



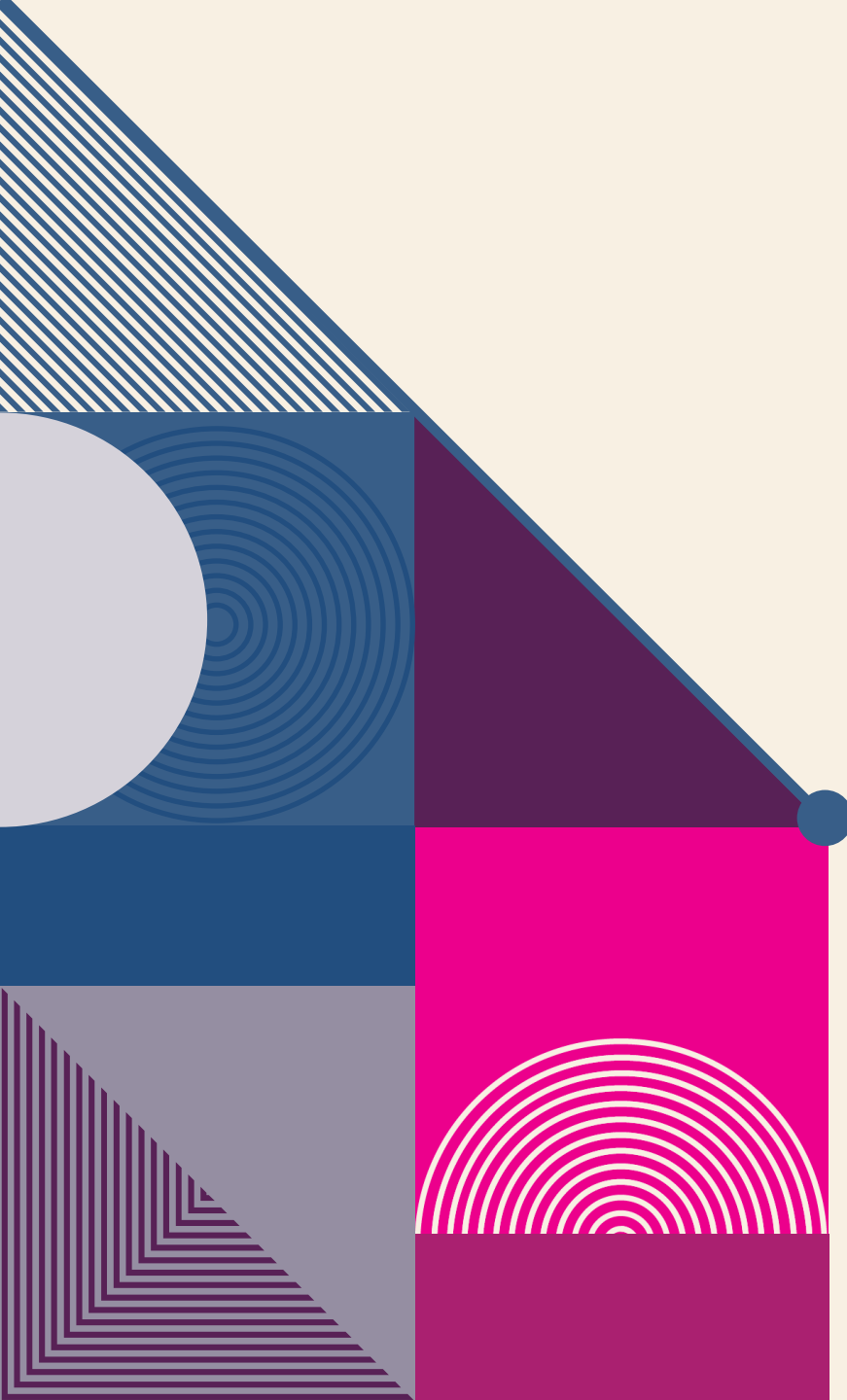
# ENHANCING MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS:

## STRATEGIES FOR STAFF

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A decorative geometric pattern on the left side of the slide. It features a large triangle with a blue and white striped pattern, a blue square with a white circle and concentric circles, a dark blue triangle, a blue square, a grey square with a blue triangle, a pink square with a white semi-circle and concentric circles, and a purple square. A small blue circle is at the intersection of the dark blue triangle and the pink square.

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- UNDERSTANDING THE O VERLAP
- CORE STRATEGIES



# UNDERSTANDING THE O VERLAP

# MENTAL HEALTH + SPECIAL EDUCATION

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# MENTAL HEALTH + SPECIAL EDUCATION

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# MENTAL HEALTH + SPECIAL EDUCATION

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# MENTAL HEALTH + SPECIAL EDUCATION

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# BEHAVIORAL ≠ DEFIANT – LET’S REFRAME WHAT WE SEE

| What We See               | What Might Actually Be Happening                    |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Refusing to do work       | Overwhelmed, anxious, or unsure how to start        |
| Talking back              | Feeling unheard or needing to feel in control       |
| Leaving the room          | Sensory overload or flight response to anxiety      |
| Not following directions  | Auditory processing delays or working memory issues |
| Constant interruptions    | Impulsivity, ADHD, or fear of forgetting thoughts   |
| Slamming books or yelling | Fight-or-flight response to emotional dysregulation |

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- Co-regulate before you redirect:**

Help the student feel safe and grounded *before* addressing the behavior.

- Use nonverbal cues:**

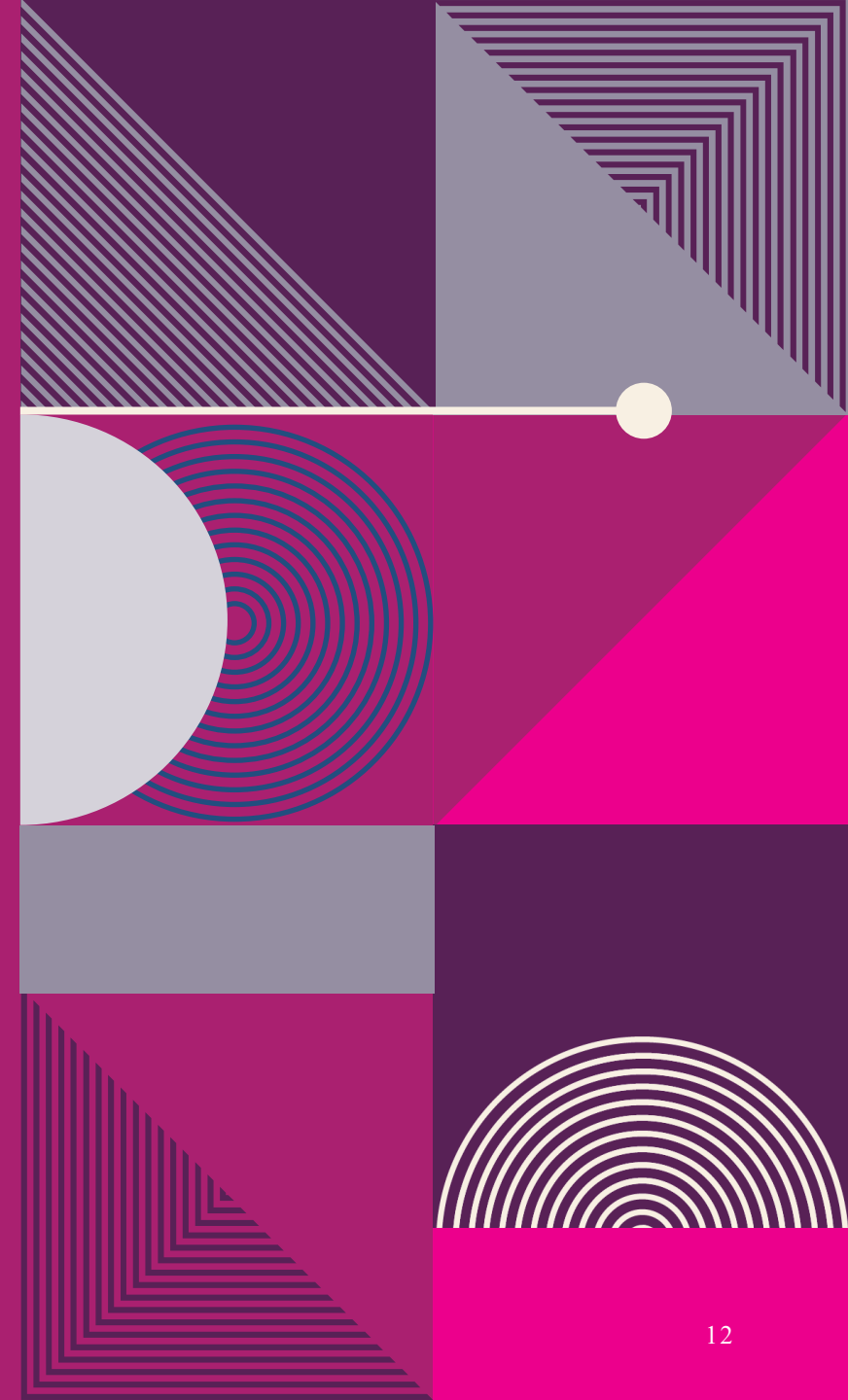
Avoid calling students out in front of peers. Use visual signals or quiet proximity.

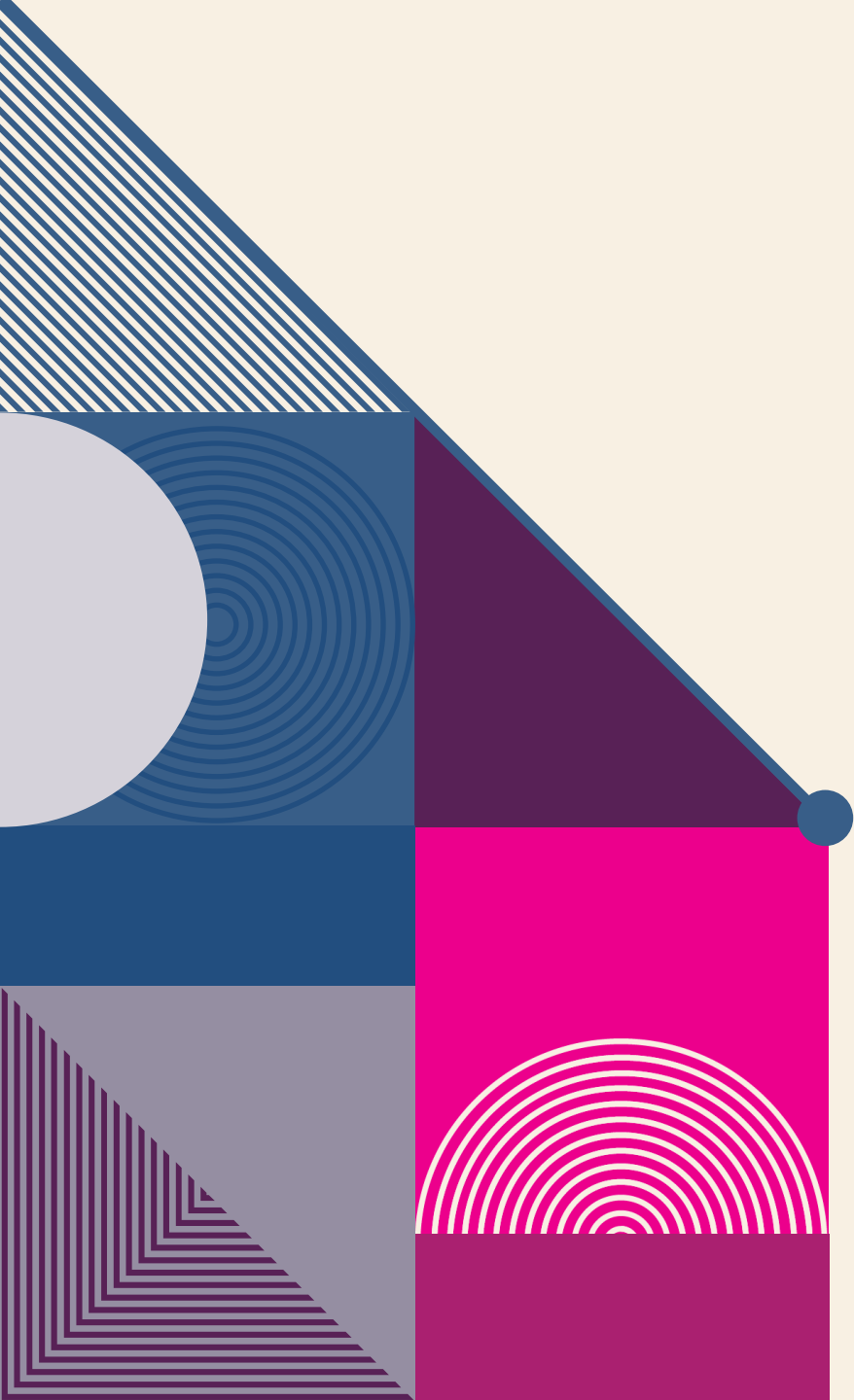
- Offer choices, not ultimatums:**

This reduces power struggles and increases buy-in.

- Create behavior replacement plans:**

Teach what to do *instead* of just what not to do.





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## What Are Emotional Check-Ins?

Emotional check-ins are brief, intentional moments where students (or staff) pause to identify and name how they're feeling.

These check-ins can be done one-on-one, in small groups, or even as a classwide practice.

For SPED students or those with emotional regulation challenges, this can be a powerful regulation tool that builds emotional awareness and supports executive functioning.

# ROUTINE EMOTIONAL CHECK-INS

✨ WHY IT WORKS (ESPECIALLY FOR SPED AND 504 STUDENTS)

- Builds trust between student and adult
  - Reduces meltdowns and miscommunications over time
  - Creates predictable safe spaces and structure
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# ROUTINE EMOTIONAL CHECK-INS

## HOW TO IMPLEMENT CHECK-INS

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 Tools You Can Use:

- Feelings Wheels or Thermometers
- Emoji Charts
- Mood Cards or Flip Charts
- “Color Zones” (Red = mad, Blue = sad, Green = calm, Yellow = nervous)
- Digital check-in forms (Google Forms with emoji buttons or sliders)
- Check-In Boxes: “I need help,” “I’m doing okay,” “I feel great today!”

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- If your body could talk, what would it say?
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- What would help you feel calm or ready right now?
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- Would you like a calm space, break, or to talk privately?

# ROUTINE EMOTIONAL CHECK-INS

## 💡 PRO TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

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# SAFE SPACES ON CAMPUS—QUIET ROOMS, SENSORY TOOLS, VISUALS

🔑 Sensory Corners (in classrooms or resource rooms)

Ideal for students with sensory needs (SPD, autism, ADHD)

✅ Include:

- Fidget tools
- Noise-reducing headphones
- Bouncy bands or wobble stools
- Textured sensory bins (rice, beads, sand)
- Aromatherapy playdough or lavender sachets

🗣️ Teach students to request sensory breaks before they're in crisis.

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## ✓ What It Means

When students exhibit challenging behaviors—especially those in special education—those behaviors are often functional, meaning they serve a specific purpose for the student.

They are not random, personal, or malicious.

🧠 Behavior is a form of communication.

It tells us something a student may not have the skills or words to express.

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Instead of...

“Stop acting out!”

“This is disrespectful.”

“You’re not trying hard enough.”

“Why are you always doing this?”

Try this...

“I can see you’re having a tough time—want to take a quick break?”

“It seems like you’re frustrated. What can I do to help?”

“This seems hard—can we work through one piece at a time?”

“I’ve noticed this keeps happening. Let’s figure it out together.”

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## 💡 Practical Ways to Collaborate:

### 1. Be Present at IEP Meetings

- Don't just attend—be prepared with mental health observations, interventions you've tried, and emotional patterns you've noticed.
- Suggest SEL goals or mental health accommodations (e.g., "Can we add a 5-minute check-in after transitions?").

### 2. Create a Quick Connection System

- Use shared communication tools: a Google Doc, quick text/email check-ins, or behavior alert forms.
- Design a "Red Flag" system: when a student shows increased distress, both SPED staff and counseling team are informed.

### 3. Co-Teach SEL or Coping Skills Sessions

- Invite a SPED teacher to join a social-emotional group with shared students.
- Model strategies for students AND staff—great professional development in action!

# COLLABORATION WITH SPED TEAM (DON'T OPERATE IN A SILO)

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# HAVE A GOOD DAY!

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