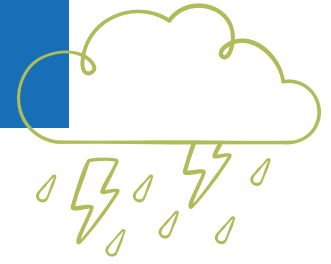


10 Things to Do When the Storm Hits

(Real Moves You Can Actually Use in the Moment)

1



When a student is melting down, shutting down, panicking, refusing, or spiraling, their brain shifts into a reactive state. This isn't the moment to teach, correct, or problem-solve. Your role is to create physical and neurological safety by steadying your own nervous system, reducing demands, and offering simple, supportive lifelines. These strategies help the student regain enough regulation to think again — and help you stay grounded in the middle of the storm.

1. REGULATE YOUR BODY TO ANCHOR THE SPACE

Soften your face, drop your shoulders, unclench your hands, and take one slow, deep breath. Students feel your nervous system through your nonverbals long before they hear your words. Your regulation is the safety signal.

2. LOWER YOUR VOICE & SLOW YOUR MOVEMENTS

Shift to a warm, steady tone and use slow, predictable motion. Loud voices, fast walking, or sudden gestures can amplify threat. Calm pacing communicates, "You're safe with me."

3. REMOVE DEMANDS AND REDUCE COGNITIVE LOAD

No questions, corrections, reminders, or new expectations. Reduce pressure in the environment so the student's system has space to downshift.

4. APPROACH WARMLY — OR SUPPORT FROM A CALM DISTANCE

Move closer only if it feels safe for the student. If proximity escalates them, shift to supportive distance. Your posture, angle, and presence matter more than your words.

5. GET BELOW OR BESIDE EYE LEVEL

When safe and appropriate, reposition your body to reduce perceived threat. Being lower or at the side communicates safety more effectively than standing over someone.

6. USE ONE GROUNDING, PREDICTABLE SENTENCE

Keep language minimal. Choose a single supportive phrase such as:

- "I'm here."
- "You're safe."
- "I can help when you're ready."

Neutral tone. No lectures. No multi-step directions.

7. OFFER A SIMPLE CHOICE OR A SMALL PAUSE

If the student is reachable, try short, low-demand choices:
“Sit here or there?”

If they are not reachable, simply pause and stay near without adding pressure.

8. NAME THE EMOTION — NOT THE BEHAVIOR

Acknowledge what you see:

“Looks overwhelming.”

This validates the internal experience without fueling the external behavior cycle.

9. INTERRUPT THE ESCALATION GENTLY

A quiet, unexpected-but-kind move can shift the emotional loop, such as:

- A soft surprise (“This is tough... and I’m glad you’re here.”)
- A calming gesture
- A brief, neutral moment of curiosity

It disrupts the cycle without dismissing the emotion.

10. STAY PRESENT — NOT SOLVING OR FIXING

Be the calm anchor. This is the “do nothing on purpose” move: you stay nearby, grounded, and steady. No problem-solving. No reasoning. Just safe presence.

Use these outside of the heat of the moment to strengthen safety, connection, and partnership.

TEACH AFTER, NOT DURING

Once everyone is calm, revisit what happened with curiosity and care. Collaboratively explore what led up to it and what might help earlier next time.

REPAIR WITH THE STUDENT WHEN NEEDED

If your own emotions got activated, repair restores trust. A simple, “That’s not how I wanted to handle it,” is powerful modeling.

UPDATE SUPPORTS AND PLANS

Use what you observed in the storm to adjust tools, routines, accommodations, or co-regulation strategies so the next storm is easier to navigate.

LOOK FOR EARLY SIGNS OR "TELLS"

Notice small cues that show a student is heading toward overwhelm: changes in breathing, posture, tone, pace, focus, or energy. Early recognition makes earlier support possible.

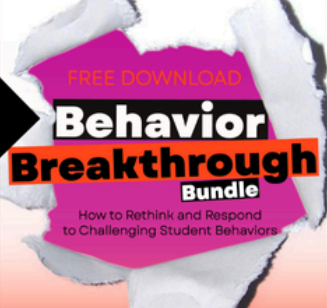

Build Co-Regulation Systems

Teach and practice calming tools when everyone is regulated. Reinforce the idea that students can borrow your calm and that emotions are safe to experience together.

Stop struggling with old behavior systems.

Get tools that actually work.

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