

UNDERSTANDING **NEURODIVERSITY**

Behavioural Challenges, Mental Health and Learning



Case Study

Navigating Behavior and Regulation in Group Settings

Context

You're running an after-school program for children aged 8–12. The program includes structured activities (e.g., crafts, sports) and unstructured free play. Your staff-to-child ratio is 1:10, and most staff members have basic training in child supervision but limited experience in addressing behavioural challenges. The program serves children with diverse needs, including neurodivergent participants and those from various cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Recently, you've noticed that several children struggle with selfregulation during transitions between activities. This often leads to outbursts, refusals, and occasional physical conflicts between peers, creating a ripple effect of dysregulation in the group.

Jordan (age 10), frequently refuses to participate when the group moves from one activity to the next, often yelling, "I don't want to!" and running to a corner of the room.

Maya (age 9), becomes visibly upset when there's too much noise, covering her ears and yelling at others to be quiet.



What might be the underlying reasons for Jordan's refusal to transition?

refusal

running to a corner

yelling "I don't want to"

Current activity is enjoyable - doesn't want to stop

Fear

Anxiety

Discomfort with the unknown (new activity)

Abrupt transition

Doesn't understand the reason for transition

Lack of control

No prompts or cues

Overwhelmed

Avoiding something - needs space

personal goal was not met



What might be the underlying reasons for Maya's sensitivity to noise?

covering ears

yelling at others to be quiet

trauma

discomfort

anxiety

tinnitus or pain

sensory overload

stress

trying to control the setting - could be because they do not feel safe to advocate or comfortable enough to ask for help



at home time, a child climbed up a tree (gleefully) and refused to get down and go home. It was so hard to know what to do! We were not able to get him down from the tree and the staff ended up going home and the mum waited at the bottom of the tree.

Recognizing the power dynamic can be dysregulating

Gleeful

Climbed a tree Refused to come down Refusal to get in the car

Bored at home vs. fun at the program

Having fun playing with parents

Attention seeking, seeking engagement with parents

Transitions are challenging

Attachment to program or place

Demand avoidance tasks at home

Needing a transition routine or longer transition time

Anxiety looking for comfort

Incidentally creating

Fuelled by attention

Afraid to get down routine from the tree

What is the difference between classroom and home? Is the home environment supportive?



A child (approximately age 6) is described as "obedient" or "compliant." She tends to go off on her own and does not engage with other children or activities. She seems to be controlling her environment. She also has perfectionist tendencies. When playing with other children, she is usually following, not leading.

> spends time alone

perfectionism

following the lead of others

obedient" or "compliant"

does not engage

worried about making mistakes or not meeting expectations

anxiety

lack of control

modeled or

fear of rejection worried about the perception of others

learned

behaviour

seeking control where possible - safety

lack of control in home environment or demand avoidance

sensory overwhelm

avoiding attracting attention to themselves

prefers independent activities

avoiding reactions

What is happening in the home/classroom dynamics?



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What proactive strategies could help Jordan and Maya regulate their emotions?

What adjustments could be made to the physical or social environment?

How might you create routines to support predictability and reduce anxiety?

How can the space be adapted to be sensory-friendly, considering noise, lighting, and movement?



Regulation Checklist

Navigating Behavior and Regulation in Group Settings

Approaches: □ Empathy – behaviours are communication □ Co-Regulation – provide supportive, nonjudgmental responses □ Neuroaffirming lens – celebrate diversity in children
Proactive Techniques: □ Visual schedules and timers □ Predictable routines □ Offer choices to increase engagement
Responsive Techniques: Under Calming tools Redirect to a quiet area
Follow-up Techniques: □ Debrief when regulated □ Collaborate with caregivers
Environment: Quiet zones Minimal visual clutter Noise reduction Visual cues Noise-cancelling headphones Weighted lap pads Visual emotion charts Fidgets



Case Study

Navigating Behavior and Regulation in Group Settings

How can you train staff to respond effectively to dysregulation without escalating situations?

What tools or resources could staff use to feel more prepared and regulated?

How can you encourage staff to approach behaviour through a trauma-informed, neuroaffirming lens?

What things do you already do that

make you feel:

Happy?

Rested?

At peace?

Grounded?

Energized?

Jot down as many ideas as you can on a piece of paper or in a word document. Examples:

Going to home depot Reading a book

Listening to music (heavy metal is regulating)

Working out/exercising

Being in nature Having a bath

Eating my favourite food (soup) Removing self from stimuli Taking a deep breath

Pet snuggles

Watching 'is it cake?'

Having the fridge stocked and food prepped

Getting a good night's sleep Time alone to drift and create Time with friends and family

Being deeply engaged in an activity

Having an open schedule

Getting satisfaction out of completing a

mundane task

Cooking Baking Etc.

What format fits your lifestyle?

Where can you display it so that you see it regularly?





Create Your Own Self-Care Menu

WELCOME!

Welcome to this prototype of our Self-Care Menu worksheet! This worksheet will walk you step-by-step through creating a menu of caring activities that you can turn to on good days and bad. You might use this menu on good days, to have a visual reminder of daily habits and routines. You might also turn to this menu when you're feeling overwhelmed, depressed, anxious, or stressed. When you're in that state of mind, it can be hard, if not impossible to think of things to do to help yourself feel better. Putting in the work now to write down some ideas is, in itself, a practice of caring for your future self.

HOW TO USE THIS

- Think of this as a tapas menu. Some days, you may only want or need to choose one item. Other days, you might want to mix and match things to care for yourself more deeply. There is no right way! Do what feels good and right to you.
- This is NOT a to-do list it is a menu. The goal is not to "accomplish" everything on your list, but to have an easy reminder of things you enjoy doing and you know can help you.
- Keep this where you will see it! Maybe that's on your fridge, in your office, or your bathroom mirror.

HOW NOT TO USE THIS WORKSHEET

- Do not use this list to shame yourself. The goal is not to do everything, but something.
- Don't choose things that you wish you would do, if you were a different person. Feeling shame for not doing things you tell yourself you "should" do is not helping anyone. Pick things that you know will help you and that you will actually do.
- Don't overwhelm yourself! Try to limit yourself to 3-5 options for each category. If you are struggling, the last thing you want is too many options to choose from.

STEP 1: START WITH WHAT YOU KNOW

What things do you already do that make you feel happy? Rested? At peace? Grounded? Energized? Brain dump those things onto a blank piece of paper.

STEP 2: ORGANIZE!

There are two blank templates on the following pages. One allows you to organize your self-care menu based on your capacity and energy. The other allows you to organize based on the amount of time you have available. Choose one, and start organizing your list from Step 1, writing down each item in the appropriate spot on the template.

STEP 3: GET CREATIVE

Are there any areas on your menu that are sparse? Brainstorm some activities you could do in those areas and add them to your template.

STEP 4: USE IT!

Keep your menu somewhere you will regularly see it - in your journal, your bathroom mirror, your fridge, or workspace. Turn to it when you are in need of some care.



Self-Care Menu

HOW FULL IS MY CUP?

FULL CUP / HALF CUP / EMPTY CUP

Each column represents how "full your cup" is on a given day.

With a full cup, you can do anything! With a half-full cup, you might be lacking energy or motivation. With an empty cup, you may be struggling just to make it through the day. Arrange your activities into the categories below. This way, even on an "empty cup" day, you know there is still something you can do to care for yourself, even if it's small.

	FULL CUP	HALF CUP	EMPTY CUP		
PHYSICAL	ex. HIIT workout	ex. Go for a walk	ex. brush teeth or hair.		
	ex. Journal my feelings	ex. Cry / dance it out	ex. Listen to music that matches my feelings		
RELATIONAL	ex. Zoom or call a friend	ex. Text a friend	ex. Think of someone I'm grateful to know		



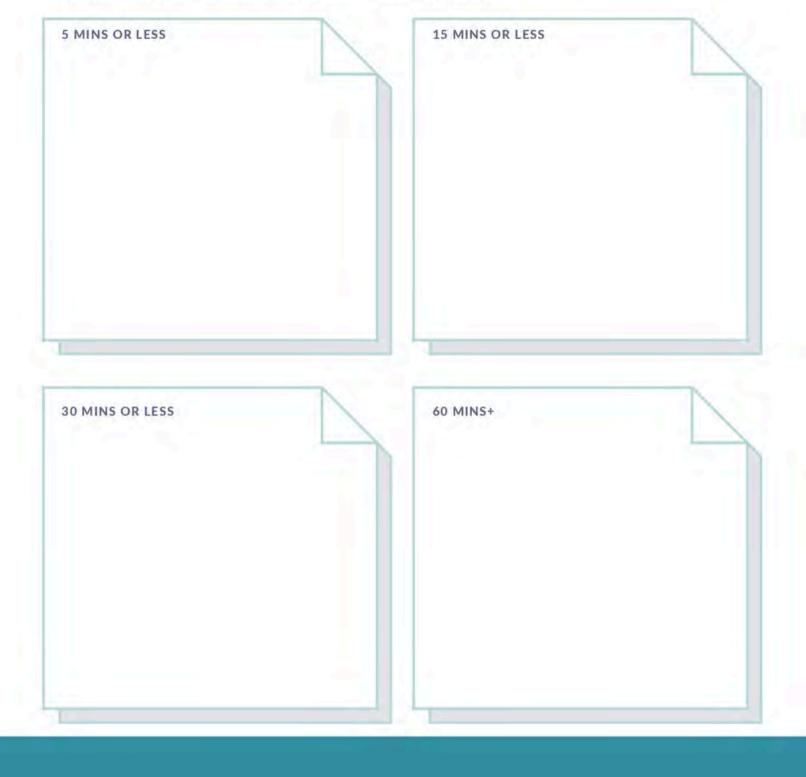
Self-Care Menu

HOW MUCH TIME

ORGANIZE YOUR LIST BASED ON THE TIME YOU HAVE AVAILABLE

"I don't have time to do self-care!" Sound familiar?

By organizing your self-care menu based on how much time each activity requires, you can help yourself believe that you always have time to do something loving for yourself!





meal size or type



SELF-CARE MENU

00	take a few deep breaths	5	MINS
B	stretch your body	5	MINS
0	listen to your favourite song	5	MINS
	meditate on your purpose	15	MINS
	read a chapter of a book	15	MINS
	journal out your thoughts	15	MINS
1	take a walk outside	30	MINS
Z	get crafty	30	MINS
8	cook a new recipe	30	MINS

time measurement

@thefabstory



Choose an action to give your mind a little break today!

AT HOME

211 11711M	
Meditate	. 5 MINS
Spend a quiet moment with yourself	15 MINS
Do something creative	
AT WORK	
Do a brain dump	10 MINS
Take a short break	30 MINS
Focus on one task at a time	60 M INS
OUTSIDE	
Get some fresh air	10 MINS
Get active and move your body	20 MINS
Spend time with your support circle	60 MINS

location



Upcoming Workshop

Join us March 4, 10-11:30am Social and Emotional Learning

Where we will cover the pillars of Social and Emotional Learning:

Self-Awareness
Self-Management
Social Awareness
Relationship Skills
Responsible Decision Making

Workshop recordings, Zoom links, and slides are all found on our website here: https://ldsociety.ca/united-way-schools-out-program/

Thank you!

LDS - Learn. Develop. Succeed.
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