

# Avoiding Power Struggles in the Classroom



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The West Virginia Behavior/Mental Health Technical Assistance Center is proud to be a collaboration between the West Virginia Department of Education and the West Virginia Autism Training Center at Marshall University.



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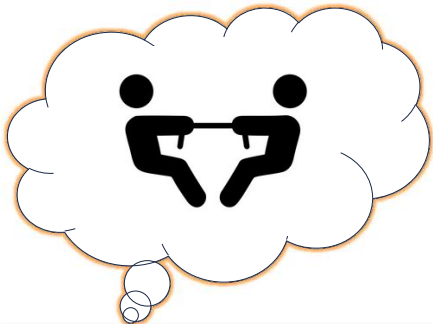
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"A power struggle collapses when you withdraw your energy from it. Power struggles become uninteresting to you when you change your intention from winning to learning about yourself."  
Gary Zukav

and the child!

Warriormindcoach.com

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The Escalation Cycle

co-escalation

calm

stressor

agitation and acceleration

peak

de-escalation

recovery

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What is a co-escalation in a power struggle?

Feels distrusted, disrespected, resentful, embarrassed, mad, fearful, and/or powerless.

Responds with behaviors that attempt to dominate, criticize, or attack (retaliation) to meet their objective.

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By the time I count to three...

I've told you two times!




I won't say it again...!

10...9...8...  
That's it. If you don't \_\_\_\_, there's no \_\_\_\_!

Because I said so!

Is that what \_\_\_\_ looks like?!

What did you say?!

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INFLEXIBILITY + INFLEXIBILITY = MELTDOWN



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**Unhelpful Thoughts**

- She just wants attention.
- She's manipulating me.
- He's not motivated.
- He's making a bad choice.
- She has a bad attitude.
- She knows what buttons to push.
- He's just like his Dad.



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**If you "win" the power struggle, what do you really win?**



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**Unintentional messages sent**



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**Threat vs. Warning  
LIMIT Setting**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Come from a place of dysregulation</li> <li>• Lack of follow-through</li> <li>• Delivered harshly</li> <li>• The consequence is disproportionate to the offense</li> <li>• Meant to make the child feel bad</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comes from a place of calm</li> <li>• Meant to help the child understand the rule or expectation</li> <li>• The consequence is related to the behavior</li> <li>• There is follow-through</li> <li>• Goal is to give the child another chance</li> </ul>
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MARSHALL

### Threat Examples

- If you don't leave the park now, I won't bring you here again.
  
- You know better than this, I've seen you do it. If you don't do it right now, I can't let you play with this again.
  
- If you don't put the toys up right now, you aren't going to...."

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MARSHALL

### Warning Examples

- It's not safe to climb that shelf. If you climb up there again, then we will have to go to the other part of the room to play.
  
- If you talk loudly in the library, we will have to leave.
  
- \*\*\* A tip to help think and respond in warning statements\*\*\*  
*Use When-Then statements more often than If-Then*

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MARSHALL

### Let's Get Brainy

- **Prefrontal Cortex/Upstairs Brain**
  - Learning, thinking, decision-making, regulation
  - Less developed at birth
  - Where "school" happens
  
- **Limbic System/Downstairs Brain**
  - Fight, flight, freeze, or fawn
  - Survival
  - More developed at birth
  - Where stress behavior originates
  - Where emotions live

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**Triune Brain Theory**

Each brain works as a "brake" for the other.

When **Red Brain** is leaning too far and emotions are running high, **Blue Brain** will help to use self-distraction or resist a temptation.

When **Blue Brain** is leaning too far, **Red Brain** will kick in and shut the **Blue Brain** down when it doesn't have the sense to do so itself.

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**Meltdowns and the Brain**

When the **Red Brain** gets tipped too far, the **Grey Brain** takes over resulting in challenging behaviors in the form of fight, flight, freeze, or fawn reactions.

**Blue Brain** is left with its feet dangling in the air. This is why reasoning with a child during a meltdown isn't possible.

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**Window of Stress Tolerance**

Baseline levels of stress for Child 1 & Child 2

Window of stress tolerance for Child 1 & Child 2

BREAKING POINT

Forbes, 2012. *Help for Billy*

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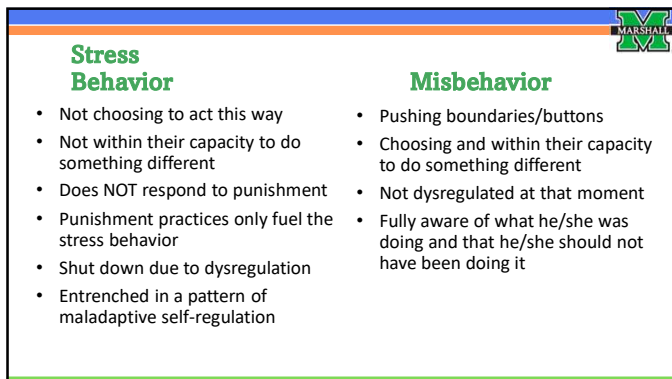
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**Stress Behavior**

- Not choosing to act this way
- Not within their capacity to do something different
- Does NOT respond to punishment
- Punishment practices only fuel the stress behavior
- Shut down due to dysregulation
- Entrenched in a pattern of maladaptive self-regulation

**Misbehavior**

- Pushing boundaries/buttons
- Choosing and within their capacity to do something different
- Not dysregulated at that moment
- Fully aware of what he/she was doing and that he/she should not have been doing it

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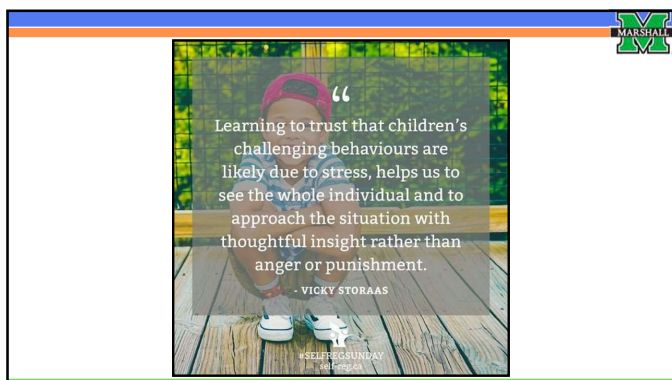
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“ Learning to trust that children's challenging behaviours are likely due to stress, helps us to see the whole individual and to approach the situation with thoughtful insight rather than anger or punishment. ”

- VICKY STORAAS

#SELFBODYSUNDAY  
100 Days of SEL

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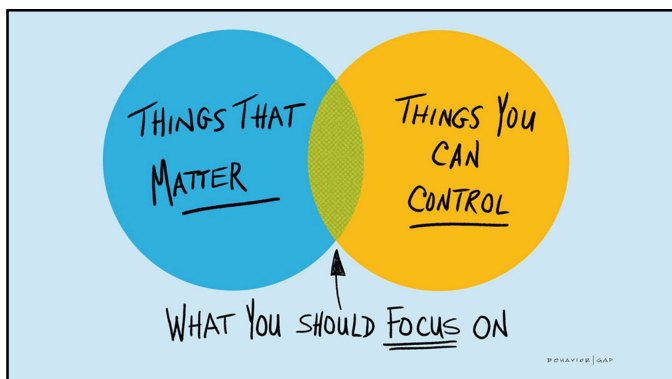
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THINGS THAT MATTER

THINGS YOU CAN CONTROL

WHAT YOU SHOULD FOCUS ON

POBAYIR | GAT

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# The Pyramid Model

Intensive Intervention  
Targeted Social Emotional Supports  
High Quality Supportive Environments  
Nurturing & Responsive Relationships  
Effective Workforce

NCPMI

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## Nurturing and Responsive Relationships (Tier 1)

- Creating a caring classroom community
- Relationships between children
- Relationships between staff and families
- Relationships between staff and children
- Relationships between staff

NCPMI

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## High Quality Supportive Environments (Tier 1)

Provide clarity, consistency, and predictability in the environment using:

1. Balanced schedules
2. Clear classroom routines
3. Efficient transitions
4. Strategies that promote engagement
5. Behavior expectations and rules

NCPMI

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**Targeted Social Emotional Supports:  
What Do We Teach in Tier 2?**



- Friendship skills
- Emotional literacy
- Self-regulation and anger management
- Problem solving

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**Lagging skills that come to the surface in power struggles**

**FRIENDSHIP SKILLS**

- Understanding how their behavior makes other people feel
- Understanding what other people think of them and their behavior
- Understanding other people's points of view

**EMOTIONAL LITERACY**

- Handling feelings when angry, frustrated, or annoyed
- Not taking things too personally, exaggerating, or thinking things are worse than they are
- Saying what they are feeling

**SELF-REGULATION**

- Waiting for something they want
- Pausing before they respond

**PROBLEM SOLVING**

- Changing their mind if offered a different idea or solution
- Understanding why a plan may need to change

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**Students succeed if**



**Students are doing the best they can with the skills they have.**

Teach them the skills they need.



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**Behavior Equation**

Skills > Demands/Expectations/Stressors = Desired Behavior

Demands/Expectations/Stressors > Skills = Challenging behavior



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**Co-Regulation and CPS**

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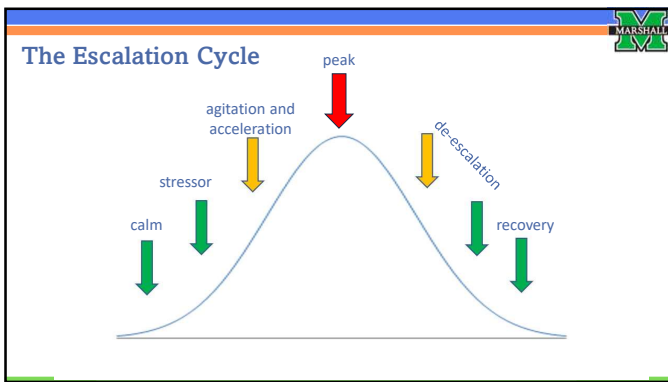
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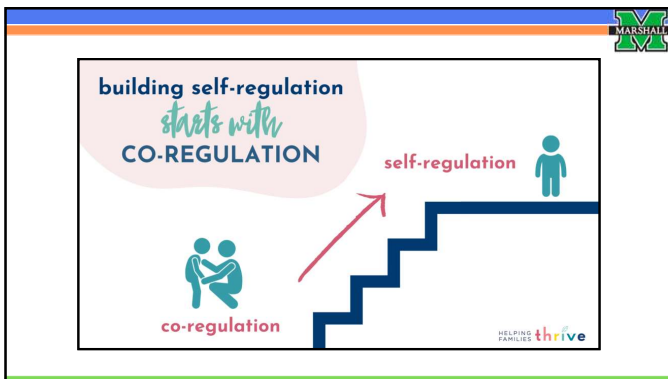
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**When you co-regulate:**

- Simplify your language
- Slow your movement
- Match child's affect
- Soften your tone
- Get on child's level
- Validate child's feelings, no matter how irrational
- Listen; let them know what you hear

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**"CALM DOWN!"**

By teaching self-regulation through co-regulation students are learning what it LOOKS like and FEELS like to be calm, not told to "calm down" (which doesn't work for ANYONE).

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**Respond by Asking Two Questions**

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1. WHY?      2. WHY NOW?

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**A** Impose will

**B** Solve the problem collaboratively

**C** Drop or reduce the demand

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**Plan A Responses:**  
**Impose will**

- Threat
- Offering rewards
- Bribing
- Negotiating
- Nagging

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**Plan C Responses:**  
**Drop or reduce the demand**

- “When you start the activity, we hope you’ll join us—but if you don’t, we’re not going to make you.”
- “I know that writing can be hard, so for today, let’s try having you tell me what you want to write, and I’ll write it for you.”

*“You only need to worry about giving in or backing down if you’re engaged in a power struggle. If you’re solving problems with your child, there is no power struggle.”*  
(p.64 The Explosive Child)

*let it go*

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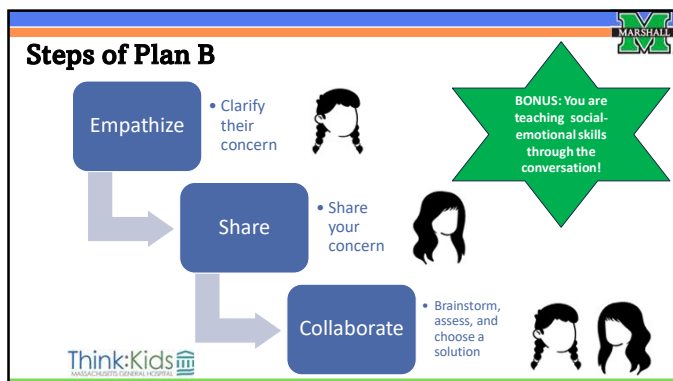
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- I noticed you've had a hard time during \_\_\_\_\_ lately. What's up?
- It's ok. You're not in trouble. I want to understand what's going on.
- Tell me more. (Ask questions!)
- So you are saying that \_\_\_\_\_. Is that right?

\_\_\_\_\_



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- My concern is that (health, safety, learning, impact).  
\_\_\_\_\_ 
- I wonder if there's a way we can \_\_\_\_\_ that matters to you and also \_\_\_\_\_ that matters to me.
- Do you have any ideas?
- Does it address both concerns? Is it doable?  
\_\_\_\_\_ 

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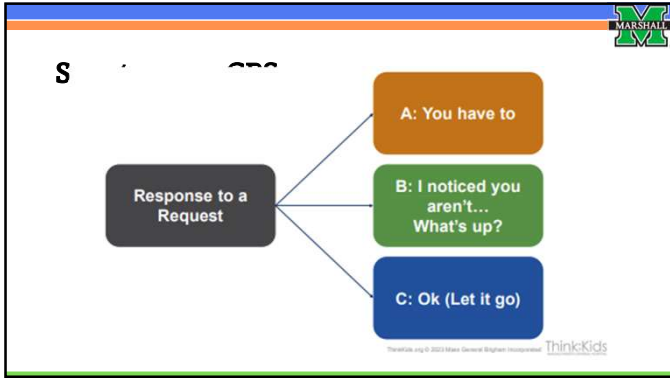
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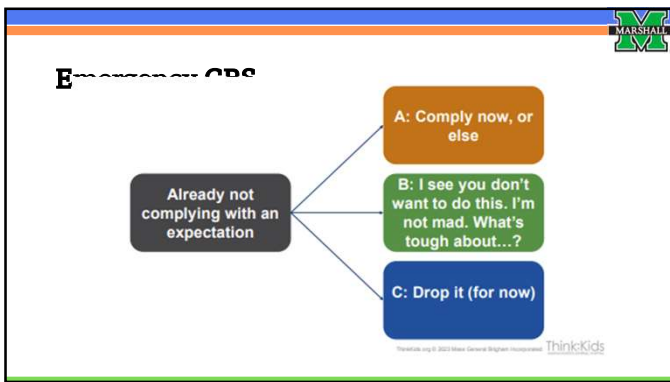
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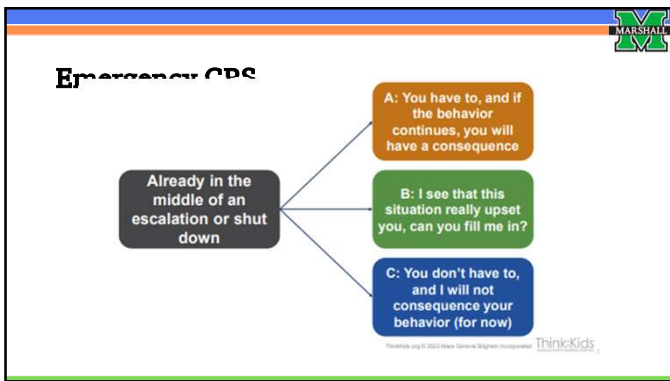
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# Wrap Up



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# Thank you!

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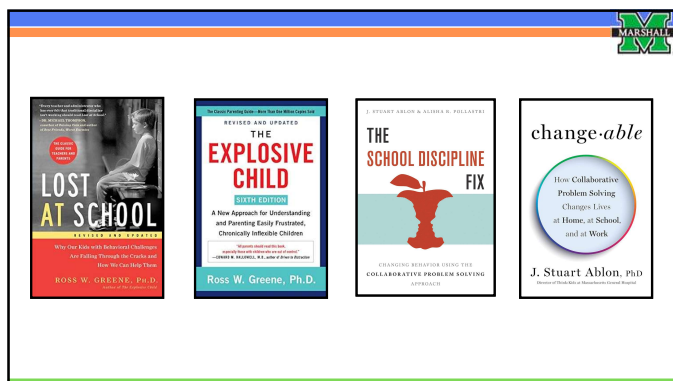
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