



Supporting Caregivers with Challenging Children
Strategies and Tools to Help You and Your Child Stay Regulated Together

Regulation Basics

Important Points

- **Regulation Defined** – Regulation is the ability of our brains to shift so we can do what is necessary in life, especially modulate our moods, self-calm, delay gratification, and tolerate transitions. When regulated you can generally match your energy appropriately to the activity, engage with others, follow directions, and shift between emotions without being stuck.
- **Developing Regulation Skills** – We are not born knowing how to regulate our behaviors and emotions. Those skills start during infancy and build gradually. When an infant becomes distressed because they are hungry, wet, or tired, and then a caregiver helps manage the need and soothes them in their distress the child starts to learn how to regulate. They learn that they can tolerate distress, especially when they have a supportive relationship that will help them move through the difficult feelings and sensations. As children grow the kind of support changes, but the cycle of getting dysregulated and then having a caregiver help them through the hard situations and emotions continues to build those skills. It typically takes seven (7) years or more for a child to learn self-regulation skills.
- **Regulation, Stress, and Safety** – Main job of the nervous system is to keep up safe both within our environment and in our own bodies. If the nervous system is stressed or does not feel safe our bodies and brain are on alert, or in extreme cases reduce pain and go into a fight or flight state. When that happens one cannot focus on engaging with others and being curious about the world. This can happen whether or not the threat is real or merely perceived.
- **Sensory Input and Regulation** – Our sensory systems give our body and brains a consistent flow of information and help us be alert to potential threats. This has a big impact on our regulation. If our sensory systems are not processing information clearly or letting in too much input the body may be on alert more than necessary, and therefore less regulated.
- **Regulation and Relationships** – Caregivers play an enormous role in helping children regulate. Ideally, caregivers give children the sense that they can tolerate distress and move through it, “This feels big, we can move through this together.” They help the child feel safe and contained in those

hard experiences, “I’m here with you in the big feelings.” In addition, caregivers who are predictable in their responses help create a sense of safety which supports regulation. Supportive caregiving relationships can be a regulation powerhouse for children.

- **Window of Tolerance & Set Point** – These are the conditions where we are well regulated and most available for learning, loving, and interaction. The window of tolerance is where we can be our best selves and show our highest level of skills. Children with a broad window are typically “go with the flow” kids. Children with a narrow window can flourish and engage well when conditions are exactly right. However, it is very easy to knock them out of that window, and then the child might melt or shut down. A person’s “set point” is where they feel most comfortable from a regulation perspective. Based on a person’s personal history that set point might be calm and organized, high energy, or on alert.
- **Regulating with Big Emotions** – Regulation is not just being happy and calm. It is possible to stay regulated within big or difficult emotions and then work through them. Being regulated while feeling angry or sad means that a person can express their feelings safely and engage constructively with others. It also possible to be overly excited and dysregulated.

3 Easy Things to Try

- Notice for yourself how regulated you feel in different environments during your week. Where do you feel most calm and connected? Where do you feel overwhelmed?
- Pay attention to how regulated you feel when you are interacting with other people. Do certain people make you feel calmer? Do others generally put you on edge more?
- Observe how different environments and relationships affect your child’s ability to be regulated.

For More Information

Short and Sweet

- Emotional Regulation in Children | A Complete Guide – <https://www.parentingforbrain.com/self-regulation-toddler-temper-tantrums/> (Parenting for Brain website)
- Self-Regulation Skills: Why They Are Fundamental – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4UGDaCgo_s (Committee for Children brief video)
- Cookie Monster Practices Self-Regulation – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0YDE8_jsHk (NPR-Life Kit Parenting – NPR video)

Deeper Dives

- ***The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*** by Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson (Book)
- ***Permission to Feel: Unlocking the Power of Emotions to Help Our Kids, Ourselves, and Our Society Thrive*** by Marc Brackett (Book)

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