

Emotion Coaching

Stormont Coffee morning 01.10.25
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Today's session



To explore simple ways to support our children's emotions in a calm, practical way through the Emotion Coaching Framework

What is emotional regulation?



*“...the ability to **do what needs to be done** to be in the **optimal state** for the **given situation**. This includes regulating one’s **sensory needs**, **emotions** and **impulses** to meet the **demands** of the environment, reach one’s **goals** and behave in a **socially appropriate way**.”*

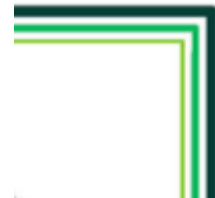
Emotional Reregulation is the core process underlying attention and social engagement and is essential for optimal social, emotional and communication development and for the development of relationships (Prizant and Meyer, 1993).



Emotion Coaching is a relational approach to responding to behaviour which develops internal regulation skills

- It means noticing feelings, naming them, helping our child stay calm, and then problem-solving.
- Children with learning differences often struggle to express how they feel. They need simple words, repetition, and our calm presence.

Co-Regulation / Self Regulation



Co-regulation



Seeking help or comfort from others to make us feel calm or alert

Self regulation



Things we do make ourselves calm or alert

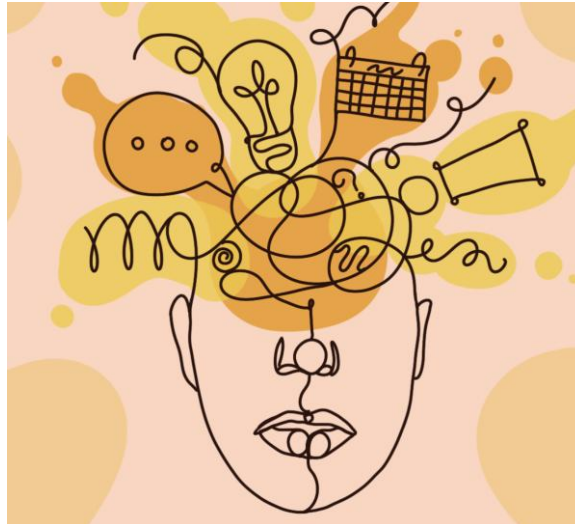
- We are not born able to self-regulate
- Emotional regulation is gained by co-regulation
- Well-regulated adults are needed when children or young people experience dysregulation
- The brain is shaped by social experience and strengthened by repetition

What is emotional dysregulation?



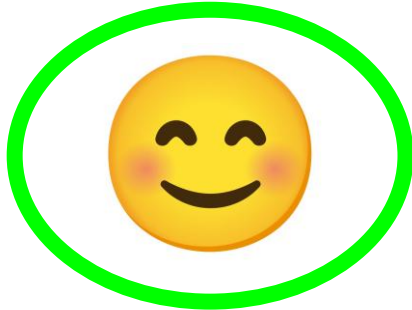
“Emotion dysregulation” is the term used to describe an inability to regularly use healthy strategies to diffuse or moderate negative emotions’

Cornell University Research Program, 2019



Emotion Coaching is a relational approach which develops internal regulation

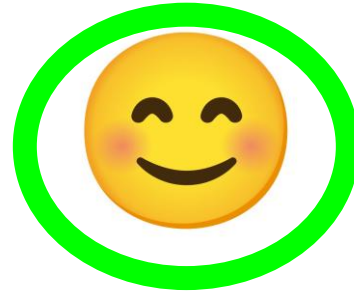
Sanctions and Rewards



External Framework External

Regulation - behaviour is supported/managed by external factors (e.g structures and routines in the environment, behaviour policies)

Emotion Coaching



Internal Framework

Internal Regulation - the ability to manage your own emotional state without relying solely on external prompts or interventions - supported by Emotion Coaching

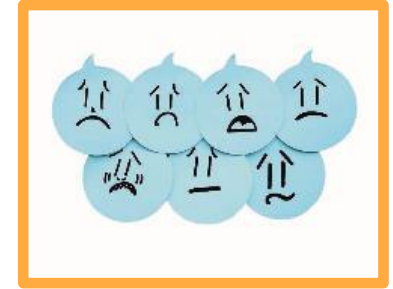
Traditional behaviour management policies can co-exist with relational approaches for supporting behaviour

Emotion Coaching

- Developed in the US by John Gottman (1997)
- Based on research into what parents of happy, resilient and well adjusted children and young people do
- Recognises the evidence that what adults do shapes and strengthens brain development in children

Emotion coaching enables children and young people to manage their own behaviour through helping them to understand the different emotions they experience, why they occur, and how to handle them.

It aims to help children move from a state of 'fight, flight or freeze' (i.e. survival) to be able to think rationally.



Sees negative emotions as sign of weakness or manipulation
Try to get rid of emotions with punishment
Try to 'toughen up' child
Can break connection between adult / child and may make the child want to get even.



Disapproving style

Low Empathy



Dismissing style

Uncomfortable with negative emotions
Minimises emotions, e.g. don't worry, that's life, you'll be fine
Focuses on getting rid of emotion via logic, distraction, or rescuing to make better rather than understanding the emotion

High Guidance

Adult is aware of own emotions (O2 mask!)
Adult can empathise, listen and connect with the child.
Adult can scaffold and support joint problem solving with the child together.

Emotion coaching style



High Empathy

Laissez-faire style



Adult is overwhelmed and feels helpless, afraid or distressed by emotions of child.
Offers empathy but no guidance on how to manage the feelings so no containment.
Can lead to escalation and doesn't help child to manage own behaviour.

Low Guidance

Examples of Parenting Styles

1. **Dismissing** - A child becomes upset because their routine changed.

Parent response: *"You're fine, it's not a big deal. You'll forget about it by tomorrow."*

1. **Disapproving** - A child shouts because they are overwhelmed by noise.

Parent response: *"Stop shouting! "You need to behave. Big girls don't cry like that."*

1. **Laissez-Faire (Permissive)** - A child becomes frustrated and throws a toy.

Parent response: *"You're upset, that's okay."*

1. **Emotion Coaching**

A child gets upset when they cannot have the iPad.

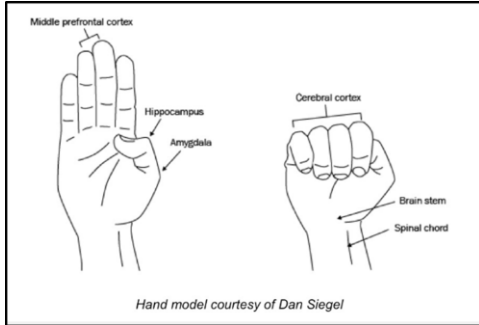
Parent response: *"You're really frustrated. You wanted the iPad. It's hard to wait. The iPad comes after dinner."*

Reflection

Look at the 4 parenting styles...

- Which style do I tend to use most often?
- Do I use different styles depending on the situation/context?
- Which style would I like to move towards? What gets in the way?

Emotion Coaching



1

- Notice, name and empathize the feelings of the child

2

- Set limits on the behaviour

3

- Help the child to solve the problem

Step 0 – Getting ready

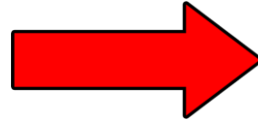
Co-regulation: Connecting, Mirroring & Matching



The adult should set the emotional tone: **NOT** the adult reflecting back the angry or distressed face of the child, but the child being able to reflect the calm and empathic face of the adult.

Co-regulation: Connecting, Mirroring & Matching

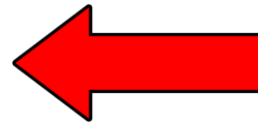
'A' leads



'B' follows



'A' follows



'B' leads



Co-regulation

Practicing internal regulation



- Think of **one scenario** that often triggers you in everyday life (outside of the school context)
- What are your initial feelings / thoughts / reactions?
- **What strategies** that you use to stay regulated in this scenario?



Step 1

1

- Notice, name and empathize the feelings of the child

Notice

What physical or verbal signs are there to indicate distress?

'I can see that... I notice that... I can hear that'



Name

Name the emotion and help the child to label it.

'It looks like you are feeling angry...' 'I can see you are sad'



Empathize

Be sympathetic and let them know you understand how they may feel.

'I understand that your angry. That's ok, it sounds very upsetting'



Example Visuals for Step 1

Emotion Faces

- Use emojis, simple drawings, or photos
- Say: *"You look like this face -maybe you feel sad?"*



Colour Zones

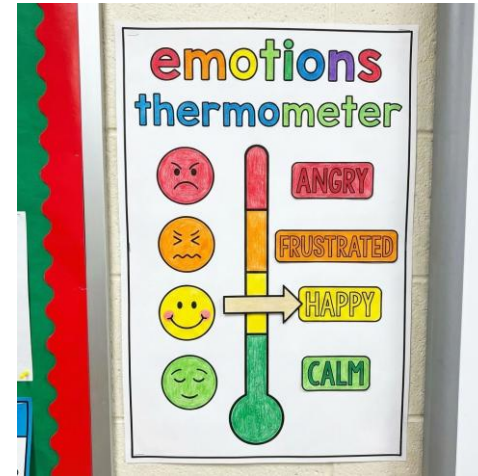
- Link emotions to colours (e.g., Zones of Regulation)
- Say: *"Your body looks in the Orange Zone - maybe worried or frustrated."*

Body Clues

- Show pictures of fists, tense shoulders, crying, scrunched face
- Say: *"Your hands are tight - that can mean angry."*

Feelings Thermometer

- Low to high intensity
- Say: *"You look halfway up - maybe a medium-big feeling."*



Two-Choice Emotion Cards

- Offer 2–3 feelings only
- Say: *"Are you more angry or sad?"*

Sentence Starters for Step 1 (notice, name and empathise)

- It seems that you are.....
 - That sounds as though it was
 - That must have been
 - I wonder if you are feeling
 - I notice...
 - I can see that....
-
- I'm sorry that happened to you, that must feel
 - That sounds (or feels) like it is a big feeling.
 - I would feel if that happened to me.
 - It's normal to feel about
 - It's OK to feel angry about when ... happens to you
 - I can see you feel ...when that happens/when I do(say)....

Step 2



2

- **Set limits on the behaviour**

- **Maintain a calm and empathetic tone**
- **Be the change you want to see - help the child mirror your state of calm and relax**
- **Make it clear that some behaviours cannot be accepted**
- **State the boundary limits of acceptable behaviour (We can go to the corner but we cant...)**
- **Reinforce that it is the behaviour and not the child that is unacceptable**

“You know we need rules to keep everyone safe”

“We must remember our rule for hitting. Hurting people is not acceptable”

‘Every one in school has the right to be safe. You behaviour has not been safe and that is not ok’

Step 3

3

- Help the child to solve the problem

Explore

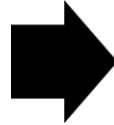
support the child to strengthen their awareness of their personal triggers and body cues as well as developing emotional vocabulary.

How were you feeling?

I wonder if you were feeling Because.....?

How did you know you were feeling.....?

What did your face, hart, stomach, hands do when you felt.....?



Scaffold

Work with the child to establish alternative responses to the given feeling.

What could you do when you feel like that again ?

Who could you tell when you feel like that next time ?

How could we help when you feel that again ?

Where could you go when you feel like that again ?



Empower

Encourage the Child and remain emphatic in order to remove feelings of shame from the encounter

Remind the pupil of times they have done this before.

Set clear targets about what to do next time.

Provide praise and motivation as the child achieves to wards these targets.

**Thank you for
listening!**

The 4 Steps of Emotion Coaching

0. Regulate yourself

Stay calm and present



1. Notice, name, and empathize feelings

Recognize the emotions
your child is experiencing



2. Set limits on behavior

Express clear boundaries



3. Problem-solve

Guide your child to an
appropriate solution

