



## As a parent, how can I help my child emotionally regulate?



### What is emotional regulation and why is it important?

It can be easy to label challenging behaviour as defiant. However, challenging behaviour is often not in children's control. It is more accurate and helpful to understand this behaviour as a sign that children cannot handle their 'big emotions' (e.g., anger, sadness, fear). When they feel overwhelmed, their emotions are getting the best of them. That is, they cannot emotionally regulate.

Emotional regulation is the ability to manage your emotional responses and behaviour to arising situations. It includes being able to resist highly emotional responses to upsetting situations, to calm yourself down when you get upset and to handle frustration without an outburst.

### How can families support their children with developing the skills of emotional regulation?

There are many ways families can support the development of emotion regulation skills, including:

- Managing the environment. Consistent limits, clear expectations and predictable routines (e.g., warnings when transitioning) can help children predict how the day will go, which may decrease opportunities for emotions to build up.
- Listening for the emotions. Tuning-in and trying to understand what your child is feeling can help your child tolerate and cope with uncomfortable emotions.
- Labelling, acknowledging and validating emotions. Labelling the emotion for your child can help to build their emotional vocabulary. Acknowledging and validating the emotion can support your child in feeling understood. Let your child know their emotions are normal and natural and everyone experiences different emotions from time to time.
- Modelling emotion regulation. Children learn from their families. Talking about your emotions and coping strategies can help your child learn different emotion regulation skills. In modelling emotion regulation skills, it is also important to 'stay calm in the storm' (during emotional outbursts) and to use positive self-talk.
- Stay calm and model self-regulation. It is important to remember that when children are reacting in the moment, they are in survival mode. Do not try to talk to them, because they cannot respond to logic or reason. Instead, stay calm, show empathy,





- help them become self-aware and guide them through sensory experiences and calming strategies.
- Offer help to problem-solve a better way to manage different emotions, once you and your child are feeling calm and well regulated.
- Help children develop a toolbox of coping strategies to use, when feeling dysregulated. The idea is to help children stop in the moment, remain calm and think and not to act on their big emotions. Their toolbox could include suggestions linked to the following:
  - o Mental breaks (e.g., book, music, colouring, creativity, hobbies, games, movies)
  - o Physical breaks (e.g., dance, sports, walk, stretch)
  - o Spiritual breaks (e.g., yoga, meditation)
  - o Sensory experiences (e.g., sound, taste, touch, movement)
  - o Grounding activities (e.g., deep breathing, slow counting, visual imagery)
  - o Positive self-talk (e.g., affirmations)
  - o Social support (e.g., ask for help, connect with a friend/ parent)
- Hold back from punishing dysregulated behaviour. Instead, use it as a starting point to understand where children need support. Remember that punishment will not teach children the skills they need to regulate.
- Praise efforts to regulate emotions. Help children feel cared about, valued, and understood as they learn to regulate. Praise your child for attempts or successes related to calming their emotions.

Emotional-regulation is a skill that needs to be supported in children, because it is key to their overall success and happiness. Children who can cope with stress, anger, disappointment and frustration are more able to do well in school, with friends and at home. Remember that the more children practice regulating themselves, the easier it will become for them to cope with and adapt to change. You can help children by removing unnecessary demands and guiding them with loving support.

If you have any questions or ideas on how we can further support you and your child with their emotional regulation skills, please contact the school office. We are also looking for new ways to support our families and we value your thoughts and ideas.

Mrs Bhogal

