

Co-Regulation Quick Guide for Educators

Purpose: Provide educators with a fast, practical reference for how to stay regulated while supporting dysregulated students.

What Is Co-Regulation?

Co-regulation is the process of one regulated nervous system calming another. In schools, this means that how we show up – especially during stress or conflict – can shape how safe or supported a student feels in their own body and mind.

When a Student Is Dysregulated, Try This Instead of This:

When a student...	Instead of this...	Try this...
Shuts down or refuses to work	“If you don’t do this now, you’re going to lose recess.”	“It looks like something’s getting in the way right now. Let’s figure it out together.”
Becomes defiant or explosive	“That’s disrespectful. Go to the office.”	“You’re having a hard moment — I’m here, and we’ll get through it safely.”
Walks out of the room	Chase or scold	Pause, stay calm, and welcome them back with dignity when they’re ready
Cries or gets overwhelmed	“Calm down”	“I see big feelings. Want to take a break or grab a strategy?”
Pushes materials or gets physically agitated	“Stop it!”	“Let’s take a pause. Do you want space or support right now?”

Core Principles of Co-Regulation in Schools

- **Regulation is contagious.** Our calm can create theirs. But, our panic will escalate theirs.
- **Behavior is communication.** Look underneath the outburst for a need, not just a rule break.
- **Predictability = Safety.** Students feel safer when adults are consistent, clear, and kind.
- **Connection is a precondition for correction.** Relationships first, always.

Your Co-Regulation Toolkit: Try These in the Moment

- Take a breath before you speak
- Lower your voice instead of raising it
- Give the student a regulated “anchor” (a calm presence, not a lecture)
- Offer a choice: “Would you rather try this now or come back to it in 5 minutes?”
- Use *nonverbal* cues like a calm hand gesture, a visual break card, or proximity support
- Validate the feeling: “It makes sense that you’re upset.”
- Follow up later with curiosity, not consequences: “Hey, what was going on earlier?”