

What is Emotional Self-Regulation?

'Self-regulation is the ability to manage disruptive emotions and impulses, and to think before you react.' – Mind Tools

In school, children need to be able to self-regulate to help them be ready to learn. Children whose states of arousal are too high or too low will struggle to focus on the learning task at hand.

Update: new research links self-regulation with greater resilience in young people

Researchers have analysed whether self-regulation would be a good predictor of resilience. This study shows that helping these young people to bounce back from adversities by acquiring self-regulation skills such as setting goals and adjusting their path after a misstep, equips them better to do well in school and in life. – Science Daily

What happens when children cannot self-regulate?

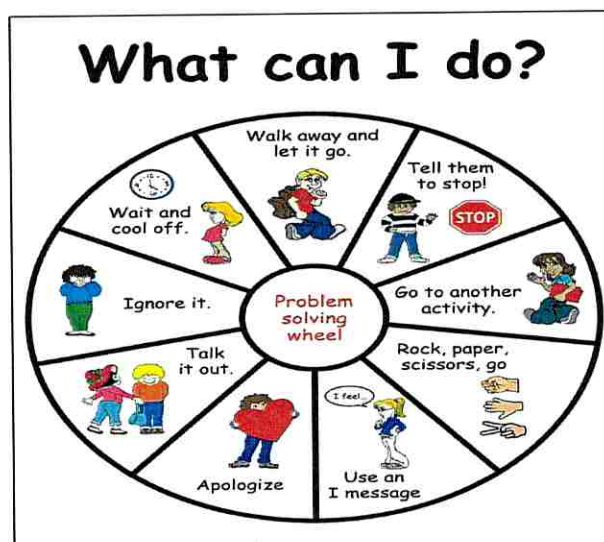
Children that are unable to self-regulate are prone to the following:

- tantrums and outbursts
- self-injurious behaviours such as punching, kicking, biting
- emotional distress
- inattention/distractibility
- refusal to participate

How can we help children learn self-regulation?

To help children learn self-regulation, we need to work on their:

- executive functioning – memory, planning and behaviour inhibition.
- emotional regulation – initiating, inhibiting, or modulating our state or behaviour in a given situation.
- sensory integration – the process by which we receive information through our senses, organise this information, and use it to participate in everyday activities.



What are the Zones of Regulation?

What zone am I in?



Use tools to get in the green zone.



The Zones of Regulation is a cognitive behaviour approach for helping students self-regulate their behaviours, emotions, and sensory needs. By using concepts and visuals to help students learn to recognise their feelings and level of arousal, it allows them to employ strategies for optimal learning. The Zones can be compared to traffic signs. When given a green light or in the Green Zone, one is “good to go”. A yellow sign means be aware or take caution, which applies to the Yellow Zone. A red light or stop sign means stop, and when one is the Red Zone, this often is the case. The Blue Zone can be compared to the rest area signs where one goes to rest or re-energize. All of the zones are expected at one time or another, but the curriculum focuses on teaching students how to manage their Zone based on the environment and people around them. For example, when playing on the playground or in an active/competitive game, no one would think twice about one being in the Yellow Zone but that would not be same in the library. – Zones of Regulation

Although the Zones of Regulation is often used to support the needs of children with ASD or ADHD, it is very much applicable to all children, and even adults. The ability to recognise our own state of arousal and to make the necessary adjustment so that it is appropriate for the occasion we face is something we all require to function optimally.

The Goals of the Zones of Regulation

The goals of the zones of regulation are to teach children to:

- identify their feelings and levels of alertness
- develop effective regulation tools
- learn when and how to use the tools
- problem solve by exploring helpful solutions
- understand how their behaviours influence thoughts and feelings
- ultimately – develop independent regulation

The Four Zones of Regulation

Blue Zone: low level of arousal; not ready to learn; feels sad, sick, tired, bored, moving slowly.

Green Zone: calm state of alertness; optimal level to learn; feels happy, calm, feeling okay, focused.

Yellow Zone: heightened state of alertness; elevated emotions; has some control; feels frustrated, worried, silly/wiggly, excited, loss of some control.

Red Zone: heightened state of alertness and intense emotions; not an optimal level for learning; out of control; feels mad/angry, terrified, yelling/hitting, elated, out of control.

What Zone are You in?

- Blue Zone – your body is running slow, like when you’re tired, sick, sad or bored.
- Green Zone – like a green light, you feel “good to go”. Your body may feel happy, calm and focused.
- Yellow Zone – when you start to lose control, like when you feel frustrated, anxious, worried, silly or surprised. Use caution when you are in this zone.
- Red Zone – when you experience extreme emotions. When you are in this zone, you are out of control, you have trouble making good decisions, and you need to STOP!

Tools for Regulation			
For the Blue Zone – increase arousal:	For the Green Zone – maintaining:	For the Yellow – decrease arousal:	For the Red Zones – decrease arousal:
think happy thoughts talk about your feelings rub hands together run on the spot shoulder rub ask for a hug swinging or spinning stretching or jumping jacks strong scents vibration drink water crunchy foods bright lights listening to loud music	keep your eyes on the teacher remember your daily goals finish your homework think happy thoughts be a good friend help others work hard smile	talk to my parents/friends take 3 deep breaths do a wall push up use a fidget go for a walk take a break read deep pressure slow movement heavy work to muscles soft lighting listen to music chewy foods	take three deep breaths how big is my problem – the size of your reaction should match the size of the problem. How big do others see the problem? How big should your reaction be? jump on a trampoline relax your muscles talk to an adult sensory break push the wall count to 20 walk away STOP! deep pressure slow movement heavy work to muscles soft lighting listen to music chewy foods

Common Questions on the Zones of Regulation

Can you be in more than one zone at a time?

Yes. Your child may feel tired (blue zone) because she did not get enough sleep, and anxious (yellow zone) because she is worried about an activity or contest at school. Listing more than one zone reflects a good sense of personal feelings and alertness levels.

Should children be penalised for being in the RED zone?

It's best for children to experience the natural consequences of being in the RED zone. If a child's actions/choices hurt someone or destroys property, he needs to repair the relationship and take responsibility for the mess they create. Once the child has calmed down, use the experience as a learning opportunity to process what the child would do differently next time.

Can you look like one zone on the outside and feel like you are in another zone on the inside?

Yes. Many of us "disguise" our zone to match social expectations. We use the expression "put on a happy face" or mask the emotion so other people will have good thoughts about us. Parents often say that their children "lose it" and goes into the RED zone as soon as they get home. This is because children are increasing their awareness of their peers and expectations. They make every effort to keep it together at school to stay in the GREEN zone. Home is when they feel safe to let it all out.

Tips for Practicing the Zones of Regulation

- Know yourself and how you react in difficult situations before dealing with your child's behaviours.
- Know your child's sensory threshold. We all process sensory information differently and it impacts our reactivity to situations.
- Know your child's triggers.
- Be consistent in managing your child's behaviour and use the same language you use at home.
- Empathise with your child and validate what they are feeling.
- Have clear boundaries/routines and always follow through.
- Do not deal with an angry, upset child when you are not yet calm yourself.
- Discuss strategies for the next time when you are in a similar situation.
- Remember to ask your child how their choices made you feel (empathy).
- Praise your child for using strategies. Encourage your child to take a sensory break to help regulate their bodies.

Make a Coping Skills Box

What is it?

A coping skills box is a place to keep things that help to calm you down in periods of distress. Having everything gathered in one place helps you remember to use your coping skills rather than using negative behaviours.

What to put in it?






1. Self-Soothing Objects that help to calm you through your five senses:
 - Something to touch – e.g. stuffed animal, stress ball
 - Something to hear – e.g. music, meditation guide
 - Something to see – e.g. snow globe, happy pictures
 - Something to taste – e.g. mints, tea, sour candy
 - Something to smell – e.g. lotion, candles, perfume


2. Distractions to take your mind off the problem for a while, e.g. puzzles, books, artwork, crafts, knitting, crocheting, sewing, crossword puzzles, sudoku, positive websites, music, movies, etc.
3. Opposite action – do something that is opposite to your impulse that is consistent with a more positive emotion:
 affirmations and inspiration – e.g. looking at drawings or motivational statements
 something funny or cheering – e.g. funny movies, books
4. Emotional Awareness – tools for identifying and expressing your feelings, e.g. a chart of emotions, a journal, writing supplies, art supplies.
5. Mindfulness – tools for grounding yourself in the present moment, e.g. meditation or relaxation recordings, grounding objects (rock, paperweight), yoga mat, breathing exercises.
5. Crisis Plan – contact info of supports and resources for when coping skills aren't enough, e.g. family/friends, therapist, psychiatrist, hotline.


Put it all together


Once you have gathered everything, put them together into a box and decorate it. Keep the box in a place where you'll remember it and USE IT!


Taking Charge of My Feelings and Behaviors

Taking Charge: I am checking how I feel right now.	 Feel really good- I feel excited!	 Feel good - I am calm and satisfied	 Feel different - I feel like something is changing around me	 Feel bad: My muscles are getting tighter	 Feel really bad- my heart is beating fast and muscles are getting tighter
Do I need to do something to help me feel O.K. or be safer?	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
How do I feel now?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>


write down my thoughts 


ask for help 


give teacher my "I need a break" card 

ask for help 


ask for a _____


wait 


help a friend 


squeeze or press down on something 


What will make me feel better or safer?





sit and count to 20 


think about a safe place 


think about my strengths (what I do well) 

put my hands down 

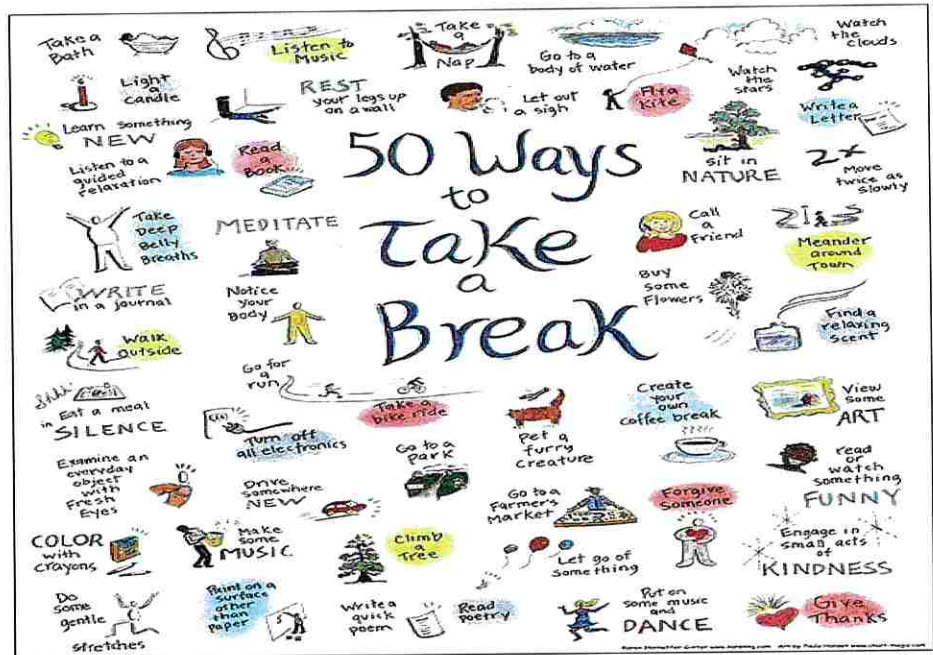
draw a picture 

Squeeze my hands 

breathe in and out slowly 

stretch my body 

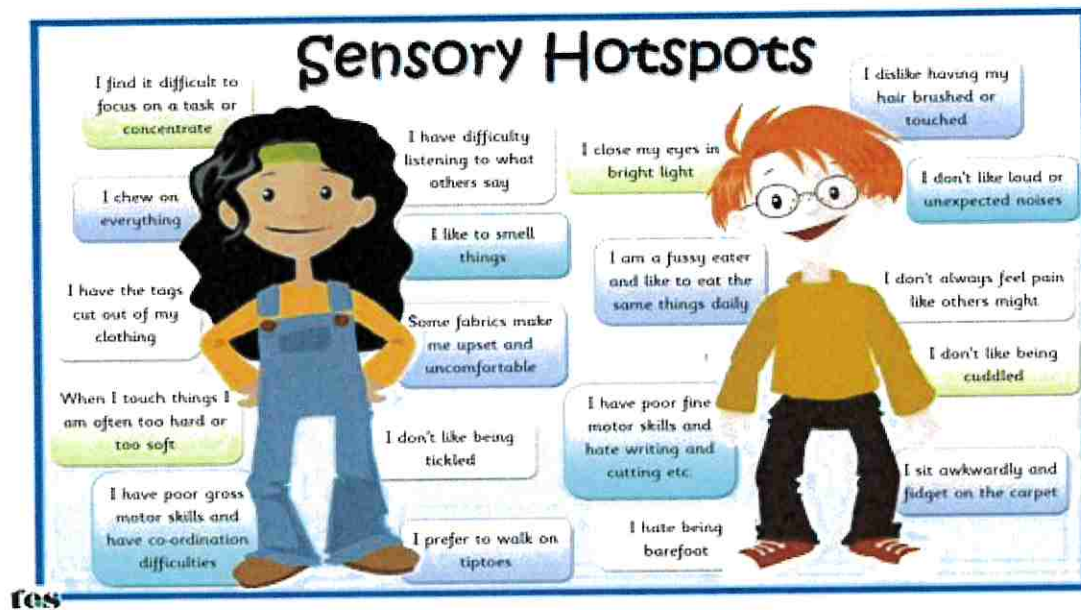
Ideas for your Calm Plan



 <h2>Drain</h2> <p>Extend arms out, pretending your arms are faucets. Tighten arm, shoulder, and face muscles. Exhale slowly making a "ssshhh" sound and release all your muscles, draining out the stress.</p>	 <h2>S.T.A.R.</h2> <p>Smile, Take a deep breath And Relax. Encourage belly breathing where the tummy goes out when the air goes in, and in when the air goes out. Also help children learn to exhale slower than they inhale.</p>
 <h2>Pretzel</h2> <p>Standing up, cross your ankles. Now cross your right wrist over left, turn your hands so your thumbs are facing the floor, put palms together and interlace fingers. Bend your elbows out and gently turn your hands down and toward your body until they rest on the center of your chest. Put your tongue on the roof of your mouth. Relax and breathe.</p>	 <h2>Balloon</h2> <p>Place your hands on top of your head and interlace your fingers. Breathe in through your nose as you raise your arms, inflating an imaginary balloon. Release the air in the balloon by pursing your lips, exhaling slowly, lowering your arms and making a "pbbppppb" sound.</p>

Sensory Break: Sensory Activities for Sensory Integration

The following image helps teachers and parents identify some of the common sensory hotspots that some children may have:



Sensory activities that can help children with these hotspots may be proprioceptive, vestibular, or tactile in nature.

Proprioception

Proprioception is the sense of knowing the relative positions of the various parts of our bodies and strength of effort we employ during a movement. Children with proprioceptive needs can benefit from the following activities:

- carrying heavy baskets or objects
- jumping jacks
- leaning against a wall or table palm presses
- pushing or pulling boxes; wheelbarrow walk
- jumping on a trampoline
- crawling through a tunnel
- pushing against objects, wall push-ups
- standing on toes and stretching
- finger fidgets

Vestibular

The vestibular system is responsible for the sense of balance and spatial orientation for the purpose of coordinating movement with balance. Children with vestibular sensory needs can benefit from the following activities:

- bounce on a yoga ball
- walk on a balance beam
- bear/crab/snake walk
- roll neck slowly in a circular movement
- imitation game – e.g. Simon Says
- gentle rocking
- jump up and down; try to touch the door frame
- sit and spin / yoga seat
- roll on the mat

Tactile

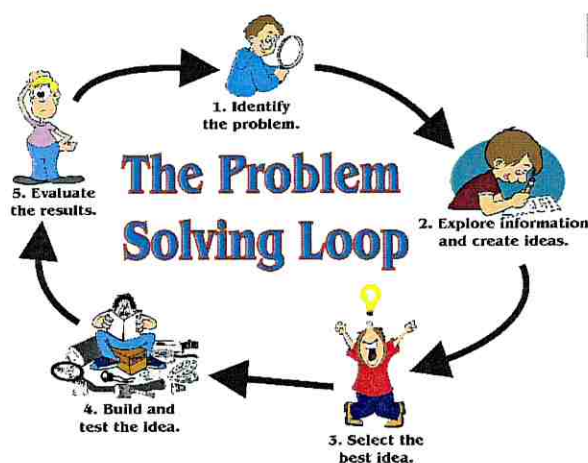
Tactile sensory needs can be fulfilled with “touch” activities, such as the following:

- fidgets / play dough activities
- weighted blanket / objects
- bear hugs (from behind)
- finger paint, stringing beads
- walk barefoot on the mat
- squeezing / pulling activities
- feely box activities
- self-hug and hand presses

Sensory Activities at Home

When your child needs a sensory break at home, try these activities:

- roll out the “cookie dough” with a yoga ball firmly over the back and limbs
- pillow fight
- mopping or sweeping the floor
- stirring cookie dough or cake batter
- jumping jacks
- chewing gym, eating crunchy foods (pretzels carrots, small ice chips, or sipping water from a cup with a thick straw while doing seated work)
- pushing or pulling boxes or laundry baskets with a few toys or books in it
- carrying or pushing pillowcases of stuff animals around the house
- helping with chores, pulling a heavy trash can, vacuuming, water plants
- removing couch cushions, piling them on the floor and “crashing” into them
- roller-skating uphill, ice skating, jumping rope, marching, hopping and skipping
- walking on a treadmill set to go uphill
- pulling other kids around on a sheet or blanket
- crawling through a t-shirt tunnel
- tidying the garden such as raking leaves, pushing the wheelbarrow, water the flowers
- crossing monkey bars
- swinging on a swing



Remember try out the strategies and see if they work for you. If they do, great! Carry on. If they are not helpful-stop it and try something else. Eventually you will find what works the best for you.