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Module 1: The Brain Behind the Behavior

Objective: Shift the adult's perspective from "this child is giving me a hard time" to "this child is having a hard time."

- "To understand tantrums, we have to look at the brain. Emotion Dysregulation (ED) occurs when a child's brain lacks the capacity to regulate the intensity of an emotion, leading to a system overload."
- "Psychiatrist Dr. Dan Siegel coined the concept of the **Upstairs and Downstairs Brain**. The 'Upstairs Brain' handles logic, reasoning, and emotional control—but it isn't fully developed until our mid-20s. The 'Downstairs Brain' controls basic survival instincts and massive emotional reactions (fight, flight, or freeze)."
- "During a tantrum, the Upstairs Brain goes completely offline. The child is operating purely from the Downstairs Brain. You cannot reason with a child in this state, because the logical part of their brain is literally inaccessible."

Tips & Tricks

- **Educators:** Frame this for your class environment. Remember that sensory overload in a loud classroom often trips the wire for the Downstairs Brain.
- **Parents:** Stop trying to explain *why* they can't have the toy while they are screaming. Save the logic for when the Upstairs Brain is back online.

Module 2: The Anatomy of a Tantrum

Objective: Map out the lifecycle of a meltdown to help adults identify where they are in the storm.

- "Peer-reviewed studies on behavior analysis tell us that all behavior serves a function. Tantrums typically fall into one of four categories: seeking attention, escaping a demand, accessing a tangible item, or fulfilling a sensory need."
- "A tantrum is not a flat line; it's an arc. It starts with a **Trigger** (an antecedent), moves into **Escalation**, peaks in the **Dysregulation Zone**

(the full meltdown), and slowly moves into a **Calming** phase before returning to a baseline."

- "If we intervene at the peak (the Dysregulation Zone) with punishments or demands, we actually extend the duration of the tantrum. Our goal is to catch it during Escalation or wait it out until the Calming phase."

Tips & Tricks

- **Educators:** Document the "ABCs" of the tantrum. **A**ntecedent (what happened right before), **B**ehavior (what the child did), and **C**onsequence (what happened right after). Finding the pattern is the key to stopping it.
- **Parents:** Learn your child's specific Escalation cues. Is it whining? Pacing? Clenched fists? Intervening at the first physical sign of stress is infinitely easier than stopping a full-blown meltdown.

Module 3: Proactive Strategies & Prevention

Objective: Use evidence-based methods to stop the tantrum before it starts.

- "The most effective intervention for tantrums happens before the child is even upset. In Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), this is called **Antecedent Manipulation**—changing the environment to reduce the likelihood of a meltdown."
- "Research on emotional socialization shows that children rely on their caregivers for *regulation*. A child borrows your nervous system. If you are stressed, rushing, and chaotic, the child will mirror that dysregulation."
- "Two of the most powerful preventative tools are predictable routines and providing structured choices, which give the child a sense of autonomy within your boundaries."

Tips & Tricks

- **Educators:** Use visual timers to prepare children for transitions. A 5-minute warning gives the child's brain time to process the shift, reducing "escape-driven" tantrums.
- **Parents:** Offer "forced choices" to grant autonomy without yielding control. Instead of asking, "Are you ready to put your shoes on?" ask, "Do you want to put your left shoe on first, or your right shoe?"

Module 4: In the Storm – De-escalation

Objective: Provide a game plan for when the tantrum is in full swing.

- "When the tantrum hits, your primary job is safety and co-regulation. You are the anchor; they are the storm. If the anchor gets swept up in the storm, the ship sinks."
- "Ignore the behavior, but do not ignore the child. This means avoiding giving in to the demand (which reinforces the tantrum), but staying physically present and empathetic to their distress."
- "Keep your language incredibly brief. The Downstairs Brain cannot process paragraphs. Use a calm, low voice and repeat a single validating boundary."

Tips & Tricks

- **Educators:** Create a designated "cool-down" or "zen" corner in the room. This isn't a time-out (which is punitive), but a safe space with sensory tools where they can regulate away from the audience of their peers.
- **Parents:** Use the "Validate and Boundary" script: *"You are so mad we have to leave the park. It's hard to leave when we are having fun. But it is time to go to the car."* Say it once, hold the boundary, and wait.

Module 5: Post-Tantrum Repair & Teaching (50–60 mins)

Objective: Use the baseline period to teach replacement behaviors and repair the relationship.

- "Once the child has completely returned to baseline, the Upstairs Brain is back online. This is the time for **Functional Communication Training**—teaching them what to do *instead* next time."
- "Children who struggle with emotional dysregulation often feel shame after a massive outburst. Connection and repair are crucial. Reassure them that while the behavior wasn't acceptable, your love for them is unconditional."
- "Finally, explicitly teach the skills they were lacking. If they threw a toy because they couldn't get it to work, practice saying, *'I need help'* when

they are calm."

Tips & Tricks

- **Educators:** Praise the recovery. *"I saw how frustrated you were with that math problem, but you took three deep breaths and asked for a break. I am really proud of how you handled that."*
- **Parents:** Roleplay the trigger during a calm, happy moment later in the day. *"Let's pretend it's time to leave the park. Show me how you can use your strong voice to say you're sad, without throwing your shoes."*

Selected Peer-Reviewed References for Your Slides:

- **Compas, B. E., et al. (2017).** *Coping, emotion regulation, and psychopathology in childhood and adolescence: A meta-analysis and narrative review.* Psychological Bulletin. (Discusses the foundational mechanisms of emotion regulation in youth).
- **Gross, J. J. (1998).** *The emerging field of emotion regulation: An integrative review.* Review of General Psychology. (Core framework for understanding how emotions are generated and regulated).
- **Holodynski, M., & Kärtner, J. (2022).** *Parental Coregulation of Child Emotions.* In *Emotion Regulation and Parenting.* Cambridge University Press. (Explains how children 'borrow' adult regulation).
- **Siegel, D. J., & Bryson, T. P. (2011).** *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind.* (Source of the Upstairs/Downstairs brain model, widely cited in pediatric behavioral interventions).