

# Preschool Field Officer Service

## Integrated Child, Family and Youth Services



## Emotional Regulation

Just like walking, talking, and toilet training, regulating emotional responses is a developmental achievement that children are not born with.

Parents and teachers can have a major impact on a child's ability to regulate their emotions by:

- Providing a stable, consistent environment - setting clear limits, and helping their child know what is going to happen next by creating predictable routines. Thereby, helping him/her feel safe, secure and calm.
- Accepting the child's emotions and responses as 'real'. Children who demonstrate emotional outbursts or tantrums are not doing it to irritate you, or make your life difficult. Accepting your child's emotions and responding with patience and acceptance teaches your child to cope with their emotional responses.
- Talking about your own feelings, by using the language of emotions incidentally in everyday conversations, and interpreting others emotional responses (non-verbal); can help your child to recognise and label their emotions.
- Encourage your child to talk about their feelings. Research indicates children who use negative self-talk get angry more than those children with positive self-talk. Encourage your child to practice positive self-talk. For example "I'm disappointed I didn't win, but next time I might win", rather than "I never win, I'm hopeless at this game".
- Practice – identify typical situations which lead to emotional outbursts and problem solve how your child could respond. Teach your child to generate several solutions – but this is only possible when your child is calm, not in the middle of an outburst. Encourage your child to think of a few possible solutions, discuss the consequences.

Problem solving involves 5 steps:

- Name the problem and how your child feels
- Brainstorm Solutions – it doesn't matter if they are solutions you don't think will work – this is brainstorming only
- Evaluate the solutions – if you do that what could happen?
- Choose the solution you think is the best, and try it out
- Reflect – How did that work? If that solution didn't work, try another solution

- Teach your child 'Calm Breathing' - a technique that teaches your child how to slow down their breathing when stressed or anxious.

Start by teaching your child when they are calm and relaxed, this is a tool he/she can use anywhere at any time. Use a visual prompt to teach him/her to:

- ***Smell the chocolate cake – take a slow deep breath in, and hold for 1 or 2 seconds***
- ***Blow out the candles – exhale through the mouth – wait 2 or 3 seconds***
- ***Repeat twice more***
- ***Practice 2 or 3 times a day (practice when your child is calm, they need to be comfortable using this technique before using it in a stressful situation)***

**NOTE: Other strategies that your child can use to calm himself / herself**

- ***Tense and Relax muscles***
- ***Squeeze balls***
- ***Listening to music***
- ***Going to a quiet area***
- ***Look at a book***
- ***Punching bag***

**(Each strategy can be taught individually – your child can then choose the strategy they feel will help them at the time)**

- Help your child to learn and become aware of the stages in the build-up of an outburst. The point to intervene and use the self-talk strategy or a calming technique is not when the child is looking grouchy, sulking or grumbling.
- Encourage appropriate expression of negative feelings – teaching children to recognise and label feelings, helps them to put their feelings into words rather than respond inappropriately.
- Provide positive reinforcement for your child's efforts, and encourage him/her to practice regularly; thereby making it easier for him/her to put the strategy in place when he/she is stressed, angry or anxious.

### **Additional Reading**

- The Raising Children Network - [http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/preschooler\\_emotions\\_play\\_ideas.html/context/566](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/preschooler_emotions_play_ideas.html/context/566)
- Kids Matter – Australian Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative - <https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/early-childhood/resources-support-childrens-mental-health/about-emotions/self-regulation>
- *Self-regulation in Early Childhood* : Paperback : Guilford Publications : 9781572307520 : 31 Jan 2002

<https://www.cdd.unm.edu/ecspd/resources/pdfs/QualityChildcare/Resource%20Guide/SelfRegulationTipsandStrategies.pdf>