

Resilient Children and Families Program

Helping Children and Families Cope through Difficult Situations Community of Practice



Importance of Co-Regulation

Co-regulation is a supportive and interactive process in which the attuned caregiver responds to the child's needs and helps the child manage their own emotions during a stressful moment. In co-regulation, the caregiver provides external support and guidance to help the child regulate their emotions and behavior. This support may involve offering comfort and reassurance, as well as modeling coping strategies and emotional regulation techniques. Through co-regulation, children learn to understand and manage their own emotions and develop self-regulation skills.

Benefits of Co-Regulation

1. Children learn to identify and regulate their emotions.
2. Secure attachment is formed between children and their caregivers.
3. Consistent co-regulation promotes healthy brain development.



How to Co-Regulate:

- **Maintain a Calm and Neutral Presence:** When a child is upset, maintaining an emotionally neutral demeanor helps the child return to a state of calmness.
- **Stay Attuned:** Pay close attention to the child's nonverbal cues, like body language and facial expressions, to understand their emotional state and respond to their needs. Children's distress can be overwhelming, and a child may feel there's no way for them to regain control. Naming the feelings can help children separate themselves from their overwhelming feelings. Also, describing how these big feelings show up in their body allows them to notice how this feeling is affecting them.
- **Provide Reassurance:** A gentle touch on the back or the holding of a child's hand during moments of distress can provide comfort and help them feel secure. Use a comforting tone of voice while offering reassurance by saying things like, "You're safe," or "I'm here to help you." Consistency in your responses also helps children learn what to expect, which can reduce anxiety and help them regulate their emotions more effectively.
- **Assist the child with finding a calming strategy:** It is important to find the best coping skill(s) for each individual child. Early childhood professionals can help children learn what

works for them by offering a variety of options and techniques. It is also helpful to practice these techniques when the child is calm and then encourage the child to use them when upset or distressed. Some examples include:

- Teach children simple breathing techniques and practice them together. You can say, “Let’s take a deep breath together,” and model slow, deep breaths.
 - Sensory experiences, such as playdough, sand trays, or water tables, can be calming for overexcited or overwhelmed children.
 - Personalized calming kits that contain items like stress balls, fidget toys, or calming jars. These kits can be used when children need to self-soothe.
- **Help the child resolve the conflict:** When the child is relatively calm, try talking about what to do now. “What would you like to play with now?” “Do you want to read a book with me?” If there’s still a conflict that needs to be resolved, use open-ended questions to try to find a solution that works. If a child gets more agitated when you suggest other activities, that’s a sign they need some more co-regulation.