



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.

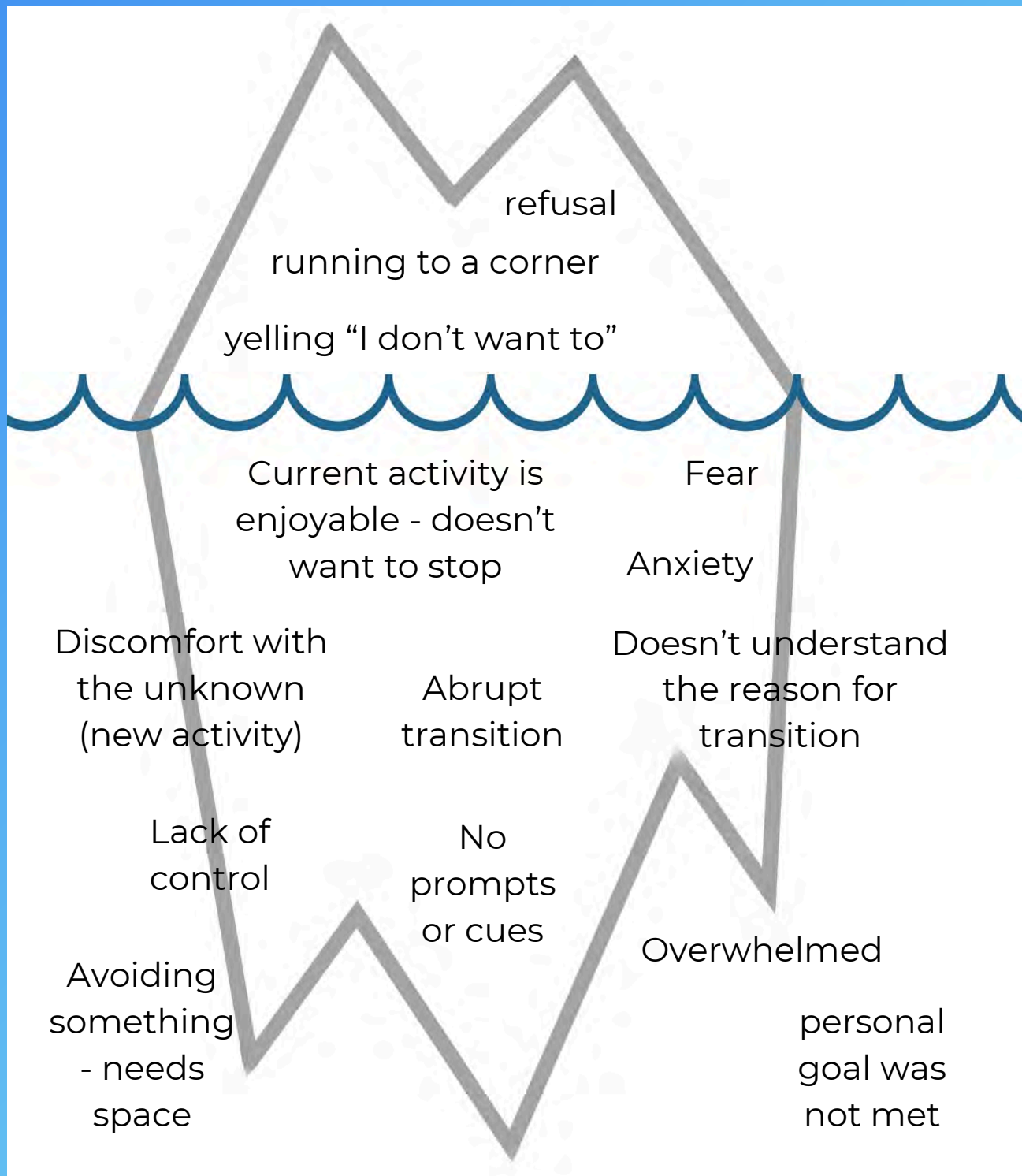
Recently, you've noticed that several children struggle with self-regulation during transitions between activities. This often leads to outbursts, refusals, and occasional physical conflicts between peers, creating a ripple effect of dysregulation in the group.

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.

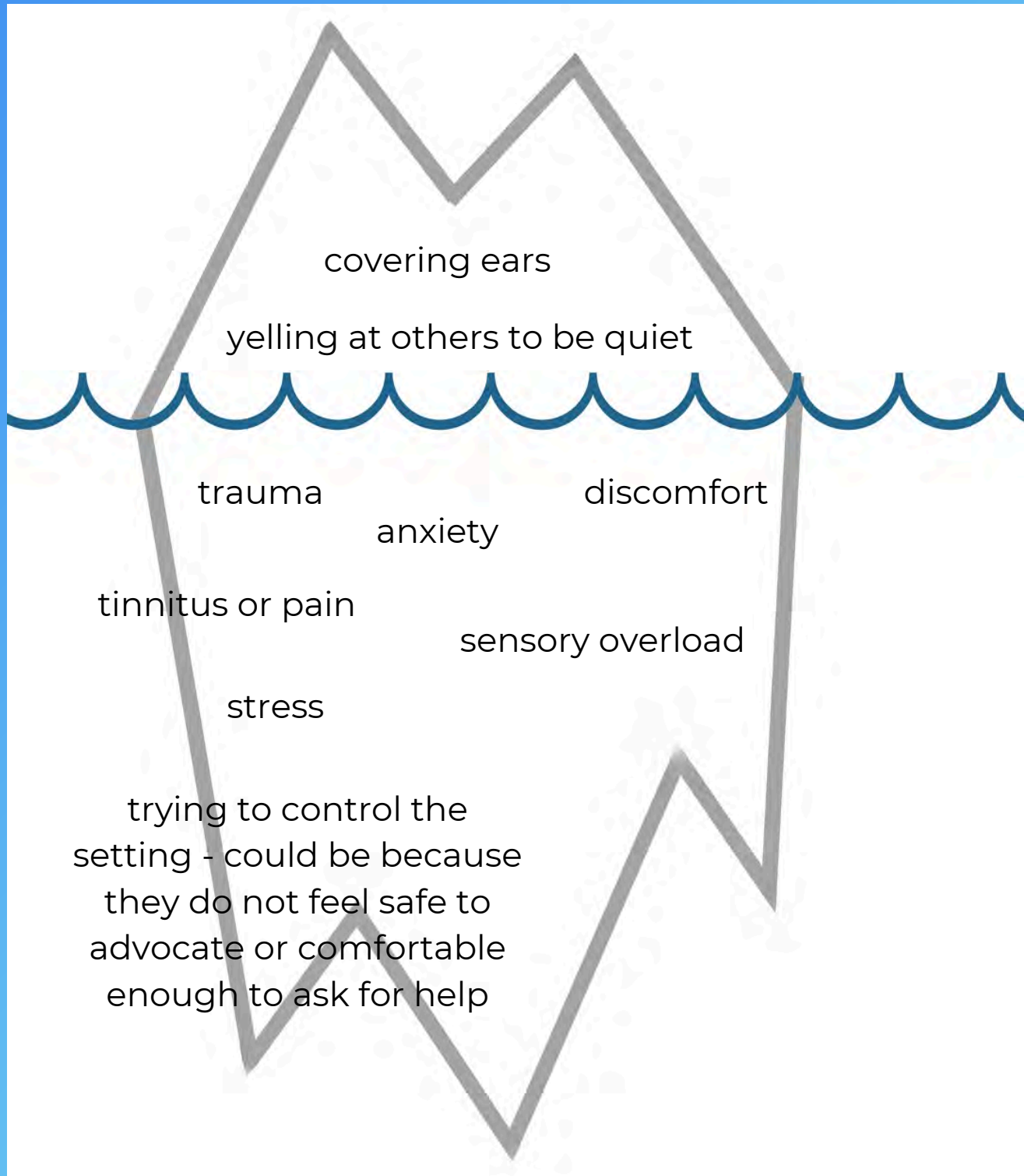
Maya (age 9), becomes visibly upset when there's too much noise, covering her ears and yelling at others to be quiet.



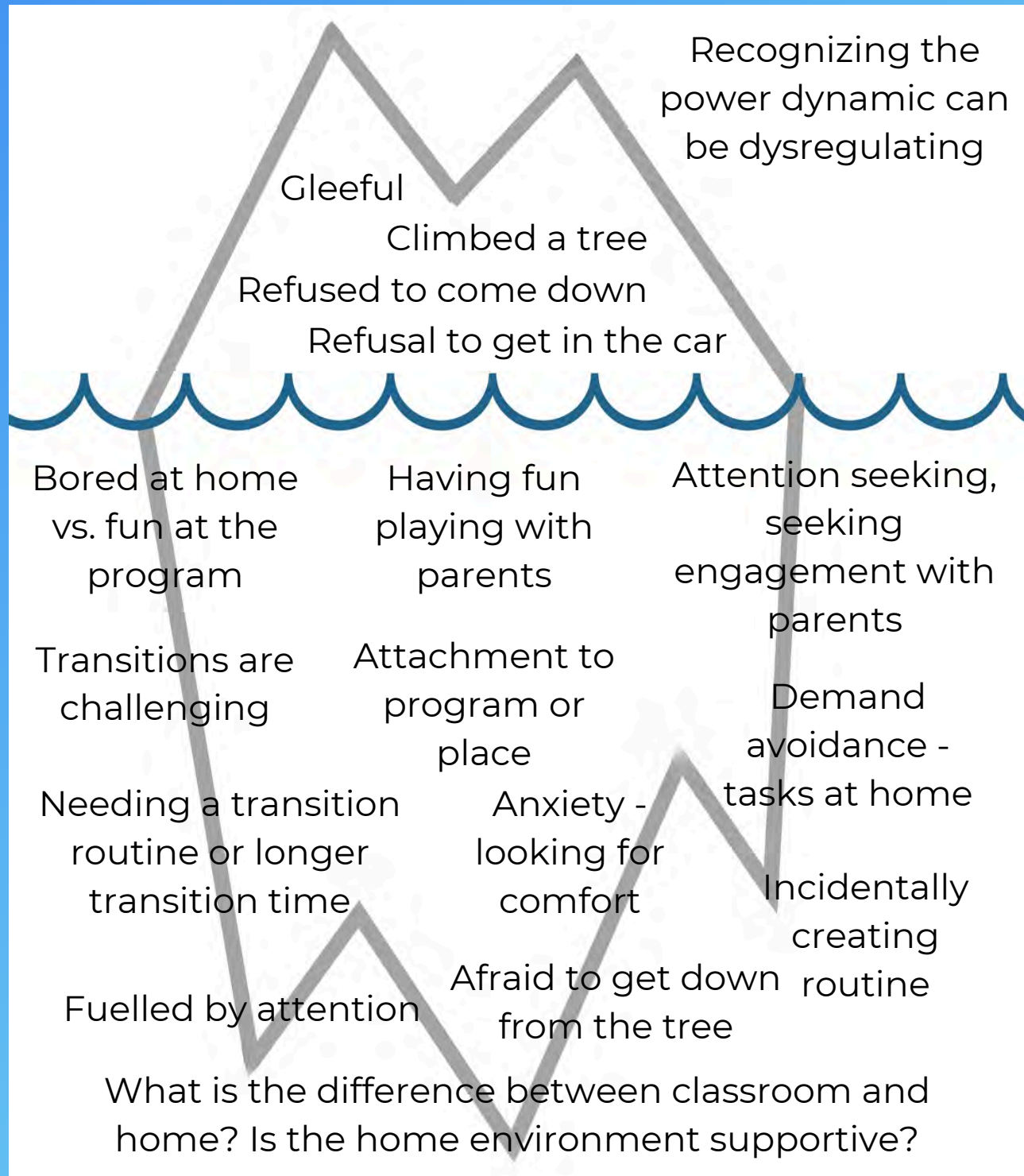
What might be the underlying reasons for Jordan's refusal to transition?



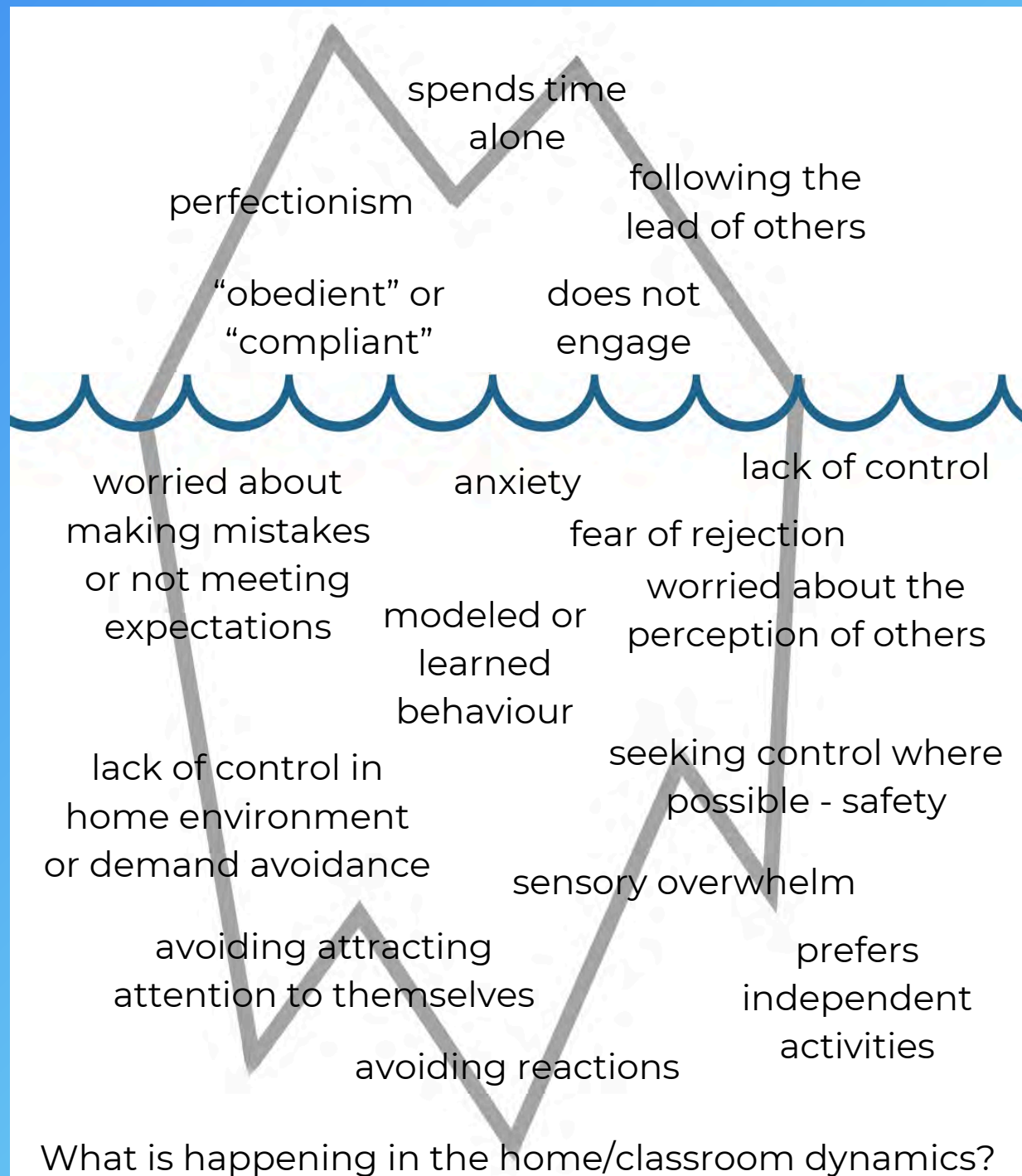
What might be the underlying reasons for Maya's sensitivity to noise?



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.



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.



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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:

- ☐ Validate emotions
- ☐ Offer 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 WORKSHEET

- 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	<div>ex. HIIT workout</div>	<div>ex. Go for a walk</div>	<div>ex. brush teeth or hair.</div>
EMOTIONAL	<div>ex. Journal my feelings</div>	<div>ex. Cry / dance it out</div>	<div>ex. Listen to music that matches my feelings</div>
RELATIONAL	<div>ex. Zoom or call a friend</div>	<div>ex. Text a friend</div>	<div>ex. Think of someone I'm grateful to know</div>



Self-Care Menu

HOW MUCH TIME
DO I HAVE?

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!

5 MINS OR LESS

15 MINS OR LESS

30 MINS OR LESS

60 MINS+



meal size or type



mood



time measurement



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/](https://ldsociety.ca/united-way-schools-out-program/)**

Thank you!

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