

Information & Ideas for Adults Helping a Child who Experiences Emotional Dysregulation

There is a lot of information online, and a lot here too, and that can feel overwhelming. It may be a good idea to go through some of these and choose a few that you will start with/ give a go.

The three Rs strategy is a useful one to remember when a child is feeling a big emotion: **Regulate, Relate, Reason**

It is important to **help a child to regulate**, before trying to have a rational conversation. Below are some strategies that may be useful to help regulate and engage the thinking brain:

- **Breathing strategies** (*practice when not anxious e.g.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2iF7ICevkM>)
- **Tense muscles then relax.**
- **Grounding techniques e.g.,** engage the senses (see image below), name things of a given colour, do some simple maths. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lp_LCrZRINE
- **Any movement** – throwing, jumping, running, star jumps, resistance work, stomping, scrunching.
- **Sensory based activities**, e.g., music, a nice smell, fidget toys, glitter jar.

Mindfulness

5 things you can see 

4 things you can hear 

3 things you can touch 

2 things you can smell or like the smell of 

1 slow deep breath which you can focus on

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Sit or stand

Tense – hold (5 secs) – Release

Toes
Calves
Thighs
Stomach
Fingers
Arms
Shoulders
Jaw
Eyes

Understanding dysregulation: How to Support a Highly Emotional Child

Dysregulation occurs when the brain responds to sensory input in a manner that triggers the alarm state.

When a child is dysregulated, it is harder to listen, comprehend, and cope.

Remember the Three "R"s

Regulate
focus on soothing your child. Make them feel calm, safe, and loved.

Relate
Validate their feelings with your words and tone of voice. "I know you're upset right now." "This is very hard". Focus on connecting with your child.

Reason
Once your child is calm, now it is time to talk about alternatives to behaviors while reinforcing limits you set before. You can reassure them you love them but that the behavior they're exhibiting is not ok.

Until a child is regulated, they are unlikely to related to you (feel connected & comfortable). And until a child is related, they are unlikely to have the mental capacity to reason with you.

<http://www.thinkkids.org/regulate-relate-reason/> <https://fessicalangtherapy.com/blog/regulate-relate-reason-brain-state/>

SQUARE BREATHING

1 2 3 4
breathe in for 4 seconds

4 3 2 1
breathe out for 4 seconds

hold for 4 seconds

Follow something square with your eyes whilst breathing in this pattern.

Understanding big emotions:

This short video can help older children (and adults) to understand big emotions it offers an insight into the brain; how the emotional brain hijacks our thinking brain. The video talks about anger, but a similar principle applies to other big emotions such as fear or worry. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p011sqwv>

Some informative videos or articles:

- [Emotional Health for you and your family webinar](#) – with Natalie Hunt; forward to 4mins (30mins)
- Zones of Regulation 15mins video presentation- M. Agudelo <https://www.bensoncofeprimary.org.uk/supporting-children/>
- CAMHS understanding and coping with Anxiety: <https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/camhs/wellbeing/anxiety/>
- [ANXIETY | Top phrases for calming anxious children - Bing video - Pooky Knightsmith](#)
- Family Lives, anxiety in young children: <https://www.familylives.org.uk/advice/your-family/wellbeing/dealing-with-anxiety-in-young-children/>

Some useful books:

- Helping Your Child with Fears and Worries 2nd Edition: A self-help guide for parents
- The Big Bag of Worries
- HAPPY CONFIDENT ME Life Skills Journal: developing children's self-esteem, optimism, resilience & mindfulness through 60 fun and engaging activities