

The Five Domains:

Why the Same **Kid** Can Feel
Like **Different** Kids on
Different **Days**

THE FOUNDATIONS: PART 1



When the Same Kid Feels Like Different Kids

Picture Tuesday at 4pm: Your kid is building the most elaborate LEGO city you've ever seen. The focus is intense. The attention to detail is wild. They haven't moved in 45 minutes.

Now picture Tuesday at 4:47pm: It's story time and they're melting down like you just asked them to climb Everest.

Same kid. Same hour. Completely different human.

Or how about this: They're totally fine at home. Then you walk into Target and within five minutes they're clinging to you, whining, or losing it in the cereal aisle.

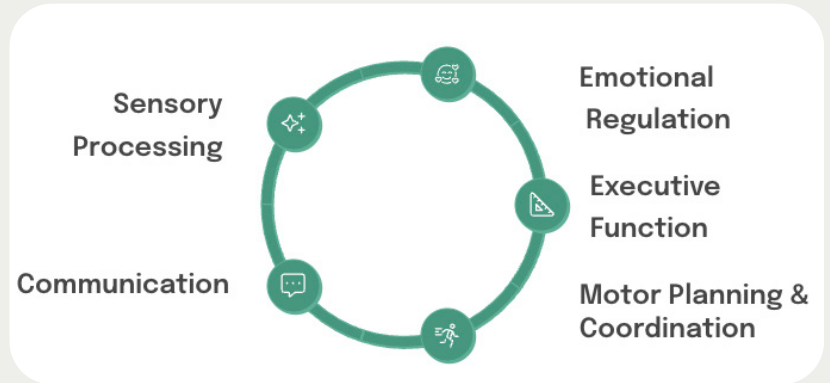


And that brilliant strategy you discovered last week? The one that finally worked? Today it's like it never existed.

Here's what might actually be happening

(and why these patterns are super interesting!)

Your child has five major systems *running at all times*: sensory processing, emotional regulation, executive function, motor planning, and communication.



These systems (we call them "brain domains") work together constantly, in ways that shape how your child experiences and responds to the world.

When you understand how these brain domains interact, those "different kid" moments start making sense.

Even better, you'll spot patterns you can actually work with instead of just wondering what went wrong.

The patterns you're already noticing? They're signals. Windows into how your child's unique brain and body system operates.

Five Brain Domains in Action:

The Classic Grocery Store Meltdown

Your child was totally fine in the car. Chatting. Maybe singing. All good. Five minutes into the grocery store? They're clinging to you. Whining. Getting increasingly dysregulated. By the time you hit the cereal aisle, it's a full meltdown.

What might really be happening in their brain:

Sensory Processing is MAXED OUT → Fluorescent lights buzzing → Dozens of visual inputs competing for attention → Background music + scanner beeps + other people's conversations → The cold air, the smells, the feeling of the cart handle → Their brain is working overtime to filter and process all of this.

Motor Planning is in Overdrive → Navigating around people without bumping into them → Walking in a straight line while the environment is visually chaotic → Potentially trying to manage a cart or hold your hand → Their body is working hard to move through unpredictable space

Executive Function is Stretched Thin → Following you through the store while you stop and start unpredictably → Remembering they're supposed to "stay close" → Managing their impulse to touch interesting things → Trying to remember what you said about "good behavior in stores" → Their brain's management system is juggling too many things at once

Communication Becomes Harder → With their brain using so much energy to process the environment, language gets harder to access → They might not have words for "this is too much" → Their ability to understand your instructions decreases as their system gets overloaded

Emotional Regulation Goes Offline → All those other systems are at capacity, so there's nothing left for managing feelings → Small things feel big because there's no buffer left → The meltdown isn't manipulation. It's a nervous system reaching its limit

Why We Focus on These Five Domains

These domains emerged from decades of research across neuroscience, occupational therapy, and developmental psychology. We focus on sensory processing, emotional regulation, executive function, motor planning, and communication because:

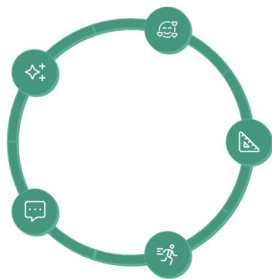
- **They're deeply interconnected**—when one system gets maxed out, the others feel it
- **They're often misunderstood**—what looks like behavior is often brain and body communication
- **They're observable**—you can track patterns without needing clinical training
- **They're actionable**—small environmental shifts often make measurable differences

Sensory Processing

How your child takes in information from the environment —light, sound, touch, movement, smells, textures, temperature, body position

Communication

Not just speech—this includes understanding others, using gestures, reading tone, processing what's being said, and expressing needs (sometimes through behavior rather than words).



Emotional Regulation

Manages how feelings rise, fall, and are processed. Helps your child move between emotional states without getting stuck.

Executive Function

The brain's management system for planning, organizing, starting tasks, switching between activities, holding information in working memory, managing time.

Motor Planning & Coordination

Coordinates how your child moves through space—from big movements (running, climbing) to small movements (buttoning shirts, holding a pencil) to navigating transitions between activities.

The five domain framework isn't the only way to understand how kids' brains work but it *IS* particularly useful for parents noticing patterns and trying to figure out what's actually going on.

We focus on ages 2-8, when these systems are actively developing and their interactions are most visible.

How Domains Work Together

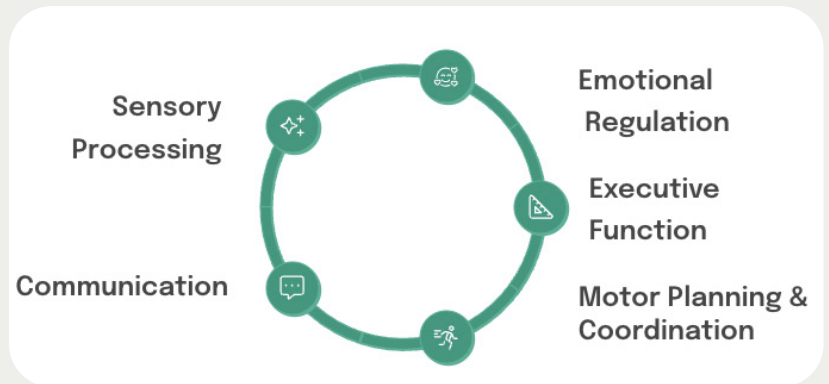
Four common patterns you might recognize

Movement & Attention	Sensory & Emotion
When your child bounces on their yoga ball during homework and focuses better, it's their motor system sending organizing signals to their executive function networks. Movement literally primes their brain for learning.	Those weekend birthday party meltdowns? Their sensory processing system gets overloaded from loud music, bright decorations, and crowded spaces. When sensory input maxes out, emotional regulation often goes offline.
Communication & Regulation	Planning & Emotion
A child who's chatty at home but silent at school isn't being defiant. When sensory and executive function systems are working overtime to cope with the school environment, communication often takes a backseat to conserve brain energy.	Morning routine meltdowns make more sense when you realize that motor planning (getting dressed, organizing backpack) requires executive function . This is much harder when emotional regulation is already wobbly from rushing or transitions.

What's Next

You just learned the Five-Domain lens. Now you can spot the five systems and recognize when they're interacting.

That's the conceptual foundation.



Part 2 translates this into practice:

- What your child's physical responses might be communicating
- Real pattern examples from families who've used this lens
- Your systematic observation framework for tracking what you see

Ready to apply the framework?

Continue to Part 2

Educational Content Only

This content is developed with care, backed by research, and offered with respect for your family's unique journey. It's designed to complement—never replace—professional clinical services, medical advice, or therapeutic interventions.

Every child's brain works differently. You know your child best, and what resonates for one family may not apply to another.