

# Searching for the “Why?”

*“When we begin to know ourselves in an open and self-supportive way,  
we take the first steps to encourage our children to know themselves.”*

—Dr. Dan Siegel, M.D.

Most teachers and early childhood educators enter the field because they love children and are passionate about providing them with a learning experience that will benefit each child throughout his or her life. Many educators beautifully orchestrate the 25+ students in their classrooms while operating within the curriculum standards provided by each state. Teachers not only instruct children about how to write their name and execute multiplication tables but also are there for students in many different ways. They make a child smile who is having a bad day, put a Band-Aid on a child’s knee after she’s fallen down, give up their snack when a child forgets to pack one, and spend their nights tailoring lesson plans to motivate children to learn. They foster curiosity, empathy, friendships, and help students to learn who they are and who they one day hope to become. Parents entrust their children to a teacher’s care for the majority of each day. Parents “expect” that teachers are “doing their job” to help prepare their children for the next stage of education and the next stage of life. Teachers have an

enormous job of preparing the next generation for success; however, many may feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities and experience the frustration of being underpaid and not supported.

Nowadays, teachers are tasked with increasingly more responsibility for fostering development within the school environment. The burden often falls on them to establish foundational skills that children previously had when entering school: things such as postural stability (i.e., the ability to sustain an upright position in a chair), shoulder and hand strength, the ability to identify and express how they are feeling, as well as the ability to enter play with peers appropriately. Moreover, according to the Center for Disease Control, the rates of neurodevelopmental diagnoses, such as autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and sensory processing disorder (SPD), continue to increase, resulting in a more diverse population in every classroom.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) estimates one in five children have a learning difference.<sup>2</sup> With the lack of training and educational opportunities around how best to teach to a wide variety of learning needs and develop a foundation of emotional and relational safety, teachers often feel overwhelmed and underequipped. They may occasionally feel at a loss about how to best support the children they so clearly want to help. Oftentimes the strategies they use to manage challenging behaviors may seem ineffective, short-lived, or perhaps even detrimental to the student’s progress.

At times, children with unique learning needs engage in behaviors that look oppositional, defiant, lazy, or disengaged. In fact, a 2017 NCLD report revealed “that children with learning and attention issues are as smart as their peers and can achieve at high levels but too often are misunderstood as lazy or unintelligent.”<sup>2</sup> They are assigned a behavior plan that may have good intentions but does not actually address the underlying cause of the negative behaviors. In order to optimize a learning environment that accommodates all children, it is necessary for teachers to explore “why” a child is displaying certain behaviors. As the “why” begins to be uncovered, better supports and systems can be put in place to address the underlying cause rather than put a Band-Aid on the behavioral symptoms. *It’s not that teachers don’t want to discover “why,” because most teachers do want to understand the underlying cause when a child is having a difficult time. It’s that many teachers don’t feel equipped to ask the right questions, don’t know there’s a different way of addressing behaviors, don’t have the resources with over 20 children in the class, or do not know how to work against a system that has been doing the same thing for decades.*

There is hope! With the advancements of brain research, we now know more than ever before that the nervous system can be changed over time. We also know more about the interconnectedness of the brain and interconnectedness of people than ever before. This is good news not only for children with learning differences and social-emotional difficulties but also for adults who are learning new ways of interacting with and responding to the needs of all children. Our brains and relationships can change, too. This is due to exciting research about the brain’s neuroplasticity. **Neuroplasticity** is the brain’s ability to change over time with certain repeated experiences. This concept underlies the statement “neurons that fire together wire together,” which we use frequently throughout this book. This means that the more frequently you practice a certain skill set, the more likely those neuronal connections in the brain will be created and solidified, making it easier for us to do new things over time. We all have certain strengths as well as areas where we struggle. This is likely tied to certain areas in the brain that aren’t fully developed, or integrated, which we will discuss more in Chapter 6.

Our students do too, and as we will explore throughout this book, children’s disruptive behaviors are what we see on the surface. Underneath those behaviors are likely certain vulnerabilities, possible skill sets that are lagging, or certain areas of the brain that aren’t fully integrated that we need to uncover and better understand. It all starts with slowing down, and asking, “Why?”

**Neuroplasticity:**  
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## Reflective Activity

Asking “why” a student is displaying a certain behavior allows you as a teacher to optimize a learning environment that accommodates all children. As the “why” is uncovered, better supports and systems can be put in place to address the underlying cause. Rather than putting a Band-Aid on the behavioral symptoms, we can address the underlying vulnerability. We know that most teachers want to understand the underlying cause when a child is having a difficult time, but many teachers don’t feel equipped to do so. The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) estimates one in five children have a learning difference, meaning in a classroom of 30 you are likely to have

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at least five to six students who require more support. Take a moment to think about those students and start to uncover the “why.”

Student with unique learning needs	Assumptions I make about him/her	Questions I can ask to gather more information



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## A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO INTERPERSONAL NEUROBIOLOGY

Throughout this book, we will discuss some concepts related to brain science that will help us to better understand the “why” underneath children’s (and our own) behaviors. One framework that we, the authors, have valued in our personal and professional lives is interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB). We will use this framework as a starting point, but will also integrate other ideas, research, and theories throughout this book. Some of the other frameworks we used as inspiration to the ideas and activities in this book include the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT); Developmental,

Individual-Differences, & Relationship-Based Model (DIR); the Neurorelational Framework (NRF); and Ayers Sensory Integration (SI). All of the frameworks we draw on have the theme of supporting brain-based regulation, development, and understanding of behavior through the lens of co-regulating relationships. *This means that our brains grow and develop from and through relationships with other people. Through safe co-regulating relationships, we can support the brain development of our students, ultimately allowing for optimal learning environments for all. We aim to give strategies to educators that you can use within your classrooms that are informed by this research.*

IPNB is a framework developed by neuropsychiatrist and author Dr. Dan Siegel that serves as a starting point for asking “why” a child is behaving in a certain way and for intervening once the “why” is uncovered. In this book, we will discuss some of the principles of IPNB, and other relational frameworks, and help apply them to the classroom setting.

IPNB posits that human functioning, well-being, and regulation is a product of integration among and within three separate systems.<sup>3</sup> This is known as the “triangle of well-being.”

1. *The brain/body* includes our brain, nervous system, and body functions. If certain aspects of these are not functioning properly then we may see an impact on empathy, insight, resilience, or physical health.
2. *Relationships* include how we navigate building connections with others as well as how our brain grows through relationships with people in our lives. If we lack the skills to build relationships or do not have safe, trusting relationships with those around us then we may see an impact on communication and social engagement.
3. *The mind* includes mental processes, thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It is the subjective experience of how we regulate, understand, and organize our physical experiences and our relationships with others. Dr. Siegel describes the mind as “the process that regulates the flow of energy and information.” This flow of information within our bodies and between people actually has the potential to shape and change our minds. He goes on to explain how mindful awareness can help us all live more fulfilling lives, become better teachers, and become more engaged students.

Each of these three systems must be integrated in a way that promotes “linkage” and “differentiation.” “Linkage” refers to the connectedness of areas in our brain, relationships with others, and integration of mental processes. “Differentiation” refers to the unique functions and aspects of our brain, self, and mental processes. In this way, everything has its special role and works together to create something whole. The end result, as Dr. Dan Siegel puts it, is an “integrated brain, empathic relationships, and coherent mind.” If one system is not well integrated, it can result in the feeling of chaos (feeling “out of control” or unstable) or rigidity (being inflexible or controlling). When chaos or rigidity takes over, it becomes difficult to self-regulate, engage in complex thinking, or participate in social activities. Many times, this is what happens with children who are “acting up” or “misbehaving” in school—they are communicating that something is out of balance in their brain, relationships, and/or mind.

Another important aspect of IPNB, as well as other brain-based relational frameworks, explores the organization of the brain and how this relates to our ability to function and engage with the world around us. The brain develops over time and is structured to promote integration, or connectedness. There are many different types of integration, and we will focus on a few in this book. One of the ways integration occurs in the brain is horizontally (i.e., right hemisphere and left hemisphere) and vertically (i.e., top part of the brain and lower part of the brain). Let’s first explore the two hemispheres of the brain—or the “horizontal brain.” The horizontal brain is organized into a right hemisphere and a left hemisphere. Research shows us that each hemisphere is responsible for different functions despite the fact that both hemispheres are in close communication with each other. We need to rely on both hemispheres in order to function in a regulated and integrated way. More research is developed all the time on how interconnected the left and right hemispheres really are and how closely they work together. While this is the case, it is helpful to have a general understanding of the differences between each side of the brain:

- The right hemisphere is traditionally recognized as the creative, imaginative, and intuitive hemisphere.<sup>4</sup> It detects and makes sense of emotions. A child who has strong right hemisphere functions and is experiencing less integration with the left hemisphere at a particular moment might need help putting language to his feelings and

understanding his emotional states in a more logical and linear way.

- The left hemisphere is traditionally recognized as the logical, linear, verbal, and literal hemisphere. A child who has a strong left hemisphere mode of processing but is experiencing less integration with the right hemisphere at a particular moment may appear rigid or have difficulty discerning nonverbal cues. She is not being intentionally defiant; she just needs help developing flexibility, processing emotions, and doing things “out of order” without becoming overwhelmed.

You may see yourself as being more logical and detail-oriented or as being more connected with your emotion and intuition. Do you find yourself processing information in more of a language-based way, or through more visual, nonverbal means? While we all have certain modes of processing that we rely on, our brains have *hopefully* developed the ability to function in a well-rounded, regulated, and integrated way throughout most of our days. However, when we enter a situation where we feel stressed or dysregulated, our brain becomes less integrated, and we tend to fall back on a less integrated way of approaching the world—which may be from either a more emotional or a more logical way. In this book, we simplify this concept by referring to certain situations and activities as being more “right-brained” or “left-brained.” We also hope to provide you with information and activities to help build an awareness into when we may fall into moments of chaos and rigidity and how to move through this.

When we have appropriate linkage between the two hemispheres, the brain is considered well integrated. This allows us to step back in highly emotional situations and implement logic, feel what we are feeling, verbally express our feelings, and figure out what steps to take to solve the problem. The integration of the horizontal brain emerges primarily from development and experiences. This means, for example, that in toddlers and younger children, we can expect them to approach situations with a more emotional, “right brained” mode of processing until the flow of information from the logical, linguistic, “left brain” allows for integration.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the “horizontal” organization of the brain, there is a bottom-to-top organization of the brain—this is called the “vertical” organization of the brain. The vertical brain is a product of our evolution, whereby the lower levels of the brain are more primitive, quicker

to process or respond to information, and instinctual, while the higher levels of the brain are developed over time, are slower to process information, and allow us to have conscious control of our bodies and minds. Here are a few examples of vertical brain organization:

- At the lowest level of the brain is the *brainstem*, which is responsible for our most basic involuntary functions: heart rate, breathing, blood pressure, motor reflexes. Think about a newborn baby who is beginning at the most basic level.
- The next level is comprised of sensorimotor processing, which takes place in the *midbrain*. Think about an infant’s motor development and sensory exploration through the first year of life.
- Then there is the level of the *limbic system*, which is responsible for emotional regulation. Think about a toddler who is wrestling with her emotions and trying to gain more self-regulation.
- Finally, there is the level of the *cerebral cortex*—all of our higher-level thinking, attention, and engagement. Think about a school-age child who is cognitively engaged in learning.

As you look at the vertical organization, you can see that the lower levels of the brain are also responsible for the fight, flight, freeze response (discussed in Chapter 2), memories of sensory experiences (discussed in Chapter 4), strong emotions, and impulsivity (i.e., acting before thinking). The higher levels of the brain are responsible for decision-making, learning new things, problem-solving, self-understanding, insight, empathy, morality, impulse control, and developing regulation.

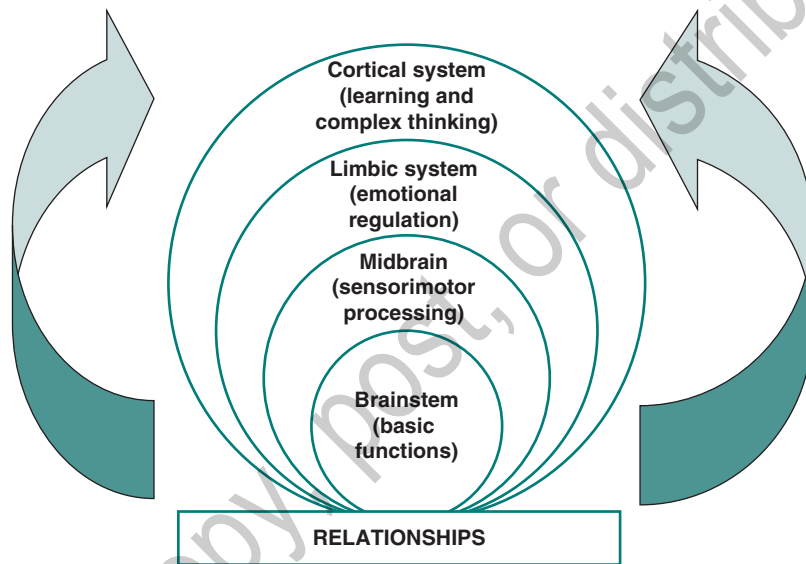
Children (and adults) must first have their needs met in the lower levels of the brain in order to engage in more complex processes at higher levels of the brain. For example, a child who is hungry cannot complete his multiplication table because his brain is focused on meeting that basic need for food. Once that child eats a snack, he will be much better regulated and engaged in academic demands. A child who is experiencing anxiety cannot use higher-level thinking to “push through” the situation because her brain is communicating fear and threat. After that child is comforted and calm, she can then return to the situation and problem-solve a way forward. In both situations, it is a matter of “can’t,” not “won’t.”<sup>4</sup>

As we mentioned above, science has shown that the brain is “plastic” or has “neuroplasticity,” which means that the brain can be changed



## Supportive Diagram

Our brain is organized vertically, from bottom to top, whereby the complexity increases as you move up. The needs of the lower levels of the brain have to be established before skills in the higher levels of the brain can develop. Co-regulating, safe, consistent, and secure relationships are an important part of this process, every step of the way.



through rewiring the neurological system.<sup>5,6</sup> This indicates that the brain actually learns to respond to different situations, tasks, and activities through experience and repeated exposure. Eventually, through a lot of practice, the brain translates this into an automatic response. For example, when we learn to tie our shoes, we must concentrate on the task and practice it the same way over and over before the brain learns the specific motor pattern. After a while, we don't even have to think about how to tie our shoes, and we can do it with our eyes closed. However, if someone taught us a different way to tie our shoes, we would be teaching the brain a new motor pattern that requires more conscious thought and rewiring of the neurons being fired.

This concept is true for our emotional responses as well. If a child repeatedly has negative emotional experiences when completing

math computations, then the brain will start to wire in a way that signals distress when any type of math problem is presented. If the child can remain regulated while facing the challenges of math computations, through positive co-regulating relationships with those around him, by using mindfulness strategies, and by skill-building, his brain will start to wire in a way that no longer triggers a stress response.

As you can see, the integration between the horizontal (right and left) and vertical (top and bottom) parts of the brain is critical. This integration happens slowly as a child develops and is a result of the experiences and relationships she has throughout her life. The need for an integrated brain to promote regulation is true for every child regardless of his or her learning needs. When children are regulated, they can be curious, engaged, focused, and responsive. When a child is not regulated, we as parents, educators, and clinicians need to look a little deeper, try to figure out where disintegration is occurring, and better understand “why” they are having difficulty regulating. We will continue to unfold these concepts throughout the book.

Oftentimes, children need someone to co-regulate with—someone to come alongside them and say, “I understand you’re having a hard time. Let’s figure it out together.” However, the response often heard by the child is, “You’re giving me a hard time. You need to do what I tell you.” **Co-regulation** requires a positive relationship with that child—someone she can feel safe with and trust. Co-regulation and safe relationships are where the heart of teaching lies. This is where regulation is developed. This is where learning begins. By identifying brain-based responses to common triggers in the classroom setting, we can use what we know about the brain and relationships to identify ways to help each student and teacher fulfill his or her full potential. These concepts are explored more in depth in Chapter 2.

## APPLYING A BRAIN-BASED, RELATIONAL LENS TO THE EDUCATIONAL SETTING

### Co-regulation:

attuned and responsive interactions between child and adult that allow them to reach a state of regulation together.

The research is clear in that our brains grow, develop, and change through relationships and experiences with others.<sup>4</sup> Children who have sensory-enriched, relationally safe, consistent, and predictable environments have larger, better developed, and more integrated brains.<sup>7–9</sup> It is therefore important to focus on the quality of relationships with each student. As a teacher, you have the power to form, change, and

mold each developing brain in your class, and help your students form a positive association with learning. By engaging in healthy, stable, foundationally safe relationships as well as sensory-attuned learning environments, teachers have the power to positively impact brain development, brain integration, and overall body and brain-based regulation, ultimately enhancing each student’s ability to learn.

## Strategy I: Engage in Positive, Regulating Experiences

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The same concept of brain development, integration, and regulation is true for all of us: parents, professionals, and teachers. Just as children who have relationally safe and sensory-attuned environments are better able to regulate and learn, teachers who are regulated have a larger capacity to connect with students, engage in the joys of students’ learning, and feel energized about what they do. In this way, the IPNB framework and other relational models serve as a form of self-care, support, and understanding for educators. In order for a teacher to effectively co-regulate with a student, the teacher must first be regulated. Oftentimes, dysregulated adults cause a child to be more dysregulated as well, resulting in a cycle of co-dysregulation. This is why it is important that teachers feel supported and equipped to take on the daily challenges they face in the classroom. Teachers must be engaged in positive relationships with those around them every day, as well as engaged in regulating experiences throughout the day.

When we engage in positive, regulating experiences, this helps to facilitate an “integrated brain, empathic relationships, and coherent mind.” These regulating experiences can be small moments throughout the day, such as sitting with a cup of coffee in the morning, walking around the block on your lunch break, eating lunch with a favorite colleague, or writing in a journal a night. When chaos or rigidity takes over, it can negatively impact the way you interact with those around you—especially your students. If you start to experience more chaos or rigidity in your life, particularly related to teaching, it is likely that the integration of your brain/body, relationships, or mind is obstructed.

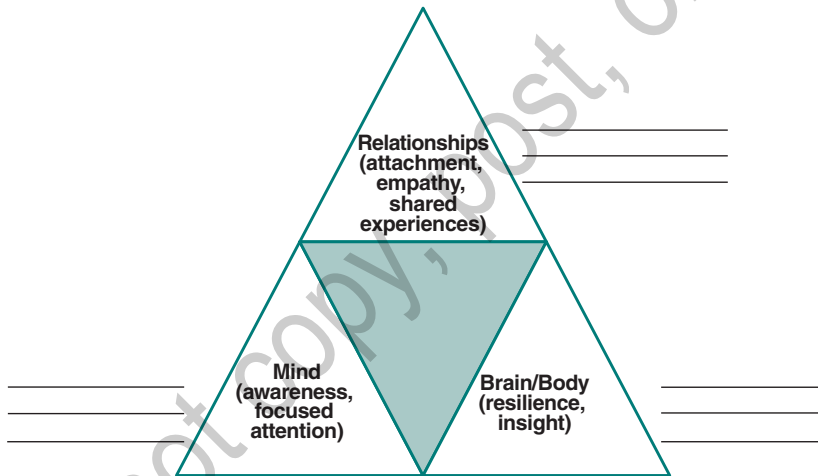
In his book, *The Mindful Brain*, Dr. Siegel states,

The human connections that help shape our neural connections are solely missing in modern life. We are not only losing opportunities to attune to each other, but the hectic lives many of us live leave little time for attuning to ourselves.<sup>10</sup>

It is therefore important that we not only focus our minds on ways to engage, attune, and connect with our students but spend time sending the flow of energy into connecting, engaging, and attuning with ourselves. By allowing ourselves this space, we will open the door to the endless potential of human capacity for compassion, empathy, and love, feel more successful in our lives but also support the next generation in becoming empathetic, compassionate, and loving adults.

## Reflective Activity

Now it’s your turn to complete an IPNB triangle for yourself. Think about your relationships, brain/body, and mind. Write a + next to the things that help facilitate the integration of each system or a - next to the things that hinder the integration of each system.



**Consider:** What areas of your triangle are more integrated than others? What areas are less integrated than others?

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## Strategy 2: Reflect Often

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Reflection helps cement learning.<sup>11</sup> One of the exciting things about life and our brains is that there is no end to self-discovery. Because of this, we will provide opportunities throughout the book for you to integrate the left and right side of your brain by understanding this information in a logical way and also having the opportunity to reflect and “feel” the information on a more experiential level. The “reflective activities” in each chapter will help you, as teachers, to consider various aspects about yourself and your teaching approach in order to better connect with your students’ experiences and enhance your ability to utilize the information in this book.

In his books, Dr. Dan Siegel talks about the foundational importance of COAL: curiosity, openness, acceptance, and love.<sup>3,10</sup> We hope to foster this tone throughout our book, as well as provide opportunities for us to use this as a starting point to allow a safe place to reflect together. Here are some questions that you can use to reflect about yourself as you get started. You can keep these questions in mind as you continue to read.

- What can I do to regulate myself throughout the day?
- What are signs of dysregulation that I notice in myself?
- How can I create patterns of empathy, understanding, and trust with even the most challenging students?
- Who can I talk to or be with in order to process the events of my day or week?
- What areas of teaching are restorative and which areas are draining? Why?
- Which of my personal relationships are restorative and/or draining, and how do they impact my teaching?

Next, consider these questions regarding your students. Again, keep these questions in mind as you continue to read this book.

- Why might this student be demonstrating this behavior?
- Are there patterns of dysregulation that I notice in this student?
- How can I come alongside and join with, rather than penalize the student?
- What can I do to help this child co-regulate in this moment?
- Is there something I am doing that is contributing to a cycle of co-dysregulation?

## The “Why” Behind Classroom Behaviors, PreK–5

- Am I making false assumptions about this student’s behavior?
- What are the strengths of this student, and how can I capture those strengths?
- With which students do I need to build stronger relationships?

*Not only is it important to use the brain to help our students develop integration, but it is also important to remember how to use the power of the mind in moments of stress and dysregulation. As we get to know ourselves better, and reflect more often, this will help us to have more integration in our brains and our lives. We will then be better able to maintain a regulated stance when confronted with overwhelming situations. Once this happens, we will be better able to use a right hemisphere to right hemisphere connection<sup>11</sup> between teachers and students to portray a regulated, safe, meaningful message of connection and comfort to the other person.<sup>6,11</sup> This means connecting emotionally, using mostly nonverbal communication. We will discuss how to do this in moments throughout the book, especially when we talk about attending to our nonverbals. This type of “right to right” connection between people, if done correctly, can help to develop a powerful, protective relationship or “teacher-student dyad,” between a teacher and the students in her class.*

### Strategy 3: Identify Vulnerabilities and Reframe Triggers

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We often hear teachers say they want to help particular students who are struggling, but they don’t know how or where to start. We hope this book will serve as a resource for you, as teachers, to empower, equip, and engage students. As a result, we will see students thriving who once were failing; students engaging who once were withdrawing; students supported who once were penalized; and teachers who feel successful, empowered, and ready to take on new challenges.

As teachers, you likely spend so much time thinking and worrying about your students. Wondering what triggered certain behaviors, and how to help them navigate certain situations better next time. You likely don’t have too much time to think about yourself, what **triggers** you, and how to better support your **vulnerabilities**. We hope to be able to provide you with the opportunity to care for yourself and reflect with the activities in this book.

**Trigger:** an event or behavior that occurs causing teachers and/or students to enter a state of dysregulation.

**Vulnerability:** an underlying area of functioning that is not yet fully developed or integrated.

It is therefore important to spend a few minutes thinking about your triggers and vulnerabilities as well. You may notice that there are certain students, parents, or particular stressful situations that trigger you to become more dysregulated. Identifying such triggers can allow you to better explore “why” you may be triggered and what vulnerabilities underlie your triggers. Vulnerabilities may include a sensory sensitivity, a learning difference or disability, a traumatic memory, or a skill that has not yet been fully mastered. We will explore individual differences as well as additional potential underlying vulnerabilities in Chapter 6. In this way, your triggers can be reframed as a learning experience and your vulnerabilities as an opportunity for growth. When you feel yourself becoming triggered, it is important to be more conscious about how you can regulate yourself so that you can then co-regulate with a student to prevent both of you from entering a heightened state of dysregulation together. Keep these triggers and vulnerabilities in mind as we move through the principles and strategies in this book.

We all fluctuate between different states of arousal and regulation throughout the day. In the fast-paced classroom environment with over 20 students, it can be difficult to identify what the trigger was, let alone what vulnerability may be underlying the trigger that is causing the particular student to become upset. This can also happen to us as adults, since it is sometimes hard to know why we are triggered or overwhelmed. By building insight into your own states, warning signs, and vulnerabilities, you can better maintain your own state of regulation and ultimately model this for your students. Likewise, it is important to remember that a student is not doing certain things *to* you or the behaviors aren’t directed *at* you. At times, a student’s challenging behavior may feel manipulative. It might feel as though they are doing something intentionally to push your buttons or get on your nerves. Most of the time, however, challenging behaviors from students are a cry for help, and an attempt on their part to connect with you. However, they likely do not know how to connect with you or ask for help in an adaptive way. When you find yourself feeling as though a particular student is doing something on purpose to intentionally make you mad, remember, it is not your fault—try not to take it personally!

While you’ve likely spent time thinking about your students’ triggers, we invite you look even deeper. What might underlie the triggers? How can we identify what vulnerabilities may be hiding underneath the behavior, and even underneath the trigger to the behavior? Students who frequently experience triggering events at school may

## Reflective Activity

You can use the chart below to help identify student behaviors that are triggering for you, warning signs in your body, changes in your nonverbal communication, or ways that you can tell that you are becoming frustrated, overwhelmed, as well as the underlying vulnerability:

Triggering student behaviors or environmental stressors:	Identify warning signs in your body:	Underlying vulnerability	What can I do in this moment to calm myself?
<i>Students talking, and/or noisy environments are very overwhelming for me.</i>	<i>My muscles get tight, I clench my jaw, my heart beats quickly, I start thinking thoughts that I can't take this anymore!</i>	<i>Maybe I have an auditory sensitivity that makes noisy environments unbearable to me.</i>	<i>Take a deep breath, ask for help from my teaching assistant, get a glass of water, model for my students how to calm down when upset.</i>



need extra support through co-regulation and brain integration. Asking “why” a student might be triggered is the starting point to better understand the vulnerability underneath his behavior. There are many reasons and potential vulnerabilities why a student may be triggered. From individual differences, sensory preferences, learning styles, temperaments, learning disabilities and SPDs, there are many reasons why students may enter a state of dysregulation. Let’s take a moment now to think about a student who may be particularly challenging and hypothesize why this might be.

## Reflective Activity

Think about students who are particularly challenging or who need extra support. Complete the chart below for those students. You can revisit these students as you progress through the book.

Why might the student be struggling? What vulnerabilities might they have?	Are there patterns/ triggers of dysregulation?	What can I do to co-regulate?	How can I help support the student?



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We will continue to explore the various ways teachers and educators can integrate the principles of IPNB and other relational theories into their classrooms for the sake of their students as well as for themselves. The demands of the school environment make it even more important for students to stay regulated in order to optimize learning—from the academic workload to the sensory stimulation to the social environment. Therefore, the relationship between the teacher and students, along with the teacher’s understanding of the students’ behaviors, is an integral piece of the student remaining regulated. This is called the “*teacher-student dyad*” and will be expanded on in Chapter 3. While this strategy may take more effort to begin than some other teaching strategies, it can yield more engaged learners, more rewarding relationships, and more successful experiences for both teachers and students in the long run. First, we need to further explore regulation and understand why it sets an important foundation for learning.

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