

R.E.C.A.S.T.

Relationships, Emotion, Culture, Attention, Sensation, Tasks

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What is it?

This tool is designed for all students who may be struggling with regulatory and nervous system sensitivity that can create behavioral challenges that are due to an over responsive or under responsive sensory system, possibly compromised by acute, chronic, or developmental adversities and trauma. Although I have adapted this tool for students who are struggling emotionally and socially in our classrooms and schools, this tool can be integrated into any organization or home where caregivers, parents, and adults collaborate to discover the sensory needs beneath behaviors.







How is it used?

R.E.C.A.S.T is a template that provides an opportunity for staff and eventually students to come together exploring a multitude of options and experiences that support the emotional, social, and cognitive needs of the student. This template allows us to adjust, modify, and accommodate each student's needs to ensure feelings of safety and connection. As you begin to use this tool, it is important to keep a small notebook of experiences, environments, persons, and times throughout the day that can activate and unintentionally dysregulate a behavior.



Why?

This template with the collaboration from the adults who serve students help us to deeply understand how trauma and adversities are held in our bodies, not just in our thoughts and feelings. Adverse experiences affect our physiological and unconscious need for felt safety which can manifest with increased sensitivity to everyday experiences, reprogramming our stress response systems so that a student's reactions may look explosive, aggressive, fearful, defiant, anxious, irritated, or shut down. This can affect our relationships, tasks, attention, emotional temperature, feelings, and thoughts. All behavior can be seen as communication, while signaling what may be occurring in the student's nervous system.

RELATIONSHIPS 	Who does the student trust? Who provides felt safety for the student?
EMOTION 	What are the dominant emotions beneath the behavior?
CULTURE 	Where and when is the behavior occurring? What does the student need in the environment?
ATTENTION 	What experiences, things, people, or processes hold this student's attention?
SENSATION 	What sensory needs are the behaviors communicating?
TASKS 	What task feels difficult? What work feels overwhelming?

R.E.C.A.S.T.

Check-In With Yourself + Students

It is critical that the adults who are working together reflect upon their nervous system state, checking in with what we have carried into our gathering. Are we aware of our biases and the diverse cultures we have brought, along with our state functioning? In other words, what part of my brain is activated right now? Can I share a compassionate lens through our work together? Am I able to reflect and notice what activates negative emotion in my nervous system? How can I provide cues of safety and what signals am I unconsciously sending that may cue danger or threat? We know that a regulated adult can regulate a child or adolescent.

When collaborating, there may be other meeting times when adults will bring students and parents/caregivers to the gathering for their feedback, sharing what needs, tasks, and relationships feel missing and desired.

	Adult Nervous System Check-In	Student Nervous System Check-In
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can we find short-term and longer-term cues of safety for ourselves, planning those out ahead of a crisis?• What states do I find often? Are these pleasing or dysregulating?• When I feel dysregulated, where am I? Who am I with? Where does this happen most often?• What do I notice about sensations in my body when I feel unsafe, dysregulated, threatened or in danger?• What cues safety for me? Which people, places, settings, environments? What experiences feel calming to my nervous system?• Am I able to be grounded and anchored, yet open and spacious as I deeply listen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who does the student trust? (phone call, text, letter writing, drawing a picture, writing a letter and preparing it to be sent)• Who connects and cares for this student deeply?• Who provides cues of safety for this person?• Who is able to co-regulate and meet this student where they are in their nervous system state?• When this person is feeling anxious, who helps them reconnect with the joy in their life?• Does this person need time alone (with a co-regulator available nearby?)• Who does the student need?

Emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Do I have the capacity to see this person through a compassionate lens?<ul style="list-style-type: none">Anger and aggression are at the tip of the iceberg. Some possible underlying emotions might be... sadness, fear, frustration, loneliness, feeling unseen/not heard, rejection, misunderstood, shame, abandonment, confusion, failure, and overwhelm.Do I have the capacity to look for what's beneath the "big emotions?"<ul style="list-style-type: none">Co-regulating and sitting beside this person may help them to better understand what's beneath their anger and/or painful sensations or feelings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">What are the dominant emotions beneath the behavior? <table><tr><td>Anger/Irritation</td><td>Validate, notice me, more space, less talking</td></tr><tr><td>Sad</td><td>Touch, connection in my own way, warmth, pressure, questions of service</td></tr><tr><td>Nervous</td><td>Deep breaths, movement, focused attention practice</td></tr><tr><td>Worried</td><td>Validating, "What do you need? How can I help? What can we do to make this better?"</td></tr><tr><td>Anxious</td><td>Journaling, movement, my own choice, focused attention practice</td></tr></table>	Anger/Irritation	Validate, notice me, more space, less talking	Sad	Touch, connection in my own way, warmth, pressure, questions of service	Nervous	Deep breaths, movement, focused attention practice	Worried	Validating, "What do you need? How can I help? What can we do to make this better?"	Anxious	Journaling, movement, my own choice, focused attention practice
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Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Am I able to understand what this person's activators are?Am I consistently providing cues of safety for this student?Are there culturally responsive resources that meet this student in their nervous system state?Do the people supporting this student have the capacity to stay connected through the conflict?Are we aware of the diverse culture and lived experiences of this student?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Where and when is the behavior occurring?Is this student in a state of sensory overload?Was it activated or triggered in the cafeteria, hallway, recess, bathroom, classroom, bus?What does the student need?<ul style="list-style-type: none">Different space? Different arrangement of classroom, order, time, space?Less noise? Improved smells?Does a student need a different adult/relationship?Is there intentional predictability and rituals that feel available & repetitive in our classrooms and school?What environment/experience helps this person feel safe & regulated? (quiet room, outside, playground predictable routines, watching youTube, listening to a playlist, another trusted adult?)What environment/experience brings purpose and joy to this student?										

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Does this student have a bit of felt control over their environment/experiences?<ul style="list-style-type: none">If not, what can we do to support their autonomy and sense of agency?												
Attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none">How can I provide cues of safety and be a source of co-regulatory support?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">What experiences, things, people, or processes hold this student’s attention?What types of attention or solitude will help this student feel better?What do they enjoy?What experiences, interests, and activities do they discuss often?What activates joy, pleasure, and peace in this student?												
Sensation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Does this person need me to share my calm, my energy, or both?Am I using my body, not just my ears to listen?Do I see my intentional presence as an intervention?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Is this person hypo or hyper aroused?What sensory input or resources would help this person feel safe, connected, & regulated?<ul style="list-style-type: none">Earplugs, headphones, cold or warm drink, swinging, deep pressure, drumming, going for a walk, etc.What sensory needs is behavior communicating? <table><tr><th>Troubling Sensations</th><th>Repairing Sensations</th></tr><tr><td>Loud, abrupt, harsh noises</td><td>Quiet with headphones, quiet area, more predictable transitions</td></tr><tr><td>Crowds</td><td>Space, a buddy, create chunks of time in large spaces or outdoors</td></tr><tr><td>Trouble Sitting Still</td><td>Movement</td></tr><tr><td>Hot, Angry, Sweaty</td><td>Ice pack, cold water, portable fan/vocalizing</td></tr><tr><td>Jumpy, Irritated</td><td>Rhythm (clap, chant, copy rhythm)</td></tr></table>	Troubling Sensations	Repairing Sensations	Loud, abrupt, harsh noises	Quiet with headphones, quiet area, more predictable transitions	Crowds	Space, a buddy, create chunks of time in large spaces or outdoors	Trouble Sitting Still	Movement	Hot, Angry, Sweaty	Ice pack, cold water, portable fan/vocalizing	Jumpy, Irritated	Rhythm (clap, chant, copy rhythm)
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Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Are we prioritizing the social and emotional well-being of this student knowing that we cannot access the cortex (where learning occurs) unless we feel safe and connected?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">What task is difficult?What work feels overwhelming?Is it difficult to get started?Difficulty staying focused/distracted?Is this person able to advocate for themselves when tasks feel overwhelming? Do the tasks given have purpose, relevance, or meaning in their life?												

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can we do with these challenging tasks? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Dosing chunks of challenging assignments ◦ Rearrange timing of a task ◦ Frequent check-ins: what does this look like? ◦ Agree upon choices that would ease the level of frustration/anxiety ◦ Movement and validation ◦ Variety of images, color, audio, other supports to help student feel successful • What part of the brain is this person able to access? Are they able to access their prefrontal cortex, or do they need a brain aligned task that meets them in the midbrain & lower brain regions where there is an emotional override? • What tasks feel peaceful or energizing? What tasks bring joy?
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