

PSYCHOEDUCATION

Behaviour (emotional regulation)



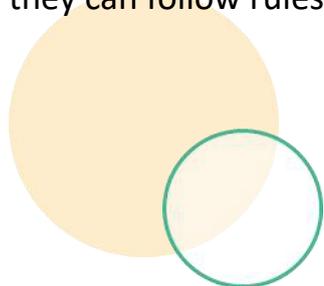
Sometimes, children can feel really big emotions that are hard to control, and this can lead to outbursts, either at school or at home. These outbursts can be frustrating for everyone concerned and might lead to punishments or consequences. But punishments don't always help children learn how to calm down or handle their feelings better. One reason children might act out is that they haven't learned how to manage their feelings yet, so it's important to figure out what's going on and how to help them feel more in control.

What emotional regulation?

Self-regulation is when you learn to understand and manage your feelings and behaviour when things happen around you. It helps you make good choices, stop yourself from reacting too strongly when you're upset or excited, and calm down after something happens.

We first learn self-regulation by having someone help us. This is called co-regulation, which happens when a caring adult, like a parent or teacher, helps calm us down when we're feeling big emotions. This helps our brain grow in a way that makes it easier to manage our own feelings as we get older.

After learning through co-regulation, children can start learning how to manage their feelings on their own. That's why it's important for parents and teachers to work together to find the best ways to help kids handle big feelings and challenges, so they can follow rules and understand limits.



Why do some children struggle to self-regulate?

There are many reasons why some children find it harder to self-regulate than others, including:

- Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in early life, such as being adopted or looked after. ACEs may include prolonged stressful events, poverty, or other traumatic experiences. Co-regulation is particularly important for these children.
- Children who have additional needs, e.g. social communication difficulties, ADHD or sensory processing difficulties.
- Temperament – some children are more reactive than others.
- Physical needs not being met, e.g. hungry or tired.

What can we do to help?

The good news is that children can learn how to control their emotions with help from parents, teachers, and caregivers. Children don't automatically know how to manage their feelings. At first, they act on their impulses—like when toddlers have tantrums. That's why adults need to teach them, using moments when they are feeling big emotions, to show them how to calm down and handle their feelings. We can help by co-regulating (helping them calm down), teaching them skills, letting them practice, and giving lots of praise when they try to manage their feelings.

Children's brains grow very quickly when they are little, especially the part of the brain that helps with self-control. So, early childhood is a really important time to start learning self-regulation. However, because the brain develops in different stages, older children sometimes benefit from help with self-regulation. Whilst co-regulation is useful for younger children, older children can be taught specific skills to help with self-regulation.

Strategies to help with self-regulation?

Model Calm Behaviour

Adults need to stay calm when helping a child with their emotions. If an adult looks calm, kids will see how to stay in control, even when feelings get big. Kids learn by watching adults, so it's important for grown-ups to show how to handle their emotions too.

Use Empathy

Let kids know that their feelings matter. Don't tell them their feelings aren't important. Instead, show you understand how they feel.

Play Games to Practice Self-Regulation

There are lots of fun games that help kids learn how to wait, take turns, and control their impulses:

Try Mindfulness or Meditation

If you notice your child getting stressed, try doing a quiet activity like mindfulness or meditation. These activities can help them slow down, focus on their breathing, and calm down. There are great apps that have meditation exercises just for kids!

Co-Regulate

Adults can help kids calm down by being caring and understanding. This is called co-regulation. If a child is upset, get close to them, talk in a soothing voice, and let them know it's okay to feel the way they do. Focus on their feelings (like being angry) and not just the behaviour (like yelling or swearing).

Take Breaks

Sometimes kids need quick breaks to refocus and relax. Take 2-3 minutes for stretching or a fun game like "Shake Your Sillies Out." This can help them focus better afterward.

Talk About Emotions

Make time to talk about all the different emotions we experience—like happy, sad, excited, or angry. It's okay to have big feelings, but what matters is how we handle them. Use storybooks, songs, or games to make learning about feelings fun.

Adjust for Sensory Needs

Some kids may be extra sensitive to things like lights or sounds. If this is the case, making small adjustments, like dimming the lights, might help them feel more comfortable.

Useful websites and apps:

Behaviour Matters –a website to help parents, carers and teachers develop their skills to handle children’s behaviour in an encouraging and respectful manner and, by doing so, promote positive relationships in schools and at home.



www.behaviourmatters.org.uk

The Family Hub Network have a range of courses for parent, such as Relax Kids, Chill Skills, Talking Teens and Understanding Behaviour, to help them support their children’s emotional health and well-being.



www.stocktoninformationdirectory.org/family-hubs

Hartlepool Family Hub offer a Being a Parent course to help parents understand their child, communicate with them and manage their behaviours through to adolescence.



www.hartlepoolfamilyhubs.co.uk

North Lincolnshire CAMHS have produced the following leaflet containing helpful advice of ways to support your child develop self –regulation skills.

[NL-Emotion-regulation-e-leaflet-02.21.pdf \(rdash.nhs.uk\)](#)

