

S.O.D.A. PROTOCOL

The S.O.D.A. protocol is an adult social-emotional self-regulation strategy for gaining control of your emotions when you feel triggered. Social neuroscience tells us that we can avoid an amygdala hijack if we can pause for 10 seconds before responding to something that pushes our buttons, leading to potential fight, flight, freeze, or appease type behavior. When leading equity work, it is important to have tools for self-regulation.

STOP

This first step simply asks you to stop and pause rather than react in habitual ways. When you enter an interaction that feels challenging, work hard to stay open-minded. Open-mindedness means being open to other points of view, other ways of doing things, and staying open to changing your own viewpoint. This might mean not allowing a certain cultural display, such as a students' animated verbal exchange, trigger you.

OBSERVE

In the second step, check yourself. Don't react to what is going on. Instead, take a breath. Use the 10-second rule. When the brain gets triggered, it takes stress hormones approximately 10 seconds to move through the body to the prefrontal cortex. In the pre-hijack stage, the biochemicals cortisol and adrenaline are just beginning to kick in. There is still some "wiggle room" to listen to your wiser self and begin using stress management techniques to interrupt the amygdala take-over effectively. Try to describe to yourself what is happening in neutral terms. It is during this step that you can recognize that what was originally perceived as a threat isn't really.

DETACH

Sometimes when we get triggered, we get personally invested in being right or exercising our power over others. Deliberately shift your consciousness to more pleasant or inspirational images. If those techniques fail, go get a drink of water, literally take a few steps back to shake yourself up a bit. When we can detach from the goal of being right or defending ourselves, we can redirect our energy toward being more responsive rather than reactive.

AWAKEN

When our amygdala reacts, it's because we are trying to protect ourselves. Shifting focus from yourself to the other person in front of you, helps you "wake up" or become present in the moment. Try to see the other person as someone with his own feelings. He might be scared and reacting out of fear. Ask yourself a few questions about the other person. What are they thinking? How are they feeling in this moment? Shifting over to their perspective will get you out of your own reactive mode and will put you in a better position to have a positive interaction.

From Chapter 4: Preparing to Be a Culturally Responsive Practitioner (pp. 67-68) in *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* (Corwin, 2015).