

Helping Children to Self - Regulate

What is self-regulation?

Self-regulation is the ability to understand and manage your emotions and behaviour in response to things happening around you. It helps you to control your impulses (to make better decisions), to not overreact when upset or excited, and to be able to calm down after an incident, should one occur.

Sometimes, children are not able to manage their 'big emotions', resulting in distress either in the classroom or at home, which can then lead to further distress caused by sanctions or other negative consequences. One possible reason for this disruptive behaviour is poor self-regulation, so it can be helpful to look at what might be going on and what we can do to help. Teachers and parents must work together to find the most effective strategies, so children can manage the 'big emotions and challenges they may face.

Why is self-regulation important?

Managing our feelings and emotions is vital, as our ability to do so can affect our lives in so many ways.

- physical, emotional, and social wellbeing
- academic achievement
- sense of self
- social skills, friendships, and relationships

Strategies

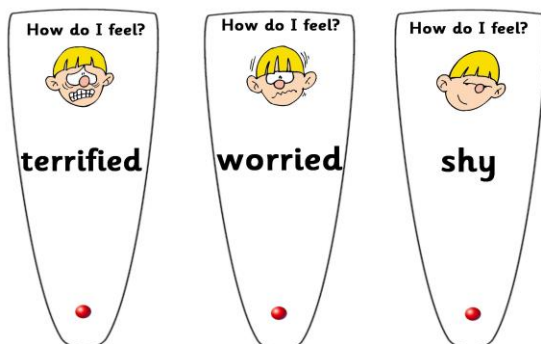
Talk about emotions

Find opportunities to talk about the range of emotions we all experience – how we all experience different feelings, it's normal and it's how we manage them that's important.

Emotions Card Games

- Sort the cards into positive and negative emotions.
- Ask the child to pick a card and with you, act out the emotion. Both of you think of why you might feel that way

Emotions Fans



Feelings Diary

Today I feel...

Directions: Circle the emoji that best describes how you are feeling.

Happy
 Sad
 Surprised
 Scared
 Angry
 Disappointed

Because...

Draw or write about what happened

Mindfulness or Meditation

If you sense your child getting stressed, then try to engage them in a quiet activity. Mindfulness and meditation are good ways for children to learn to pause and focus on breathing and calming down highly charged emotions. There are some fabulous apps and videos where you can find a range of meditations for children.

Have a Bank of Calming Techniques

- Zen Flash Cards



Blowing Feathers



Visualise a Quiet Place



Go to Your Safe Space

- Worry bag - personalised bag with some fidget toys, stress ball, notebook, and pen to write worries down to access at times anxiety strikes.
- Do something physical-throw or kick a ball, run around

Breathing/Relaxation Exercises

Practising 'relaxation' is paramount to managing stress. When we relax, the flow of blood increases around our body giving us more energy. It helps us to have a calmer, clearer mind which aids positive thinking, concentration, memory, and decision-making. It slows our heart rate, reduces our blood pressure, and relieves tension. Muscular relaxation exercises and deep breathing are two ways to help people to relax and combat symptoms of anxiety and depression and can be used in conjunction with mindfulness techniques.

Getting Started

- Find a quiet space away from distractions
- If you're trying these relaxation exercises with a child or a group of children, make sure your instructions are clear and engaging.
- You don't have to do them all. Keep an eye on how long the children are engaged and try again another time.

Melt the ice cream

Imagine you are ice cream. Which flavour will you be? Starting at the tip of your ice cream you begin to melt. First, your head and neck melt, then your shoulders, arms and right down to your toes. Feel how relaxed you are.

Hand Massage

Self-massage can be an excellent source of stress relief. Simple exercises to start with hand massage can include simply shaking your hands gently or gliding your index finger and thumb along the fingers on your other hand, going up and down one finger at a time.

Squeeze and relax

Cut an orange into segments. Squeeze the orange segment as hard as you can to get as much juice as possible out of the segment. Try squeezing for the count of 10 without stopping. Use your whole body to squeeze that segment. When you squeeze hard like this it makes your body tense. This is what tense feels like. You might feel tense if you are angry, worried, upset or scared about something. When you stop squeezing the segment then your body begins to relax. This is what relaxation or calm feels like. Try and recognise this tense feeling next time you are angry, worried, scared or upset. Imagine you are letting go of the orange segment and allowing your body to relax. You can practise this exercise with playdough or a stress ball.

Bubble blowing

Imagine you are blowing bubbles. Blow 5 sets of bubbles. Breathe out through pursed lips, long and slow and then take a breath in through your nose before blowing some more bubbles long and slow.

Shoulder roll breath:

- Take a deep, long breath, and relax your entire body.
- Now roll your shoulders up to your ears as you inhale deeply for a count of 3.
- Breathe out through your mouth and roll your shoulders far back and down (as far away from your ears as you can manage) as you exhale for a count of 4.
- Repeat slowly in a continuous movement (in between shoulder rolls) while breathing in and out.

Useful References and Links

www.mindful.org/mindfulness-for-kids

www.elsa-support.co.uk

20 Relaxation/calming activities for children