

BUILDING LEARNING FROM THE GROUND UP

What the Pyramid of Learning
Teaches Us About
Behaviour, Regulation, and Readiness



KIND *Connections*

LEARNING

CONNECTION ♦ COMPASSION ♦ CONTINUOUS GROWTH

THANK YOU!

FOR JOINING OUR WORKSHOP

Hi there,

Thank you for investing your time in this professional development resource.

Your commitment to understanding children more deeply, through a lens of regulation, connection, and movement, has the power to shift not just behaviours, but the learning trajectory of every child in your care.

This pack is designed to sit in your staff room, planning folder, or on a shelf you reach for often. It's practical, evidence-informed, and here to support you in the moments that matter.

Let's get started!

— Justine

YOUR DOWNLOAD
LINK IS AVAILABLE HERE



PROFESSIONAL
GROWTH PACK

KIND
Connections

LEARNING

CONNECTION ♦ COMPASSION ♦ CONTINUOUS GROWTH

Ready to learn

Mini PD moments to shift the lens on readiness

Ready to Learn

PD that builds understanding of readiness through movement, regulation, and reflection.

About this series:

This professional development (PD) pack is designed as a flexible, bite-sized learning resource that you and your team can weave into your existing professional learning schedule.

Whether you're using it for:

- **Staff meetings:** share the article and use the prompts to reflect as a group.
- **Individual reflection:** use the journal prompts to map your own practice and observations.
- **Planning sessions:** link strategies to your programming, intentional teaching, and environment setup.
- **Staff room learning:** keep it visible and accessible for ongoing professional conversations.

This pack is designed to be used alongside the current blog in the **Ready to Learn series**.

By reading and exploring the blog first, you create a shared starting point for discussion and inquiry. The blog acts as a catalyst, sparking questions, prompting reflection, and encouraging deeper investigation into how the concepts apply to your setting, your children, and your team.

This integrated approach helps you embed the learning into your everyday practice while aligning with your QIP goals.

Whether used in staff meetings, planning sessions, or informal conversations, *Ready to Learn* helps you embed deep thinking in everyday practice - one small shift at a time.

Educator Wellbeing

Connection, Compassion, Continuous Growth

The series is built around the principles of **connection, compassion, and continuous growth**, for both children and educators.

By focusing on educator wellbeing and understanding the brain-body connection, you'll strengthen your capacity to co-regulate with children, model healthy regulation, and create environments where everyone can thrive.

The reflective prompts and journal spaces can be used as evidence in your Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), supporting a culture of continuous improvement and dedication for holistic wellbeing development.

Use this PD pack to:

- Explore new perspectives on readiness.
- Reflect on your current practice and identify shifts you can make.
- Document your professional learning journey in a way that aligns with shared goals and aspirations.
- Build a shared language in your team about behaviour, regulation, learning and wellbeing.

Remember: Educator wellbeing is not separate from children's wellbeing, it's a core regulation strategy.

When you understand and care for your own nervous system, you bring greater calm, clarity, and compassion into every interaction.

Teaching With Movement in Mind

Why Movement Matters

Movement isn't a break from learning.
It is learning.

When children move, they regulate.
When they regulate, they connect.
When they connect, they can engage
in the complex thinking required for
learning.

This professional development series is
designed to walk alongside educators
as they unpack what it truly means to
support readiness, not through
pressure, but through presence.

We begin with the body, the senses,
and the nervous system.

That's where learning begins.



In our previous blog **Why Movement Matters**, we explored why regulation must come before learning and how movement provides the foundation for academic and behavioural success.

In this second installment, **Building Learning from the Ground Up**, we go deeper.

You'll be introduced to a powerful tool, the Pyramid of Learning, and gain insight into how sensory and motor development directly influence attention, behaviour, and emotional regulation.

Each layer building upon the next.

When we strengthen the foundation,
the whole structure becomes more
stable.



Building Learning from the Ground Up

What the Pyramid of Learning Teaches us about Behaviour, Regulation & Readiness



Building Learning from the Ground Up

What the Pyramid of Learning Teaches us about Behaviour, Regulation & Readiness

Written by Justine Tarrant, Kind Connections Learning

I know you can relate...

You've just finished setting up a learning experience and are about to start a transition with a story when you feel the energy of the room shift. There's a level of irritability that wasn't there before, and the noise level starts to rise. Then suddenly, a cushion goes flying across the room, and everything changes.

The ripple effect is immediate. Block towers collapse, someone's in tears, another child becomes upset because it's too loud, and you're left wondering: what just happened?

I used to spend a lot of time reflecting on moments like these.

What was the trigger?

What led up to it?

Was it something in the environment, a child's internal state, or the group dynamic?

I became obsessively curious about what was going on beneath the surface. That curiosity sent me down a rabbit hole that completely shifted how I view children's development, my role as a teacher, and an understanding about my own regulation and resilience.

A Pattern Emerges

Over my teaching career, I've often found myself thinking about particular children long after the day had ended. Some strategies would work beautifully one day, then fall completely flat the next. It was frustrating at times, and confusing.

Then I started noticing patterns.

Take windy days, for example. I began to see a link between strong winds and big emotions.

Building Learning from the Ground Up

What the Pyramid of Learning Teaches us about Behaviour, Regulation & Readiness

I noticed that certain children, not just one or two, but a consistent few, seemed to become more dysregulated, more impulsive, and less able to focus when the wind picked up.

I could almost predict that we'd need to shift gears: more outdoor time, more movement, more flexibility in our transitions. Less sitting. Less talking.

Over time, and a lot of exploration into the our brain - body connection, and particularly around our senses, I realised these weren't just random behaviours. They were windows into the child's nervous system, showing me when something deeper needed attention.

Seeing the Whole Child Differently

What I was really doing was shifting from a behaviour-first lens, to a strength-based, neuro-sequential one. In other words, I started thinking about what developmentally needed to be in place **before** some of the complex tasks I was asking children to do.

I reframed my questions and began to ask myself:

What is this child's nervous system telling me right now?

That's when I found the **Pyramid of Learning**, a framework developed by Kathleen Taylor and Maryann Trott in 1991 that helped me map what I was observing into a model that made sense.

I have utilised this pyramid as a tool for activating a deeper level of curiosity around a child's behaviour, as well as a deeper level of empathy for what a child was experiencing during certain times.

Building Learning from the Ground Up

What the Pyramid of Learning Teaches us about Behaviour, Regulation & Readiness

The Pyramid of Learning: A Holistic Lens

The Pyramid of Learning helps us understand why some children seem to struggle with focus, transitions, or emotional regulation, and why traditional behaviour management strategies aren't always effective.

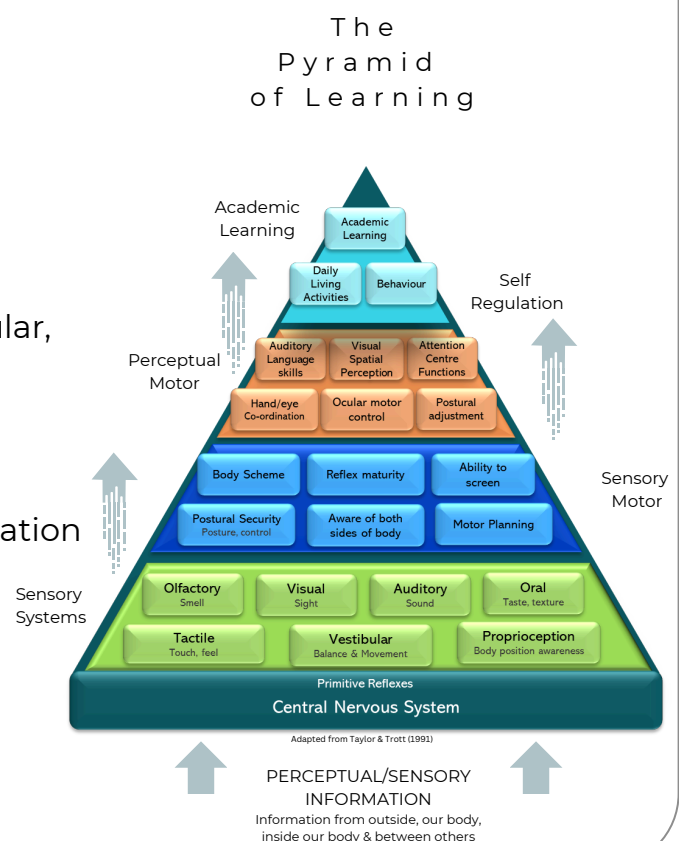
It shows us that before children can access academic skills like reading or writing, there are foundational systems in the brain and body that need to be in place.

Let's pause and think about this: *we'd never build a house starting with the roof, right?* And yet, in many learning environments, we expect children to sit still, concentrate, and "behave", before checking whether their foundations are strong enough to support those expectations.

"Foundations are not optional. They're essential." Justine Tarrant

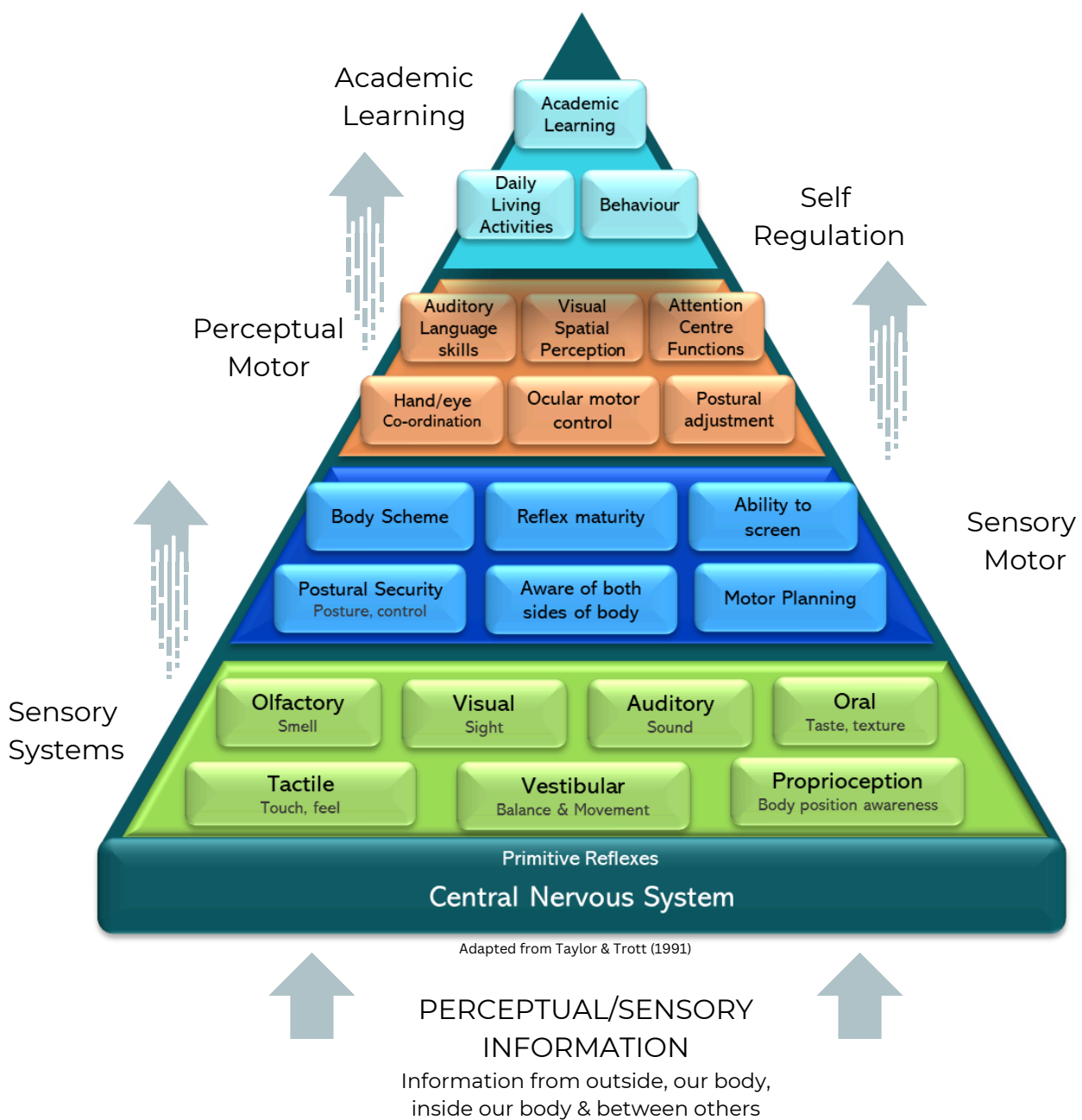
Here's a simplified view of the Pyramid from the bottom up:

- Central Nervous System
- Sensory Systems (all 8, including vestibular, proprioception, and interoception)
- Sensory-Motor Development
- Perceptual-Motor Development
- Functional Behaviour / Emotional Regulation
- Academic Learning



Taking a Bottom Up Approach

The Pyramid of Learning



Building Learning from the Ground Up

What the Pyramid of Learning Teaches us about Behaviour, Regulation & Readiness

Starting at the Bottom

Central Nervous System: The Base Layer

This is where it all begins, the brain and spinal cord. This system processes information and determines whether a child feels safe, stressed, calm, or overwhelmed.

If the nervous system isn't regulated, learning is going to be a struggle, no matter how "ready" we try to make them.

"Regulation is the foundation. Learning is the outcome." – Dr. Stuart Shanker

Think of that child who constantly seeks movement, or another who shuts down during transitions, often these are nervous system signals, not defiance.

Sensory Processing: The 8-Sense Puzzle

Beyond the five senses we all know (touch, taste, smell, sight, hearing), there are three others that often fly under the radar but are crucial in early childhood:

- Vestibular (balance & spatial orientation)
- Proprioception (body awareness)
- Interoception (internal signals like hunger, needing the toilet, or emotional states)

When a child's sensory systems aren't processing information efficiently, it can show up as:

- Difficulty sitting still
- Resistance to touch or certain textures
- Big emotional outbursts seemingly "out of nowhere"
- Trouble listening or following instructions

Through embracing a neuro-developmental way of viewing children uniquely, we begin to appreciate that how they react or respond to sensory information is deeply personal, and not always within their control.

Building Learning from the Ground Up

What the Pyramid of Learning Teaches us about Behaviour, Regulation & Readiness

Sensory-Motor Development: Moving to Make Sense of the World

Once the sensory systems begin working together, they support physical movement. Crawling, rolling, climbing, and balancing are more than just play, they build essential brain pathways.

When children engage in movement-based activities, they activate multiple brain regions at once, strengthening neural connections and improving coordination, focus, and regulation.

This is also where primitive reflex integration comes into play. Primitive reflexes are automatic movements babies are born with (like the startle reflex).

As they grow, these reflexes should “integrate”, meaning they become more refined and voluntary. If not, they can interfere with posture, focus, and learning later on.

Perceptual-Motor Development: Where Movement Meets Meaning

Here's where motor skills meet vision, hearing, and spatial awareness.

Perceptual Motor Skills refer to a child's growing ability to interact with their environment by combining use of their senses and motor skills.

This involves brain functions necessary to plan and make decisions from simple to more complex.

Think about:

- Copying from a whiteboard
- Tracking words across a page
- Following multi-step instructions
- Timing and rhythm in songs or movement games

These skills don't just emerge on their own, they're built on the foundation of movement and sensory integration.

Building Learning from the Ground Up

What the Pyramid of Learning Teaches us about Behaviour, Regulation & Readiness

Functional Behaviour & Emotional Regulation

Now we begin to see outcomes like:

- Being able to follow routines
- Engaging in social play
- Showing independence in daily tasks

These are all signs that the earlier systems are coming together. When children feel regulated in their bodies, they're able to express emotions more constructively, take turns, and participate in group settings.

Academic Learning: The Tip of the Pyramid

This is where formal learning becomes possible, not just because a child is "old enough," but because their whole system is ready.

We can't expect focus, memory retention, and impulse control to appear without supporting everything below.

When we look through the lens of the Pyramid, we see that "readiness" is really about integration.

"When children can't learn, we must ask what's happening in the layers below."
Carla Hannaford

Building Learning from the Ground Up

What the Pyramid of Learning Teaches us about Behaviour, Regulation & Readiness

A New Perspective on Behaviour

Understanding the Pyramid of Learning changes how we respond to challenges in our learning spaces. It encourages us to be curious, not reactive.

Instead of asking, “Why is this child being difficult?” we can begin asking:

- What sensory input are they processing (or not processing)?
- Is this movement a form of self-regulation?
- What do they need to feel grounded in their body before they can focus?

This framework invites us to see behaviour as communication, not manipulation.

Your Regulation Matters Too

Let’s not forget something equally important: **you**.

Your own nervous system is part of the environment. When you’re grounded, children can co-regulate with you. When you’re frazzled, they absorb that energy too.

This is why collective wellbeing, for educators, teams, and families, is a central aspiration. Regulation isn’t just a child-focused goal. It’s a whole-community responsibility.

“Regulated adults raise regulated children.”– Mona Delahooke

Final Thought

If you’re working with a child who seems distracted, disorganised, or constantly dysregulated, it’s not a reflection of your teaching methods. It’s a signal that their foundation needs attention.

Let’s meet them there, at the base of the pyramid, and build upward, with movement, understanding, and connection.

Reflection

Building Learning from the Ground Up
What the Pyramid of Learning Teaches us about
Behaviour, Regulation & Readiness

Reflective prompts:

- What might this behaviour be telling me about the child's nervous system?
- Which sensory systems could be activated (or overloaded) in this moment?
- Is this a regulation issue disguised as a behavioural one? What are the signs?
- How can I respond with connection before correction?
- What co-regulation tools do I use in challenging moments?
- What daily rituals could support regulation before group time?
- How am I caring for my own nervous system today?

Journal Pages- Use these pages to:

- Reflect on your observations of children
- Map behaviours to different layers of the pyramid
- Brainstorm strategies you can try
- Set intentions for supporting co-regulation in your learning space

Prompts:

- A moment I found challenging today was...
- I noticed this sensory-seeking behaviour...
- One child I'm curious about right now is...
- A co-regulation moment that worked well today was...
- One way I'll care for my nervous system this week is...

Strategies to get you started

3 Practical Strategies by Pyramid Layer

Central Nervous System (Regulation)

1. Create calming spaces with soft lighting and noise-buffering elements
2. Use breathing and movement rituals to start the day
3. Offer consistent routines with sensory signals (e.g., bells, visuals)

Sensory Integration

1. Provide regular vestibular input (e.g., swings, rocking, spinning)
2. Use tactile play (e.g., sand, water, playdough)
3. Offer deep pressure tools like weighted toys or body socks

Sensory-Motor Development

1. Include crawling tunnels, scooter boards, and obstacle courses
2. Encourage climbing and balancing on outdoor structures
3. Integrate rhythmic, cross-lateral movements into songs or games

Perceptual-Motor Development

1. Play games that require tracking or copying patterns (e.g., Simon Says)
2. Offer fine motor tasks like threading, tweezers, or cutting shapes
3. Practice visual scanning with hide-and-seek or treasure hunts

Functional Behaviour & Emotional Regulation

1. Model and name emotions with visuals and stories
2. Offer calming jars, fidget tools, or visual schedules
3. Build in daily co-regulation check-ins with children ("How's your body feeling today?")

Academic Learning

1. Use movement breaks between focused tasks (e.g., brain gym)
2. Incorporate music, rhythm, and visuals into lessons
3. Reduce expectations for seated learning when regulation is low

References

Building Learning from the Ground Up
What the Pyramid of Learning Teaches us about
Behaviour, Regulation & Readiness

References and Further Reading

- Taylor, K., & Trott, M. (1991). The Pyramid of Learning
- Hannaford, C. (2005). Smart Moves: Why Learning Is Not All in Your Head
- Ayres, J. (1972). Sensory Integration and Learning Disorders
- Delahooke, M. (2019). Beyond Behaviors
- Porges, S. (2011). The Polyvagal Theory
- Neff, K. (2011). Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself

Web Resources:

- www.kindconnectionslearning.com.au/blog
- www.sensoryintegration.org.uk
- www.polyvagalinstitute.org

Ready to Go Deeper?

Join Our Workshop:

Unlocking Learning Through Movement

- Live 2-hour Zoom PD
- Includes printable toolkit & visual resources
- Only \$65 | Multiple 2025 dates available
- Register at www.kindconnectionslearning.com.au/workshops

Explore the Course:

Moving Minds: Supporting Children's Development Through Sensory Integration & Movement

- Self-paced online course
- Real-world examples, guided reflection, and practice tools
- Launching September 2025
- Learn more at www.kindconnectionslearning.com.au/course

Final Words

Thank you for being part of this movement for regulation, connection, and holistic learning. When we build learning from the ground up, we honour the whole child. And when we nurture our own wellbeing, we become the most powerful regulation tool in the room.

Let's keep building, one layer at a time.

Reflection Journal

**BUILDING LEARNING FROM
THE GROUND UP**

'Ready to Learn' Series

KIND
Connections

LEARNING

CONNECTION ♦ COMPASSION ♦ CONTINUOUS GROWTH



Reflection

Date :

KEY TAKEAWAYS

-
-
-

NOTES

CURIOSITIES & IMPLICATIONS

IDEAS TO EXPLORE



Reflection

Date :

Take a moment to reflect on these prompts

- What do I already know about regulation and the role of movement?
- What signs of dysregulation or unmet sensory needs have I noticed in children I work with?
- What strategies have I tried so far - what's working and what's not?
- What's one thing I hope to explore further?

A large area of horizontal dotted lines for writing reflections.



TO EXPLORE :

A vertical list of seven dotted lines, each preceded by a small square box, for listing items to explore.



CURIOSITIES:

A vertical list of seven dotted lines for listing curiosities.



Reflection

Date :

A large area for writing, consisting of many horizontal lines, intended for the student's reflection.



Reflection

Date :



Challenge Prompt

Date :

A Mini Challenge:

- Choose one child in your care and observe them over a few transitions or routines.
- What are they doing with their body? Are they; still, fidgety, bouncing, seeking or avoiding touch, sound, or space?

Bring 1 insight from this observation to your next meeting.



TO EXPLORE :



CURIOSITIES:



Reflection

Date :

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing.



Reflection

Date :