Brain-Based Behavior Response Guide

Neuroscience-Informed Strategies for Challenging Behavior

The Three-Part Brain Model

Understanding brain function helps us respond more effectively to challenging behavior.

1. Brainstem (Survival Brain)

- Controls basic survival functions: breathing, heart rate, reflexes
- Always active - cannot be "turned off"
- Responds automatically to perceived threats

2. Limbic System (Emotional Brain)

- Processes emotions and detects threats
- Home of the amygdala - the brain's alarm system
- Triggers fight, flight, or freeze responses

3. Prefrontal Cortex (Thinking Brain)

- Handles reasoning, decision-making, impulse control
- Considers consequences and future outcomes
- GOES OFFLINE during stress response

Fight, Flight, Freeze Responses

Response	Classroom Presentation
Fight	Aggression, defiance, arguing, property destruction
Flight	Running away, escaping, avoiding, hiding
Freeze	Shutdown, dissociation, appearing not to hear

Key Insight: These are NOT choices - the student's survival brain has taken over.

Traditional vs. Brain-Based Responses

Traditional Response	Brain-Based Response
"Calm down right now"	Reduce verbal demands; use calm presence
"If you don't stop, you lose recess"	Wait until regulated to discuss consequences
"Why did you do that?"	Process the event after brain is back online
"Look at me when I'm talking"	Reduce sensory demands during dysregulation

Co-Regulation Strategies

1. Regulate yourself first - your calm is contagious
2. Lower your voice and slow your movements
3. Reduce verbal demands - use fewer words
4. Provide physical space if needed
5. Offer sensory supports (deep breaths, quiet space)
6. Wait for regulation before processing the incident

Remember

Consequences are appropriate AFTER regulation, not during dysregulation.

The goal is not to excuse behavior but to work WITH the brain instead of against it.