

# Adult Skills

## Definition

Supporting students behaviorally requires unlearning default ways of *reacting* and *learning* more adaptive ways of *responding*. Doing so benefits our own adult well-being, as well as the students and teams we support.

## Strategies and Tips

### AWARENESS

#### **Notice**

Monitor your own physiological responses. For example, when a student is struggling, how is your heart rate, the pace of your breathing, your facial expressions. Simply notice; this will help you become more consciously aware.

#### **Label It**

Once you notice your physiological state, label it without judgement for yourself or the student you're supporting. "Yep, my stress cycle is activated. My heart is racing." Focus on using language that describes what you're feeling vs judgements.

#### **Tolerate It**

Stress cycles don't last forever. Part of completing a stress cycle is increasing our own distress tolerance to these body signals vs trying to shut them down. We will be okay. My stress cycle will subside.

### REAL TIME

#### **Physiological Sigh**

When stress response cycles are activated, a quick way to respond to our own nervous system is to use this very deliberate way of breathing. One long inhale followed immediately by a second super quick inhale then slowly exhaling. Repeat 2-3x.

#### **Of Course...And**

How we talk about hard things matters. Acknowledge the hard *and* the work. "Of course he is having a hard time *and* we are helping". Replace negative self-talk with this. Multiple feelings can co-exist.

#### **Pause & Offer Help**

Before presenting more demands to the student: pause, offer help. It's okay to reduce/pause talking and wait until they are ready for your help.

#### **Pass the Torch**

When your stress response activation is prolonged ask to switch to avoid power struggles. This is key!!

### PRACTICE

#### **Coping Skills**

Find two coping skills that you will focus on developing proactively. Choose things you can do in the classroom while supporting students and practice daily. For example, every hour label 5 things you see/hear/feel. This is also great modeling for students.

#### **Breath Work & Water**

Proactively work on your breathing. Set a timer at intervals throughout the hour to take breaths and drink water prior to your nervous system being activated and students struggling.

#### **Distress Tolerance**

Stress response cycles are a part of being human and most of the time they are activated because we have little distress tolerance. Learn to talk about how to tolerate the distress of students vs becoming overly activated too.

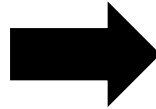
## Things to Avoid:

- Jumping into correcting the student; instead take a second to reflect on your own nervous system & regulation. A dysregulated adult cannot regulate a dysregulated student. And yes, we ALL get dysregulated as adults.
- Ignoring the physiological cues that your stress activation cycle is not slowing down. Ask for help as soon as it is possible. This usually means once the student is safe and another adult can switch with you. Take a few minutes to reset.
- Talking negatively about the student and/or their family. This does not help and only increases your reactivity the next time.

# Adult Skills

## Staff

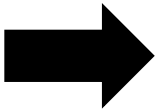
Upon arriving first thing in the morning, student cusses at staff, throws over a chair and sits in a corner with their iPad. Staff look at each other and the teacher. Heart rate is up, negative thoughts start about how tough a day it is going to be. UGH! Staff don't correct the student who is dysregulated. Instead, they help the other students who are arriving but feel the tension within themselves, especially on their face.



## Strategy

### Notice & Of Course...And

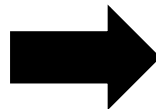
Staff notice that their heart rates immediately go up and the frantic looking at each other is happening a lot. Staff put their hand over their heart just to feel. In their mind, staff think, "Of course he's struggling, it's Tuesday. And we don't need to get in a power struggle. Wait." Staff help other students arriving. "Of course this is a bummer way to start *and* we know how to help the other kids transition without fuss".



Student keeps getting out of their seat, wandering the classroom, talking to peers, and repeatedly sharpening their pencil. Redirection works for a few seconds but as soon as the staff step away, behaviors start up. Staff feel the tension on their forehead and how their breath is shallow. Staff notice the negative thoughts popping up quickly.

### Label It & Pause and Offer Help

Staff label (i.e., think) what is happening with the student and their own stress activation and try to do so without judgement. "Alrighty...this is frustrating. Something is going on. Guess today is going to be a lot of redirection." Staff redirect student and say they will return in a minute to check about the next step. Staff stay in proximity and within a minute check-in, then complement the on-task behavior.



Every time the free choice/reward break is over, the student shrieks and protests (e.g., "No, no, no!"). The student speaks in short phrases and relies on visual supports and her token system. Staff are using the student's first-then visual and reassuring her that they will help with the assignment so the student can earn the next free choice asap. The student responds to this every time and calms down within a few minutes. However, today it's happening nonstop.

### Tolerate It, Of Course/And & Coping Skills

Staff notice that each time the student engages in distress behavior their own stress response system activates. Staff talk to themselves (internally), "Yep, this is hard to tolerate and she is ok and I am ok. Just learning to tolerate the waves. Of course she is activated, she doesn't want to stop drawing. And we've got this.". Staff label 3 things they see/hear/feel as their coping skill.

## Additional Reminders:

- All humans experience distress behavior, however, our lack of tolerance for these natural human moments is nearly non-existent. Building our own capacity to tolerate the distress behaviors of our students will help us stay regulated and in our thinking brain so that we can actually help de-escalate the student.
- Students don't volitionally "choose" to act out, just like we don't as adults. Behavior is the outward sign that a stress cycle has been activated.

# Adult Skills

## Staff Self-Management

### Reflection

How do I typically react to students showing distress behavior? \_\_\_\_\_

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What do I typically notice happening in my body when my nervous system is activated?

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What do I usually do when my nervous system is activated? \_\_\_\_\_

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Which two skills am I going to focus on scaling up?  
And why did I choose these? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Skill Use

Skill #1:

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Skill #2:

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On a daily basis, check off the box if you practiced using the skill you are scaling up. Remember, this is *not* evaluatory. This is about focusing on skills that will help you as an educator.

#### Week #1

| Strategy              | M | T | W | Th | F |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|----|---|
|                       |   |   |   |    |   |
|                       |   |   |   |    |   |
| Successes & Barriers: |   |   |   |    |   |

#### Week #2

| Strategy              | M | T | W | Th | F |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|----|---|
|                       |   |   |   |    |   |
|                       |   |   |   |    |   |
| Successes & Barriers: |   |   |   |    |   |

#### Week #3

| Strategy              | M | T | W | Th | F |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|----|---|
|                       |   |   |   |    |   |
|                       |   |   |   |    |   |
| Successes & Barriers: |   |   |   |    |   |

#### Week #4

| Strategy              | M | T | W | Th | F |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|----|---|
|                       |   |   |   |    |   |
|                       |   |   |   |    |   |
| Successes & Barriers: |   |   |   |    |   |

# Adult Skills

Notes