



Strengthening Safety and Regulation: The Fundamentals of Supporting Traumatized Students

Students don't act truly independently. They act in response to their relationships and a wider context. To think relationally means to locate the student's behaviour within this dynamic, rather than view the student as separate from their surroundings. This involves trying to understand student behaviour in terms of what precipitated it and what maintains it. It also includes an appreciation for the influence of the educator's actions. Often, the educator can unintentionally be acting in a way that perpetuates problematic student behaviour, despite their best efforts to do otherwise.

From: The Third Path: A Relationship-Based Approach to Student Achievement and Behaviour

CONNECT

- Make relationship repairs
- Build behavioural repertoire
- Reward positive behaviour
- Give responsibility
- Provide choice
- Ensure any consequences are meaningful
- Avoid shaming
- Avoid power struggles
- Have a plan and follow through
- Maintain limits and boundaries
- Recognize the student's relational style
- Have clear and meaningful expectations

- Expand emotional vocabulary
- Encourage emotional expression
- Address emotional needs
- Recognize underlying feelings

- Help the student recognize their distress
- Provide physical activity
- Provide breaks (even from the classroom)
- Provide calming strategies
- Co-regulate
- Be reassuring
- Be responsive
- Recognize the signs of distress
- Remain calm
- Be attuned

- Reduce known triggers
- Know your students
- Be in charge of your classroom
- Be aware of your body posture
- Be aware of your voice and expression
- Be consistent
- Be authentic

4 Student's Relational Style

The **behaviour response** is also usually a learned response. The student draws upon the behaviours they have been **taught** by their caregivers to attempt to get their emotional needs met. Their behaviour repertoire may be healthy and effective or relatively ineffective.

The **feeling response** is generally learned from adult caregivers (and even peers). This involves the way the student has been taught to **make sense** of their physiological response. This can be adaptive or maladaptive.

The **physiological response** is generally **involuntary** and non-conscious. This usually occurs in reaction to a contextual trigger that feels threatening in some way. This can be both instinctive and/or learned. This sets in motion the fight/flight or freeze response.

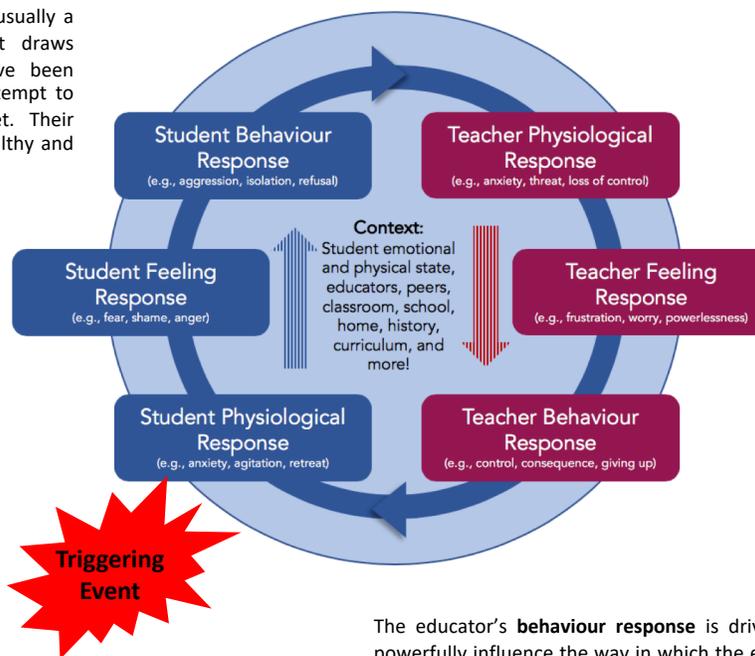
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The **triggering event** can come in a variety of forms. The trigger may be obvious or not, very recent or may have happened some time ago. Triggers may be external or internal; (i.e., the student's own thoughts and feelings).

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Cycle of Student Behaviour



The educator's **behaviour response** is driven by their feelings and beliefs. These powerfully influence the way in which the educator will understand and react to the student's behaviour. The educator should take care not to act from their own emotion or faulty beliefs, and instead should strive to discover why the student is behaving the way they are, what needs underlie their behaviour, and what response will best de-escalate the student's behaviour by addressing their needs. This **relational approach** takes a longer term view and focuses on student growth (rather than behaviour control).

Educator's Relational Style

Educators can have a **physiological response** to student feeling and behaviour. The response tends to be **automatic** and often outside of their conscious awareness. The more challenging the student feeling or behaviour, the more powerful (and potentially dysregulating) the physiological response will likely be.

The educator's **feeling response** is influenced by their physiological response and shaped by their assumptions and beliefs about the student's feelings or behaviour. These may be accurate or inaccurate, effective or relatively ineffective.

REFLECT

- Know your own hot buttons
- Practice mindful self-observation
- Listen to your body
- Balance relationships vs. tasks
- Stay truly open to learning
- Recognize your signs of stress
- Develop your "system" for stress management

Which of the following do you tend to believe?

You need to assert authority and control over your class.
OR
Children need structure, acceptance and understanding.

The child is making the choice to misbehave.

OR
The child is responding to their situation using the best strategy that they have right now.

Children need to be compliant.
OR
Children need to feel safe and secure.

If the parents are not committed to supporting their child, there's not much I can do to make a difference in the child's life.

OR
If the parents are struggling, then the child needs my support more than ever.