

# The 4 Ss for Educators (PreK–12)

# 4S

This document is designed to help educators rethink behavior—not as something to manage or fix, but as information about a student’s current state. It supports teachers in shifting from reacting to behavior to responding to what a student’s nervous system needs in order to learn.

## WHAT THIS DOCUMENT HELPS TEACHERS DO

- Develop a shared, practical way to understand behavior across classrooms and teams
- Recognize when students (and adults) are in reactive states rather than ready-to-learn states
- Respond to behavior with regulation and connection, not escalation or control
- Use everyday interactions (tone, pacing, feedback, transitions) as behavior support tools
- Build classroom conditions that reduce recurring behavior challenges over time



# HOW TEACHERS ARE MEANT TO USE THIS FRAMEWORK

## 1. SHIFT FROM “WHAT IS THE BEHAVIOR?” TO “WHAT STATE IS THIS STUDENT IN?”

- Behavior is treated as a signal, not a problem
- Teachers learn to look underneath behavior to identify whether a student is:
  - Over-activated (fight/flight)
  - Under-activated (freeze/shut down)
- The goal is always to help students return to a **ready state for learning**

## 2. USE ADULT REGULATION AS THE PRIMARY TOOL

- Teachers are positioned as co-regulators
- How you show up matters:
  - Your tone
  - Your pace
  - Your posture
  - Your predictability
- Regulation strategies are effective:
  - Before behavior escalates
  - During challenging moments
  - After incidents, to support repair and learning

## 3. APPLY THE FRAMEWORK ACROSS THE ENTIRE DAY

- Greetings and transitions
- Giving directions and feedback
- Managing mistakes and conflict
- Supporting work stamina and engagement
- Repairing relationships after hard moments

Every interaction either helps a student stay regulated or pushes them further out of the ready state.

## 4. ALIGN CLASSROOM CULTURE, NOT JUST INDIVIDUAL INTERVENTIONS

- The framework helps teachers move beyond:
  - **Clip charts**
  - Token systems
  - One-off strategies
- Instead, it supports:
  - Consistent adult responses
  - Relational safety
  - Predictable routines with flexibility
  - A calmer, more supportive classroom climate

**SAFE**

**Definition:** I protect students from emotional harm and avoid being a source of threat or fear. Safety means more than physical security; it includes emotional, social, and neurological safety.

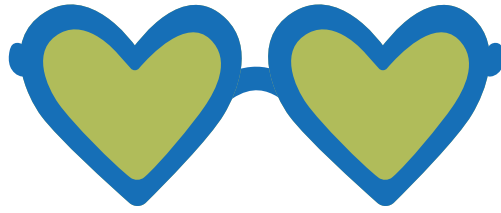
### **When Students Feel Safe They...**

- Are comfortable with what is going on
- Know what is expected and what to do
- Feel it is okay to be vulnerable and take risks
- Understand what is happening or will happen next
- Sense no internal alarms going off
- Understand gestures, words, looks, and tone of voice

### **To Help Students Feel Safe You Can...**

- Invite calm by being calm (posture, tone, pace)
- Get curious and notice what they are trying to communicate
- Validate emotions rather than dismiss them
- Reduce sensory input (e.g., lights, noise, clutter)
- Offer individualized choices (e.g., where to sit, which tool to use)
- Slow down to give processing time (e.g., pauses before transitions)

## SEEN



**Definition:** I notice and see others through the lens of wholeness, beyond behaviors or deficits. Students feel recognized for who they are, not just what they do.

### When Students Feel Seen They...

- Believe someone understands their point of view
- Feel empathy for their worries and concerns
- Know others notice and address their unmet needs
- Are understood as whole people with intersecting identities
- Believe others care about their thoughts and feelings
- Trust that their rights will be upheld

### To Help Students Feel Seen You Can...

- Notice them as people beyond behaviors (e.g., strengths, interests)
- Listen to understand, without rushing to fix
- Allow processing of emotions before moving to solutions
- Use “I notice...” or “I wonder...” statements to validate perspectives
- Be aware of biases, power, and privilege in interactions
- Acknowledge impact vs. intention (e.g., “I see my words felt harsh”)

## SOOTHED



**Definition:** I am calm and responsive, helping students regulate their nervous systems through co-regulation and supportive strategies.

### When Students Feel Soothed They...

- Are flexible, energized, and calm
- Can respond and reflect vs. react and ruminate
- Are not overpowered by emotions
- Are able to manage stressors effectively
- Are grounded, creative, and willing to engage
- Can adjust to changes and stay present

### To Help Students Feel Soothed You Can...

- Acknowledge feelings and allow time to process
- Recognize and reduce stressors (e.g., noise, pace, workload)
- Monitor tone of voice and facial expressions
- Use empathetic nonverbals (e.g., soft eyes, slow movements)
- Provide lifelines (e.g., calm corner, choice cards, water break)
- Offer processing pauses (e.g., 10 seconds of silence after directions)

## SECURE



**Definition:** I help students feel safe, seen, and soothed consistently so they can trust, explore, and confidently take action.

### When Students Feel Secure They...

- Have an internalized sense of well-being
- Experience harmony among different parts of the brain
- Are grounded, enthusiastic, and resilient
- Connect in positive relationships and communities
- Take risks, try new things, and navigate uncertainty
- Solve problems and take clear action

### To Help Students Feel Secure You Can...

- Set clear boundaries that “breathe” (flexible but consistent)
- Support creative problem-solving (e.g., brainstorm solutions together)
- Connect emotionally (e.g., greet at the door, regular check-ins)
- Forgive and repair when harm occurs (e.g., apologize when needed)
- Follow through on promises to build reliability
- Encourage reflective routines (e.g., daily check-outs, journals)