



**SUPERCALM**  
Sensory Wellbeing Solutions for Children

## NEURO AFFIRMING SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

SUPPORTING REGULATION & EMOTIONAL WELLBEING



PATHWAY TO REGULATION-SUPPORTIVE  
ENVIRONMENTS WHERE NEURODIVERGENT  
LEARNERS CAN THRIVE

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# SUPERCALM

Sensory Wellbeing Solutions for Children



## Introduction

We've created a practical guide to support schools implementing a regulation-first approach across classrooms, support plans and behaviour recording.

This resource translates research into everyday school practice helping staff move from reacting to behaviour to understanding what students need to access learning.

### The guide supports whole-school consistency in:

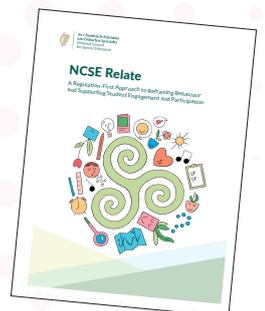
- Incident recording
- IEP language
- Behaviour support planning
- Staff communication
- Inclusive practice

### Why this matters:

Because when a student is overwhelmed...they're not choosing behaviour — they're experiencing a stress response.

### Evidence-informed and aligned with:

- NCSE regulation-first and relationship-based guidance
- Collaborative & Proactive Solutions — Ross Greene
- Neurodevelopmental & stress response research — Bruce Perry
- Polyvagal Theory — Stephen Porges
- Self-Determination Theory — Deci & Ryan
- Occupational Therapy sensory regulation approaches — A. Jean Ayres
- Universal Design for Learning



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# LANGUAGE PILLARS



## Neuroaffirming Language Guide

A neuro-affirming approach embraces diverse communication styles, welcoming people to connect authentically in ways that are true to who they are whether through words, gestures, electronic devices, stimming or silence.

It is about creating a community where everyone feels safe, valued, respected & included.

### NEURODIVERGENCE

“Autism is a Neurodivergence; an Autistic person is Neurodivergent.” Neurodivergence describes the existence or mind-body experience being Neurodivergent. It is a broad term and encompasses the state of being of anyone who’s neurocognitive function differs from societal standards of neurotypical.

### NEURODIVERGENT

“I have ADHD, I am neurodivergent.” Is a person who diverges from the neurotype that benefits from and works with the way the society they live in operates. A person with multiple different neurocognitive neurodivergences can be called multiply neurodivergent.

### NEUROTYPE

“Within this study there were multiple neurotypes.” A neurotype refers to type of neurocognitive make up of a person. Neurotypical and Neurodivergent are neurotypes.



Ref: Neurodivergent Affirming Language Guide,  
Scan QR code above to read article in full.

Neuro-affirming language emphasizes respect, acceptance, and positive representation of neurodivergent individuals. Here are some examples:

## IDENTITY-FIRST LANGUAGE:

Many neurodivergent individuals prefer identity-first language, which puts their neurodivergence at the forefront of their identity. For example:

"Autistic person" instead of "person with autism"

"ADHD person" instead of "person with ADHD"

**RATHER THAN  
'PEOPLE  
WITH AUTISM'**

PLEASE CHOOSE...

**AUTISTIC  
PERSON**

**RATHER THAN  
'PEOPLE  
WITH ADHD'**

PLEASE CHOOSE...

**ADHD  
PERSON**

## AVOIDING NEGATIVE TERMINOLOGY:

Language develops and changes over time, terms that were once considered to be appropriate may not be appropriate today.

language used by and for the neurodivergent community refrains from using language that implies a deficit or a problem

For example: Use "neurodivergent" instead of "disordered"

**RATHER THAN  
'DISORDER'**

PLEASE CHOOSE...

**NEURODIVERGENT**

**RATHER THAN  
'DIFFERENTLY  
ABLED'**

PLEASE CHOOSE...

**DISABILITY**

**RATHER THAN  
'HIGH OR LOW  
FUNCTIONING'**

PLEASE CHOOSE...

**VARIABLE  
SUPPORT NEEDS:  
VARY ACROSS  
ENVIRONMENTS  
& OVER TIME.**

**SUPPORT NEEDS ARE CONTEXTUAL  
THEY ARE NOT FIXED TRAITS**

## FOCUS ON POSITIVE TERMINOLOGY:

Neuro-affirming language focuses on positive descriptors to emphasize strengths and positive traits.

For example: "Detail-oriented" instead of "obsessive"

**RATHER THAN  
'ARGUMENTATIVE'**

PLEASE CHOOSE...

**ANALYTICAL  
THINKER  
QUESTIONS  
LOGIC**

**RATHER THAN  
'RIGID'**

PLEASE CHOOSE...

**VALUES  
CONSISTENCY &  
STRUCTURE**

**RATHER THAN  
'INFLEXIBLE'**

PLEASE CHOOSE...

**VALUES  
PREDICTABILITY  
& CONSISTENCY**

## EMPOWERING LANGUAGE:

Use language that empowers and validates the experiences of neurodivergent individuals - No tragedy language. For example:

"Autistic advocate" instead of "autism sufferer"

"ADHD person" instead of "struggling with ADHD"

Neutral and Objective Descriptions: Describe behaviors and characteristics neutrally without judgment. For example:

"Stims by hand-flapping" instead of "exhibits abnormal repetitive behavior"

"Communicates non-verbally using AAC/ or using gestures / typing / device" instead of "non-verbal" as it can erase competence and implies inability rather than communication difference.

**RATHER THAN  
'REPETITIVE  
BEHAVIOUR'**

PLEASE CHOOSE...

**STIMS BY  
FLAPPING  
HANDS**

**RATHER THAN  
'NON-VERBAL'**

PLEASE CHOOSE...

**COMMUNICATES  
NON-VERBALLY**

**RATHER THAN  
'CANNOT  
SPEAK'**

PLEASE CHOOSE...

**COMMUNICATES  
USING (METHOD)**

**AVOID**

Language that implies a neurotypical standard as the benchmark

The issue with statements that imply a neurotypical standard — often called **norm-referenced phrasing** — is not that they describe behaviour. It's that they quietly define one way of being as **"correct"** and position other ways as **deficits**.

"Responds appropriately"  
 "As expected"  
 "Age-appropriate behaviour"  
 "Normal social interaction"

"Failed to comply with instructions"  
 "Demonstrates typical behavior"  
 "On par with peers"

When we measure a child against a neurotypical benchmark neurodivergent communication, processing, and regulation differences are frames as **deficit**. This can unintentionally **pathologise natural neurological variation**. Norm-referenced language subtly implies there is a:

right way to respond

typical way to process

correct emotional expression

For example:

"Does not respond appropriately to instructions"

implies wrong doing.

vs

"Responds differently when overwhelmed."

acknowledges context

**AVOID**

Comparison to an the "average" child

Frame difference as impairment

Focus on behaviour outcome rather than nervous system state

Centre adult expectation over child experience

**WHY**

We focus on nervous system state over behaviour outcome

**It Can Undermine Autonomy**

Statements like:  
 “Behaved as expected”  
 “Demonstrated good social skills”  
 Can prioritise **conformity over safety and authenticity.**

**Neuro-affirming practice prioritises:**

- Regulation First
- Sense of Safety
- Self-advocacy
- Autonomy

Shifting the Lens, instead of asking:  
 “Is this behaviour appropriate?”

We ask:  
 “What is this behaviour communicating?”  
 “What support would increase regulation?”  
 “What conditions help this child access?”



**Negatively Influences & Create Stigma**

The language used in reports shapes:  
 How teachers perceive the child  
 How support is designed  
 How peers view them  
 How the child sees themselves

When language implies  
 “not meeting the norm,” expectations  
 can lower and stigma can grow.

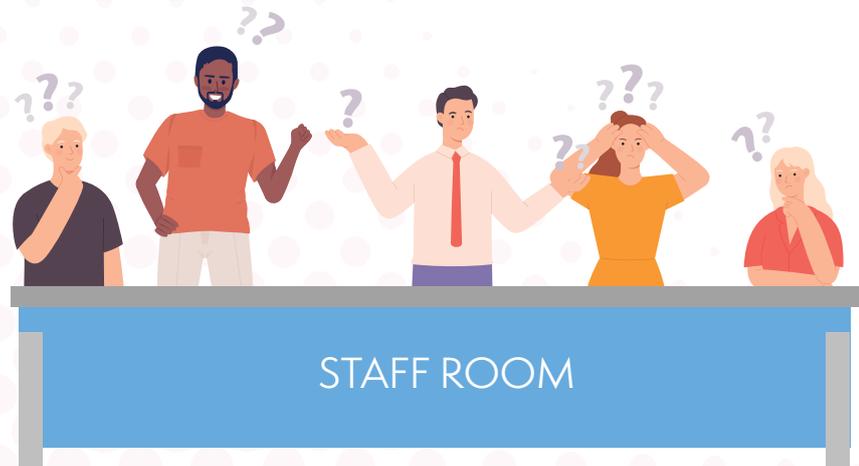


**WHY**

We focus on nervous system state over behaviour outcome

**Impact Inclusion Progress**

Norm-referenced and deficit-based language can unintentionally influence how additional support settings, including special classes, are perceived. When **reports focus heavily on behavioural concerns without contextualising regulation and nervous system responses**, it can heighten anxiety for staff and decision-makers. This may contribute to hesitancy in developing /extending inclusive provision in their school.



When **reports focus heavily on behavioural concerns without contextualising regulation and nervous system responses**, it can heighten anxiety for staff and decision-makers. This may contribute to hesitancy in developing /extending inclusive provision in their school.

**Impact Support Staff Decision Making**

Deficit-focused language can unintentionally amplify fear around behavioural needs, educators & support staff themselves can operate in a state of stress, where fight-or-flight responses reduce their capacity to respond with empathy and can prioritise **conformity over safety and authenticity**.

Language that centers understanding, regulation, collaboration and support helps create conditions where both students and staff feel safe, confident, and equipped to engage constructively.

**Shifting to regulation-informed language supports calmer systems, safer classrooms, and more confident inclusive practice.**



## ADOPTING NEURO-AFFIRMING LANGUAGE SIGNALS A PARADIGM SHIFT IN EDUCATION



**PETROL - OUTDATED**



**EV - FUTURE FOCUSED**

Using neuro-affirming language represents a paradigm shift in how we understand and support neurodivergent students.”

For too long, deficit-based and fear-driven language in professional reports has unintentionally reinforced stigma around students with additional needs. The words used in assessments, incident reports, and IEPs shape how a child is understood — by staff, peers, families, and most importantly by the child themselves.

The shift from deficit-based language to strengths-based understanding is not about ignoring challenges; it is about recognising that regulation, safety, and autonomy underpin learning. When language moves from managing behavior to understanding regulation, we move from control to inclusion. Documentation that reflects this affirms identity rather than diminishing it. Every child deserves to see themselves described with dignity, possibility, and belonging, and **every IEP should empower** neurodivergent students to recognise their strengths, feel safe in their differences, and experience school as a place where they truly belong.

Moving from deficit-based, behaviour-management language to regulation-informed, strengths-based language is a fundamental shift in how we understand neurodivergence

It represents a move from Compliance → Collaboration, Control → Co-regulation, Managing → Understanding.





# SENSORY WELLBEING

Some Examples of a Regulated Nervous System in Action...

## Engaged and Attentive -

Is present and able to engage in learning when feeling safe, supported, and regulated.



## Following Routines -

Moves between activities when given predictability and preparation.

## Body Movements -

Shows body movements that reflect comfort and regulation.

Cognitive Regulation

## Behavioural Regulation

## Self-Soothing

Uses strategies (breathing, movement, sensory tools) to support regulation when needed.

## Emotional Responses -

Expresses feelings in ways that reflect their internal state.

## Calm and Content -

Appears relaxed when their nervous system feels safe.

Focused and Attentive - when feeling safe and regulated

Problem-Solving - Attempts to work through challenges when feeling supported

Processing Information - Understands and responds using communication styles that is authentic to their communication profile.



Social Regulation

Emotional Regulation

Interacting Socially - responding to others in ways that reflects their communication style when feeling safe.

Flexible Thinking - Navigates changes with support and predictability.

Expresses Needs Clearly - Uses words, gestures, or communication tools that feel accessible



**BLAME**



**UNDERSTANDING**

**NEURO-  
AFFIRMING  
LENS**



FROM BLAME TO UNDERSTANDING - SIMPLY SHIFT THE LENS

**"HE'S BEING DEFIANT"**



"HE'S FEELING OVERWHELMED & PROTECTING HIMSELF"



**"THEY WONT EVEN TRY"**



"MAY NOT HAVE THE EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SKILLS TO PERFORM THE TASK"

**"SHE JUST WANTS CONTROL"**



"SHE NEEDS A SENSE OF SAFETY AND AUTONOMY"

**"THE ATTENTION SEEKING BEHAVIOR IS DISRUPTIVE"**



"HE IS LOOKING FOR EITHER CONNECTION, REASSURANCE OR SAFETY"

**"SHE IS BEING DIFFICULT"**



"SHE IS STRUGGLING IN THE ENVIRONMENT RIGHT NOW"

**UNDERSTANDING**

**"THEY STRUGGLE TO FOCUS"**



"ATTENTION SHIFTS WHEN STRESSED, MAY NEED REGULATION BEFORE LEARNING"

**"THERE MUST BE CONSEQUENCES"**



"THERE MUST BE UNDERSTANDING FOLLOWED BY PROBLEM SOLVING"



FROM BLAME TO UNDERSTANDING - SIMPLY SHIFT THE LENS

**"BECAME AGGRESSIVE TOWARDS STAFF."**



"HE'S FEELING OVERWHELMED & PROTECTING HIMSELF"

**OR**

"ENTERED A FIGHT RESPONSE DURING A MOMENT OF HEIGHTENED STRESS" (A STRESS RESPONSE, NOT A CHOICE)"



**HE LOST CONTROL & HIT ANOTHER STUDENT"**



"SHE EXPERIENCED SIGNIFICANT DISTRESS & ENTERED A FIGHT RESPONSE, AND REACTED PHYSICALLY"

**"SHE'S TRYING TO MANIPULATE THE SITUATION"**



**"SHE WAS RUDE USING INAPPROPRIATE LANGUAGE"**



"SHE'S COMMUNICATING DISTRESS IN THE ONLY WAY SHE CAN RIGHT NOW"

**UNDERSTANDING**

FEELINGS OF HEIGHTENED STRESS WAS EXPRESSED THROUGH REACTIVE LANGUAGE TOWARDS THE TEACHER"

**"SHE OVER REACTS"**



"SHE HAS A LOWER STRESS THRESHOLD AT THIS MOMENT"



**"THEY'RE REFUSING TO COOPERATE ON PURPOSE"**



"THE DEMAND FEELS TOO BIG FOR THEIR NERVOUS SYSTEM RIGHT NOW."



FROM BLAME TO UNDERSTANDING - SIMPLY SHIFT THE LENS



**IN A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, FEELING SAFE MEANS THE STUDENT'S NERVOUS SYSTEM IS CALM ENOUGH TO THINK, PROCESS LANGUAGE, & ACCESS NECESSARY SKILLS.**

**WHAT THIS MEANS IN PRACTICE FOR EDUCATORS & SNAS**

A STUDENT FEELS SAFE WHEN THEIR BRAIN BELIEVES:

- ➔ I UNDERSTAND WHAT IS HAPPENING
- ➔ I KNOW WHAT IS EXPECTED
- ➔ I CAN COPE WITH THIS DEMAND
- ➔ I HAVE A WAY TO COMMUNICATE OR GET HELP
- ➔ I AM NOT ABOUT TO BE SHAMED, RUSHED, OR OVERWHELMED

WHEN THOSE CONDITIONS ARE PRESENT, THE THINKING PART OF THE BRAIN STAYS AVAILABLE FOR LEARNING.

**A REGULATED BRAIN CAN LEARN. A STRESSED BRAIN CAN ONLY SURVIVE.**

**WHY THIS MATTERS IN SCHOOL**

IF WE INTERPRET STRESS RESPONSES AS BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS:

- ➔ WE INCREASE DEMANDS
- ➔ THE BRAIN FEELS LESS SAFE
- ➔ LEARNING DECREASES

**WHAT UNSAFE FEELS LIKE TO THE NERVOUS SYSTEM**

WHEN A DEMAND EXCEEDS CAPACITY, THE BRAIN SHIFTS TO SURVIVAL MODE. AT THIS POINT THE STUDENT IS NOT CHOOSING BEHAVIOUR – THEY ARE PROTECTING THEMSELVES.

THIS CAN LOOK LIKE:

- ➔ REFUSAL
- ➔ AVOIDANCE
- ➔ SHUTDOWN
- ➔ RUNNING AWAY
- ➔ ARGUING
- ➔ SILENCE
- ➔ AGGRESSION
- ➔ SILLINESS
- ➔ "NOT LISTENING"
- ➔ SELF HARM

**THESE ARE STRESS RESPONSES. NOT DELIBERATE BEHAVIOUR DECISIONS.**

**THE KEY RELATIONSHIP**



**SAFETY ALLOWS REGULATION. REGULATION ALLOWS LEARNING.**

Ref: Greene, R. W. (2008). The Explosive Child. \ Delahooke, M. (2019). Beyond Behaviour \ National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

FROM BLAME TO UNDERSTANDING - SIMPLY SHIFT THE LENS

**KEY PRINCIPLE:**

**WHEN THE BRAIN DETECTS THREAT, SURVIVAL SYSTEMS OVERRIDE THINKING SYSTEMS.**

**IN SIMPLE TERMS:**

**THE STUDENT MAY HAVE THE SKILL BUT TEMPORARILY CANNOT ACCESS IT.**

**SUPPORTING SAFETY & REGULATION IN SCHOOL USING THE 3-STEP DESCRIPTION RULE IN PRACTICE**

INSTEAD OF DESCRIBING THE CHILD, DESCRIBE THE SITUATION

**THE CONTEXT** - IDENTIFY STRESSORS IN THE SITUATION THAT RESULTED IN THE BEHAVIOUR HAPPENING, NOT THE BEHAVIOUR ITSELF.

**THE NERVOUS SYSTEM STATE** - MEANS WHETHER THE STUDENT'S BRAIN WAS READY FOR LEARNING OR IN SURVIVAL MODE. - COULD THEY THINK/ACCESS SKILLS

**THE SUPPORT NEEDED** - SUPPORT NEEDED MEANS WHAT THE ADULT OR ENVIRONMENT HAD TO CHANGE SO THE STUDENT COULD COPE.

Example 1 – Refusal to Work

Old style report wording

"Jack was non-compliant and refused to complete his writing task."

**USING THE NEURO AFFIRMING 3-STEP DESCRIPTION**

**1) CONTEXT:**

During independent writing after a noisy transition from yard time.

**2) NERVOUS SYSTEM STATE:**

Appeared overwhelmed and unable to process verbal instructions.

**3) SUPPORT NEEDED:**

Reduced language, a short regulation break, and help starting the first sentence.

**FINAL INCIDENT REPORT CONCLUSION:**

After yard time, Jack appeared overwhelmed and unable to process the writing demand. With reduced language and support to start the task, he was able to engage.

REGULATION FIRST



**3-STEP DESCRIPTION RULE IN PRACTICE**

CONTEXT

NERVOUS SYSTEM STATE

SUPPORT NEEDED



**BEHAVIOUR**

**MANAGEMENT ASKS:**

**"HOW DO I STOP THIS?"**



**REGULATION**

**SUPPORT ASKS:**

**"WHAT DOES THE STUDENT NEED TO REGAIN ACCESS TO THEIR SKILLS?"**



Ref: Greene, R. W. (2008). The Explosive Child. \ Delahooke, M. (2019). Beyond Behaviour \ National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

FROM BLAME TO UNDERSTANDING - SIMPLY SHIFT THE LENS



**“SUPPORT NEEDED.  
WHAT COULD THAT LOOK LIKE ?”**

**SUPPORTS ARE SPECIFIC HELP, ADJUSTMENTS,  
OR CONDITIONS REQUIRED FOR THE STUDENT TO  
REGAIN REGULATION & ACCESS LEARNING OR  
COMMUNICATION.**



**SUPPORT NEEDED MEANS WHAT THE ADULT OR ENVIRONMENT  
HAD TO CHANGE SO THE STUDENT COULD COPE.**



**EXAMPLES**

**ENVIRONMENT ADJUSTMENTS**

- SPEND TIME IN A QUIETER SPACE
- REDUCE NOISE LEVEL
- HEADPHONES/EAR DEFENDERS
- ALTERNATIVE SEATING (STANDING, WOBBLE, FLOOR, CUSHION)
- REMOVE AUDIENCE DURING DISTRESS

**COMMUNICATION SUPPORTS**

- REDUCED LANGUAGE OR INSTRUCTIONS
- OFFER EXTRA PROCESSING TIME
- ENCOURAGE NON-VERBAL RESPONSE - (POINTING, TYPING, AAC)
- UTILISE VISUAL SUPPORTS
- AVOID OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS DURING DISTRESS

**TASK & DEMAND ADJUSTMENTS**

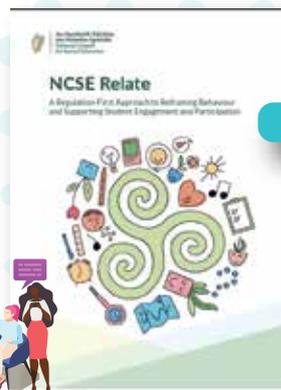
- CHOICE OF HOW TO COMPLETE WORK
- POSTPONE NON-ESSENTIAL DEMAND
- REDUCE TASK LENGTH
- REDUCED WRITING LOAD
- BREAK WORK INTO STEPS

**SENSORY STRATEGIES**

- TAILORED MOVEMENT OR SENSORY BREAK
- ACCESS TO FIDGET OR SENSORY TOOL
- CALM BREATHING SUPPORT
- DEEP PRESSURE ACTIVITY (IF PREFERRED)
- REGULATE BEFORE DISCUSSION

**RELATIONSHIP & CO-REGULATION**

- CO-REGULATION WITH TRUSTED ADULT
- CALM TONE AND SLOWER PACE
- SIT BESIDE RATHER THAN STAND OVER
- ACKNOWLEDGE FEELINGS WITHOUT JUDGEMENT
- REASSURANCE OF SAFETY



FROM BLAME TO UNDERSTANDING - SIMPLY SHIFT THE LENS

MAJOR SHIFT IN MODERN EDUCATION:

OLD MODEL CURRENT

BEHAVIOUR REFLECTS ATTITUDE  
 FIX THE CHILD  
 CONSEQUENCES TEACH SKILLS  
 INTENTIONAL BEHAVIOUR

EVIDENCE-BASED MODEL

BEHAVIOUR REFLECTS CAPACITY  
 ADJUST THE ENVIRONMENT  
 SUPPORT ENABLES SKILLS  
 STRESS RESPONSE BEHAVIOUR

5

STEPS TO SUPPORTING SAFETY & REGULATION IN SCHOOL

1

REDUCE DEMAND

**WHY:** THE BRAIN CANNOT PROCESS INSTRUCTIONS IN A STRESS RESPONSE.

**ADULTS OPTIONS:**

PAUSE INSTRUCTIONS  
 LOWER LANGUAGE LOAD  
 REMOVE AUDIENCE WHERE POSSIBLE  
 GIVE TIME WITHOUT PRESSURE  
 STOP REPEATING THE DEMAND

**INSTEAD OF SAYING:**

"COME ON, YOU KNOW THIS, JUST DO IT."

**TRY:**

"LET'S PAUSE. I'LL HELP YOU."

2

INCREASE PREDICTABILITY

**WHY:** STRESS DROPS WHEN THE BRAIN UNDERSTANDS WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT.

**ADULTS OPTIONS:**

STATE WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW  
 STATE WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT  
 KEEP VOICE NEUTRAL AND STEADY  
 AVOID SUDDEN CHANGES OR MULTIPLE INSTRUCTIONS

**INSTEAD OF SAYING:**

"COME ON, YOU KNOW THIS, JUST DO IT."

**TRY:**

"LET'S PAUSE. I'LL HELP YOU."

3

SUPPORT REGULATION BEFORE PROBLEM SOLVING

**WHY:** A DYSREGULATED STUDENT CANNOT REFLECT, APOLOGISE, OR LEARN FROM CONSEQUENCES YET.

**ADULTS OPTIONS:**

CALM TONE  
 SPACE OR PROXIMITY (BASED ON STUDENT PREFERENCE)  
 SENSORY OR MOVEMENT SUPPORT  
 CO-REGULATION (ADULT CALM HELPS STUDENT CALM)

**ONLY AFTER REGULATION RETURNS:**

DISCUSS THE INCIDENT  
 REPAIR  
 TEACH SKILLS

4

RETURN CONTROL SAFELY

**WHY:** AUTONOMY RESTORES SAFETY.

**HOW:** OFFER LIMITED CHOICES:

"HERE OR THE QUIET TABLE?"

"WRITE OR TYPE?"

5

TEACH LATER - NOT DURING DISTRESS

**WHEN:** AFTER REGULATION

**HOW:** ADULTS HELP THE STUDENT UNDERSTAND:

WHAT OVERWHELMED THEM

WHAT HELPED

WHAT TO TRY NEXT TIME

**WHY:** THIS BUILDS SKILLS INSTEAD OF FEAR.

WHAT NOT TO DO DURING DYSREGULATION - INCREASE THREAT RESPONSE AND DELAY RECOVER

AVOID: LECTURES, CONSEQUENCES FIRST, REASONING, REPEATED INSTRUCTIONS, RAISED VOICE, INSISTING ON EYE CONTACT, PUBLIC CORRECTION.

# LANGUAGE GUIDE

## STRENGTH BASED



## DEFICIT TO STRENGTH BASED RE FRAMING - SIMPLY SHIFT THE LENS

**ATTENTION-SEEKING**➔ **SEEKING CONNECTION OR CO-REGULATION****HYPERACTIVE**➔ **ENERGETIC & ENTHUSIASTIC****EASILY DISTRACTED**➔ **HIGHLY AWARE OF ENVIRONMENT****DOESN'T APPLY THEMSELVES**➔ **MOTIVATED BY MEANING & CONNECTION****OVERREACTED****EXPERIENCED A HIGH STRESS RESPONSE**➔ **EXPERIENCES STRESS INTENSELY & GENUINELY****TOO SENSITIVE**➔ **DEEPLY PERCEPTIVE AND EMOTIONALLY AWARE****MANIPULATIVE**➔ **USING AVAILABLE STRATEGIES TO GET NEEDS MET****DRAMATIC**➔ **EXPRESSIVE AND EMOTIONALLY HONEST****OBSESSIVE**➔ **DEEPLY FOCUSED. PASSIONATE ABOUT INTERESTS****AUTONOMY**

MEANS HAVING THE  
FREEDOM AND SUPPORT  
TO MAKE YOUR OWN  
CHOICES ABOUT WHAT  
YOU DO & HOW  
YOU DO IT.

**AUTONOMY** is the experience of acting with a sense of volition and psychological freedom, where a person feels their behaviour is self-endorsed and chosen rather than controlled.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being.

## DEFICIT TO STRENGTH BASED RE FRAMING - SIMPLY SHIFT THE LENS

**ARGUMENTATIVE**

➡ **ANALYTICAL THINKER. QUESTIONS LOGIC**

**OPPOSITIONAL**

➡ **PROTECTING NERVOUS SYSTEM FROM OVERWHELM**

**DEFIANT**

➡ **STRONG SENSE OF AUTONOMY**

**AVOIDANT**

➡ **SEEKING PREDICTABILITY. PRIORITISING SAFETY OR NAVIGATING COMPETING DEMANDS**

**CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR**

➡ **COMMUNICATING STRESS THROUGH BEHAVIOR**

**DISRUPTIVE IN CLASS**

➡ **EXPRESSING AN UNMET NEED OR OVERWHELM**

**NOT FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS**

➡ **NEEDS CLARITY, PROCESSING TIME, OR**

**CONTROLLING**

➡ **NEEDS PREDICTABILITY AND AGENCY**

**RIGID ABOUT ROUTINES**

➡ **FEELS SAFEST WITH PREDICTABILITY**

**INFLEXIBLE**

➡ **VALUES CONSISTENCY AND STRUCTURE**

Ref: Greene, R. W. (2008). The Explosive Child. \ Delahooke, M. (2019). Beyond Behaviour \ National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

## DEFICIT TO STRENGTH BASED RE FRAMING - SIMPLY SHIFT THE LENS

**A HELPFUL RULE OF THUMB**

IF A WORD: 1) ASSIGNS BLAME 2) COMPARES TO "NORMAL"  
3) DESCRIBES CHARACTER INSTEAD OF CONTEXT  
4) IMPLIES CHOICE DURING DYSREGULATION...IT'S PROBABLY DEFICIT-BASED.

**BEHAVIOUR INCIDENT**

➔ **MOMENT OF DYSREGULATION**

**NON-COMPLIANT**

➔ **NOT ABLE TO ENGAGE WITH THE DEMAND  
RIGHT NOW**

**ESCALATED QUICKLY**

➔ **NERVOUS SYSTEM MOVED RAPIDLY INTO A  
STRESS RESPONSE**

**TANTRUM**

➔ **DISTRESS RESPONSE**

**AGGRESSIVE**

➔ **ENTERED A FIGHT RESPONSE**

**MELTDOWN**

➔ **LOSS OF REGULATION DUE TO OVERWHELM**

**ACTING OUT**

➔ **EXPRESSING DISTRESS THROUGH BEHAVIOUR**

**TESTING BOUNDARIES**

➔ **EXPLORING SAFETY AND PREDICTABILITY**

Ref: Greene, R. W. (2008). The Explosive Child. \ Delahooke, M. (2019). Beyond Behaviour \ National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

## DEFICIT TO STRENGTH BASED RE FRAMING - SIMPLY SHIFT THE LENS

## Pathology / Medicalised Identity Labels

These come from diagnostic/medical classification systems & often imply a person is incorrect rather than different.

- |  |                         |
|--|-------------------------|
| ➔ <b>DISORDER</b>  | ➔ <b>SUFFERS FROM</b>   |
| ➔ <b>IMPAIRMENT</b>  | ➔ <b>AFFLICTED WITH</b> |
| ➔ <b>DEFICIT</b>   | ➔ <b>VICTIM OF</b>      |
| ➔ <b>DYSFUNCTION</b>   | ➔ <b>ABNORMAL</b>       |
| ➔ <b>PATHOLOGICAL</b>  | ➔ <b>MALADAPTIVE</b>    |
| ➔ <b>SYMPTOMS</b>  | ➔ <b>CONDITION</b>      |
| ➔ <b>SEVERITY LEVEL - MILD / MODERATE / SEVERE</b><br>(WHEN DESCRIBING THE PERSON RATHER THAN SUPPORT NEEDS) |                         |
| ➔ <b>COMORBIDITY</b><br>(CAN FEEL DEHUMANISING OUTSIDE CLINICAL CONTEXTS)                                    |                         |
| ➔ <b>ATYPICAL</b><br>(CAN BE NEUTRAL CLINICALLY, BUT DEFICIT-FRAMED IN EDUCATION REPORTS)                    |                         |

**WHY**

The wording in an IEP influences how a student is viewed and supported. Pathology-based terms deficit, impairment, disorder, or severity, can unintentionally position the child as the difficulty. Deficit-focused wording often lowers expectations, increases anxiety around behaviour, and leads to support based on control rather than understanding. Neutral, descriptive language keeps the focus on access to learning — what helps, what overwhelms, and what support works — which leads to more accurate planning and better outcomes for the student.

Ref: Greene, R. W. (2008). The Explosive Child. \ Delahooke, M. (2019). Beyond Behaviour \ National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

## DEFICIT TO STRENGTH BASED RE FRAMING - SIMPLY SHIFT THE LENS

**ENGAGEMENT & LEARNING****OFF TASK**

➡ **ATTENTION SHIFTED AWAY FROM THE TASK**

**EASILY DISTRACTED**

➡ **HIGHLY AWARE OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

**POOR ATTENTION**

➡ **ATTENTION VARIES DEPENDING ON REGULATION & INTEREST**

**DOESN'T APPLY THEMSELVES**

➡ **ENGAGEMENT INCREASES WITH MEANING/CONNECTION**

**UNMOTIVATED**

➡ **MOTIVATION IS CONTEXT-DEPENDENT**

**WON'T TRY TASK**

➡ **FEEL UNSAFE, UNCLEAR, OR OVERWHELMING**

**GIVES UP QUICKLY**

➡ **REQUIRES SUPPORT TO PERSIST WHEN CHALLENGED**

**NEEDS CONSTANT PROMPTING**

➡ **BENEFITS FROM SCAFFOLDING AND REMINDERS**

**NOT INDEPENDENT**

➡ **INDEPENDENCE INCREASES WITH STRUCTURE/SUPPORT**

**FAILS TO COMPLETE WORK**

➡ **WORK COMPLETION AFFECTED BY REGULATION LOAD**

**AVOIDS WORK**

➡ **PROTECTING FROM COGNITIVE OVERLOAD**

**SLOW TO START**

➡ **NEEDS PROCESSING TIME**

**POOR PARTICIPATION**

➡ **PARTICIPATES WHEN FEELING SAFE AND SUPPORTED**

Ref: Greene, R. W. (2008). The Explosive Child. \ Delahooke, M. (2019). Beyond Behaviour \ National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

PUBLICATIONS



PODCAST



TRAINING



RECOMMENDED  
RESOURCES

NEURO-AFFIRMING  
BEST PRACTICES



REGULATION TOOLS



RECOMMENDED SOURCES FOR NEURO- AFFIRMING BEST PRACTICES



The Middletown Centre for Autism website is available resource for schools committed to inclusive practice. With free podcasts, training opportunities, & evidence informed guidance tailored to educators, it provides practical support that can enhance understanding, strengthen relationships, and improve outcomes for autistic and neurodivergent students.



RECOMMENDED SOURCES FOR NEURO-AFFIRMING BEST PRACTICES



**IRELAND'S AUTISM CHARITY**



ASIAM is Ireland's national autism charity, working to create a society in which autistic people are accepted, understood, and supported to thrive. Their core goal is to promote inclusion, equality, and access to opportunities across education, employment, and community life. ASIAM provides a wide range of trusted resources, including published research, policy guidance, training programs for schools and organisations, and practical supports such as visual resources and toolkits. Their work is grounded in autistic voice and evidence-based practice, making them a reliable and valuable source of information for educators and families alike.



ASIAM RESOURCE LIBRARY



- ➔ **Research & Policy**  
Published research reports on autism in Ireland
- ➔ **Training & Professional Learning**  
Autism awareness training for schools  
Whole-school inclusion programs  
Webinars and online learning modules  
CPD opportunities for educators
- ➔ **Education Supports**  
Guidance for inclusive classrooms  
Practical strategies for supporting autistic students
- ➔ **Practical Tools & Visual Supports**  
Visual schedules and communication supports

## RECOMMENDED SOURCES FOR NEURO-AFFIRMING BEST PRACTICES



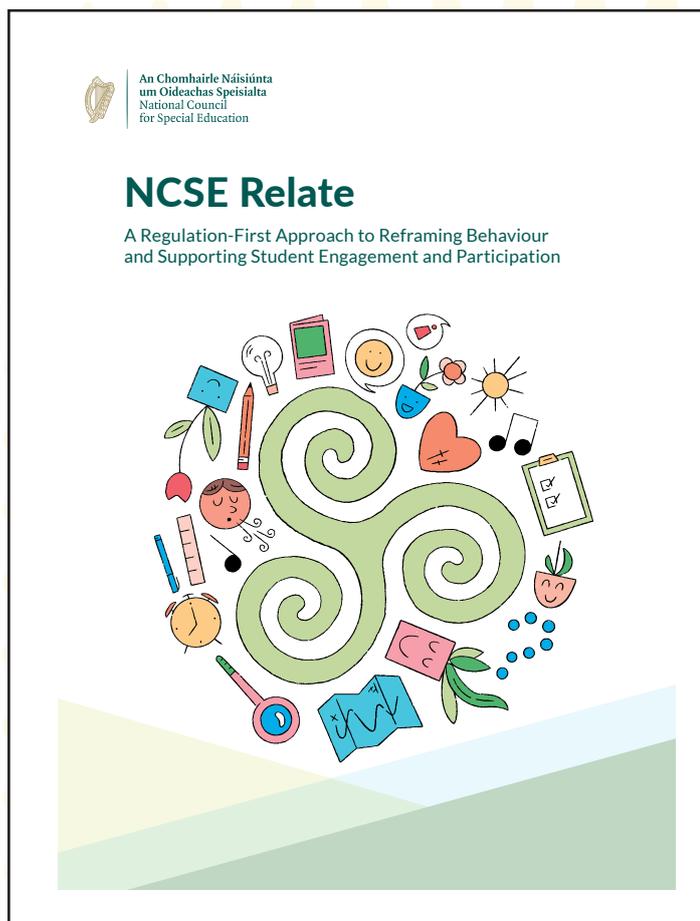
Neurodiversity Ireland is an organisation focused on promoting understanding, acceptance, and inclusion of neurodivergent people across Irish society. Grounded in the neurodiversity paradigm, it recognises neurological differences such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia and dyspraxia as natural variations of human development rather than deficits to be fixed. Neurodiversity Ireland provides advocacy, awareness initiatives, educational resources, and community engagement aimed at supporting schools, workplaces, and public services to adopt inclusive, strengths-based approaches. Their work centers lived experience and promotes environments where neurodivergent individuals can thrive.

<https://neurodiversityireland.com/>



RECOMMENDED SOURCES FOR NEURO-AFFIRMING BEST PRACTICES

A Regulation-First Approach to Reframing Behavior and Supporting Student Engagement and Participation



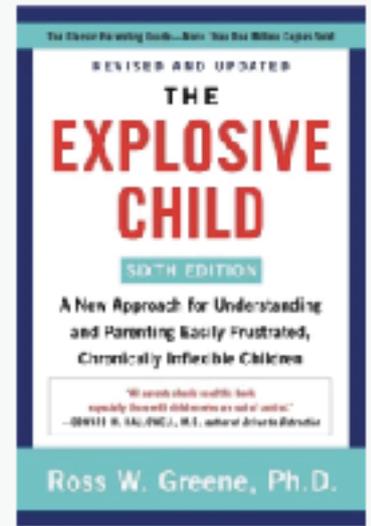
Supporting regulation & relationships in the classroom is central to inclusive education. The NCSE RELATE guidance offers practical, evidence informed strategies to help staff understand behavior through a regulation & relationship lens rather than a compliance lens. It provides clear, accessible tools that can strengthen connection, reduce escalation, & support positive outcomes for all students — particularly

those who experience stress responses in learning environments. Taking time to engage with this resource can enhance consistency across the school and support a calmer, more responsive classroom culture.

RECOMMENDED SOURCES FOR NEURO-AFFIRMING BEST PRACTICES



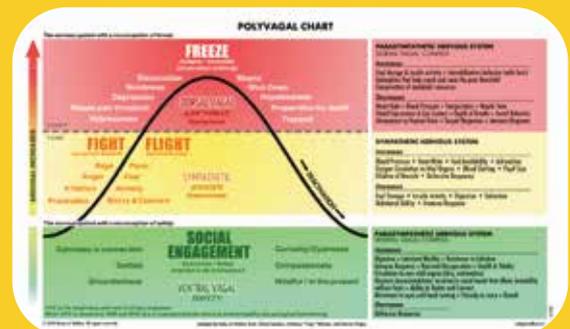
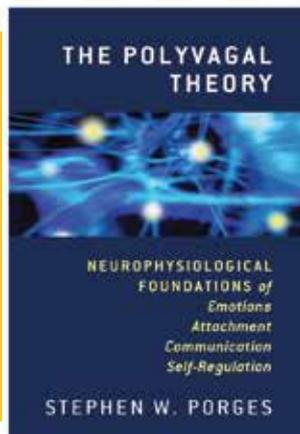
Dr. Ross Greene is a clinical psychologist & the originator of the Collaborative & Proactive Solutions (CPS) approach. His work re frames challenging behaviour as a signal of stress and unmet needs rather than willful defiance, emphasizing that “kids do well if they can.” Through his writing and the organisation Lives in the Balance, he supports schools and families to build collaborative, regulation-focused, and relationship centered environments.



RECOMMENDED



THE POLYVAGAL THEORY BY STEPHEN W. PORGES



# SENSORY REGULATION PLANNING





# SUPERCALM TOP 5 REGULATION STATIONS

Sensory Wellbeing Solutions for Children

Our SUPERCLIMBER - Transverse, Horizontal Walk Wall.  
Highly Regulating Proprioceptive Input Movement Station

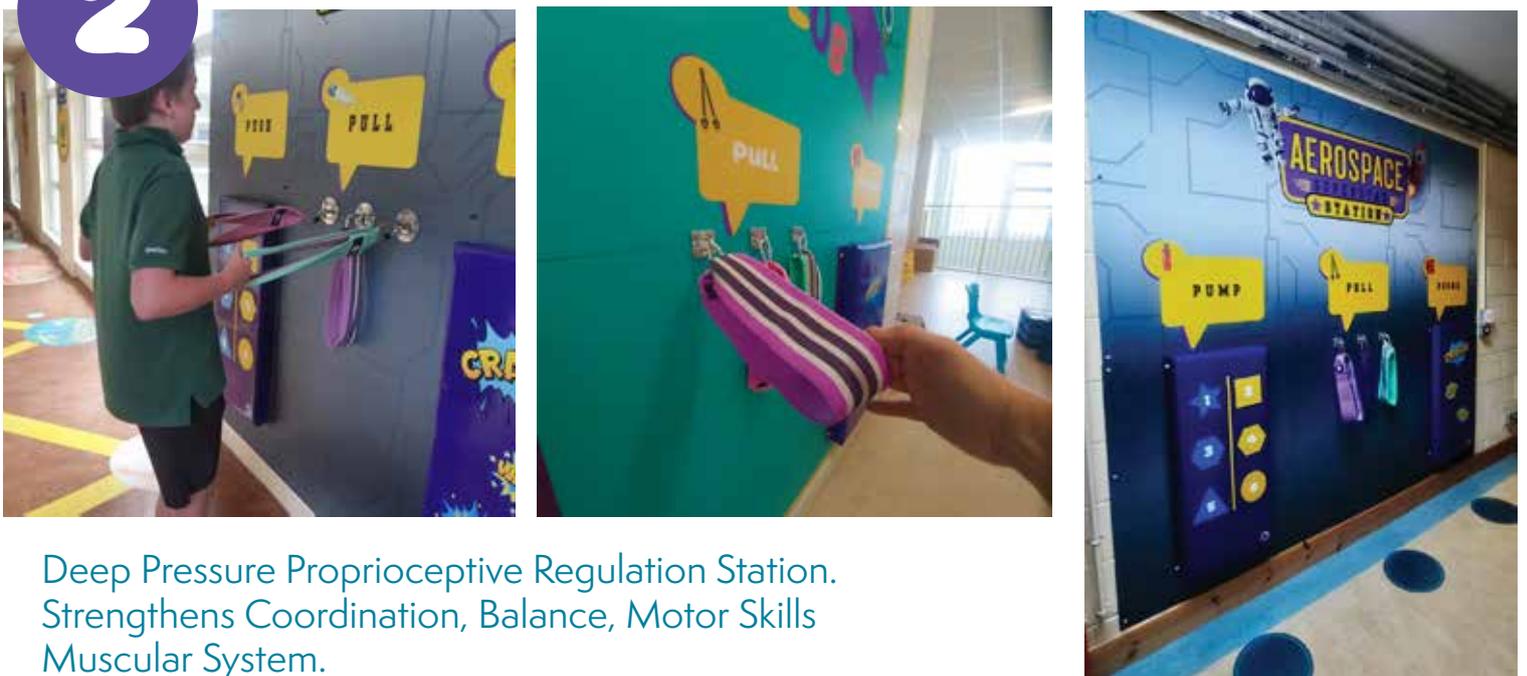
1



An effective whole-body regulation tool for schools. By engaging both upper and lower body coordination, it supports brain connectivity, strengthens cognitive and motor development, and encourages rich sensory exploration.

2

SUPER STAR GYM - Punch Pad & Resistance Band Combination Wall



Deep Pressure Proprioceptive Regulation Station.  
Strengthens Coordination, Balance, Motor Skills  
Muscular System.

3

Our SUPERPATHWAY - Universal Sensory Floor Pathway with Wall Stations: Alerting, Organising, Calming Movement Pathway



Monkey Movement Wall Ladder. Ideal for Calming Deep Pressure

Spinning Wheel Range: Animal Walks, Core Building or Yoga Movements

4



5



Regulation Tools that support access to learning - Offering choice & Autonomy.





**SUPERCALM**  
Sensory Wellbeing Solutions for Children

## OUR MISSION

To design and deliver innovative sensory regulation tools & practical know how that empowers educators to create accessible, safe inclusive learning environments.

By combining evidence based practice with practical design SUPERCALM aims to support schools in building the tools, skills, awareness & confidence needed to nurture every child's' potential and promote genuine Neuro-affirming environments where neurodivergent learners can thrive.

OUR MOVEMENT  
BREAKS WORK  
WONDERS  
*for everybody*



[supercalmsensoryproducts.com](https://supercalmsensoryproducts.com)

**ORDER NOW**

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[Supercalm@gmail.com](mailto:Supercalm@gmail.com)