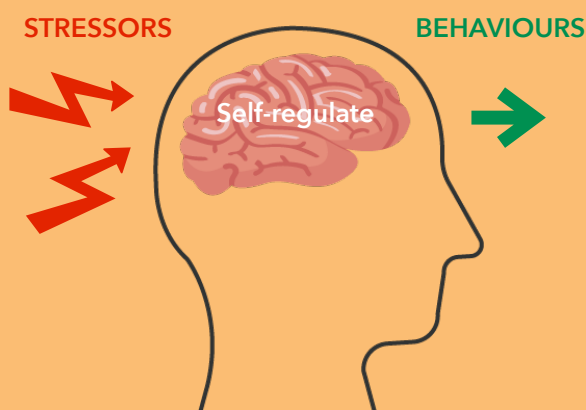


Your Guide To *Self-Regulation*

Early childhood experts are increasingly recognising the role that self-regulation plays in a child's academic learning, development, interpersonal relationships with friends and family, and participation in everyday activities. In this guide, **Chiang Jing Jing**, Senior Occupational Therapist at the Child Development Unit, National University Hospital shares what self-regulation is and how parents can help a child develop self-regulation skills.



What is self-regulation?

It refers to an individual's ability to identify stressors in his/her environment, and adjust his/her thoughts and behaviours accordingly to cope with these stressors. A child who is able to self-regulate can remain calm, sit still, stay focused, follow instructions and minimise disruptive behaviours even if he/she is upset or under pressure.

What are the types of stressors?

All behaviour is communication. When your child exhibits 'poor' behaviour, it could be that he/she is unable to cope with stressors from the environment, or demands from tasks. Try identifying the possible stressors your child is experiencing. While they differ from child to child, stressors include:

Physiological

(Hungry, sick, overtired, bored, no time to relax)

Distracting and overly stimulating environment

(Noise, smell, mess)

Feeling overwhelmed

(Not knowing how to do the assigned task, too many enrichment lessons)

Relationships

(Being bullied, separation anxiety, missing time spent with parents)

External Factors

(End of year exams, financial difficulties, loss of a loved one)



How can I build my child's self-regulation skills?

Children are not born with these skills. They need to be taught and given opportunities to practise self-regulation. This requires the support of adults they trust; adults who can soothe and guide them to think rationally, and learn how to manage stress in tough situations. This process is called **co-regulation**. Parents need to tune in and respond to their child's needs in a consistent and sensitive manner. This supportive process between caring adults and children fosters self-regulation. Over time, the child will learn to self-regulate in a more sophisticated and mature manner.

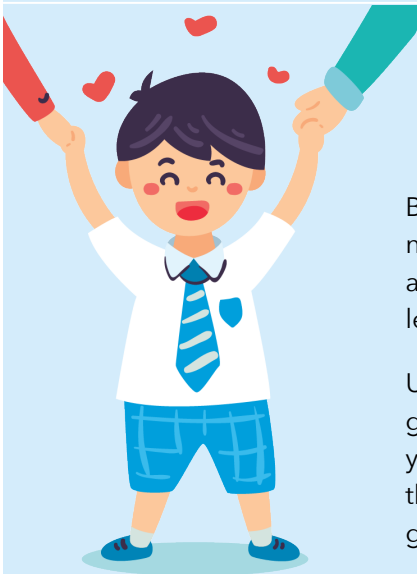
Tips for Co-Regulation

1

Build positive parent-child relationships

Be warm and responsive to your child's needs. He/she needs to feel safe, secure and supported to practise new skills and learn from mistakes.

Using discipline or punishment to teach good behaviour is a no-no as it may cause your child to model you. They may learn that they have to shout or hit someone to get the person's attention.



2

Establish routines

Consistent and predictable routines can help a child feel safe and secure too. Important routines include meal times, bed times, rest times, play times and physical activities.



3

Structure the environment

The development of self-regulation is dependent on predictable, responsive and supportive environments.

Create an environment that is calm, and physically and emotionally safe for children to explore and learn.



5

Validate your child's feelings

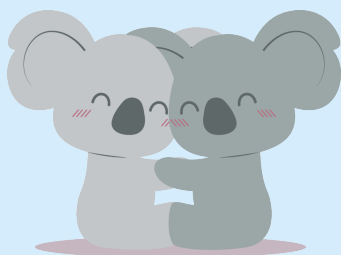
Children can feel misunderstood when getting into trouble for 'bad behaviours'. Even if you do not agree with their behaviours, validate their feelings so they feel understood (e.g. "I can tell you are angry because..."). This makes way for reflective problem-solving.

4

Soothe your child

Help your child to calm down before teaching or reasoning with him/her. Try using a calming voice, firm hugs, gentle rocking and/or supportive silence.

This teaches a young child how to manage overwhelming emotional arousal.



6

Normalise big feelings

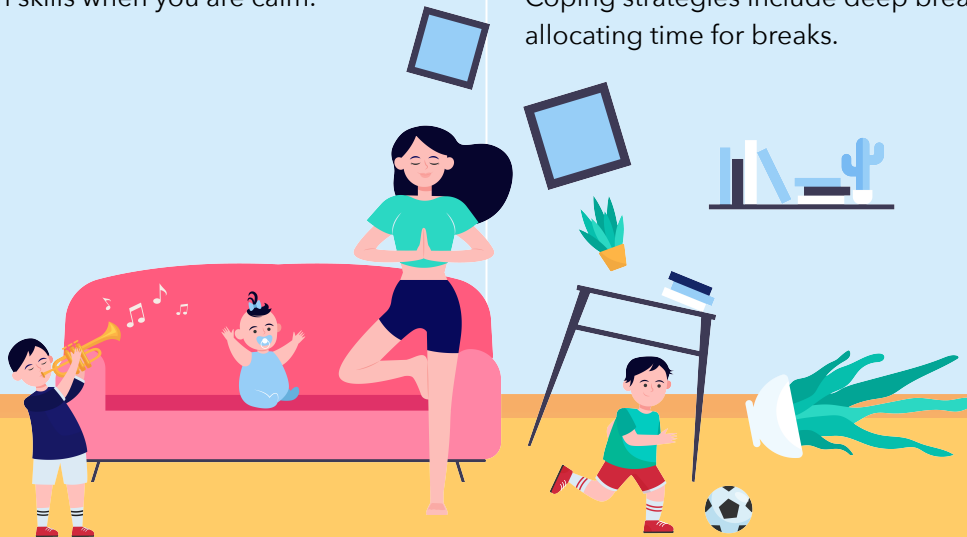
When having a bad day, share how you feel. It is important that your child knows he/she is not alone and others experience big feelings from time to time too (e.g. feeling anxious or out of control).



7

Build your own self-regulation skills

Children are sensitive to others' emotions and behaviours. It is easier to soothe and teach self-regulation skills when you are calm.



8

Model positive coping strategies

Your child will learn to manage his/her behaviour better when shown how to rather than being told. Coping strategies include deep breathing and allocating time for breaks.

9

Make time for frequent check-ins

Talk to your child about how they are feeling and the challenges they are experiencing especially when he/she is going through big transitions (e.g. changes in school).



For information on NUH Child Development Unit, visit: <https://www.nuh.com/cdu>

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Information is correct at time of printing (Sept 2020) and subject to revision without prior notice.

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