

SEND &amp; INCLUSION · GRADES 1–6

# Emotional Regulation

A toolkit for primary classrooms

## What emotional regulation actually is

Emotional regulation is the ability to:

- Recognise what you're feeling
- Tolerate the feeling without being overwhelmed
- Choose a response that fits the situation
- Recover after a strong emotion

It's a developmental skill. Children at age 5 are not expected to regulate well. By age 11, most can regulate most of the time. Some children — anxious, autistic, ADHD, traumatised, with attachment difficulties — develop regulation more slowly. They need EXPLICIT teaching, not just expectation.

## Why 'use your words' often fails

<b>When emotion is high, words go offline</b> <p>The brain's language centres are partially shut down by high stress. The child literally cannot find words in the moment. Demanding them adds shame.</p>	<b>They may not have the words yet</b> <p>A 6-year-old may know 'angry' and 'sad' but not 'frustrated', 'overwhelmed', 'embarrassed', 'jealous'. Without precise vocabulary, they can't articulate.</p>
<b>They may not know what they feel</b> <p>Identifying emotions is itself a learned skill. Many children FEEL but can't yet NAME.</p>	<b>Co-regulation comes before self-regulation</b> <p>Children regulate by borrowing the calm of an adult. Asking them to use words asks them to self-regulate. They're not there yet.</p>

## Co-regulation — the foundation

<b>Be calm yourself</b> <p>Children's nervous systems mirror adults'. If you're stressed, they will stay stressed.</p>	<b>Lower your voice</b> <p>Quiet voice = safe situation. Raised voice = danger. Even when calming a child, raising your voice makes things worse.</p>
---	--



<b>Slow your movements</b>  Sudden movements signal danger to a stressed brain. Move slowly, predictably.	<b>Name what you see</b>  'I can see you're upset.' 'It looks like that was hard.' Don't say 'you should calm down' or 'don't be silly.'
---	---

## Building self-regulation over time

Stage	What you teach	Example
1. Notice	Body signals of emotion	'My tummy feels tight when I'm worried'
2. Name	Vocabulary for feelings	'I'm frustrated' (not just 'angry')
3. Pause	Wait before reacting	Take 3 breaths
4. Choose	Pick a response from a known list	'I can ask for help / take a break / talk to my friend'
5. Recover	Reset after the emotion eases	Drink water, rejoin lesson

## Practical things you can do

1. EMOTION VOCABULARY ON THE WALL. A poster with 30+ feeling words and pictures. Refer to it constantly. 'Are you frustrated? Is it more disappointed?' 2. EMOTION CHECK-INS. At the start of the day, every child shows their feeling on a scale (1-5, or weather symbols, or zones). Takes 90 seconds. Tells you who needs watching. 3. CALM CORNER. A space for self-chosen breaks. Five minutes. Then back. 4. BREATHING TECHNIQUES TAUGHT IN CALM TIMES. 4-4-8 breathing, finger breathing, square breathing. 5. REPAIR AFTER UPSETS. When a child has been dysregulated, talk later — when calm. 'What was happening for you? What might help next time?' 6. MODEL YOUR OWN. 'I'm a bit frustrated today because the printer broke. I'm going to take a deep breath.' Children learn most from what they see.

## What this is NOT

Emotional regulation is NOT: • Children always staying calm. (Unrealistic and unhealthy.) • Children suppressing feelings. (Causes other problems.) • Avoiding all triggers. (Children need to learn to ride waves, not be protected from waves.) • A short-term project. (It takes years. Be patient.) A classroom where regulation is happening WELL is one where children sometimes get upset, then come back to calm with adult help, and over time need that help less.

