

Top 7 Regulation Strategies

Being able to regulate our emotions with our caregivers and by ourselves, is a part of growing up and developing new skills. Understanding emotions, experiencing them and working through them can be challenging and often leave our children, and ourselves as caregivers, feeling exhausted, not good enough and helpless. As Occupational Therapists a part of our job is to teach our children and their parents how to work through a range of emotions and feelings on a daily basis.

Below are 7 top strategies that we implement in our therapy intervention sessions to make each day easier for your whole family.

1. **Holding Space:** This means being present emotionally, physically, and mentally for your children when they are experiencing feelings. It is free of judgment and making a decision to take the time to put aside your feelings, agenda and to do lists, to support them in this moment.
2. **Acknowledge and Narrate:** If your child is experiencing an emotion, acknowledging and narrating what happened and what they are feeling will help your child to know that you understand what they are feeling and together can share the emotion, help work through it and come out the other time.
3. **Deep Pressure Hugs (proprioception):** Providing deep pressure through hugs, squishes or laying down can support the calming of the body. This is due to the touch connection and safety when being held as well as the sensation that is found to be calming.
4. **Flexion /Fetal / in a ball position:** When we experience deep emotions, such as frustration and anger, our body's become very stiff and long (known as extension), we also can throw ourselves backwards or on the floor. When this happens we are reactivating our emotions and feelings to continue for a longer period of time. By wrapping our body's into a fetal or a ball position, or for younger children holding them in a baby's cradle position in our arms (with our arms around their necks to not allow it to throw backwards), it can help calm, allow deep breathing and ability to reset our body.

5. **Breathing/ Respiration:** When experiencing our emotions, our heart rate increases, our breathing is rapid and we are unaware this is occurring. Focus on matching your breathing with your child, including the fast paced and intensity, then over time slowly take deeper breaths in and out, allowing your child to connect and start to regulate with your breath so it is in sync and slowly calms. Additional blowing bubbles or different breathing activities once out of their emotions can further help them to remain calm and regulated.
6. **Ice Chips/ Cold Water / Ice Packs:** Our body overheats when we experience emotions internally. We may show this through our body with increased sweating or redness in the face or some actively seek out cold liquids including ice chips or ice blocks. By providing ice chips to chew on, cold water or ice blocks, it can help our children to regulate their internal body temperature. Placing cold packs or a cold washer on the back of neck, wrists or different body parts will help reset the nervous system.
7. **Positive Supportive Phrases:** When our children experience emotions our cognition shuts down and our body takes over. This can be extremely scary for our children as they don't know what they are doing at the time, and cannot control it. At this moment, they are not registering what we say to them, so limited words and consistent phrases are very important at this time. Once the body calms down and engages again, more language can be added slowly. Choose your own phrases, here are some examples, but not limited to;
 - "You are safe"
 - "You are so brave"
 - "Caregiver loves you"