it temporarily goes “offline” and the limbic system takes over and starts the “fight, flight, freeze” response.

Flip Your Lid

Cortex-think, reflect, perceive, and remember, plan and make decision with our cortex. Awareness/self-awareness comes from this region.

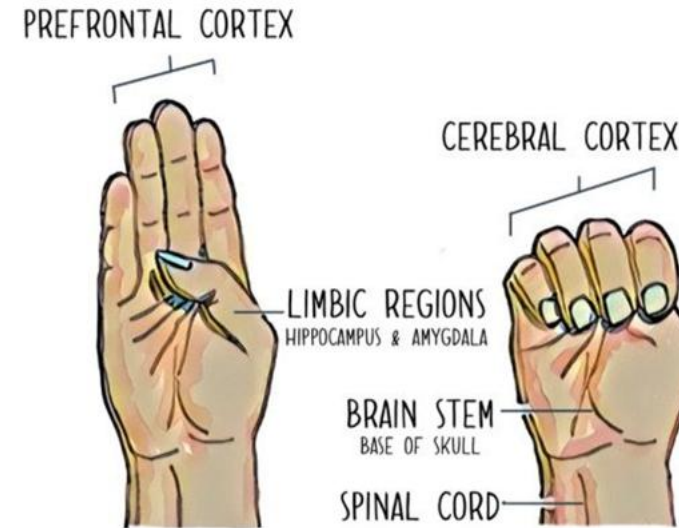
If you lift your fingers, you'll see below them the thumb, which represents the emotion-generating limbic area of the brain. Motivates us, how we focus our attention, and how we remember things.

Lift the thumb you find in your palm the lowest and oldest area as the brain the brain stem. It's the part of the brain that can interact with the thumb region above it, the limbic area to create reactive states of being angry or scared.

The brain itself sits atop the spinal cord, represented by your wrist.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bKuoH8CkFc&t=310s>

Dr Dan Siegel's Hand Model of the Brain



NVR
Northampton

Fist brain-Brain back to front/inside out, bottom of brain determines an incoming threat; it shuts down higher processing things.



Fight, Flight, Freeze Responses

The stress response system serves as a mechanism for **survival**.^{22,53}



Fight/Flight/Freeze is not always PHYSICAL. It can be the following: anxiousness, perfectionism, arriving late or leaving early, daydreaming, sleeping, shutting down, resistance...

Nervous System Survival Responses: Steady / Grounded

WHAT WE SEE

- Focusing
- Friendly
- Collaboration
- Asking for help
- Kindness
- Pause
- Reflective
- Creative



WHAT IS UNDERNEATH?

POSSIBLE FEELINGS

- Peaceful
- Curious
- Hopeful
- Safe
- Connected
- Engaged



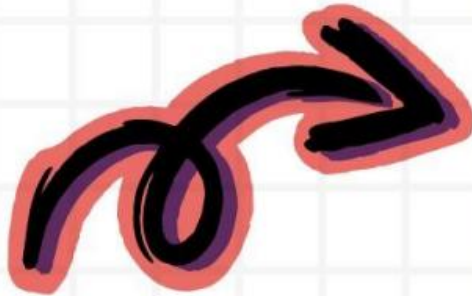
POSSIBLE SENSATIONS

- Fluffy
- Open
- Airy
- Bubbly
- Smooth
- Light
- Radiating
- Loose
- Sparkling

Nervous System Survival Responses: **Fight**

WHAT WE SEE

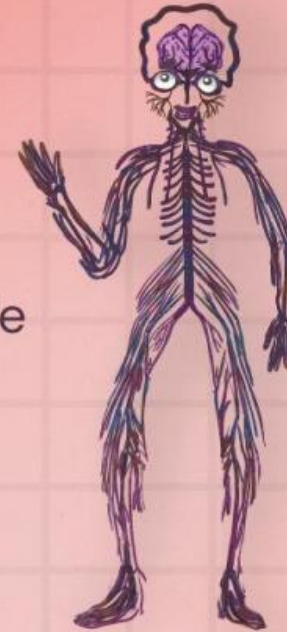
- Yelling
- Criticizing
- Blaming
- Hitting
- Throwing
- Aggressive
- Demanding
- Reactive



WHAT IS UNDERNEATH?

POSSIBLE FEELINGS

- Fear
- Anxious
- Pressured
- Frightened
- Feeling unlovable
- Feeling stuck



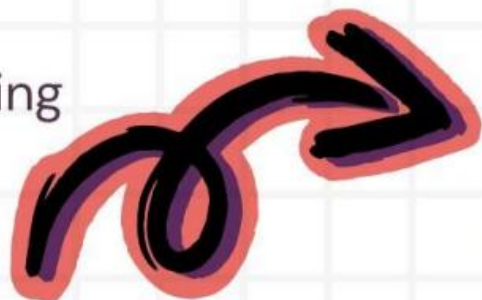
POSSIBLE SENSATIONS

- Teary
- Pounding
- Burning
- Tight
- Tense
- Electric
- Hot
- Fast
- Sharp
- Knotted

Nervous System Survival Responses: **Flight**

WHAT WE SEE

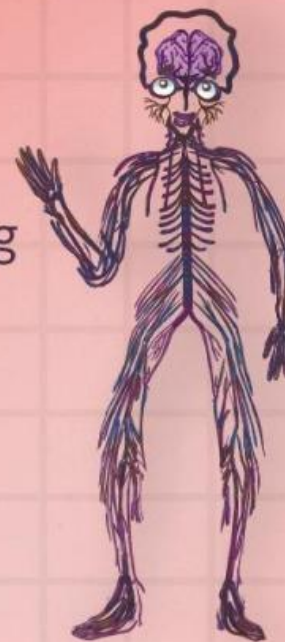
- Fidgeting
- Avoiding
- Unfocused
- Procrastinating
- Running
- Eloping
- Disengaging



WHAT IS UNDERNEATH?

POSSIBLE FEELINGS

- Restless
- Pre-occupied
- Over-doing
- Over-stimulating
- Pulled in many directions
- Scared
- Anxious



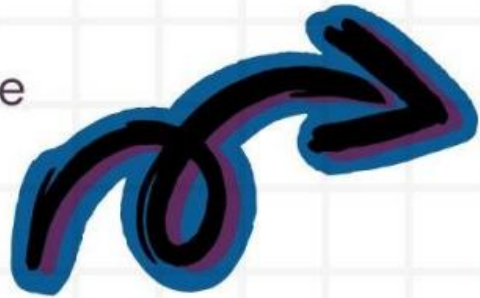
POSSIBLE SENSATIONS

- Teary
- Buzzing
- Prickly
- Dizzy
- Twitching
- Scattered
- Knotted
- Fluttery
- Queasy
- Breathless

Nervous System Survival Responses: Collapsed / Shut Down

WHAT WE SEE

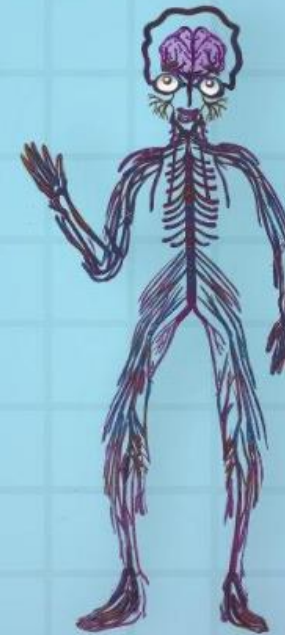
- Absent
- Hiding
- Zoning Out
- Unresponsive
- Isolating
- Scrolling
- Day-dreaming
- Not completing work
- Tired / exhausted
- Disconnecting



WHAT IS UNDERNEATH?

POSSIBLE FEELINGS

- Lonely
- Terrified
- Despair
- Hopeless
- Exhausted
- Judged
- Overwhelmed
- Abandoned
- Isolated



POSSIBLE SENSATIONS

- Teary
- Knotted
- Queasy
- Numb
- Void
- Flat
- Dull
- Hollow
- Empty
- Heavy

So, What Is Behavior?

Behavior is just something that is being communicated.

Behavior is a signal and symptom showing that the nervous system is struggling.

Video: [Trauma and the Nervous System: A Polyvagal Perspective](#)

4 Pillars of Applied Educational Neuroscience

These four pillars blend together supporting the nervous systems of adults and youth, addressing co-regulation, relational touch points, and our physiology as we rewire our perceptions of discipline.

Educator Nervous System

Behavior management is about adults. Our brains and bodies hold the state of our nervous systems, and it takes a steady adult to settle a child or adolescent.

Co-Regulation

Co-regulation is our biological priority. Co-regulation is at the heart of discipline protocols. When we share a safe, emotionally available sanctuary of space and a trusting presence, students can borrow from our calm in moments of dysregulation. Co-regulation is often nonverbal.

Touch Points

Touch points are micro-moments of connection that often occur through our facial expressions, tone, greetings, noticings, validation, and deeply listening as we follow the student's agenda.

Language of the Nervous System

When we understand that negative behaviors are only signals addressing the dysregulation of the nervous system, we begin to feel empowered and relieved. The way we feel, think, and behave is a nervous system response. As we teach our staff and students about their neuroanatomy, we learn together.

Dr. Lori Desautels
Applied Educational Neuroscience

<https://revelationsineducation.com>

1. Educator Nervous System
2. Co-Regulation
3. Touch Points
4. Language of the Nervous System

Pillar 1: Educator Nervous System

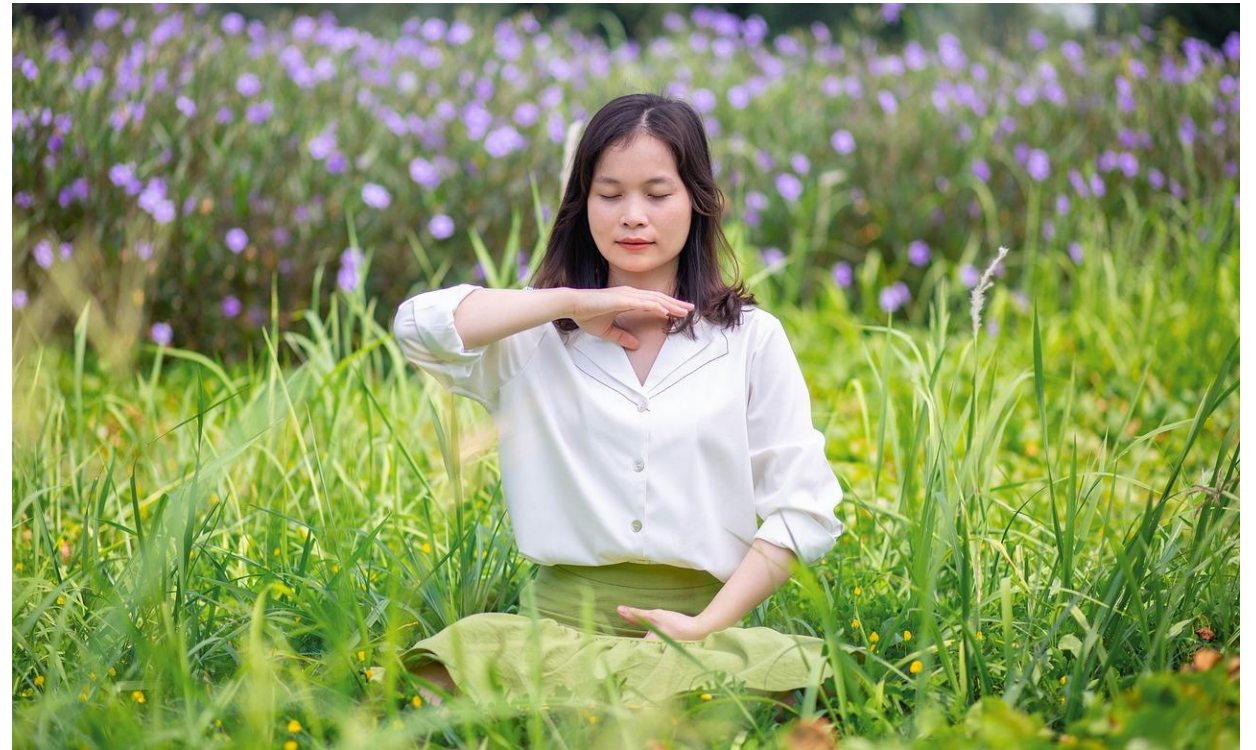
- **We go first as adults! It starts with taking self-inventory.**
 - 41% of parents say that on most days they are so stressed they cannot even function. (US Surgeon General Report, 2024)
- **Behavior management first centers around the adult nervous system.**
- **It takes a steady adult to steady a child.**
- **We can get triggered and activated constantly by dysregulated behaviors. We need to be aware of what our nervous system is telling us.**

**TEACHER
MODE**



Pillar 2: Co-Regulation

- **Emotions are contagious**
- **We are not negating consequences; we are helping kids get to the cortex for repair.**
- **Co-regulation is a discipline**
- **Model “90 second pause”**



Co-Regulation Questions

- What do you need right now? What can we do to make this better?
- Is there something I can do to help or to make things easier for you?
- How can I help you in this moment?
- Do you need time? Do you need me to be close?
- Do you need help, or just to be heard?
- I see you are.... Would you like to talk about it, or are you ready to talk about it? Or would you rather take a break?
- What message is your brain telling your body?
- What does this mean to you?
- What could make a “right now” difference?
- Would you like to move or sit?
- I’m wondering what just happened. Can you help me understand?
- Do you need space or support right now?
- Can we figure this out together?
- I hear you are saying.....How can I best support you right now?
- I noticed.....What’s happening?
- Would you like to tell me more?
- May I ask you a question?
- What is your nervous system needing?

Pillar 3: Touch Points

- **Micro-moments or nonverbals: posture, tone, approach, eye contact, etc.**
- **Are we cueing safety for our students and in our environment?**
- **Validation**
- **Affirmations**



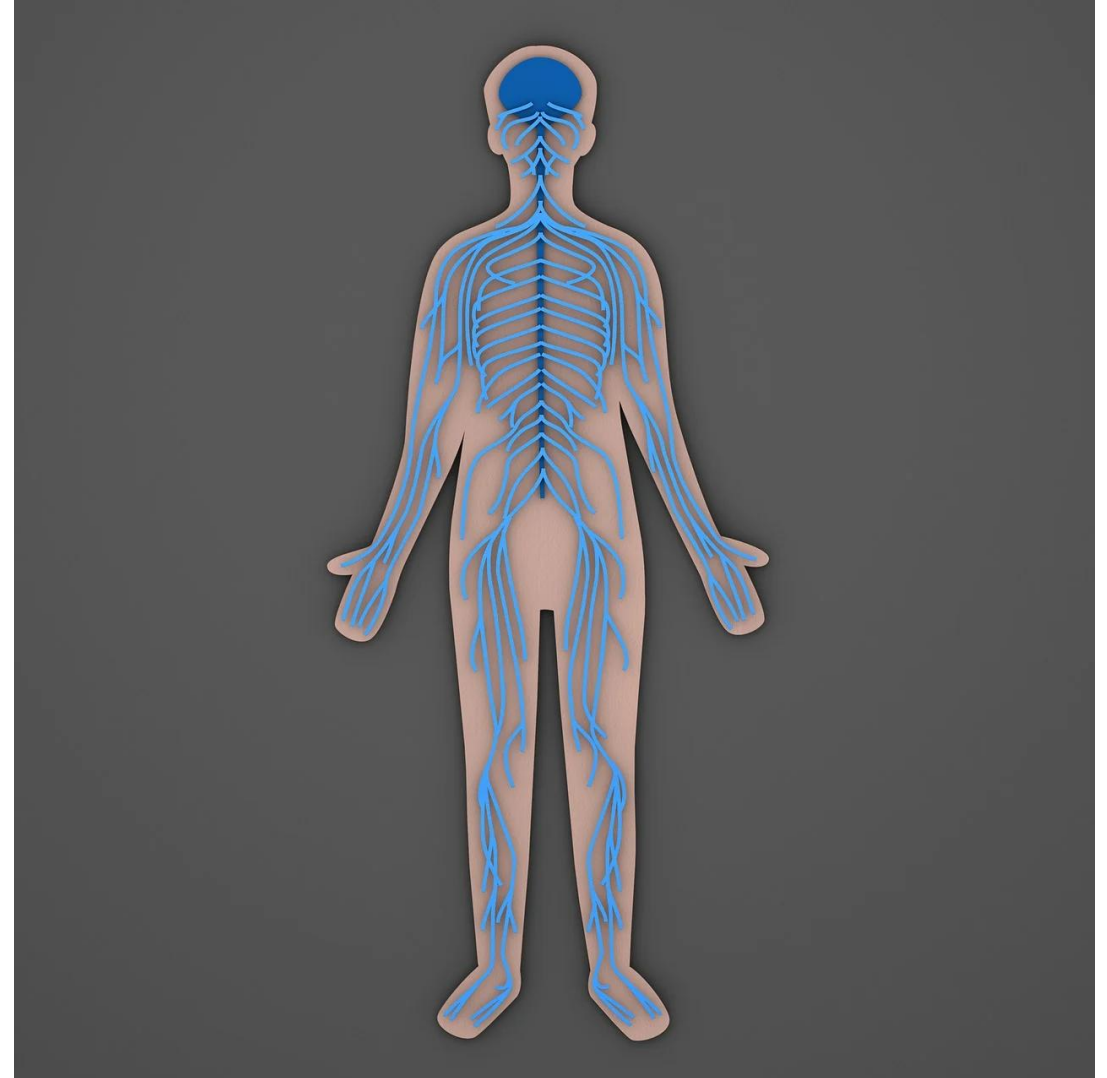
Pillar 3: Touch Points

**The most powerful co-regulation strategy is
VALIDATION.**

**“Validation doesn’t mean we agree with
them. It means we feel with them.”**

Pillar 4: Language of the Nervous System

- **Prioritizing teaching ourselves and students about their neuroanatomy.**
- **Builds empowerment knowing why behaviors may be occurring and how they impact the nervous system.**



Focused Attention Practices

Focused Attention Practices are executive functioning practices and are either Steading or Energizing.

When engaging, it's important to:

- Explain the why
- Always provide choices
- Ask for feedback after the practice
- Gradually build on the length of time engaged in practice
(Example: 10 seconds to then challenge to do 15 seconds, etc.)

<https://revelationsineducation.com/free-lesson-plans/>

Focused Attention Practices

- **Buzzing Like A Bee**

- Strong humming massages the amygdala and dampens it down to produce parasympathetic pathways by getting oxygen to the brain. It can decrease blood pressure and heart rate.

- **Sliding Palms**

- Bring hands together with palms touching, at eye level. With a deep inhale, slide one hand down with our fingertips stopping in the center of our opposite hand's palm. On the exhale, curl fingers around the hand that just slid down our opposite hand. Move back and forth sliding our palms and, on the exhale, grasping our fingers.

- **Swinging Arms and Friction Hands**

- This is also how you teach sensations to kids and the language of the NS.
- These can stimulate vagal braking, reduce inflammation, and re-energize or settle the nervous system

The Regulated Classroom Practices

Forms of Co-Regulation Practices:

Connectors

- *Back to Back Countdown*
- *Walk and Stop*

Activators

- *Hand Drumming*
- *Shake It Out*

Settlers

- *Imagine a calming place or presence*
- *Learning to exhale (bubbles)*

Affirmations:

- *Glimmers*
- *Savoring*



Beach: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1T06UhcX0Q>

Forest: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNN7iTA57jM>

Frontline/Professional Development Credit

- Ensure that you have registered for February 16th District Professional Development in the Frontline District Catalog.
- Be sure to mark the activity complete within 30 days to receive credit. The exit survey will serve as the Knowledge Evaluation and be given during your building's "sunset" meeting.

Thank you for attending!

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<https://forms.office.com/r/1Byt6f58Vu>