

EMOTIONAL REGULATION IN YOUNG CHILDREN Introducing the Zones of Regulation

Emotional Regulation is a skill that children begin to develop in the toddler / preschool years and continue on learning throughout their lives. Just like all early childhood achievements, some children are more adept and master the skills quickly, whilst others take longer and require high levels of adult support along the way.

WHAT IS SELF REGULATION?

Self regulation is the ability to understand and manage behaviour and reactions to feelings and things happening around you. It includes being able to:

- ❖ regulate reactions to emotions like frustration or excitement
- ❖ calm down after something exciting or upsetting
- ❖ focus on a task
- ❖ refocus attention on a new task
- ❖ control impulses
- ❖ learn behaviour to help get along with other people.

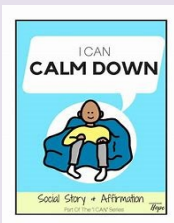
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Self regulation helps children to:

- ❖ learn at school – it gives children the ability to sit and listen in the classroom
- ❖ behave in socially acceptable ways - it helps children control impulses
- ❖ make friends – it helps children to take turns in games, share toys and express emotions in appropriate ways
- ❖ become more independent –it gives children the ability to make good decisions about their behaviour and learn how to behave in new situations
- ❖ manage stress - it helps children learn how to cope with strong feelings

There are a few key points to consider when supporting children to regulate their emotions:

Identify where each child's understanding is at: Assess each child's current level of understanding in relation to labelling emotions; can they correctly identify happy, sad and angry in themselves and others (including pictures of faces)? Can they label any secondary emotions such as frustrated, tired, surprised, jealous? Do they know what "calm down" actually means? Can they list some physiological signs of feelings that accompany facial expressions, such as clenched fist/teeth, faster heartbeat, red/hot face for anger? If they are not quite there yet, then intentionally plan for and teach these concepts on a daily basis. Children cannot express their feelings appropriately unless they can understand and label them first.



Intentionally teach: Ensure that children's interests are considered when teaching the concepts; if a child is not interested their attention will be quickly lost. Try and think outside of the box and create opportunities for all types of learners. Perhaps pop some feelings activities into the sandpit/sand tub for a sensory seeking child, maybe an active child would enjoy identifying faces attached to the obstacle course or the train obsessed student may respond well to different faces placed on the engines? Try creating social stories for tricky concepts such as deep breathing to calm down

Frequent adult role modelling: Encourage all adults (including parents) to use language related to feelings and emotions on a daily basis. It is important for children to understand that *everyone* feels a variety of emotions throughout each day, including parents and teachers. It is also vital that children learn it is ok to experience *all* feelings, no feeling is 'bad' or 'wrong.' What is important to learn is how to respond to feelings appropriately.

"I'm feeling frustrated today..."

Reinforce: Ensure that acknowledgement and positive reinforcement is provided when children engage with the materials, use new concepts and show the ability to regulate an emotion. Don't forget that emotional regulation is not just about calming down when angry, but about exerting control over all emotions. This may also include soothing self when sad, accepting an adult decision, focusing attention when excited etc. It is important to point out to children when they have practiced/achieved these skills.

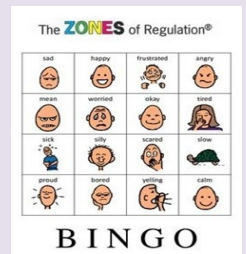
The Zones of Regulation

The Zones of Regulation is a framework for teaching children about emotional and sensory self-management. The Zones approach uses four colours to help children identify how they are feeling and guides them to implement strategies to support regulation. The beauty of the 'Zones' is that it is not an in-depth additional program that teachers must somehow find the time to implement; it is simply a teaching tool and way of thinking that can be incorporated into all aspects of the preschool.

Introduction of Zones

- Display a poster and begin using the language, throughout play and routines: Red Zone, Blue Zone, Yellow Zone, Green Zone, Rest, Go, Slow and Stop plus other 'feelings' words
- Frequently model the language in front of children. e.g. "I stubbed my toe last night, it hurt so much, I felt sad and I was in the blue zone." "I was angry because the rain stopped me from walking my dog, so I was in the red zone"
- Teach these concepts when children are in the green zone, in the 'ready to learn' state. A child who is already upset cannot grasp new concepts. Remind children that we all flow in and out of all zones daily
- Share the concepts/language with families, consistent practice masters new skills

Activities you may like to try:



- Acknowledge how children are feeling: eg: "I can see you're feeling angry, it looks like you're in the red zone" "You seem to be in yellow, let's go and grab your toolbox!"
- Provide and support children to access an array of 'toolbox items' that are readily available eg: an enclosed calm area, water to drink, deep breathing visuals, bubbles to blow, the option to engage in heavy work. Ensure these tools are visually represented in your classroom eg:



For more information about the Zones of Regulation <https://www.zonesofregulation.com/learn-more-about-the-zones.html>

There is also a vast array of information that can be found on Google or educators can contact the Wyndham PSFO Team for info/resources – psfo.service@Wyndham.vic.gov.au