

— Creating Classrooms Where Every Child Can Thrive —

Emotional Regulation for Learning

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“

**When my feelings are
too loud, there's no
room for learning**

”

Overview

1

Window of
Tolerance

2

Low Arousal
Classroom Culture

3

Co-Regulation

4

Self-Regulation



1

Window of
Tolerance

— *Key Principle* —

Regulation must come
before learning

Hyper-Aroused (Fight/Flight)



Regulated
(Window of Tolerance)



Hypo-Aroused (Freeze/Collapse)

The Window of Tolerance

The zone where students feel calm, alert, and ready to learn

--

Inside the window: thinking brain online, able to engage, connect,
and problem-solve

--

Window size varies: child to child, day to day, moment to moment

The Goldilocks zone: not too activated, not too shut down, but just right





Hyper-Aroused (Fight/Flight)

Fidgeting, pacing

--

Shouting, crying

--

Aggression, rapid breathing

--

Can't sit still



Hypo-Aroused (Freeze/Collapse)

Slumped posture

--

Silence, lethargy

--

Zoning out, "checked out"

--

Appears to have given up



Which state do you find
harder to respond to?
What might help?

**- 60 -
seconds**

— Try This: When a Child is Hyperaroused —



- 1 -

Lower your voice

Speak more quietly and slowly than feels natural. They'll start to match you.

- 2 -

Reduce your words

Every sentence requires processing.
Say less. Pause more.

- 3 -

Give space, not proximity

Move back slightly. Crowding a hyperaroused child increases threat.

- 4 -

Offer grounding

"Feel your feet on the floor" or hand them something to squeeze

— Try This: When a Child is Hypoaroused —



- 1 -

Change their position

"Can you stand up for a second?"
Movement shifts the nervous system.

- 2 -

Offer cold water

A sip of cold water or cold on the
wrists activates gently without
overwhelming

- 3 -

Give a small task

"Can you pass me that pen?" A simple
request with a clear end point.

- 4 -

Try gentle rhythm

Tap a slow beat on the desk they can
follow. Rhythm regulates.

2

Low Arousal
Classroom Culture

— *Key Principle* —

Relationships come first



**We need to be
Amygdala Whisperers**

The PACE Approach

- P -

Playfulness

- A -

Acceptance

- C -

Curiosity

- E -

Empathy

PACE is an approach, not an intervention. It's how you are with children all the time, not something you "use" in a crisis



Create touchpoints
("I thought of you when I saw...")

Use gentle, child-like humour

Spot anything funny & mention it

Use non-verbals to signal safety
(smile, wink, thumbs up)

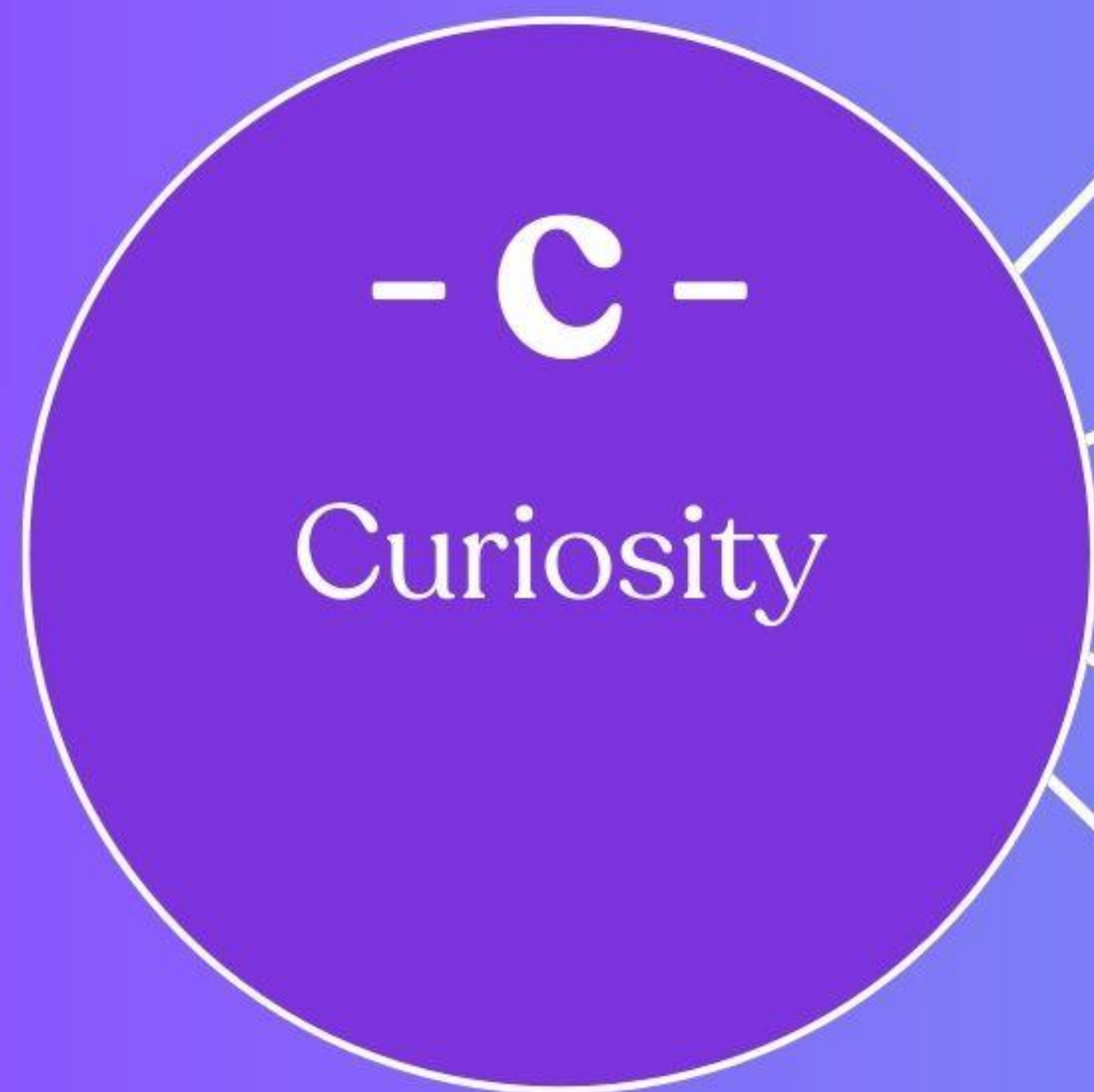


Listen to understand, not to respond

Accept their inner experience
(even if you need to correct behaviour)

Help them feel heard and valued

Correct while maintaining
connection ("We'll work this out together")



Seek first to understand

("Are you okay? I'm worried about you")

Wonder, don't assume

("I wonder if...")

Be curious about the need
beneath the behaviour

Not-knowing is okay

("Help me understand what's going on")



Name their experience with
compassion ("That sounds really tough")

Share in their joy too
(freudenfreude, not just hard moments)

Show it, don't just say it
(tone, posture, presence)

Thank them for telling you



Playfulness | Acceptance | Curiosity | Empathy

Which element of PACE comes
most naturally to you?
Which feels harder?

**- 60 -
seconds**

Key Principle

Every interaction is an
intervention

Karen Treisman

I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather

- Haim Ginott -





— Reduce Sensory Load —

Declutter: clear surfaces, intentional displays

Lighting: softer or natural light where possible

Noise: turn off humming devices; consider acoustics

Predictability: visual schedules, warnings before transitions

Regulation space: a designated quiet zone

A calmer space requires less energy to navigate



3

Co-Regulation

PreFrontal Cortex
(Thinking brain)



Amygdala
(survival brain)

**When a
child's brain
detects
threat, the
thinking
brain goes
offline**



Neuroception: The Hidden Scanner

The nervous system constantly scans for
safety or threat

--

This happens below conscious awareness

--

Children don't decide to feel unsafe;
their body decides for them

--

Triggers can be invisible to us
(a tone, a smell, a change in routine)

Stephen Porges, Polyvagal Theory

**Co-regulation is like
stabilising training wheels**

**It helps children find their
balance until they can ride on
their own**



Co-Regulation

Low Demand

Grounding

Calm Voice

Walk or Do

Breathing

Body Language





Slow – Low – Low – Low – Low

Speak more slowly

Lower the volume

Lower your pitch

Lower your body

Lower demands

— Try This: Lowering Demands —

- 1 -

Fewer words

Every sentence requires processing
they don't have right now.

- 2 -

No questions

"What happened?" and "Are you
okay?" are demands in disguise.

- 3 -

No choices

"Do you want to sit here or there?"
adds cognitive load when there's none
spare.

- 4 -

Just presence

Being nearby and quiet is often
enough. You don't have to do anything.



When a child is upset, what's
your instinct: to fix, to teach, or
to sit alongside?

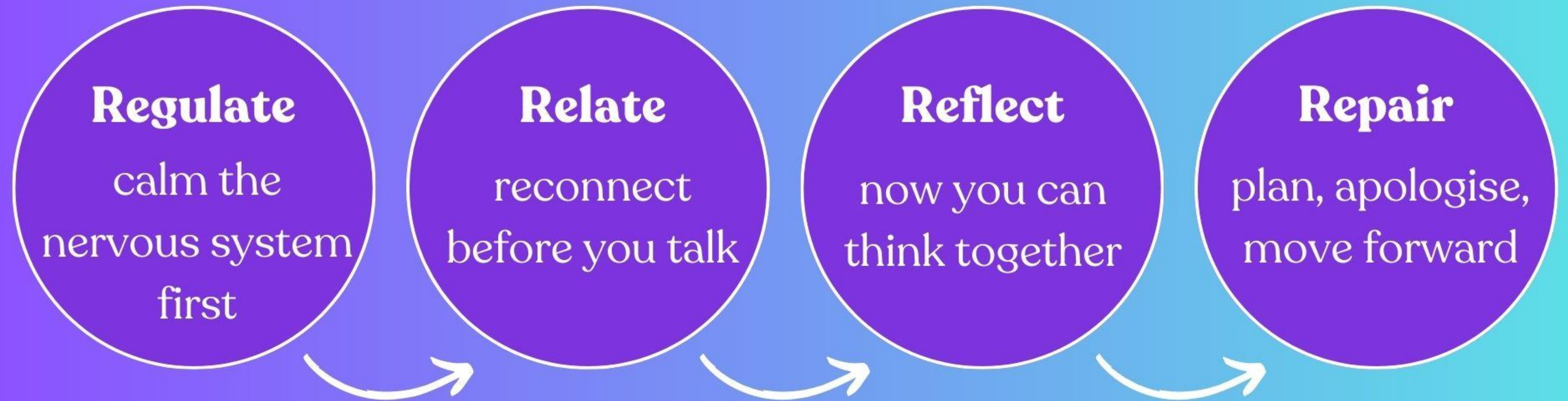
**- 60 -
seconds**

— Key Principle —

When capacity is gone, less is more.

Sometimes the most powerful thing
you can do is nothing except be there

The 4Rs (Bruce Perry)



Always in this order

4

Self-Regulation

— Key Principle —

Asking a dysregulated child to 'make better choices' is like **asking someone who's drowning to swim more efficiently**



What self-regulation strategies
do your students already use?
What seems to work?

**- 60 -
seconds**

Self-Regulation Toolkit

Physical

- Breathing (4:6, box breathing)
- Squeeze-and-release
- Cold water on wrists
- Slow, heavy movement

Cognitive

- Counting slowly
- Calming phrases ("I am calm")
- Safe place visualisation
- Name it to tame it

Sensory

- Textured objects, fidgets
- Repetitive rhythmic movement
- Grounding (5 things I can see...)
- Calming sounds

Relational

- 20 second check-in
- Sitting with a trusted adult
- Seeking a safe person
- "Time in"

Different children need different tools

Help them build their own

— *Key Principle* —

Practice makes permanent

— Try This: Teaching Self-Regulation —

- 1 -

Practise Proactively

Use calming strategies before times of stress, not just in response to them.

- 2 -

Three-Part Transitions

Endings (letting go of what's finishing), the neutral zone (the uncertain middle), the new beginning (what's coming next)

- 3 -

Have Your Own Go-To Breathwork

Know and use your preferred breathing approach so you can model regulation and stay steady yourself.

- 4 -

Have a Toolkit of Regulating Activities

Different children need different strategies. Offer variety so everyone has something that works for them.

Key Takeaways

Regulation before learning

Relationships first. Every interaction is an intervention

Co-regulation is the bridge to self-regulation

Teach when calm, not in crisis

Your mood makes the weather



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