

Emotion regulation

“Emotion regulation” is a term generally used to describe a person’s ability to effectively manage and respond to an emotional experience. Emotion regulation is also known as emotional self-regulation.

When supporting your child to regulate their emotions, you need to be aware of:

- A)** Your own emotions – this is important to ensure you have self-regulated before supporting your own child so that you can model calm and regulation to your child. See the factsheet titled **Parent mental health and wellbeing** for further information on self-care as a parent
- B)** Your reaction to these emotions; and
- C)** How the above may affect your child’s emotions (also known as co-regulation).

Co-regulation

Younger children in particular will need your support to regulate their emotions as they may be too young to understand the ‘big feelings’ they are feeling. This can also be true of older children, particularly in times of crisis. This is called ‘co-regulation’.

Stages of co-regulation:

- 1)** Self-check in. Are you in a space where you can provide a calm presence? If not, take the steps to regulate yourself first if you are able to
- 2)** Get close to your child and listen to them, tell them you are there for them
- 3)** Let your child know that you want to understand the best that you can. Listen to them
- 4)** Empathise and validate what your child is sharing. It can be helpful to give examples of where you may have experienced something similar, however be mindful to ensure that your child is the focus. Continue to listen
- 5)** Remind your child that you are there for them, offer affection in a way that is appropriate for them and with their consent

- 6)** Ask if they would like to have space, or suggest a calming activity. Remind your child that you are always there for them

Self-regulation

Learning to regulate emotions is a skill that helps children develop ways of substituting impulsive reactions with regulating activities that supports their mental health.

Impulsive reaction	Change to	Regulated reaction
Shout and throw a puzzle on the floor when the piece does not go in.	→	Count down from 10 and take deep breaths.
Shouting and swiping to the floor the blocks on the table when someone else knocks down their tower.	→	Taking deep breaths and telling the other child “I am playing”, “my tower” or seeking help from an adult.

To aid your child with this you can use a framework/curriculum designed to help recognise feelings, and tools and strategies to help regulate them called Zones of Regulation.

Zones of Regulation

Zones of Regulation teaches children scaffolded skills to build awareness of their feelings/internal state, exposes them to a variety of tools and strategies for regulation, prosocial skills, self-care and wellness. It is a systematic approach to teach regulation by categorising the different ways we feel into 4 coloured zones. Zones of Regulation respects the individual and unique self, and helps children become more independent in regulating their emotions.

When supporting your child’s emotion regulation there are steps to follow with increasing complexity.

1. Emotion recognition

It is important that your child can recognise their own emotions and in others. In Zones of Regulation, emotions are divided into 4 categories:



Start to introduce your child to the words and visuals, incorporate them into activities your child finds motivating. Once they are familiarised with them, you can introduce activities of matching and categorising into zones. Use visuals to talk about different situations, e.g., a picture of a boy crying after he fell from the bike. You can also use visuals to check in, ask your child how they're feeling at different points during the day, you can have a poster on the wall, or small visuals on a keychain.

To learn about emotions in others you can use characters from TV shows, books or real-life opportunities.

Below are some helpful ways of teaching emotions:

- Teach one emotion at a time starting with the emotion that is easiest for your child to grasp
- Say that you wonder if they might be feeling 'emotion' e.g., happy because you can see that they are smiling
- Use a family Zones of Regulation chart to model emotions and speak about these within the family
- Ensure that all feelings are validated, and avoid use of negative language to associate with feelings of 'anger'. Validate by saying, 'it is okay that you are feeling angry right now'. Avoid the focus of teaching the Zones of Regulation to be to 'get back to green' as this again can build a negative association with feelings other than 'calm' or 'happy'.

Ultimately, it is most important to make learning person-centred to your child and what works for them!

2. Emotion coaching

Emotion coaching is a technique by which a child is supported to recognise their emotions and come up with a plan to help them solve the problem.

These are the steps for Emotion Coaching:

- 1. Tune in:** Notice or become aware of your own and your child's emotions. Make sure you are calm enough to practise emotion coaching; otherwise, you might want to take a break.
- 2. Connect and validate:** Use this situation as an opportunity for you to practise and for your child to learn. State what emotions you think your child might be experiencing to help them connect their emotions to their behaviour and validate these emotions: 'I'm wondering if you are feeling angry. It is okay to feel angry'.
- 3. Practise empathy:** Put yourself in your child's shoes, think about when you felt a similar emotion, and try to remember what it feels like.

- 4. Reflect:** Once everyone is calm reflect on what happened and why it happened.
- 5. End with problem solving and setting limits:** Whenever possible, try to end the situation by guiding and involving the child in problem-solving.

Toolbox

Using Zones of Regulation can provide your child with a visual cue to access these problem-solving strategies. The visual cue is called a Toolbox. Toolboxes include strategies to help regulate your child in each zone. These will be individualised and are best created as a guided activity with your child.

See an example of a toolbox below:

Happy

When I am feeling **HAPPY** I can:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Green Zone

I am feeling:
Happy, focused,
ready to learn,
and calm

😊

Logan's Green Toolbox

- Ready to work
- Targets
- Play with my friends
- Ready for group

3. The behaviour cycle or 'crisis curve'

What is the behaviour cycle?

The behaviour cycle tools are adapted from the 'crisis' or 'escalation' curve, which show the stages of a crisis/escalation, and have a dual function:

1. To identify what is observed for the individual across the various stages of a 'crisis' when considering behaviours that challenge.
2. To identify strategies to support the learner that correspond with the stage of the cycle being observed.

The colours used within the cycle correspond with those used in the Zones of Regulation, and can be used alongside a learner's emotional regulation programme.

Whilst the behaviour cycle is typically used with those that support a child (parents, teachers, teaching assistants etc.), the tool can also be used by your child themselves. It can be used to map out body sensations, thoughts, actions and feelings based on the stage of the cycle, to provide a visual guide with regulation strategies.

For an example of a behaviour curve see our website or read our blog on **Understanding the behaviour cycle**.

References

<https://zonesofregulation.com/>

Somerset Children and Young People, https://www.cypsomersethealth.org/?page=mhtk_secp_5