

Emotion Coaching with Zones of Regulation

Emotion Coaching and the Zones of Regulation are tools to help teach emotional regulation to children. If children are able to recognise when they are becoming less regulated, they can then become in charge to help manage their feelings.

It is not a 'quick fix' but is a teaching tool and a way to develop emotional skills.

ZONES OF REGULATION



BLUE ZONE

Low State of Alertness



GREEN ZONE

Ideal State of Alertness



YELLOW ZONE

Heightened State of Alertness



RED ZONE

Extremely Heightened
State of Alertness



Triggers

Sometimes, a child might have predictable triggers and we can try to intervene to remove the trigger or prepare the child. Here are some examples of triggers. You might find it useful to do a log to see if you can spot a pattern in your child's behaviour.

Being told what to do
Losing
Feeling left out
Being scared
Something is unfair
Being tired
Being late
Change in routine
Being told no
Being hungry
Being touched

Emotion Coaching with Zones of Regulation


Talk to your child about your own feelings and what zone you are in:

This is really frustrating me and making me go into the Yellow Zone. I need to use a tool to calm down. I will take some deep breaths which will help me reach the Green Zone.

No zone is wrong or bad to be in. We all experience each of the zones.

Tools

Push/pull something
Listen to music
Colouring
Turn the lights off
Count to 10
Splash water in your face
Drink a glass of water
Lazy 8 breathing
Have a snack
Jump/bounce
Take a walk
Star jumps
Carry something



Here are some suggestions for tools to help regulate your emotions. You might have other ideas!

Example script for the adult to the child

LABEL: I can see you are frowning and kicking the wall. I think you are in the red zone. I would be feeling like that if I didn't want to do something.

VALIDATE: We can't behave like that even though you are annoyed because it's not safe. You're probably angry because you have been asked to put the ball away.

PROBLEM SOLVE: It looks like you need to take some action to calm yourself down. Would you like a drink of water or to push against something?

Once the child is calm, discuss 'what could you do next time you feel like this?'

Blank script

LABEL: I can see you are _____. I think you are in the _____ zone. I would be feeling like that if _____.

VALIDATE: We can't behave like that even though you are _____ because it's not safe. You're probably _____ because you have been asked to _____.

PROBLEM SOLVE: It looks like you need to take some action to calm yourself down. Would you like _____ or to _____?

Once the child is calm, discuss 'what could you do next time you feel like this?'

Other useful phrases to label and validate feelings

Did it make you feel ____ when ____?

Were you feeling ____ when ____?

It sounds like that made you feel _____.

That would make me feel _____ too.

It makes me feel _____ when _____ happens also.

It looks like you're very happy.

You seem a bit sad.

Are you feeling annoyed?

It sounds like you were really scared.

I bet that made you pretty grumpy.

Tantrums

Upstairs Brain

Allows us to think before we act
Decision-making
Control over emotions & body
Focus/concentration
Empathy
Self awareness



Downstairs Brain

Allows us to act before we think
Fight/Flight response
Emotional reactions
Bodily functions

Source: Siegel & Bryson "The Whole Brain Child"

■ Upstairs tantrum

Child decides to throw a fit
Could stop if they wanted to
Able to control emotions and make decisions
May look out of control
Needs firm boundaries and clear discussion about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour

■ Downstairs tantrum

No longer able to use upstairs brain because so upset
'Flipped their lid' – amygdala has hijacked higher parts of brain
Needs nurturing, comforting and soothing
No sense talking consequences or appropriate behaviour

If a child is in a 'downstairs' tantrum, they need nurturing and soothing as their 'upstairs' reasoning brain is offline. There is no point in discussing feelings until their upstairs brain is back up and running.

The goal...

The goal is for the child to be able to identify which zone they are in and how they are feeling. Then for them to choose a tool that is best for them before their behaviour escalates.

I am feeling _____.

(Know the zone.)

I need to _____.

(Know if they need more energy or less energy.)

I can _____.

(Know what tool to use.)