A FREE WORKBOOK FOR TEACHERS AND SUPPORT STAFF

The Gede Educator Workbook

Twenty-five nervous systems, one room, and the one you brought with you

A classroom is not a set of children learning. It is a set of bodies deciding, minute by minute, whether this room is safe enough to learn in — and one of those bodies is yours, which the others are reading more closely than they read the board.

This workbook takes what is known about nervous-system states, Internal Family Systems and body-based practice, and puts it where you actually work: the corridor at 8.45, the maths lesson after wet play, the child who has gone quiet at the back, the parent at the gate who has heard a version of events.

Work through it in order for staff training, or open the part you need before Tuesday. Write in it — the answers you type stay on this device, and the printed version has lines for a pen.

PLEASE READ FIRST

This is professional development for everyday classroom life, not therapy, diagnosis or treatment, and it does not replace your setting's safeguarding procedures. If something a child says or does raises a concern, follow your safeguarding policy first and speak to your designated lead — always, and before anything in this workbook.

WHAT'S INSIDE

1. The room reads you first · 2. Your own map, at work · 3. Mapping the class · 4. Meeting activation in a group · 5. The child who goes quiet · 6. Parts, in classroom language · 7. Proximity, touch and consent at school · 8. Teaching it, and surviving the term

Plus: a chapter-by-chapter planning table, one page for the desk, a class repair page, a five-day plan and a note to send home.

PART 1

The room reads you first

Three nervous-system states in plain language, and why yours sets the ceiling.

Before a child processes a single instruction, their body has already run a much older calculation: am I safe here, is anybody with me, do I have enough room. It answers in a state rather than a sentence, and the state decides how much of your lesson can land.

Three are worth knowing by sight. Settled: breath low, face available, able to hear a correction without collapsing. Activated: fast, loud, wriggly, urgent, sometimes funny at exactly the wrong moment — the body has decided something must be handled now. Shut down: heavy, far away, flat, “I don't know” on repeat — the body has decided nothing can be handled, so it powers down.

None of this is a behaviour choice, which is why behaviour systems alone rarely reach it. A sticker cannot argue with a body that has concluded it is unsafe. What changes a state is conditions: pace, volume, light, proximity, predictability, one steady face.

The uncomfortable part is that the steadiest condition available in most classrooms is the adult. Your breath, your walking speed and the pitch of your voice are read by twenty-five nervous systems continuously, and a room can only settle as far as the grown-up in it has settled. This is not a demand to be serene. It is a reason to notice yourself first, briefly, on purpose.

What each state looks like at school

	In you	In the class
Settled	Breath low, you can be interrupted without irritation, humour available	Hum of work, children negotiate, a no is survivable, transitions run
Activated	Talking faster, standing taller, counting down, needing compliance now	Volume climbing, silliness, chairs scraping, refusal at the door, tears over pencils
Shut down	Flat, going through the plan, counting to home time, nothing left to give	Heads down but nothing written, shrugs, hoods up, the quiet ones you stop noticing

THIRTY SECONDS AT THE DOOR

1. Before the class comes in, stand at the door and put both feet flat.
2. One long out-breath, longer out than in. Just one.
3. Ask yourself the question once: settled, revved up, or shut down?
4. Change nothing. Name it, then greet the first child.
5. Repeat it after break, when the room is hardest.

WRITE IT DOWN

The lesson where I feel most settled is… and what makes it work is…

The point in the day my own state usually drops is…

One class I am currently reading as “badly behaved” that might be activated is…

One child I have been reading as “fine” who may be shut down is...

THIS WEEK

Do the door breath before three lessons this week and notice which class you needed it most for.

PART 2

Your own map, at work

Where you go under classroom pressure, and what actually brings you back.

Everyone has a default under pressure. Some teachers go up: faster, louder, more rules, more countdowns, a strong pull to win the moment in front of witnesses. Others go down: procedural, flat, technically teaching, quietly absent. Both are protective and neither is a character flaw.

The leverage is not in changing your default. It is in knowing the early signals — the ones that arrive while you still have choices. A tightening across the chest, heat in the face, a certain sarcasm that creeps in, the urge to make an example of somebody. Most people have two or three, and they are reliably physical.

Then there is the return trip, and schools make it hard: no door to close, no minute alone, a corridor duty attached to the end of the lesson. So the resets that work in a school are the ones that take under a minute and can be done in front of children — a hand on the desk, feet pressed into the floor, three long out-breaths while the class writes a title.

Worth naming honestly: the staff room can regulate you or wind you further up, and so can the ten minutes you spend rehearsing the incident in your head at 4pm. Choose deliberately, once, rather than each time.

THE RESET YOU CAN DO IN FRONT OF THIRTY CHILDREN

1. Pick one thing that takes under sixty seconds, needs no equipment and is invisible to the room.
2. Attach it to a moment that already exists: handing out books, the register, the walk to the whiteboard.
3. Practise it three times this week while calm, so the body learns the route.
4. Use it at the first early signal, not at the shouting.
5. Tell one colleague what it is, so somebody else knows to cover you for ninety seconds if you need it.

WRITE IT DOWN

Under classroom pressure I usually go (up / down / both, depending on…):

My earliest physical signal, before anyone would notice, is…

Three things at work that reliably tip me over:

Three resets I can genuinely do inside a lesson:

What I do with a hard incident after the bell — and what I would rather do:

THIS WEEK

Agree a two-word signal with one colleague that means “stand in my doorway for a minute”, and use it once.

PART 3

Mapping the class

The run-up, per child and per room — and the four causes behind most of it.

Children broadcast state long before they can name it, and a group broadcasts louder still. A tantrum at 11.20 is rarely the first thing; it is usually the fourth, and the first three were small enough to miss while you were teaching.

Most classroom storms trace back to four ordinary causes: hunger, transition, sensory load, and an unfinished thing. Before reaching for a behaviour explanation, check those four. They account for more incidents than any of us would like to admit, and three of them are fixable with timetabling rather than conversation.

Individual maps matter too, but keep them light: two or three children at a time, a sentence each. What their first signal looks like, what their second looks like, and the one thing that has actually worked at least twice. Written down, this survives supply cover, a change of TA, and your own memory in week six.

Redo it each term. A map made in September is out of date by February — children change with sleep, growth, friendships and what is happening at home.

The run-up, per child

Stage	What I see	What helps here
First signal		
Second signal		
Full state		

ONE WEEK OF THREE WORDS

1. Choose one class and one week.
2. Three times a day — arrival, mid-morning, after lunch — write one word for the room's state.
3. Beside it, write what happened in the twenty minutes before. No interpretation.
4. On Friday look for the pattern rather than the incident.
5. Change one condition next week. One only, so you can tell whether it worked.

WRITE IT DOWN

This page is about (child, initials only):

When settled, they…

When revved up, they…

When shut down, they…

The warning sign I keep missing is…

Of the four causes — hunger, transition, sensory load, unfinished thing — the one that fits this class best is…

One timetable or room change that would remove that cause:

THIS WEEK

Share one child's map with the adult who covers your class, in two sentences, before they need it.

PART 4

Meeting activation in a group

When a child is lit up and twenty-four others are watching.

The order that works is almost never the order we reach for. Regulate: get your own body down one notch. Connect: get lower, get nearer, fewer words, warm face. Then teach — the correction, the consequence, the conversation about the thrown chair all land better later, and much better one-to-one.

Talking first is the great classroom trap. Words go into a body that cannot process them, the repetition reads as pressure, and volume climbs on both sides while the audience decides who is winning. Halving your volume does more than any sentence in it.

The audience is the part parents never have to manage. Two things reduce it: move the conversation out of the middle of the room, and give the rest of the class something concrete to do for ninety seconds. “Everyone, first three questions, I'll be with you in a minute” protects the child's dignity and yours.

Consequences still exist, and children need them to be predictable. They just work better delivered from a settled body, briefly, once, when both of you can hear — and a calm consequence tomorrow morning teaches more than a loud one now.

Instead of / try

Moment	Instead of	Try
Refusal in front of the class	Repeating the instruction louder	Stepping alongside, half volume: “I'll come back in two minutes.”
Escalating back-and-forth	Winning the exchange	Naming and leaving it: “I'm not going to argue this now. Work first, talk after.”
Storming out	Ordering them back	One adult follows quietly, no questions for the first minute
Whole-class volume climbing	Shouting over it	Dropping your own voice below theirs and slowing down; wait it out
After the incident	Debriefing immediately	Two minutes at the end of the day, from a settled body, no audience

HALF VOLUME, HALF SPEED

1. Pick the next loud moment you expect this week.
2. Halve your volume and halve your speed deliberately.
3. Say one sentence, then stop talking. Count five in your head.
4. Notice what the room does with the silence.
5. Write one line afterwards about what changed.

WRITE IT DOWN

The moment I most often talk first is…

A sentence I could keep in my pocket for it:

Where in my room can a conversation happen out of the audience's sight?

The ninety-second task I can give the rest of the class is…

THIS WEEK

Agree with your class, while everyone is calm, on what you will do when someone needs to leave the room — so it is a plan, not a rebellion.

PART 5

The child who goes quiet

Shutdown in a classroom is easy to miss and easy to punish by accident.

Freeze does not disrupt, so it does not get met. A child who is shut down looks compliant from the front: still, quiet, head down, nothing written. In a busy room this reads as laziness, daydreaming or “just quiet”, and the response — a question, a deadline, a name said sharply — is exactly the pressure the body cannot take.

The signs are physical and consistent: slow blinking, a fixed stare, delayed answers, a flat voice, hands still, colour draining, sometimes a sudden sleepiness. The classic tell is that language goes before anything else. “I don't know” four times is usually not refusal; it is the sentence that is left when the words have gone.

What helps is the opposite of what feels efficient: less input, not more. Fewer words, no questions for the first minute, slightly less light or noise, a task with one step, and permission to move — carrying something to the office does more than any conversation. Presence without demand is the whole intervention: sitting near, working on your own thing, saying “nothing to answer”.

Gentle movement brings a shut-down body back faster than talking: standing up, hands on a desk pushing down, a walk with a purpose. Save the conversation for after the body has come back online, which is usually ten minutes, not ten seconds.

Reaching a shut-down child

What I notice	Unhelpful	Helpful
No answer to a question	Repeating it, waiting, eye contact	“No need to answer. I'll be back in a minute.”
Blank page	“You've done nothing all lesson”	Cutting the task to one step and doing the first line together
Hood up, head down	Removing the hood, naming it publicly	Sitting alongside, working on your own thing, no questions
Very still, far away	Sending them out	A job that involves walking and carrying something

PRESENCE WITHOUT DEMAND

1. Choose one quiet child this week.
2. Sit or stand near them for two minutes with no question and no instruction.
3. Do your own small task — marking, tidying — so they are not observed.
4. Offer one thing, not a choice of five: “Want to do the first line with me?”
5. Accept any answer, including no. Come back tomorrow.

WRITE IT DOWN

A child in my class I now think may be shutting down rather than switching off:

What I usually do in that moment:

What I will try instead:

A one-step version of a task they could actually start:

THIS WEEK

Add a movement job to your classroom — a delivery to the office — that any child can be sent on without it being a sanction.

PART 6

Parts, in classroom language

Internal Family Systems without the jargon: nobody is being difficult on purpose.

Internal Family Systems starts from an idea that is useful in a classroom even if you never say its name: a person is not one voice. There is a part that wants to get it right, a part that would rather be thrown out than look stupid, a part that goes quiet when a voice gets loud. They are not symptoms. They are strategies that worked once.

This reframes the child who refuses to start. A part of them is protecting against being seen to fail, and it is doing that job well. Arguing with the refusal is arguing with the bodyguard; the child underneath is not in the conversation at all. Speaking to the protector respectfully — “Something in you really doesn't want to start this. That makes sense. What would make it less risky?” — is the door the argument never finds.

You have parts too, and they show up in specific children. The one who makes you unreasonably irritated, the one you soften with unfairly, the one you go cold with — that is not information about them so much as information about you, and noticing it is enough to loosen it.

Keep the language child-sized and it works from four upwards: “the part of you that…”, “the bit that gets loud when things feel unfair”. Never diagnose, never announce a child's inner world to them or to the room, and never use parts language to explain away a safeguarding concern.

What a protector sounds like at school

It looks like	It is protecting against	A sentence that lands
“This is stupid, I'm not doing it”	Being seen to fail in front of the class	“Something in you doesn't want to risk this one. What's the smallest bit we could try?”
Clowning the moment work starts	The gap between them and the task	“You're good at making us laugh. I think this bit's harder than you're letting on.”
Perfect work, panic at a mistake	Not being good enough to be safe	“The part of you that needs it right is working very hard. It's allowed a day off here.”
Going silent when corrected	A raised voice, at some point, somewhere	“Nothing to answer. I'm not cross. I'll be here.”

SPEAK TO THE PROTECTOR

1. Pick one child and one recurring refusal.
2. At a calm moment, not mid-incident, say one sentence that names the protection without diagnosing.
3. Offer the smallest possible version of the task.
4. Do not require an answer or a thank you.
5. Write down what happened, including if nothing did.

WRITE IT DOWN

A refusal in my class I could re-read as protection:

What I think it is protecting against:

One respectful sentence I could say to it:

The child who most reliably gets under my skin is... and what that says about me is...

THIS WEEK

Use “the part of you that...” once with the whole class, about a feeling everyone recognises, so the language is normal before it is needed.

PART 7

Proximity, touch and consent at school

What regulates a body through contact — inside safeguarding policy, always.

Contact settles a nervous system faster than words, which is why a hand on a shoulder can end a meltdown that ten sentences could not. Schools also have safeguarding policies, and those come first, without exception. Know yours, follow it, and treat everything below as an option only where your setting allows it.

The good news is that most of the regulating effect is available without touch at all. Proximity — standing calmly nearby, sitting at the same height, facing the same direction rather than face-on — does much of the work. So does shared rhythm: walking beside a child at their pace, tidying together, throwing a ball back and forth.

Where touch is permitted in your setting, consent is the whole practice: ask first, in the plainest words, and accept no as easily as yes. “Would a hand on your back help, or shall I just sit here?” gives the child authorship, which is often more regulating than the contact would have been. Keep it brief, public, and never as a reward or an apology.

Teach children the same skill about each other. A class that asks before hugging, and hears no without drama, is doing consent education in the only way that sticks — in the body, before it is ever a topic.

Regulating contact, in order of safety

Option	When it fits	How
Proximity	Almost always, all ages	Stand or sit near, same height, side by side, no demand
Shared rhythm	Activation that needs somewhere to go	Walk together, carry something, throw a ball, tidy side by side
Self-touch, taught	Any child, no policy issue	“Hand on your own chest”, feet pressing the floor, hands squeezing together
Adult touch, where policy allows	Rare, brief, asked for	Ask, keep it public and short, stop the moment anything shifts

SAME DIRECTION, NOT FACE-ON

1. Next time a child is upset, sit or stand beside them rather than in front.
2. Match their pace before trying to change it — slow your own breath, don't ask them to.
3. Offer a self-touch option: “Put a hand where it feels tight.”
4. Stay for two minutes with no question.
5. Afterwards, note whether it took less time than talking usually does.

WRITE IT DOWN

What my setting's policy actually says about touch:

Who my designated safeguarding lead is:

Two non-contact ways I can regulate a child in my room:

The words I will use to ask, if asking is allowed here:

THIS WEEK

Teach the class to ask before touching each other this week, and to say “no thanks” without needing a reason.

PART 8

Teaching it, and surviving the term

Turning all of this into lessons — and protecting the adult who delivers them.

None of this needs a new subject on the timetable. Fifteen minutes a week is enough: read a chapter, name the feeling, do one two-minute practice, and put one word on the feelings chart. The repetition does the teaching, not the depth of any single session.

Sequence matters more than coverage. Start with feelings that are easy to admit — proud, playful, small — before the ones that cost something to name, like lonely or scared. A class that has practised naming easy feelings out loud will name a hard one six weeks later. A class asked for a hard one in week one will perform an answer.

Keep the exit predictable: every session ends with something ordinary — a game, a task, going out to play. Children should leave a feelings lesson regulated, not opened up and then sent to maths.

Then there is you. This work draws on the same reserves that teaching already drains, and a teacher running on empty cannot be the steady body in the room. Supervision, a colleague to debrief with, an actual lunch break and a hard stop at the end of the day are not luxuries here; they are the mechanism. Guard them the way you would guard a child's.

Fifteen minutes a week

Minutes	What happens	Why
0–2	Arrive: one long out-breath together, feet on the floor	Settles the room before content
2–8	Read the chapter, or listen to it read aloud	Story does the naming, not the teacher
8–10	One question, hands down, answers optional	Removes performance pressure
10–12	One practice from the practices page	Puts it in the body, not just the head
12–15	One word each on the chart, then something ordinary	Predictable exit, regulated leaving

PLAN THE FIRST THREE WEEKS

1. Pick three chapters, easiest feeling first.
2. Write the day and time each will happen. Actual times, not “sometime Friday”.
3. Choose one practice per session and print the worksheet the week before.
4. Tell the class the shape, so it becomes a routine rather than an event.
5. After week three, keep what worked and drop one thing.

WRITE IT DOWN

The fifteen minutes in my week this could live in:

The three feelings I will start with, easiest first:

The ordinary thing each session will end with:

Who I debrief with, and when:

One thing I will stop doing this term to make room:

THIS WEEK

Book your three sessions into the calendar now, and tell one colleague you have — so they exist outside your head.

PLANNING

Chapter by chapter

Sixteen feelings, the chapter that carries each one, what it sounds like in a classroom, and the practice that fits. Tick the ones you have taught.

Feeling	It sounds like	Read	Practice	Done
Small	“I’m not enough.”	Gede the Gecko	Big feet	
Unseen	“Nobody notices me.”	The Golden-Eyed Guardian	—	
Lonely	“I don’t have anyone.”	A New Friend	—	
Nervous	“My tummy feels fluttery.”	Putri	The long way out	
Hiding something	“I can’t say it out loud.”	Gede's Secret	—	
Unsure	“What if it goes wrong?”	The Dance of Trust	—	
Quiet inside	“My words got stuck.”	Finding His Voice	One true sentence	
Pushed	“I didn’t want that.”	Standing Strong	Shake it out	
Playful	“I feel light!”	The Courage to Play	—	
Impatient	“It’s taking too long.”	The Strength in Patience	—	
Scared of change	“I want it to stay the same.”	The Courage to Change	—	
Overwhelmed	“Everything is too loud.”	The Gift of Stillness	The square	
Proud	“I did that myself.”	Inner Light	—	
Rushed	“Hurry, hurry, hurry.”	Moving Slow with Wisdom	Slow hands	
Sad	“My eyes want to rain.”	The Rain	Where is it sitting?	
Safe	“I feel like me again.”	Coming Home	A hand on your own heart	

CUT THIS ONE OUT

One page for the desk

Tape it inside a planner, or beside the board where only you can see it.

THE SIGNALS

Revved up: loud, wriggly, silly, refusing at the door, tears over nothing.

Shut down: still, flat, hood up, “I don't know”, blank page.

Settled: working hum, negotiating, able to hear a no.

THE THREE STEPS

Regulate — your body first. One long out-breath at half speed.

Connect — get lower, get nearer, fewer words, same direction.

Teach — later, one-to-one, from a settled body.

SIX PHRASES

“I'll come back in two minutes.”

“Nothing to answer. I'm not cross.”

“Something in you really doesn't want this. That makes sense.”

“What's the smallest bit we could try?”

“I got too loud just then. That was mine, not yours.”

“Work first, talk after.”

REPAIR

When it goes badly in front of everyone

Every teacher has a moment they would take back. Children are not harmed by the rupture; they are harmed by rupture with no repair — and a repair done in a classroom teaches the whole room something no assembly can.

THE STEPS

1. Wait until your own body is settled. Repair from an activated body is not repair.
2. Do it privately first, with the child, before anything public.
3. Name your bit only: “I got too loud. That wasn't okay.” No “but you…”.
4. Say what you will do differently, small and true: “Next time I'll step away first.”
5. Ask one question and accept any answer: “What was that like for you?”
6. If the room saw it, say one sentence to the room. One. No speech, no confession.
7. Rejoin the ordinary — start the next task. Ordinary is the proof that it is over.
8. Log it if your setting requires it, and tell a colleague so it is not carried alone.

What happened, and what I want to say:

ONE SCHOOL WEEK

One small thing a day

Nothing here needs extra time in the timetable. Tick the box, write one line about how it went.

Day	The small thing	How it went
Day 1 — Breathe at the door	One long out-breath before three lessons. Name your state. Change nothing.	
Day 2 — Catch your early signal	Notice the first physical sign of activation once, and use your sixty-second reset.	
Day 3 — Find the run-up	Write down the twenty minutes before the hardest moment of the day.	
Day 4 — Half volume	In the loud moment, halve your volume and speed, say one sentence, then stop.	
Day 5 — Reach a quiet one	Two minutes beside a shut-down child, no questions, one small offer.	

TO SEND HOME

What to send home

Half the value of this work is that the same words exist at home. Two lines in a newsletter do more than a workshop nobody can attend.

NEWSLETTER LINES YOU CAN COPY

We are using Gede the Gecko to name feelings this term — one feeling a week.

The words we use in class: revved up, shut down, settled. No feeling is naughty.

The three steps we follow when it is hard: regulate, connect, then talk.

There is a free parent workbook and a printable feelings chart on the Gede site.

If your child comes home talking about “the part of me that…”, that is us. It is a way of saying nobody is only one thing.