



Helping Kids Cope with their Emotions

What is Emotional Self-Regulation?

“When little people are overwhelmed by big emotions, it is our job to share our calm, not join their chaos.”

- L.R. Knost

Emotional self-regulation is understanding one’s own emotions and using effective strategies to manage these emotions in a healthy way. Children may have temper tantrums to get attention, get their way, or get things that they want. Sometimes, children become very upset when routines change suddenly or when they are anxious. These tantrums may be severe, even in mildly challenging situations. “Meltdowns” can happen so frequently that it is difficult for the child to participate in daily activities. These outbursts pose a parenting challenge– how does one manage them or even prevent them occurring? It's not always easy to calm a child, but there are techniques that can often be successful.

1. Remain calm. If you get very nervous and agitated, that will make the tantrum or meltdown worse.
2. Address sensory needs immediately. If your child is sensitive to noise/sounds or bright lights– use sensory calming devices such as headphones or sunglasses to minimize sounds or light. Move him/her to a quiet area, as soon as possible.
3. Validate that your child is upset. Tell them, “I see that you are upset.” in a calm voice.
4. Suggest a calming strategy. Choose a calming strategy that your child can complete easily

THE SUPERKIDS MANIFESTO

I AM *unique*. I EMBRACE MY DIFFERENCES AND LET THEM *shine*.

I AM **ADVENTUROUS**. I *take risks* AND *push myself* TO TRY THE IMPOSSIBLE.

I AM *spirited*. I USE MY EMOTIONS AND ENERGY TO *change the world*.

I AM A SUPERKID.

I AM *creative*. I AM CONSTANTLY INVENTING, *creating* AND DREAMING OF THE UNKNOWN.

I AM *fierce*. I AM TOUGH AND TAKE A STAND FOR WHAT I *believe* IN.

FROM THIS DAY FORWARD, I WILL BE KNOWN AS A **SUPERKID**.

I AM NOT **PICKY**, ANXIOUS, **DIFFICULT**, **MESSY**, **STRONG-WILLED**. I AM MISUNDERSTOOD.

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6. Model this strategy and then do it along with your child. Repeat one or more strategies until your child is able to talk and breathe normally.
7. Provide a “safe area” for calming down. This area could be a corner of the couch, a corner of a room, or a tent set up in your in a quiet area. Keep soft, heavy blankets nearby for your child to cuddle in and relax.
8. Praise your child. Whenever they communicate their feelings with you, participate in a calming strategy, or use a “safe area” to calm– let them know they made a good choice.
9. Help your child reflect on their feelings and plan out what they can do differently the next time they are upset.

Calming Strategy Tips to Use at Home

- ◆ One way parents or caregivers can help children when they feel anxious or stressed is to teach calming strategies. Some examples are:
 1. *Counting*– count out-loud to 10.
 2. *Belly Breathing*– place hands on belly and breathing deeply to see hands rise.
 3. *Tracing Shapes*—draw out or trace shapes while using deep breathing techniques.
- ◆ Practice calming strategies daily with your child. Model these strategies when you are upset.
- ◆ When your child is upset, tell them they are safe and you are here to help.
- ◆ Acknowledge your child’s feelings without judgement.
- ◆ Bring focus on the current moment to help them become aware of emotional state.
- ◆ Do not offer solutions or try to fix the problem.
- ◆ Let your child talk about their fears or worries.
- ◆ Help your child describe their worry– draw it out on paper.
- ◆ Use an emotions chart to help your child describe their feelings.
- ◆ Take a break from a stressful task to complete an calming activity.
- ◆ Give your child a chance to “change the ending” the next time they are upset. Help them choose a new ending.
- ◆ Use social stories to help your child learn about how to change their response to a stressful situation.
- ◆ Help your child learn about things that worry them. Read a book or watch a video about these topics together.

Additional Resources

- <https://www.bcps.org/system/coronavirus/>
- https://scs.bcps.org/departments/social_emotional_support
- <https://copingskillsforkids.com/blog/using-shapes-to-teach-deep-breathing>
- <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/cc09/046ff24a9b46a8f8d789f28e8d74bf07656a.pdf>
- <https://copingskillsforkids.com/calming-anxiety>
- <https://www.kickboardforschools.com/blog/post/self-regulation-strategies-to-improve-student-classroom-behavior>
- <https://www.totalspectrumcare.com/5-effective-strategies-for-calming-tantrums-and-meltdowns/>
- <https://www.appliedbehavioranalysisprograms.com/lists/5-easy-to-implement-behavior-strategies-for-children-with-autism/>
- https://www.google.com/search?q=elmo+belly+breathing&rlz=1C1GCEB_enUS880US880&oq=elmo+be&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j0i7.4564j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

