



PARENT
RESOURCE
CENTRE
OTTAWA

Infant
Toddler

Newborn
Pre-school

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD'S STRESS REACTIONS AND BIG EMOTIONS THROUGH CO-REGULATION



Infants and young children rely on caring adults to help them manage their big emotions and stress. Through repeated comforting experiences, children learn to calm themselves and regulate emotions. This ability develops gradually from infancy into adulthood. Parents and caregivers play a crucial role in this process by providing a calming presence to help children navigate their emotions and stress. This is called co-regulation. Co-regulation builds trust and connection, setting the stage for strong emotional regulation skills in the future.

To help your child cope, practice co-regulation by staying calm and supportive and reducing their stressors. Children learn to handle their feelings, thoughts, body sensations, and nervous system with guidance from caring parents and caregivers. Co-regulation involves tuning into your child's cues and providing comfort and support for their needs in that moment.

For example:

- *A child who is struggling to go to school or childcare may need more time to transition, additional connection, and validation of their feelings to help them get out the door.*
- *A child who is having a tantrum needs support from a calm, compassionate adult who helps them process their feelings and get back on track.*

NOTICE YOUR OWN FEELINGS AND NEEDS

Check in with yourself and recognize your own emotions and needs. This self-awareness is essential for providing effective support to your child. Try calming strategies such as:

- Taking deep breaths, humming softly or offering a hug
- Rocking gently, light stretching, or movement
- Drinking cold water or splashing cold water on your face
- Picturing something positive and enjoyable
- Repeating a calming phrase to yourself such as: “My child is having a hard time and needs my support. This is not an emergency. I can connect with my child and help them through this. “
- Taking a mini-break. It’s okay to step away for a minute or two if it is safe to do so. Let your child know that you’ll be back to help them soon.
- Asking for help from another supportive adult if possible.

GET CURIOUS ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S FEELINGS AND NEEDS

Pay close attention: Observe your child's verbal and nonverbal cues to understand their emotional state.

PROVIDE COMFORT AND SUPPORT:

- **Get down to your child's level:** Offer a hug, comforting words, or simply be there to listen.
- **Create emotional safety:** Do your best to be there for your child, with open, relaxed body language and a kind tone of voice.
- **Follow their lead:** Offer the type of support that helps them best in this moment.

VALIDATE THEIR FEELINGS (IF TOLERABLE TO YOUR CHILD)

Let them know that it's okay to feel what they're feeling. This helps them feel understood and accepted. Know that some kids may like a hug or silent support. Take it slow and wait until both of you are calm before teaching and /or problem solving. Set clear limits on unsafe behaviour as needed and continue to help them process their feelings.

IF NEEDED, MAKE REPAIR AND HELP THE CHILD MAKE SENSE OF WHAT HAPPENED

Make a plan for what you can both try next time. This helps them understand their feelings better and improve their communication skills.

Notice your feelings and needs. Try calming strategies.

Get curious about your child's feelings and needs.

Provide comfort and support through soothing words, listening or a hug.

When you are both calm - validate feelings, problem solve, or give child a new option.

Make repair or help the child make sense of what happened. Plan for next time.

Be patient, learning to co-regulate with your child takes time and practice. Adjust your approach based on your child's responses, changing needs and stress levels. Some children will need more support and time to recover from stress and their emotions. **Take care of yourself too so you can support them better.** Remember, it's normal for kids to struggle with emotions and need your help. Be gentle on yourself if this feels hard. **Reach out for support if you need it.** Parenting has its challenging moments, but each time you support your child's emotions, you are deepening trust and security in your relationship and building emotional regulation skills.

COREGULATION = CALM ADULT SOOTHING AND COMFORTING A DISTRESSED CHILD