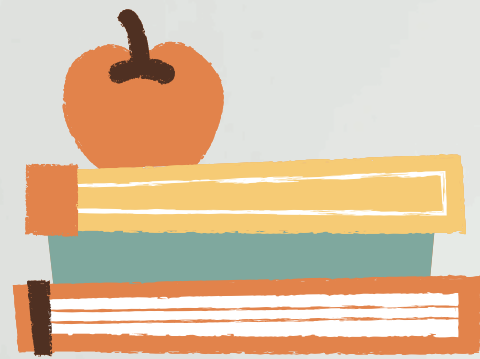


Navigating Education
WITH ADVERSE
CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

JADE WONG

educator



looking for solutions

carer



desperate to be heard

Behind every
behaviour is a
child who is
longing to be seen.



instant
family

soon, three became *five*



forever
family



family



Trauma isn't just what happened to a child,
it's how those experiences **rewired** a
child's brain and body to focus on survival,
often at the expense of learning,
relationships, and regulation.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

KEY IMPACTS



BRAIN
DEVELOPMENT



NERVOUS
SYSTEM



EMOTIONAL
REGULATION



TRUST AND
ATTACHMENT



Trauma and Neurodivergence

Why this matters for schools:

- We don't need to decide if it's "trauma" or "neurodivergence."
- If educators only see "behaviour," they'll miss the survival strategies behind it.
- The trauma-informed stance is to assume that all behaviour is communication and respond with safety, connection, and regulation first.

Trauma *changes* the brain

Trauma amplifies *shame*

Trauma *distorts* relationships



Trauma Responses

- Hypervigilance
- Mistrust
- Nervous System Responses
(Flight/Fight/Freeze/Fawn/Flop)
- Shame



Common Ground

Shutdowns/Meltdowns

Defiance

Social Withdrawal

Inconsistent Performance

May be 'fine' at school vs
'explosive' at home



Neurodivergence

- Sensory Differences
- Executive Functioning Challenges
- Communication Differences
- Masking

This is survival,
not disobedience.

felt-safety



mind

body

environment



They were safe now but they didn't *feel* safe,
until someone *helped* their body and mind believe it.



Classroom *Strategies*



Safety before learning



Regulation before reasoning



Connection over compliance



Curiosity before judgement





Safety before learning.



Regulation before reasoning.



Connection over compliance.



Curiosity before judgement.

Carer *Voices*

"The most important thing you can do for my child is to form a genuine connection. Without this, they can't learn anything."

“Connection doesn’t just happen naturally for trauma-impacted kids. It has to be intentionally built.”

*“When people talk about ‘resilience,’
please know that sometimes, just
showing up at school is real
resilience for our kids.”*

"Capacity fluctuates. Just because they managed yesterday doesn't mean they can today."

"Felt-safety is everything. If they don't feel safe, nothing else matters. Felt-safety is so personal. What feels safe for one kid, might not be what makes another feel safe."

"Family tree activities, bringing in baby photos (which some kids don't even have), Mother's Day and Father's Day or events that bring lots of joy to others - these can be incredibly painful for kids in out of home care."

~~attention~~
sleeping
connection

connection seeking

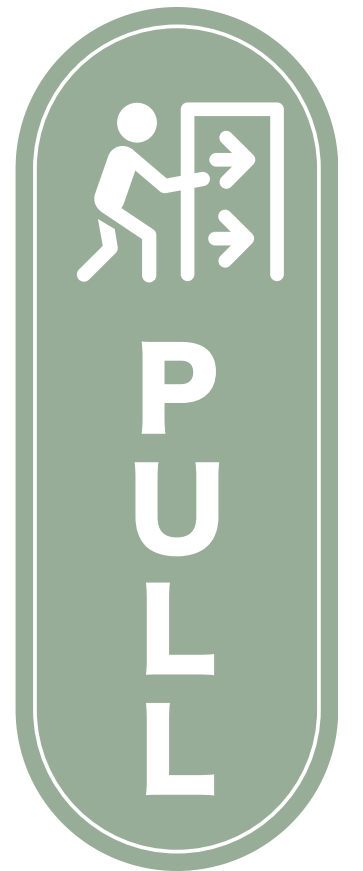
Push (What we see)	Pull (What we can do)
Refuses help with work	Offer choice: <i>"Would you like me to sit beside you or give you 5 minutes first?"</i>
Rude comment / sarcasm	Respond with calm humour or steady presence instead of escalation
Silence / shutdown	Non-verbal support (sit nearby, offer water, allow a break)
"I don't care!" / disengagement	Acknowledge feelings: <i>"It looks like this is hard right now. I'll stay with you."</i>
Angry outburst / storming out	Regulated follow-up later: <i>"I'm glad you came back. You're safe here."</i>
Clinginess / refusing to separate from caregiver	Gentle transition rituals: greeting at the door, consistent morning routine, permission to bring a comfort item
Running away / hiding under table	Stay calm, maintain proximity, offer predictable choices: <i>"Would you like to come sit by me or sit by the window?"</i>
Over-compliance / "perfect" masking	Check in privately: <i>"How's your body feeling right now?"</i> Build safe moments where mistakes are okay
Aggressive play / lashing out at peers	Redirect with co-regulation: <i>"I can see your body has big energy. Let's take a walk/run together before we re-join."</i>
Tearfulness over small things	Validate feelings: <i>"That really feels big for you right now. I'm here."</i> Teach simple regulation tools (breathing, movement)
Refusing to join group work / isolating	Allow autonomy with soft pull: <i>"You can sit by yourself for now, and I'll check in when you're ready."</i>



Think of a time when you had a student ‘**push**’ you away through behaviour, words, or silence.

What might that push have really been about?

And what could you do to gently ‘**pull**’ them back into a moment of connection or safety?”



Key Takeaways

All behaviour is *communication*, so always look beneath the surface.

Regulation *before* reasoning. Calm brains learn, stressed brains cant.

Connection creates *capacity* while safety and relationship unlock growth.

You don't need all the answers. Being a *safe*, steady base is enough.

“ This book is more than the warm embrace and gentle encouragement it provides to all those raising (or educating) kids that don’t fit the mould. It’s also a thoughtful introduction to those around these families to better understand how to provide the acceptance we all crave. This raw, honest and insightful account of Jade’s experience as a parent and teacher proves an opportunity to better understand the struggles of families.”

— *James*

“Beyond the Behaviour allows space to unpack the difficulties of parenting and examine our hearts and attitudes, simultaneously equipping parents and educators with the tools to make sense of the mess. Jade writes with a wisdom and authority that can only come from the real, lived experience of parenting through trauma and the challenges of neurodiversity. She shares her personal experiences with honesty in the most relatable way, while her warmth and authenticity leap from the pages to give you the hug you didn’t realise you so desperately needed.”

— *Emma*



