

SEND & INCLUSION · ALL GRADES

Zones of Regulation

Classroom poster

About this approach

The Zones of Regulation framework, developed by occupational therapist Leah Kuypers, organises emotional states into four colour-coded zones. It's widely used in primary schools because it gives children — including young or non-verbal children — a simple shared vocabulary for how they feel. This poster is a free reference. If your school uses the full programme, the printable curriculum is available from the official Zones publisher. For day-to-day classroom use, the four zones are enough.

The four zones

<p>■ GREEN ZONE — Ready to learn</p> <p>Calm. Happy. Focused. Content. The optimal state for learning. NOT 'always smiling' — just settled and ready. Most of the school day should be here.</p>	<p>■ BLUE ZONE — Slow body, low energy</p> <p>Tired. Sad. Bored. Sick. Sluggish. Lonely. Not 'bad' — just under-energised. Needs quiet activation, not high-energy demands.</p>
<p>■ YELLOW ZONE — Heightened</p> <p>Worried. Excited. Frustrated. Wiggly. Silly. The zone before things go wrong. Needs help to come back to green BEFORE crossing into red.</p>	<p>■ RED ZONE — Overwhelmed, out of control</p> <p>Furious. Terrified. Out of control. Devastated. The brain has gone offline. NOT a moral failing — a nervous system response. Needs co-regulation, not consequences.</p>

How to introduce it

1. **TEACH THE COLOURS.** Spend a lesson on each zone. Show pictures of faces in each. 2. **NORMALISE ALL ZONES.** There is NO BAD ZONE. We all visit all zones. The skill is noticing where you are and choosing what to do about it. 3. **DAILY CHECK-IN.** At the start of the day, every child says (or points to) their zone. 30 seconds total. 4. **USE THE LANGUAGE.** 'It looks



like Sam might be in yellow — what do you need?' 'I'm in blue today, I might need extra coffee.' Model it constantly. 5. TEACH TOOLS. For each zone, build a class list: • Blue → movement, water, talk to a friend • Yellow → breathing, calm corner, fidget • Red → safe space, quiet voice from adult, 'I'll wait'

Common mistakes

- 'You're in red — that's bad.' (No. It's just a state. Don't shame any zone.)
- 'Get back to green NOW.' (You can't will yourself out of red. It eases over time.)
- Using zones as a behaviour management tool. (They're an awareness tool, not a punishment frame.)
- Skipping yellow. (Yellow is the most teachable zone. If a child notices they're in yellow, they can act before red.)

Used well, the Zones become part of how the class talks about emotions every day. Used badly, they become another label that shames.

