

Parent Guide

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What is this resource and how do I use it?

Do you ever wonder why your child throws things when they're angry? Or, perhaps you've noticed that they find it hard to calm down by themselves when upset. These behaviours are totally normal and are part of them trying to regulate their emotions. Learn what emotional regulation is, and how you can support your child with it, in this guide.

What is the focus of this resource?

Self-Regulation

Co-Regulation

Understanding Emotions

Coping Strategies

Further Ideas and Suggestions

To help your child regulate their emotions, why not help them **create their own calm box** or a **pet worry monster**? You can also help them think about how emotions might look in themselves and others with this **Musical Emotions Game** and develop their emotional vocabulary with these **discussion cards**.

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Regulating Emotions Guide for Parents

Do you ever wonder why your child throws things when they're angry? Or, perhaps you've noticed that they find it hard to calm down by themselves when they're upset. These behaviours are totally normal and are part of them trying to regulate their emotions – and you giving them a cuddle when they need it is a huge part of learning just how to do that!

Learn more about emotional regulation, and how you can support your child with it, in this guide.



Why are they doing that?



It's important to remember that your child's brain is not finished developing yet – in fact, it's thought that our brains aren't fully developed until we're in our twenties! In early childhood, your child's prefrontal cortex to amygdala connections aren't fully formed, which means that when they're tired, their 'thinking brain' can't yet calm down their 'emotional brain' – so that spilt milk actually is a huge deal to them. While this might not help you practically (you can't force this connection!), it might help you to remember this next time you're dealing with a tantrum over the 'wrong' coloured plate. Supporting your child with emotional regulation (by giving comfort and a safe space for example) can help your child understand their emotions more and stop the problem from getting bigger.

What is emotional regulation?

Emotional regulation is the ability to understand and control your behaviour or reactions to emotions and events. Regulating your emotions can be very hard for both children and adults to master so don't worry if it's something you or your child struggle with – we're here to help! When your emotions are regulated it means that you can act in a way that's fitting for the situation, whether this is an exciting trip somewhere or dealing with a disappointment.

There are lots of ways your child can regulate their emotions depending on whether they're comfortable or uncomfortable feelings and it's important to help them work out what works best for them. There are also different types of regulation – self-regulation and co-regulation – which we will explore in this guide. It's also important to remember that your child's brain is constantly developing – try not to expect them to always have perfect emotional regulation as it's not easy! Many adults struggle to self-regulate. In this guide for parents, we'll look at how you can learn to regulate your own emotions as well as give advice for supporting your child's emotional regulation.



Did you know...?

An emotion only lasts for 90 seconds but if we keep thinking about it, or reinforcing whatever stimuli is causing that emotion, we can make it last much longer! This can be really helpful when you're dealing with your own emotional regulation. Seeing a burst of emotion as a wave to ride through with your breath can help you get through the tougher moments!

Ways to Regulate Your Emotions

Dealing with an upset, silly, angry or otherwise very emotional child can cause us as parents to become dysregulated too. Don't feel guilty about needing to take a second to calm yourself down before you support your child. If you don't, you may find that the situation escalates further! Here are some things you can do to help you calm down in those moments:

Name it to tame it – giving your emotion a name can stop it from taking control.

Shake it out – just give your arms and legs a good shake!

Use a mantra like, 'This is not an emergency' or 'I can choose how to respond'.

Use your senses – name five things you can see, four things you can touch, etc.

Splash your face with cold water.

Co-Regulation

Before a child can self-regulate, they may need an adult's help to calm down – this is co-regulation. This is a really important step to self-regulation and learning how to handle their own feelings for children so don't skip it!

Co-regulation might look like:

mirroring and accepting your child's feelings

modelling calming strategies

supporting and reinforcing self-regulating techniques

naming and validating your child's emotions

speaking calmly

providing warmth and responsiveness

providing a space for your child to calm down

modifying your environment

Co-regulation helps your child move from their dysregulated state to a regulated one where, hopefully, they will be able to discuss the situation with you.

How to Co-Regulate Your Child's Emotions

Let's say your child has just snatched a toy from another child and is shouting – here's an example of how you can co-regulate their emotions in that moment:

1

Take a deep breath yourself to help you remain calm! Approach them calmly when you're ready.

2

Say what you see and try to give the emotion a label, e.g. 'I can hear you shouting and saw you taking that toy. You seem angry.'

3

Support your child with a calming technique. This might be:

taking some deep breaths together
(our *Keeping Calm Breathing Exercises* might be helpful here)

giving them a soft toy to hug

jumping up and down

swinging or rocking together

hugging them

moving away from the situation and looking at something calming – even going to look at the clouds or some water in a sink can work

4

When they seem calmer, try to talk about the next steps – in this case, talk with them about how you can resolve the problem of the snatched toy. In other cases, you might be able to help them move on to a different activity. Give them an option – reading a book or drawing pictures together can be nice and may help your child further process their emotions.

Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is the ability to understand and control your behaviour or reactions to emotions and events. Self-regulation can be very hard for both children and adults to master so don't worry if it's something you or your child struggle with – we're here to help! There are lots of ways your child can regulate their emotions depending on whether they're comfortable or uncomfortable feelings and it's important to help them work out what works best for them.

As your child begins to be more aware of their own emotions, they might be able to start self-regulating. However, this doesn't necessarily mean they'll be able to do it completely independently – having some tools and techniques in their back pocket can help them deal with their emotions. If you've worked through co-regulating emotions with them, they may know some techniques that help them, such as deep breathing or doing some star jumps. Even taking themselves off for some quiet time counts as self-regulating, so don't worry if this is something you notice your child doing.

When will my child need to self-regulate?

There are lots of reasons your child might need to regulate their emotions – this is completely natural! You might like to think about the areas of regulation to help you further understand when your child might need to work (or need some help) regulating their emotions:

Red: This area includes really strong, uncomfortable emotions such as fear, anger or frustration.

Yellow: These emotions are still heightened but not quite as intense as the red area of regulation. In this area, your child might experience nervousness, silliness, surprise or excitement.

Green: This is the 'ideal' area of regulation for engagement and learning! Your child will be calm and ready to listen and learn.

Blue: In this area, your child might be feeling lethargic – perhaps they're sad, bored, tired or ill. While these emotions don't always come across with the intensity of emotions in the red area, they're still emotions that your child might need help navigating.

Your child might need to use different tools depending on what kind of emotion they are navigating. For example, in the red area, techniques like deep breaths can be helpful, whereas in the yellow area, doing something like yoga stretches is more accessible. For blue area emotions, getting moving with a walk, a dance or jumping up and down can help get the juices flowing in a more comfortable direction.

You can help your child self-regulate with tools like this [How I Am Feeling: Areas of Regulation at Home poster](#) and '[What Can I Do When I Feel...?' emotions plan](#) – talk through the areas of regulation with your child and look at what they think might help them within each area. Display these somewhere convenient for your child to access when they need them.



What else can I do to support my child?

There are lots of things you can do during calm moments that will help your child regulate their emotions. These things will help your child feel more in control of their emotions in general (they're also great for your wellbeing too!):

Get enough sleep: As adults, we know we can feel grumpy or low when we don't get enough sleep – it can be the same for children! Conversely, they may also seem to get bursts of energy and exhibit silliness, meaning you can see a range of reactions to tiredness in children. Try to keep to a good bedtime routine and help your child get enough sleep for their age – check out this [guide](#) for more information.

Model and verbalise: Try to get into the habit of naming your emotions in front of your child, e.g. 'I'm feeling really tired, I'm going to go and get some fresh air in the garden.' This can help them develop their own narrative for understanding their emotions.

Stay active! Moving is magic – encouraging your child to stay active develops their base wellbeing and helps them to both burn off excess energy and get their emotions under control. The types of games and activities your child does can also help build other skills like communication and problem-solving, which can help them in dealing with difficult situations too.

Did you know...?

Hanging upside down actually helps your child see things from other people's perspectives!

Be flexible: Of course, there are going to be lots of times where you have to say no to your child but can you find some moments where you can be a bit more flexible? Can you give them a choice of plate at mealtimes? Giving your child a little flexibility and control will help them feel more confident and, well, in control, which is something children crave.

Celebrate their successes: When you notice your child handling a situation well, tell them! Be specific in your praise if you can as this will help them in future situations too.

Remember that understanding your emotions and regulating them is hard for everyone – your child will have moments where they just can't do it and so will you. Try not to be too hard on yourselves.

It's okay to make mistakes.
They are just stepping stones
to success.

Your breath is your friend
when emotions are strong.

Try your best today as that is
always good enough.

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