

What is Emotional Regulation?

Emotional regulation is an awareness and understanding of one's emotions and their impact on behavior, and the ability to manage those emotions in a positive way.

Why is Emotional Regulation Important?

Our ability to regulate emotions

- Helps us calm down during times of high emotion and control negative urges during times of emotional distress.
- Helps prevent depression, aggression, and other emotional states or behaviors that could be dangerous to ourselves or others.
- Is important for mental health, academic achievement and positive social relationships, which are crucial skills for success in life.

Children with healthy emotional regulation skills

- Are able to experience, express and manage a range of emotions.
- Engage in appropriate behaviors in response to emotional situations.
- Adjust well to transitions and new situations & show a high tolerance for frustration.

Children with poor emotional regulation skills

- May exhibit a limited range of emotions.
- Have difficulties coping with stressful experiences, resulting in outbursts of negative emotions, aggression or ego-centric behavior dependent on age.
- Are less socially competent and are often less successful in school, where they have difficulty learning and are less productive.

What Causes Poor Emotional Regulation?

Poor attachment

- Requires children to fall back on crudely developed regulation strategies, since children often need the help of the adults in their lives to develop regulation skills.

Exposure to trauma

- Children learn to disconnect from their physical and emotional experiences when those experiences are too painful or overwhelming.
- Sharing feelings may not be safe or acceptable.
- Children may be unable to tell whether situations are safe, causing them to respond in order to keep themselves safe even when there is no real danger.
- Children become increasingly unable to build safe relationships or effectively manage their emotions.



What Can Be Done?

- Model healthy emotional regulation, practicing repair as needed when your emotions get out of control.
- Help children think about ways they can manage their emotions in situations where they might feel out of control.
- Practice regulation skills with children.
- Encourage healthy outlets for physical and emotional energy, such as exercise, creative activities or hobbies.
- Create consistency and use routines to help avoid meltdowns (see subsections on Rules, Routines, Rituals and Transitions in this toolkit).

Practical tools for emotional regulation

- Encourage deep breathing exercises.
- Practice Crossing the Midline activity (see explanation at right).
- Pop bubbles with only one hand.
- Play flashlight tag. In a dimmed room, have children follow your flashlight beam projected onto the wall with their own flashlight.
- Encourage babies to crawl.
- Have older children write their name in the air while rotating the opposite foot clockwise.
- Exercise...anything that gets children's hearts pumping.



Activity involves child drawing an imaginary line from head to feet, separating the right and left sides of body. Crossing midline would be moving arms, legs, or eyes from one side of the body to the other (e.g. touching left hand to right foot).

MORE INFORMATION

Creative relaxation ideas for kids



From Zemirah Jazwierska via
kidsrelaxation.com

All Relaxation Activities (kids)

Reading this in print? Go to:

<http://kidsrelaxation.com/?cat=9>

Teaching kids how to belly breathe



From fit web platform (WebMD and
Sanford Health) Belly Breathing

Reading this in print? Go to:

<http://fit.webmd.com/jr/recharge/article/belly-breathing-activity>



Belly Breathe with Elmo

From Public Broadcasting Service (PBS)
Sesame Street series via YouTube Sesame
Street: Common and Colbie Caillat- "Belly
Breathe" with Elmo

Reading this in print? Go to:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_mZbzDO-pyIA



Relaxation Thermometer with Instructions

From the Center on the Social and
Emotional Foundations for Early Learning
Relaxation Thermometer



Games to Help with Emotional Regulation