# UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOR THROUGH A TRAUMA LENS

**Do not judge the behavior — try to understand it.**

Behavior is often the brain and body trying to stay safe.

**Instead of asking 'What is wrong with them?'**
**ask 'What might this behavior be communicating?'**

## 1 Big emotions



May be signaling overwhelm, fear, or a nervous system under stress.

## 2 Shutting down



May be a freeze response or a way to cope when things feel too big.

## 3 Avoiding or leaving



May be an attempt to escape distress, uncertainty, or perceived danger.

## 4 Needing control



May be the brain searching for safety, order, or predictability.

## 5 People pleasing



May be a fawn response meant to reduce conflict or stay connected.

## 6 Hypervigilance



May be scanning for danger, change, or signs that something feels unsafe.

## 7 Trouble with transitions




May be linked to uncertainty, sensory overload, or difficulty shifting gears.

## 8 Perfectionism or overworking



May be an attempt to avoid mistakes, stay safe, or feel in control.

## WHAT HELPS?

*These supports can help the brain and body feel safer.*

- ○ Safety
- ○ Predictability
- ○ Choice
- ○ Calm voice
- ○ Clear expectations
- ○ Co-regulation
- ○ Breaks
- ○ Sensory support
- ○ Connection
- ○ Compassion

## TRY CURIOSITY INSTEAD OF JUDGMENT

*Pause. Get curious.*
*Look for the need behind the behavior.*

1. A behavior I want to understand with more compassion: _____
2. What that behavior might be communicating: _____
3. One supportive response I can try: _____

***Behavior is information. Compassion helps us see the need beneath it.***