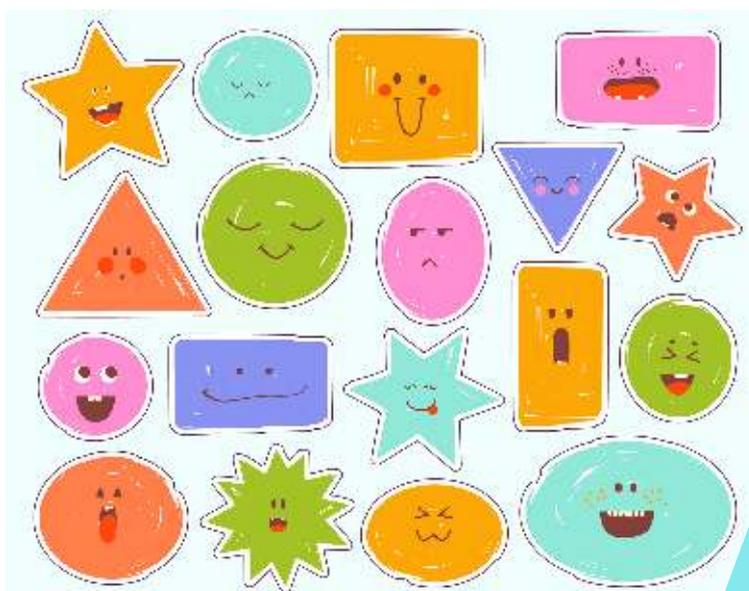


Being Your Child's Emotion Coach

How to support your child with their
emotional regulation



What is Emotional Regulation?

Emotional regulation is the ability to manage our emotion and behaviour in an appropriate way when faced with different situations. Parental influence has a huge impact on emotional regulation. Parents are the key to teaching emotional regulation through their *responsiveness, consistency* and *support*.

So *why* is Emotional Regulation important?

Regulating our emotions appropriately is necessary to develop our social, emotional and communication skills and is vital for children in developing relationships with their peers and adults. When a child is well-regulated emotionally, they are most available for learning and engaging.



How does Emotional Regulation develop?

It is a life-long developmental process and a child's emotional regulation looks different as they grow.

Emotional Regulation Through Different Ages

Toddlers: Temper tantrums, turn to adults to help with big feelings, adjusting behaviour to achieve their goals and learning about turn taking and waiting.

Preschool: May refrain from big tantrums - learned to manage those feelings and behaviours, identify solutions to simple problems, learning empathy and perspective taking.



School Age: Better at planning, imagining consequences and deciding how to respond, being able to disagree without having an argument, can see both side and imagining how others are feeling, better at expressing their needs.

It's important to note that children develop emotional regulation at their own pace and this can be impacted by many different factors such as genetics, biology, cognition, temperament, social environment, and learning.



Window of Tolerance

Dr. Dan Siegal



Each child has a unique window of tolerance, where they can tolerate emotions, challenges and stress. It is like an emotional comfort zone. When they are within this window they can love, learn, empathise, be playful, explore reflect and use words to describe their feelings.

Outside the window

We do not stay in this window all the time - everyone comes out of their window occasionally. The window can get smaller or we can experience situations that we find extremely difficult to tolerate. This will lead to us bouncing out of the window of tolerance.

What might this look like?

Each child may have unique triggers that push them outside of this window. This could be an argument, changes to their usual routine or a big test.

When pushed out of the window children may go into either the upper level

hyper-aroused (fight or flight mode) or the lower level **hypo-aroused (freeze mode)**.

- Freeze or collapse mode
- May feel shut down, switched off, flat or disconnected
- Physical changes like their heart rate drops as a survival strategy
- On the outside appear withdrawn, quiet, hard to reach, emotionless, inactive, unproductive
- Unable to learn relate or engage



HYPO-AROUSAL



HYPER-AROUSAL

- Fight or Flight Response
- Feeling frightened, distressed or anxious
- Physical changes like heart racing, dizziness and shortness of breath
- Thinking brain goes offline and disconnects from the rest of the brain
- Flip back into primitive brain
- On the outside they may appear aggressive, anxious or obsessive



Help them Manage their Emotions

Validate their Emotions and Listen



Sometimes you do not need to say anything to validate your child. This may be a relief for parents who feel pressure to do validation the “right” way and fear that they may say the wrong thing. Validation can simply be **actively listening**.



Reflect and Summarize: Observe what emotion or thought your child has expressed in a non-judgmental manner. Reflect back the essence of what you’ve observed. If he/she does not explicitly verbalise what emotion he/she is feeling, you could make gentle assumptions by saying things such as “wow, if that happened to me I’d be really mad.”

Tolerate their Feelings: Often we don’t validate because of our own discomfort with seeing someone upset. However, this only communicates to children that no one can deal with what they’ve got to say, which only leads to them hiding their feelings. Stay mindful of your discomfort and the urges to problem solve or fix situations for your child. Instead of acting on these urges, sit with the discomfort and be present for your child.

Recipe for Emotional Validation

1. Get down to your child's level and look them in the eye
2. Let your child complete their narrative so you have all the facts
3. Convey that you get what happened to them from their perspective
4. Convey that you understand how they felt as a result of what happened
5. Convey that their feelings are completely reasonable
6. Convey empathy or sympathy (not pity!) for their emotional reactions



Remember!

You can listen to and validate feelings without undermining your own decisions with limit setting and saying no, you are validating the emotion and not the behaviour.

Teach Emotional Awareness

Does my child know when they are feeling stressed, anxious, worried or frustrated? To help them learn to recognise their emotions, focus on the following:



Feeling talk

Talking about feelings with your child will help them to understand and label what they are feeling.

Children should understand that feelings are natural and normal; the more they are discussed, the more this will set in. Encourage and prompt your child to put their feelings into words, even their negative feelings. Use feeling talk and pictures to help your child link emotions to sensations/feelings in their body.

Recognise Triggers: Often certain places, situations or things can trigger an emotional reaction. Look out for patterns of this for your child. Try to identify triggers and try to help them identify these triggers. When you are aware of their triggers it will help you to know when they might need some support before they become overwhelmed. When your child is aware of their triggers it will help them know when to draw from their emotional toolbox.

Recognize How Strong the Feeling is

Use a feelings thermometer. They are helpful to assist children to become aware of emotions and the strength of their emotions. The thermometer is visual and reduces abstract ideas to simple numbers. Introduce to your child and have them involved in defining each number. Let them design their own scales for fun. Use these regularly when your child is feeling good and when they are feeling overwhelmed. You can also use these before and after your child has done an activity in their emotional toolbox (next page) to teach them how effective their emotional toolbox can be.

Feelings thermometer





EMOTIONAL TOOLBOX



Stress Toolkit

Helpful to distract and re-direct your child's attention in order to avoid becoming overwhelmed - containing sensory toys, puzzles, calming books etc.

Physical Activity Tools

These offer a quick release of emotional energy - try exercise, sports, trampoline or creative destruction like ripping paper or crushing cans.

RELAXATION TOOLS



5 Senses Grounding

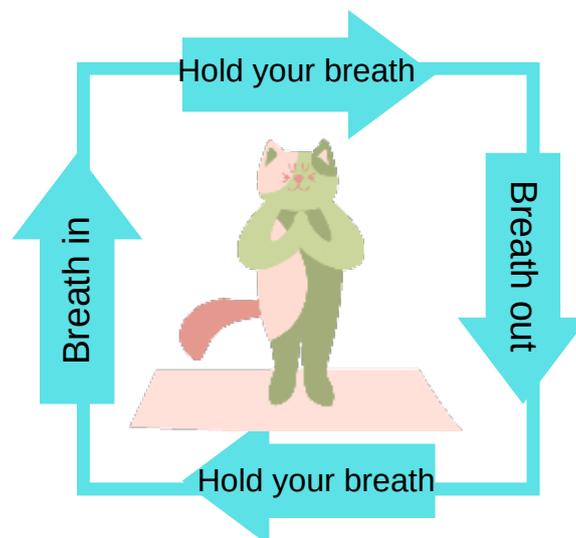
Take 3 slow calm breaths and list
5 things you can see
4 things you can feel
3 things you can hear
2 things you can smell
1 thing you like to taste
take 3 slow calm breaths.

Tension Release

Make a tight fist for 5 seconds, release and repeat.
Scrunch up the muscles in your face, release and repeat.
Hunch shoulders up to ears, release and repeat.

Breathing

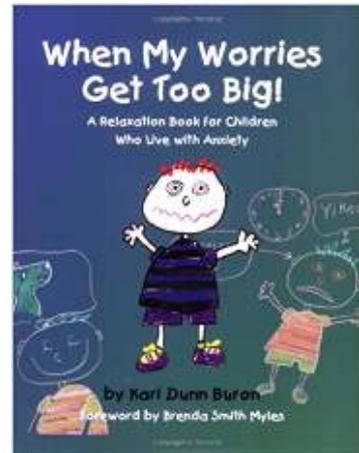
1. **Calm Breathing** Take slow, deep breaths, inhale through the nose for 4 seconds, hold for 2 seconds, exhale through the mouth for 4 seconds, wait 2 seconds and repeat 5-10 times.
2. **Shapes Breathing:** Follow a shape on a piece of paper while breathing.
3. **Bubble breaths:** Make these bubbles bigger by taking deep breaths and blowing slowly into the hoop.



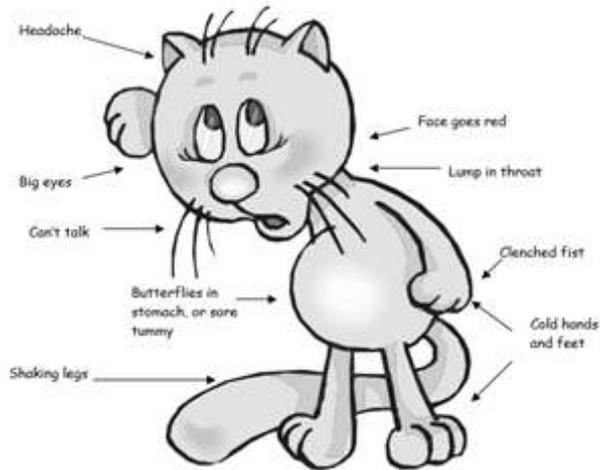
MORE HELPFUL TOOLS AND TIPS



Books and Stories can help aid understanding of strategies (e.g. when my worries get too big, Mighty Moe).



Chester the Cat feels anxious!
How does Chester feel anxiety in his body?



Visuals aids like the emotion thermometer or 'Chester the Cat' can help your child to identify their emotions.



Practice Modelling Positive Behaviours for your child - like labelling emotions, challenging your negative thoughts and solving problems.

Give lots of **praise and attention** when a child is doing something positive (or immediately after), it will reinforce that behaviour in the future.

Be Realistic

Be Consistent

Be Patient

Remember
What
Worked