



# Emotional Regulation and Calming Spaces

Family Mental Health and Wellness Forum

Presented in Partnership with DPAC and FamilySmart



**Cheryl Wallace: Behavioural Specialist  
Student Services**

**Brenna Pennell: Behavioural Specialist  
Student Services**

**Beth-Anne Cullen: Principal Hatzic  
Elementary/Acting Principal Student Services**

# ACEs

- Sexual Abuse
- Physical Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Physical Neglect
- Emotional Neglect
- Loss of a parent
- Witnessing family violence
- Incarceration of a family member
- Living with a drug addicted or alcoholic family member
- Having a mentally ill, depressed or suicidal family member

# ACEs Results

- At least 3: 3 times more likely for academic failure; 5 times to have attendance problems; 6 times more likely to have behavioural problems
- 6 or greater: 20 years off life expectancy
- Think about some of the students you know and their ACE score

# Current standing of research regarding stress response



Who here has a fear of something- (spiders, heights, ect)



Story of the biting dog



Effects on the body "The Body Remembers"



If your body is experiencing a traumatic response- your limbic system will trigger your automatic survival actions (automatic nervous system)

Flight-if your limbic system in the brain thinks there is enough time for you to flee

Fight-if the perception is no time to run but the strength to fight

Freeze-cant run and don't exhibit the strength

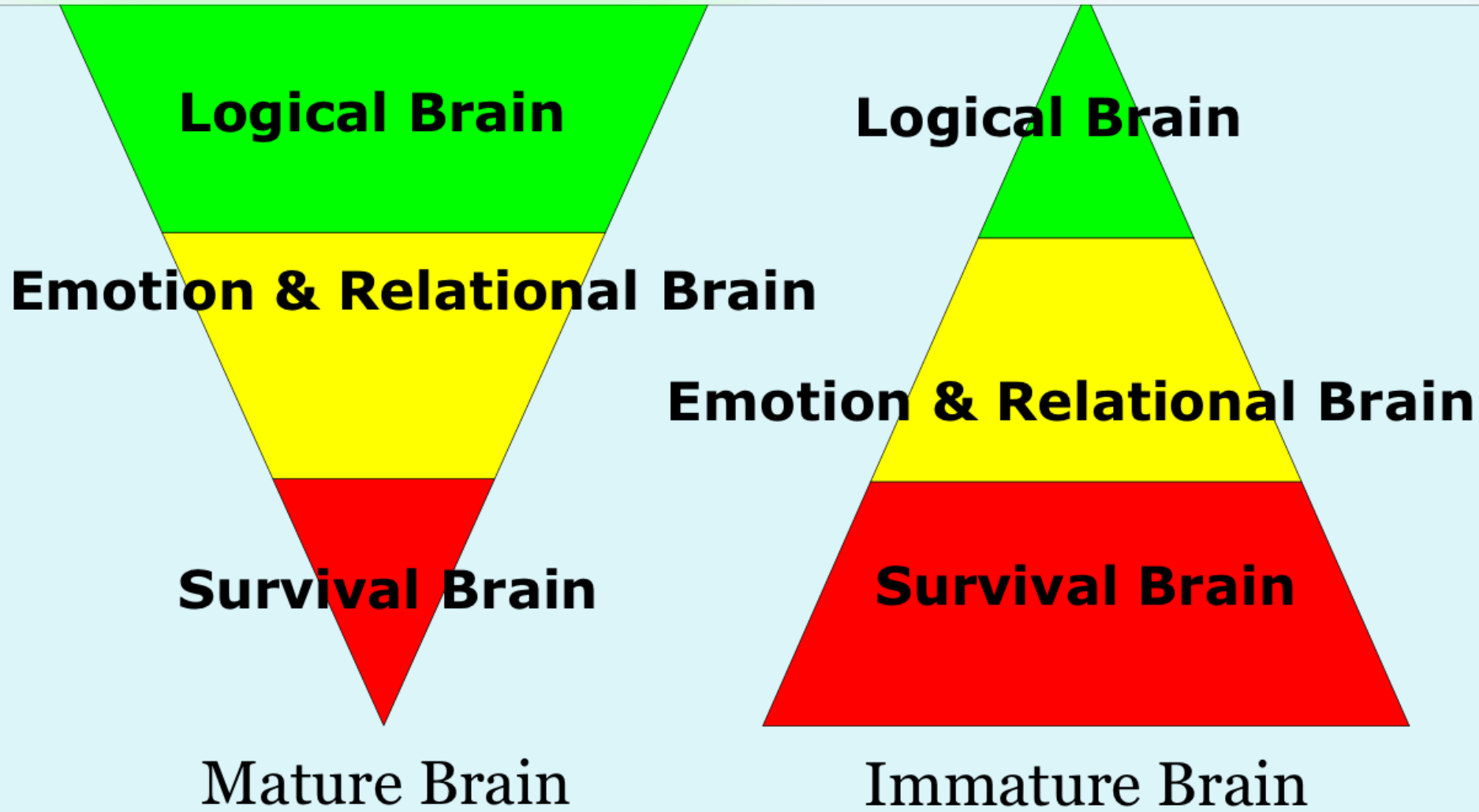
# Bear Analogy

Activated stress response=stress hormones released



# Toxic Stress

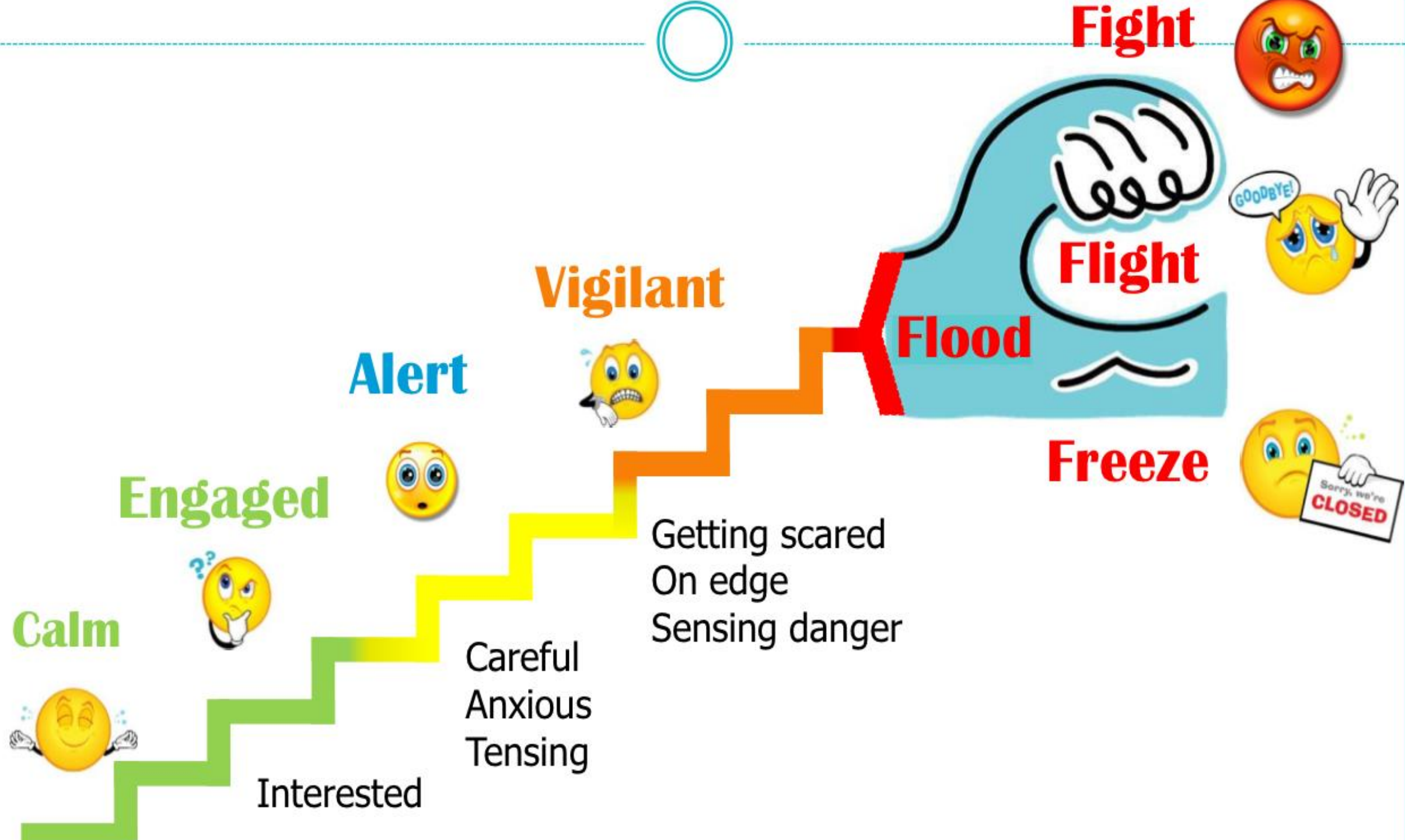
- Many students experience “toxic stress” in “toxic home” environment, this have shift them into living all their time in survival mode
- Their new “normal” is fear, reactivity and failure
- Their brains are now wired for fear
- This is a brain issue **NOT** a behavioural issue- the brain drives the behaviour
- The shift is a relationship-based model





# Trauma- impacted Students

- When working with trauma-impacted students, we must reach their Hearts before we can reach their Heads... Ken Ginsburg
- The change can happen with relationships, connections and acceptance...helps them move from the bottom up control to top down
- We need to stay “regulated” when they are “dysregulated” and ensure they are calm and safe
- Not a reflection of you!



**Fight**



**Flight**



**Flood**

**Freeze**



**Alert**

**Vigilant**

**Engaged**

**Calm**

Getting scared  
On edge  
Sensing danger


Careful  
Anxious  
Tensing

Interested

# Attuned Relationship Connect before Direct

- Kids won't learn from people they think don't like them!
- Show genuine interest
- Get eye contact and say their name
- Get down to their level
- Food and drinks help!
- Proximity





## Attuned Relationship

- When working with students who have experienced trauma the key is to be in control of the relationship without being controlling
- Set the tone, rhythm and emotional quality
- Not being able to control you emotionally will eventually teach the child that it is safe to trust adults ( don't take things personally...its hard!)

# Co-Regulate



Welcome- consistent, personal and warm

Keep the child close, maintain a high level of physical presence, support and supervision, as you would for a younger child

# Attuned Relationship

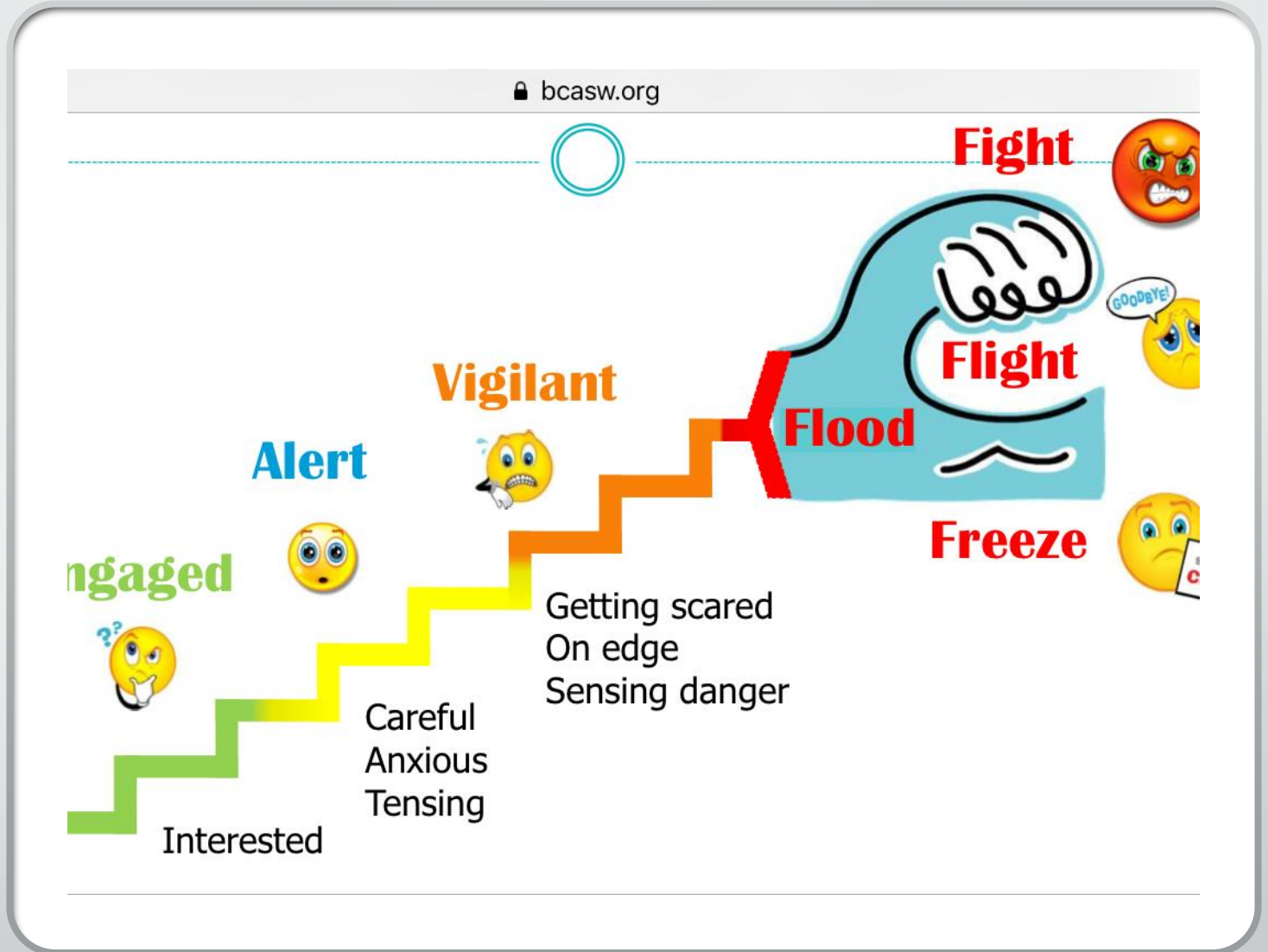
- Time in, not time out
  - Time out feels like rejection
  - Reframe their disruption as a need for your extra attention
- Attention seeking vs. **attachment seeking**
- Research indicates that a teacher needs to only spend 3-5 mins a day, everyday, no matter what happens

# Attuned Relationship

- Acknowledge good decisions and choices
- Statements to avoid “ you’re a good kid, you have potential”
- Be specific about your praise “ I really like the way you held the door for me”
- Public vs Private praise ( know which one the student likes)

# Attuned Relationship: Calm yourself

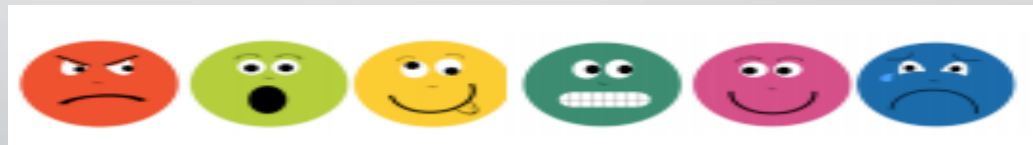
- Do not take behaviours personally!  
Where are you on the stress staircase
- Remember: If you are dysregulated you cannot help regulate
- Only regulated people can help someone who is dysregulated to regulate





# Emotional Literacy

- Putting words or symbols to our emotions (non-judgmental)
- Validating an emotion does not condone the behaviour
- Brings understanding and helps to plan for next time
  - Zones of Regulation and Superflex
- Learning cannot take place unless people feel safe (regulated)



# Emotional Literacy Strategies

- Have check ins that monitor for ...  
Tiredness, hunger, worries, what they are excited about
- Model and encourage self monitoring  
5 point scale, zones visuals, Lego check in, sharing circles
- Go over the day's schedule  
Make plans for breaks and anticipated difficulties
- Pay attention to your own state



# Calming Spaces & Activities

- Create spaces to calm anxious energy
- Sensory breaks
  - calm down box to help direct focus
- Breathing and relaxation exercises
- Music
  - to lower heart rate
- Visual cues



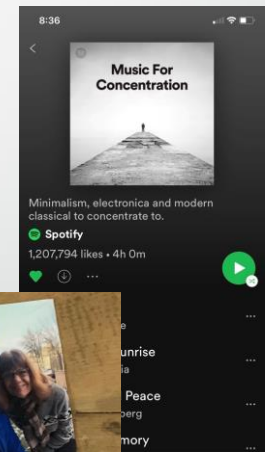
# Calming Spaces & Activities

- Create an energy output zone
  - When anxious energy needs to be burned
- Physical output can drain energy
  - Choose an activity that promotes connection if possible
- “Heavy work”
  - can give the body physical feedback and be calming
- End with a calming activity and breathing
  - Connect



# Calming Spaces & Activities for Us

- In the moment strategies
  - Pay attention to your breathing
    - 3 things breathing
  - Body check- where am I at
- Taking the time to calm
  - Music –playlist
  - Calming basket- Joy box
  - Yoga and mindfulness
  - Go for a walk outside
  - Connect with a friend



# Empowerment

- Celebrate successes and validate attempts
- Offer choices ( can be closed choices)
- Give students a voice
- Positive behavioural support: catch them being good...when using praise be specific

