



# Pause. Coach. Plan.

Three practical tools for responding to adolescent behavior with developmental wisdom, accountability, and dignity.

|                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                               |
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| <div>01</div> <div>Decision-Making Delay</div> <div>Create enough time for the thinking brain to re-engage before a student responds.</div> | <div>02</div> <div>Risk vs. Reward Interview</div> <div>Turn a behavioral moment into guided reflection, insight, and future planning.</div> | <div>03</div> <div>Brain-Aligned Discipline Plan</div> <div>Design a response that repairs harm, teaches skills, and preserves dignity.</div> |
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## The brain-aligned stance

**Development explains behavior; it does not excuse harm.** The goal is to lower threat, restore access to reasoning, and then hold the student accountable through reflection, repair, practice, and support.

### Use the tools in this sequence

| When          | Tool                      | Adult action                                                                  |
|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| IN the moment | Decision-Making Delay     | Regulate first. Reduce words, audience, and urgency. Offer a bounded pause.   |
| AFTER calm    | Risk vs. Reward Interview | Coach reflection without interrogation, shame, or a forced apology.           |
| WITH the team | Discipline Planning Sheet | Match accountability to function, harm, developmental need, and needed skill. |

### Facilitator guardrails

- Safety first: If there is imminent danger, follow campus crisis and safety procedures before using a coaching tool.
- Private when possible: Public correction can increase threat, status concerns, and defensiveness.
- Choice within limits: Offer two acceptable options; do not offer a choice you cannot honor.
- Calm is not compliance: A quiet student may still be overwhelmed. Check readiness before problem-solving.
- Equity check: Ask whether identity, disability, communication differences, trauma history, or adult bias may be shaping interpretation or response.



## ADOLESCENT BRAIN DEVELOPMENT | PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR BRAIN-ALIGNED RESPONSE

# S.P.A.C.E. Decision-Making Delay

A structured pause protocol that creates time for the student’s reasoning system to come back online before a response is required.

|   | STEP                      | ADULT MOVE                                                                                                        | SAMPLE LANGUAGE                                                        |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| S | STOP THE SPEED            | Lower your voice and pace. Reduce language. Pause the demand for an immediate explanation.                        | Say: “You do not have to answer right now. Let’s slow this down.”      |
| P | PROTECT SAFETY + DIGNITY  | Create physical and social space. Move away from peers when possible. State the boundary without a lecture.       | Say: “I will keep everyone safe, and I will speak with you privately.” |
| A | ACTIVATE REGULATION       | Offer one brief strategy: water, paced breathing, movement, grounding, quiet, or a trusted adult.                 | Say: “Would you rather take two minutes here or walk with me?”         |
| C | CHECK READINESS           | Look for slower breathing, reduced muscle tension, flexible language, and ability to consider a choice.           | Ask: “Are you ready to talk, or do you need three more minutes?”       |
| E | ENGAGE THE THINKING BRAIN | Ask one neutral question, offer two acceptable next steps, and agree on when the fuller conversation will happen. | Ask: “What is the safest next move you can make?”                      |

## Quick readiness check

| BODY                                                           | LANGUAGE                                                | CHOICE                                             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Breathing and movement are slowing; posture is less defensive. | Student can use words beyond refusal, blame, or threat. | Student can hear and select from two safe options. |

## Student micro-plan

My early warning signal: \_\_\_\_\_

The pause option that works best for me: \_\_\_\_\_

The adult or place I can use: \_\_\_\_\_

We will reconnect at: \_\_\_\_\_ Today’s next safe step: \_\_\_\_\_

**Avoid during the pause:** rapid questions, public debate, sarcasm, cornering, forced eye contact, threats of escalating consequences, or demanding an apology before regulation.



## ADOLESCENT BRAIN DEVELOPMENT | PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR BRAIN-ALIGNED RESPONSE

# Risk vs. Reward Coaching Interview

*Conversation prompts that help students examine the payoff they expected, the costs they experienced, and a more effective choice for next time.*

**Opening script:** *“I am not here to trap you or make you agree with me. I want to understand what made sense in that moment, what happened because of it, and what could work better next time.”*

**1 | RECONSTRUCT** What was happening right before the choice? What did you notice in your body, thoughts, or surroundings?

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**2 | EXPECTED REWARD** What did you hope the choice would get you, protect you from, stop, prove, or communicate?

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**3 | PERCEIVED RISK** At that moment, what did you think might go wrong? How likely did that consequence feel?

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**4 | ACTUAL IMPACT** What happened to you, to other people, to learning, safety, trust, or your goals? Who was affected?

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**5 | UPDATE THE CALCULATION** Knowing what you know now, was the payoff worth the cost? What part would you calculate differently?

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**6 | REHEARSE A BETTER MOVE** What choice could meet the same need with less risk? What would help you use it under pressure?

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Coach, do not interrogate

| USE                                           | AVOID                                            |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Curious tone; one question at a time          | “Why did you do that?” asked as accusation       |
| Reflection, wait time, and accurate summaries | Debating details, moralizing, or forcing remorse |



# Brain-Aligned Discipline Planning Sheet

A team template for balancing accountability with dignity while improving safety, skill, connection, and future decision-making.

|         |             |         |             |
|---------|-------------|---------|-------------|
| Student | <div></div> | Date    | <div></div> |
| Team    | <div></div> | Setting | <div></div> |

## 1. Define the behavior without labels

**OBSERVABLE FACTS** What was said or done? When, where, for how long, and with whom? Separate evidence from assumptions.

## 2. Read the moment through a developmental lens

| LENS              | TEAM QUESTION                                                    | NOTES / EVIDENCE |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| State + threat    | Was the student regulated enough to access reasoning?            | <div></div>      |
| Function + reward | What need, payoff, protection, or status was the choice serving? | <div></div>      |
| Skill + support   | What lagging skill or missing support made success less likely?  | <div></div>      |

## 3. Design the response

| COMPONENT          | PLANNING QUESTION                                                    | TEAM DECISION |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Immediate safety   | What must stop, change, or be supervised now?                        | _____         |
| Accountability     | How will the student own impact without humiliation?                 | _____         |
| Repair             | What action meaningfully repairs harm or trust?                      | _____         |
| Skill building     | What replacement skill will be taught, modeled, and rehearsed?       | _____         |
| Re-entry + support | What conditions, adult check-in, and follow-up will support success? | _____         |



# Final Review & Follow-Through

Pressure-test the response, clarify responsibilities, and decide how the team will know the plan is helping.

## 4. Final balance check

| RELATED                                  | PROPORTIONAL                                  | INSTRUCTIONAL                       | DIGNIFIED                                       | FEASIBLE                                  |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Does it connect to the behavior or harm? | Does intensity match seriousness and context? | Does it teach what to do next time? | Can it be completed without shame or exclusion? | Are owner, timeline, and follow-up clear? |

## 5. Commit to follow-through

Student voice included by: \_\_\_\_\_ Family communication: \_\_\_\_\_

Plan owner: \_\_\_\_\_ Review date/time: \_\_\_\_\_

Evidence that the plan is working: \_\_\_\_\_

## Implementation map

| ACTION / SUPPORT | OWNER | BY WHEN | EVIDENCE / FOLLOW-UP |
|------------------|-------|---------|----------------------|
| _____            | _____ | _____   | _____                |
| _____            | _____ | _____   | _____                |
| _____            | _____ | _____   | _____                |

## Student-facing summary

**WHAT WE WANT THE STUDENT TO HEAR** Write a brief message that names the boundary, the impact, the repair, the support, and belief in the student’s ability to succeed.

## Review questions

| AT THE CHECK-IN                              | IF THE PLAN IS NOT WORKING                                        |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| What is safer, stronger, or more successful? | What assumption should we revisit?                                |
| What does the student say is helping?        | What support, skill practice, or environmental change is missing? |

