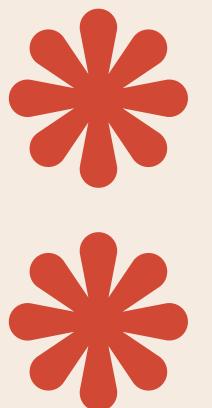
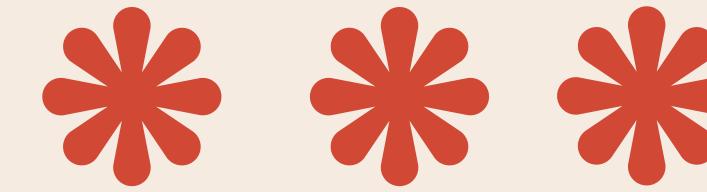

When Students Shut Down or Blow Up:

Trauma-Informed Strategies for Behavioral
Challenges in Surgical Technology Education

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Why This Topic Matters

- Surgical technology education is high-pressure by design
 - Behavioral challenges are increasing, not disappearing
 - Most educators were trained to teach content – not regulation
 - Today is about practical strategies that protect learning and professionalism
-



Name the Reality



Reframing those moments as stress responses, and learning how to respond preserves learning, accountability, and safety.

When a student shuts down or blows up, it's often labeled as attitude, laziness, or lack of professionalism.

Content & Not Behavior

We teach skills well.
Little to no training in behavior management.

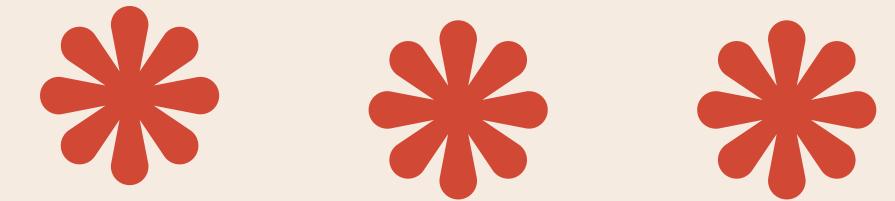
Why This Is Happening More Now

COVID-19

COVID disrupted emotional development and coping skills in younger students.

Social Demands

Many are working full-time, caring for children, financially stressed, and are first-gen college students.



This is not about lowering standards. It's about keeping students regulated enough to meet them

What's Actually Happening in the Brain

Simple brain explanation:

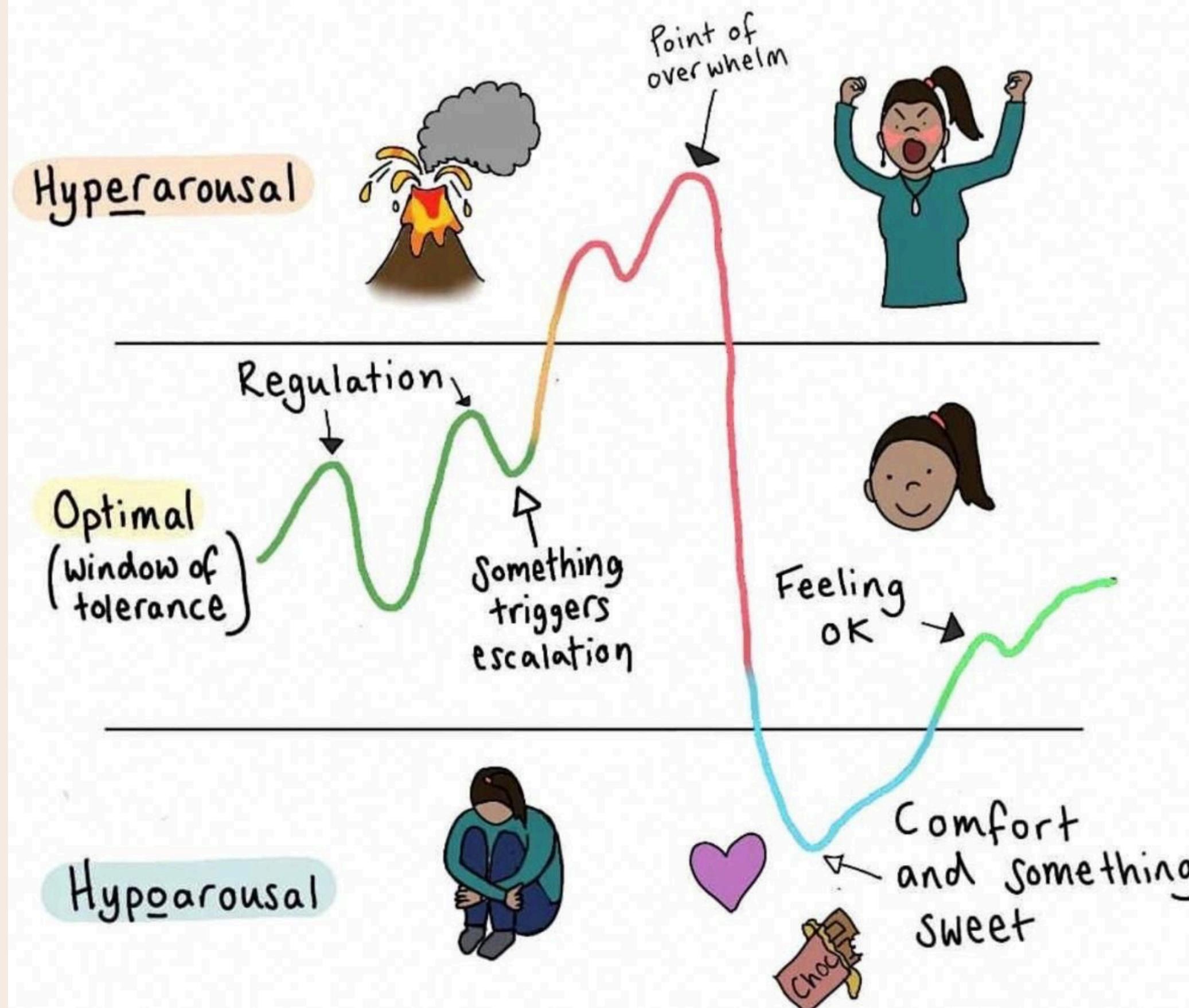
- Under stress, the thinking brain goes offline
- You cannot teach sterile technique to a dysregulated nervous system

The Stress Response



- Fight → “blow up” (arguing, defiance, anger)
- Flight → leaving, avoidance
- Freeze → shutting down, blank stare, silence

Window of Tolerance



Two Patterns Educators See



The Shutdown Student

- Silence
- Avoidance
- Missed assignments
- Flat affect
- “I don’t know” to everything



Two Patterns Educators See



What NOT to do:

- Public calling out
- Interpreting as laziness
- Increasing pressure in the moment

Trauma-informed response:



- Lower emotional temperature first
- Private check-in
- Clear structure + choice
- Predictability



Two Patterns Educators See



The Blow-Up Student

- Defensiveness
- Anger
- Crying
- Walking out
- Confrontational tone



Two Patterns Educators See



What NOT to do:

- Power struggles
- Matching intensity
- Public correction

Trauma-informed response:



- Regulate yourself first
- Short, calm directives
- Delay discipline conversations
- Revisit expectations when calm

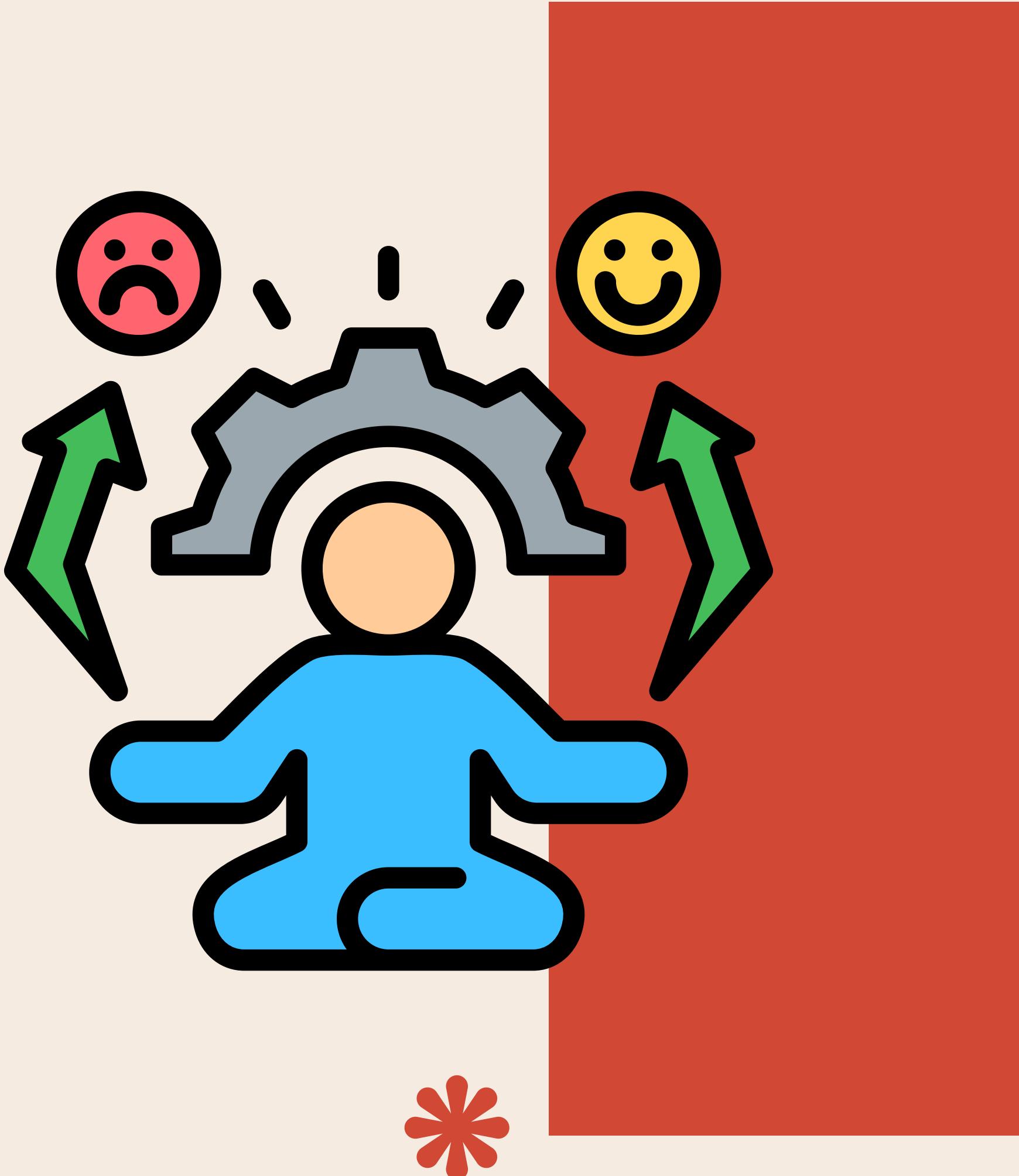


Practical Strategies Educators Can Use Tomorrow



Strategy 1: Regulate First, Teach Second

- Calm voice
- Slow pace
- Fewer words
- Neutral body language

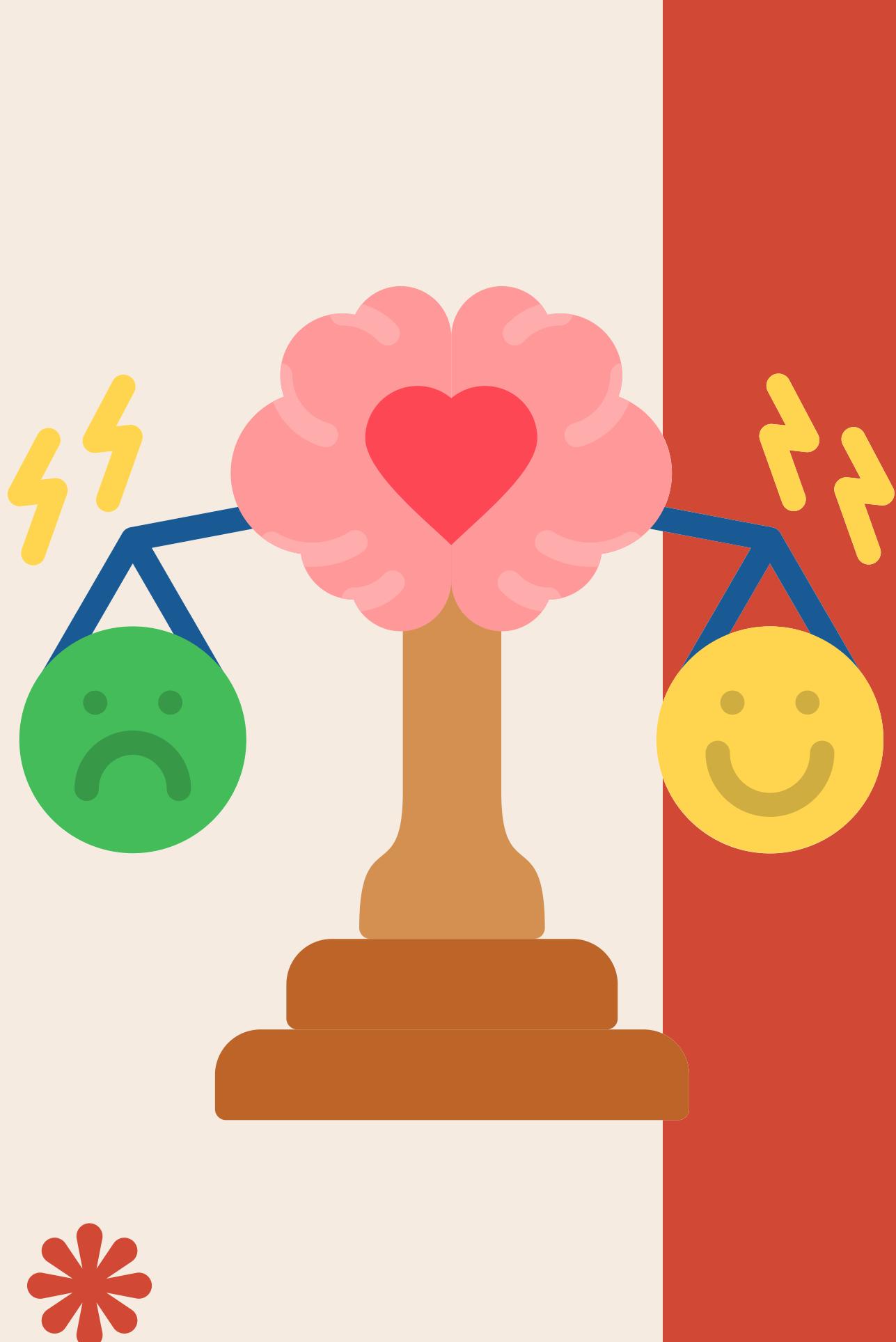


Practical Strategies Educators Can Use Tomorrow



Strategy 2: Containment Over Confrontation

- “Let’s pause this and talk after class.”
- “I can see this is a lot right now.”



Practical Strategies Educators Can Use Tomorrow



Strategy 3: Clear Structure Is Trauma-Informed

- Predictable routines
- Clear expectations
- Transparent grading
- No surprise consequences



Practical Strategies Educators Can Use Tomorrow



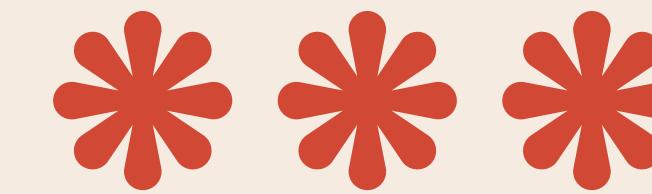
Strategy 4: Accountability Without Escalation

- Trauma-informed ≠ permissive
- Standards stay high
- Delivery changes



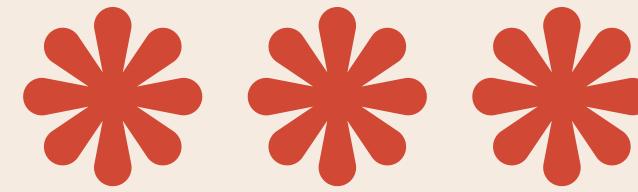


Case Study



-
- Academically capable student
 - Increasing silence and withdrawal
 - Avoids eye contact and participation
 - Missed labs or incomplete work
 - Frequent “I don’t know” responses
-





What Educators Often Feel

- Frustration
 - Confusion
 - Concern about professionalism
 - Pressure to 'push' the student
 - Fear of lowering standards
-



What was actually happening



- Overwhelm
- Fear of Failure
- Cognitive Overload

Key Point:

This was not a motivation problem
- It was a regulation problem





Check-in



How many of you have experienced this?

What labels are usually applied to the student?



Key Takeways



- Students learn best within the window of tolerance
- Shutdown and blow-ups are stress responses
- You don't need to be a therapist
- Small shifts prevent big escalations
- Regulation protects learning and professionalism



Our role isn't to fix students — it's to create conditions where learning can happen, even under stress.





A large, stylized, yellow and orange text reading "THANK YOU". The letters are thick and rounded, with a gradient from yellow at the top to orange at the bottom. The "T" has a small blue triangle on its top right. The "O" in "YOU" has a small yellow circle with a star inside. The text is surrounded by several small, yellow, five-pointed starburst shapes.

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