



Introduction to the regulation of emotions – Co-regulation and Self-regulation.

The word regulation is often used as an umbrella term for controlling our emotions. This is true but only part of what regulation is. However, this is just an introduction and emotional regulation is extremely important so I am going to focus on this area first.

None of us expect toddlers to control their emotions or do we? We apologise when a child has an outburst or look at the parent when this occurs in public whilst a parent may try to ask their child to be quieter or to calm down. This is not really going to help the child.

The first step for a child to learn to control their emotions is with **co-regulation**. This is when their caregiver (parent, teacher, significant adult) helps give them tools to become calm again. For this to occur, the most important part is for the caregiver to ensure that they are regulated (calm and available to assist, not stressed by the noise or embarrassed, but available to watch and understand what is happening for their child).

When this emotional support is available, the next step is to see what is occurring for their child. If the child has lost control, no amount of talking will help. In this case, less is more. **Hold space** for your child. This means, don't rush your child to calm down, let the child know you understand they are upset. Do not try to use a lot of language or reason with them ("We can't do that because...") but just let them know you are there whilst they slow everything down. Keep them safe, don't let them run off but also try not to keep hold of them (unless safety is a concern). Be with them, but don't rush the process. Something like "I can see this is hard for you. We can wait." Then demonstrate what regulation looks like – slow movement, quiet voice, being at eye level but not in their personal space and demonstrating slow regular breathing. This is co-regulation. This eventually leads to self-regulation, where a person can control what they do with their own emotions.

2 important takeaways I want to add. Even as adults, we sometimes need others to help us regulate and that is normal and acceptable to ask for that help. We need our children to know this. The other takeaway is that it is **HOW** we deal with emotions that is important, **NOT STOPPING** the emotions from occurring. In that, I mean, all emotions are needed, no emotions are negative. Often anger or being upset are seen as negative emotions. They are not. They help us protect ourselves (in the stone age, they helped us survive against predators). Threats are different now, and how we handle those threats is an important aspect that we need to focus on. Start to think about the tools you can help yourself and your child learn to manage emotions positively.