

Early Years Library

READ THE
INTRODUCTION
TO THIS SERIES

Part of the **Social and Emotional Learning** Series

REGULATING EMOTIONS

What do we
mean by
regulating
emotions

Emotional self-regulation means being able to monitor and manage one's emotions and related behaviour. It includes being able to calm down when experiencing strong emotions and once calm, being able to choose the best course of action. Young children will still be developing these skills, so they require adult support through modelling and coaching. Some children will find it easier than others to regulate their emotions. Starting with some knowledge of emotions and words for identifying them will provide children with the skills to understand their own feelings and those of others, and in turn regulate their emotions accordingly.

Why is it
important

Our emotions are closely connected to our thoughts and behaviours. Learning how to regulate our emotions helps us to manage our feelings and our reaction to a situation. In doing so, it enables children to express themselves in context-appropriate ways and make decisions about how to respond to challenges.

Calming down

Learning calming techniques can help children regain a sense of control when they experience strong emotions such as anger, frustration, excitement, worry or feeling upset. Structured step-by-step strategies, and quick methods like body movements, breathing and visualisation are useful for helping children learn how to calm down.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Provide children with step-by-step strategies to calm themselves down e.g. the turtle technique
- Use visual prompts like posters, cards and puppets to introduce and reinforce the calming down strategies and help children remember the different steps
- Provide opportunities for children to practise calming down strategies through the use of role play, and once familiar, prompting in the moment

Inspiring Ideas

- The Turtle Technique. Step 1: Recognise your feelings *"I feel angry!"* Step 2: Stop your body. Step 3: Tuck inside your 'shell'; take three deep breaths to calm down and think calm thoughts *"I can do it. I can calm down."* Step 4: Come out when you are feeling calm and think of a solution.
- Belly breathing. With hands gently rested on their tummies, ask children to breathe in slowly through their nose and out through their mouth, feeling their tummy gently rise and fall.
- Animal yoga. Animal poses can help children focus on their body and breath when their minds feel busy. *"Slowly move your arms up and down as if you were an eagle."* *"Pretend you are a cat sneaking up on a mouse."*
- Visualise a safe place. Help children visualise a safe and calm space when emotions are strong. *"Imagine you are floating high in the sky on a white and fluffy cloud. As you breathe in, imagine your body sinking deeper into the soft cloud."*
- Let's Talk! *"Can you tell me about a time you felt worried/angry/scared? What did you do to calm down? What are the other things you could do to calm down next time you feel this way?"*

Tip

Introduce strategies when children are feeling calm and settled so they become familiar with what they need to do. Prompt familiar strategies when they experience strong emotions.

Tip

Remind children to notice how their bodies feel, and to focus on their breathing.

REGULATING EMOTIONS

Generating, choosing and implementing solutions to cope with strong emotions

Children can benefit from support in identifying solutions to resolve the situation, choosing the best solution and implementing it. It is easier for children to think of helpful solutions if they are feeling calm. Generating solutions is the final step in the *Turtle Technique*.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Discuss how children can generate solutions to issues that might cause them to feel strong emotions. Support these discussions with visual tools and demonstrations
- Provide opportunities and games to discuss and make positive behaviour choices, such as acting out day-to-day problems with puppets

Inspiring Ideas

- A puppet shows strong, familiar emotions: *"It's raining outside so I can't use my new bicycle!" "I want pizza for my dinner, not pasta"*. Talk about what the puppet can do after calming down to resolve the situation and feel better.
- Stop, Think and Choose! Use a cuddly toy to show children how to choose a positive behaviour after calming down from strong emotions. *"We STOP what we're doing, we THINK about how we feel and what we can do, then we CHOOSE what we can do to feel better!"*
- Let's Talk! *"What do you do to cheer yourself up when you feel sad? I like to hug a cuddly toy, talk about my feelings with someone I trust or distract myself by doing something that makes me happy. How about you?"*
- Thumbs up! Thumbs down! Describe a challenging situation and children decide which solutions make them and others feel better. *"You are trying to put your coat on, but your zip has got stuck... You throw your coat on the floor. Thumbs up or down? You ask an adult for help. Thumbs up or down?"*

Tip

Emphasise that it is okay to feel uncomfortable feelings like anger or sadness. It helps to try and find solutions and make positive choices.