

Co-regulation

Co-regulation is the process of becoming attuned, or adapting to your child, by using your own self-regulation (body language, breath, pitch and tone of voice) as an anchor to help calm your child down.

Co-regulation research has taught us that the feelings and behaviors of people who are in close proximity to us can directly impact how we feel, and how we respond to our own emotions. This is an important tool for caregivers, as this helps shape a child's emotional toolkit.

What happens in the brain when a child is dysregulated?

A child's ability to regulate their emotions increases with age and brain development, however this can fluctuate depending on a child's temperament, mood, hunger, sleepiness and/or general interest. This means we can expect tantrum behavior or dysregulation to occur in a child's early years as their brain is still developing. In fact, the brain is not fully mature until mid-twenties! A great deal of our ability to reason, think, and control impulses occurs in the child's teen years.

Your child's brain is a magnificent work in progress.



When children are having a tantrum and dysregulated, it's not because they don't want to calm down, they just can't do it on their own yet.

How does co-regulation relate to parenting?

When a parent connects with a child's nervous system in challenging moments, they are communicating safety and presence, which downregulates the child's possible feelings of fight/flight/freeze. The goal is not to stop your child's big emotions, but to connect with them in safe and manageable ways that give space for emotions to flow and pass. It is often difficult for a child to self-regulate on their own since they are still developing this part of their brain.

Co-regulation is the ability to use your own regulated nervous system to help regulate with your child.

An example of this is when a baby is born, caregivers are often encouraged to spend direct contact time with their baby to support their attachment. This is when the baby spends a lot of time on the chest of a caregiver or being rocked by a caregiver. This is co-regulation.

What can co-regulation look like?

- Using a calm, steady tone of voice
- Getting down to the child's level, providing physical and or emotional comfort
- Acknowledging and validating emotions
- Anticipating needs and responding to cues such as hunger, or sleepiness
- Responding rather than reacting
- Using warmth and acceptance, observing without judgment