

Supporting Children with Emotional Regulation

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Emotional Well-being

At primary school age, it is likely that a child's thoughts and emotions relating to worries are much better explained by:

- Reasonable and expected responses to the environment or event
- Their developmental stage
- Emotional regulation
- In certain cases, a neurodevelopmental disorder e.g. ASD/ADHD

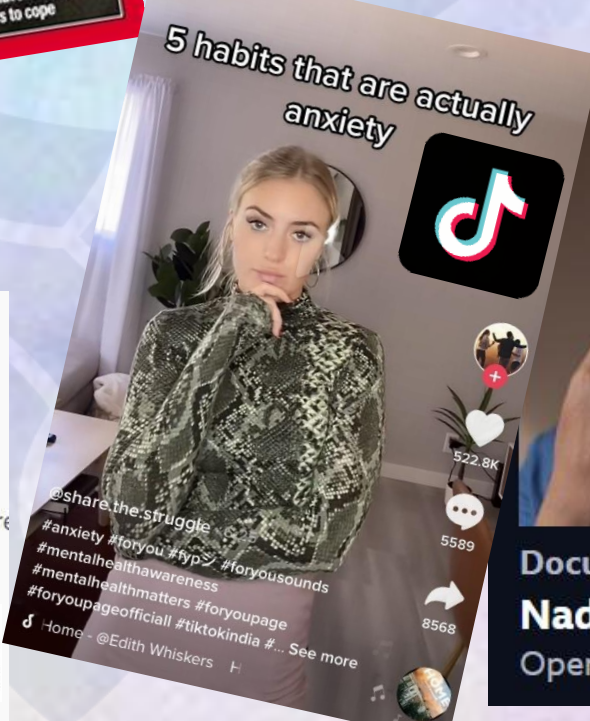


www.leamingtonobserver.co.uk

Social media adding to mental health woes

SOCIAL media is adding to a rise in mental health issues claims a south Warwickshire doctor.
Dr Jeff Foster says mental health issues were being exacerbated by the use of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, and the constant desire to "keep up with the Joneses" in a virtual world where we are told you if you have talent and you really want it, you should always be successful and you should always be happy. It's as if everyone is being told they can win the X-Factor, said Dr Foster of Leamington-based TFJ Services. "We can be made much better at seeing people's needs and helping them."

He said: "There are many studies showing a link between the use of social media and other online resources and people's mental health. I think it still an area for more research as the links are not fully understood as many positive aspects are not being highlighted. I recognise the many negative aspects of social media, but we do see examples of where it impacts negatively on the lives of people accessing our services and their families."
Dr Bernadka Dulicka, from the College of Psychiatrists, told us it is a case of striking a balance.
He said: "I am sure that social media plays a role in the pressure for young people to be online 24/7 and to keep up with their social life, or they will be excluded from their peer group and socially excluded. There's a role in unhappiness, particularly for young people, particularly those who are left out and social media also has its benefits, particularly in its ability to provide young people with a platform from which they can connect with networks and keep connected. We need to teach children how to use all aspects of social media - the good and bad - to prepare them for the digitalised world."



“Challenging the medicalisation of well-being needs”

I’m depressed.

I’m a bit OCD about it.

I have anger issues.

My anxiety is playing up.

I’m an insomniac.

“Challenging the medicalisation of well-being needs”

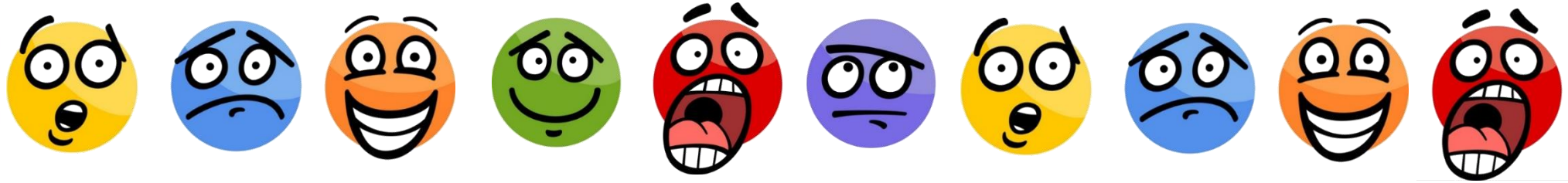
I’m feeling a bit sad.

I have strong feelings about this.

I have lots of worries.

I’m not sure how I feel today.

I’m a bit overwhelmed by some big emotions.

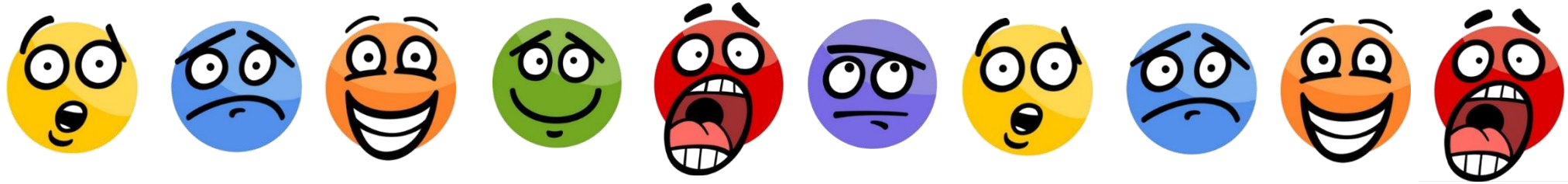


Emotional Regulation

The ability to exert control over one's own emotional state.

This may involve processes such as rethinking a challenging situation to reduce anger or anxiety, focusing on reasons to remain calm or be happy and containing our emotions until a more appropriate time.



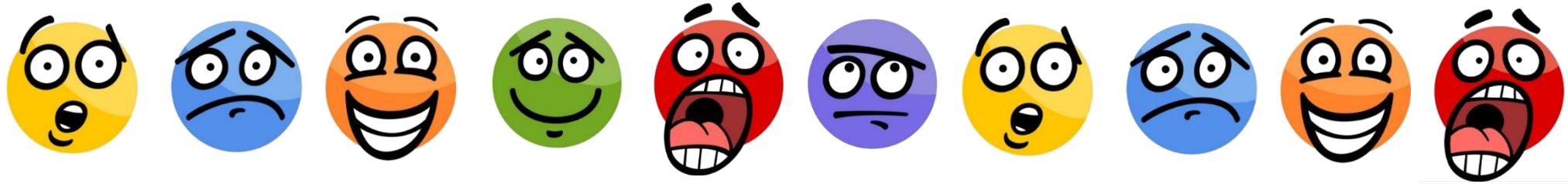


Emotional Regulation

Children will develop the ability to emotionally regulate at different stages. This ability continues developing well into adulthood.

A child cannot usually emotionally regulate to any great effect until **at least** the age of 8.

Without this ability being fully developed, children often display greater conflict, are very 'emotion driven', can be unpredictable and switch quickly between emotions.



Emotional Regulation

We need to learn and practice ways to regulate our emotions.

For example, when a child spills their drink they may be distraught, but as they grow up they no longer become upset by this and instead learn to pick up the cup, clean up the mess and get a new drink.

We are all different so some people find it easier than others to regulate their emotions. There are times we all struggle to manage our emotions!

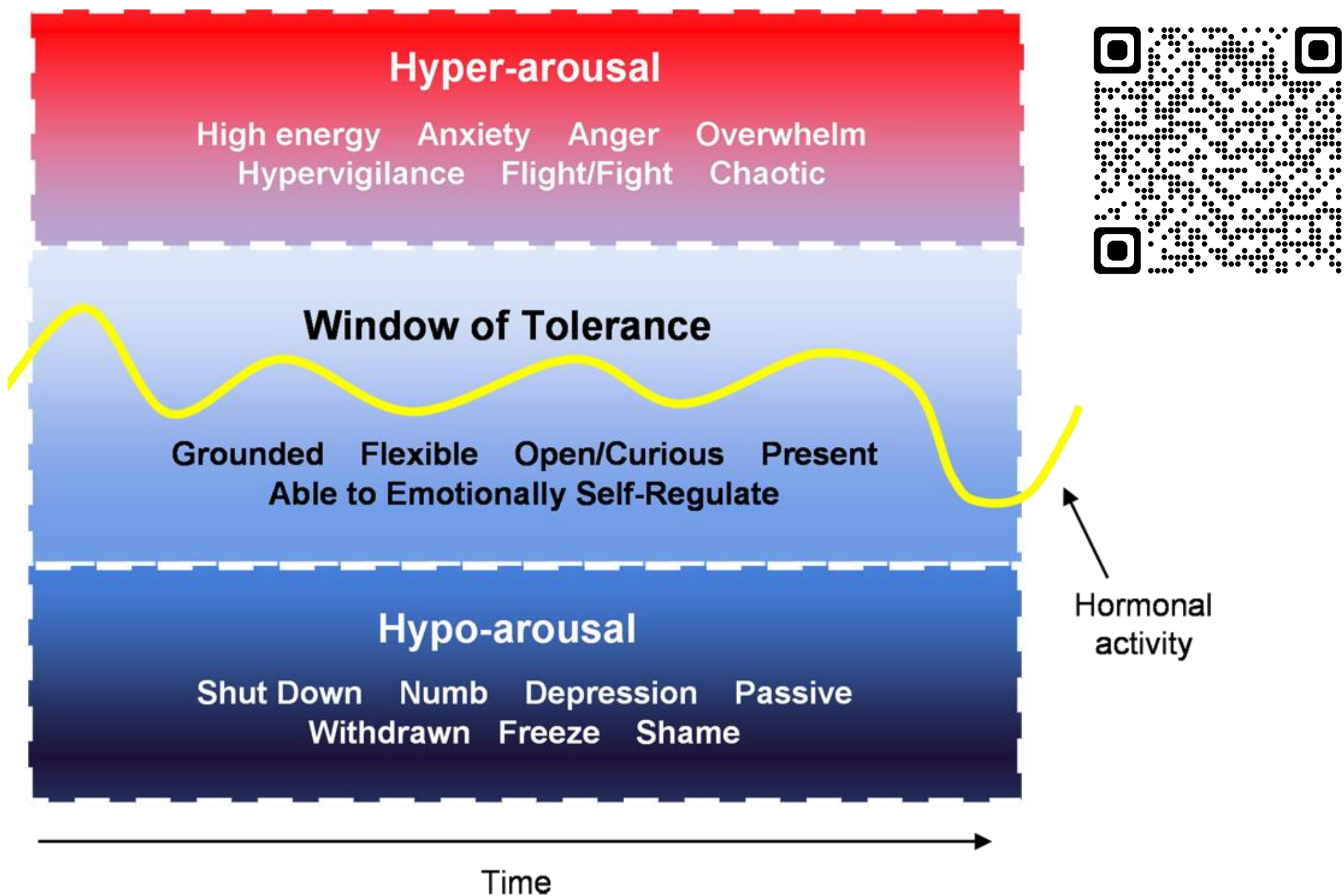
Emotional Regulation Window of Tolerance



Everyone has an emotional cup. When we wake up, most of our cups already have something in them.

Throughout the day, emotions, events, tasks and physical need fill our cup. For some children this happens slowly, for others seemingly 'simple' events can cause the cup to fill up quickly.

Eventually the cup will overflow if we do not do things to empty our cup along the way.



Emotional Regulation Window of Tolerance

What does this look like?

Children working within their brain's window of tolerance show good, age-appropriate self-control, are engaged, can problem solve, respond to instructions and appear calm.

When a child is above their window of tolerance they may appear agitated, conflict often arises, they may disengage, seem anxious, distressed or angry. They can no longer effectively process information.

When a child is below their window of tolerance they may disengage, refuse to respond or move, seem sleepy, not respond verbally or seem to 'shut down'.

A Physical Response

Fight, flight and freeze is very visceral and can be overwhelming and confusing for children.

Headaches

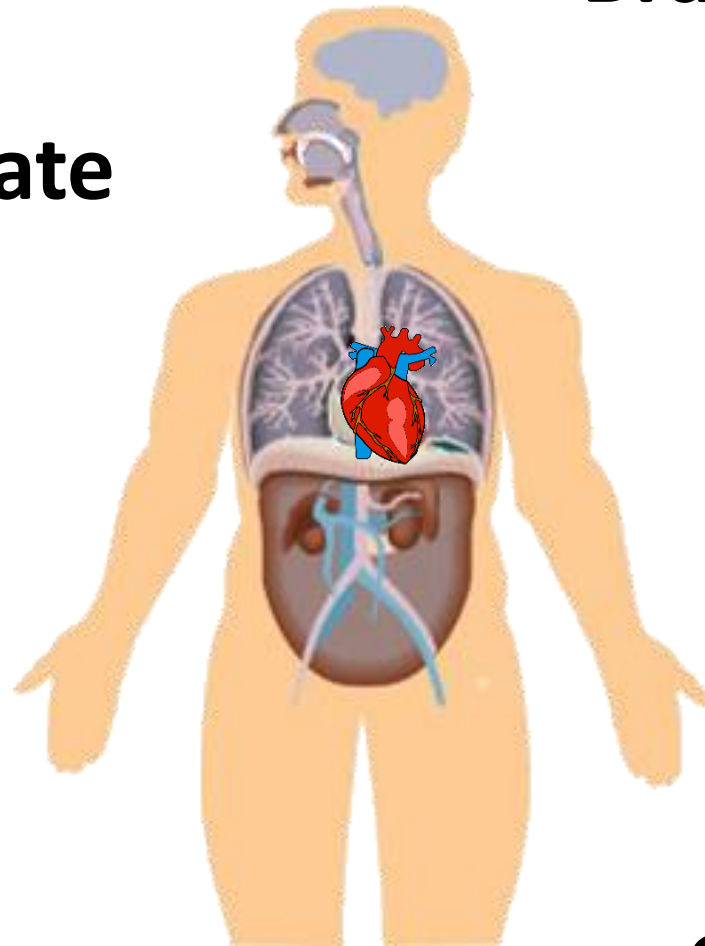
Increased heart rate

Tense muscles

Blurred vision

Fast breathing

Sweating



Brain fog

Tense muscles

Stomach ache

Sickness

Shaking

Redness

Cold hands

Fight, Flight or Freeze

This is an innate response that is triggered by acute stress.

The amygdala sends signals to the nervous system and triggers all of the physical responses that we have discussed.



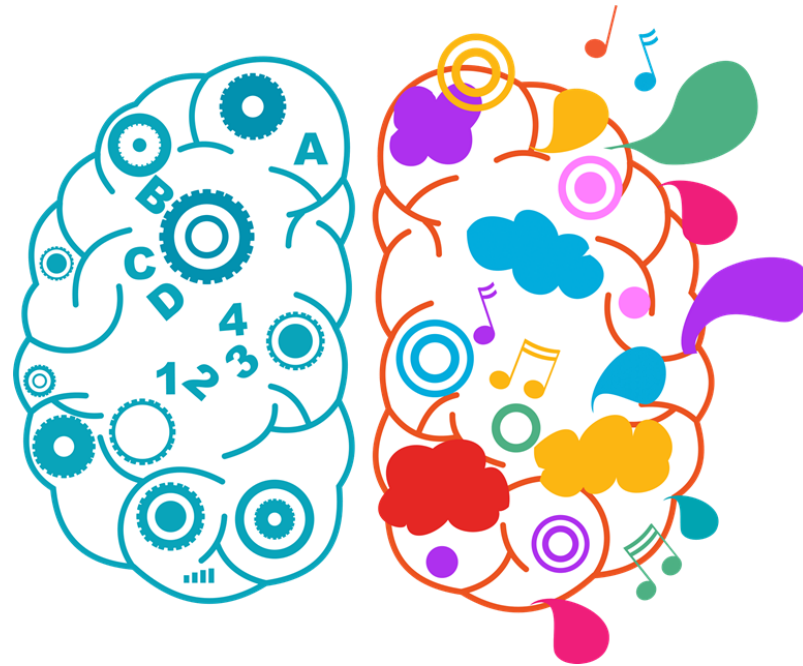
The body will return to a state of rest within 20-30 minutes. The body cannot maintain this level of intense response for a significant period of time.

“Acute stress” can be being asked to share, bedtime, change, not having cake for breakfast...
It’s all about **perception**.

Thinking System

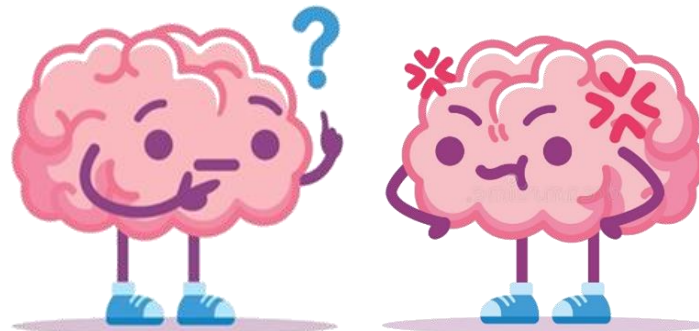
Your thinking system is clever and really takes time to think about how to react and behave.

This is in charge of language, decision making and problem solving.



Emotional System

Your emotional system is left over from prehistoric times and often does not stop to think. It can make you behave suddenly – which we need sometimes! This controls fight, flight or freeze.



Emotions and the Body

Our ultimate goal is to control our emotions more than they control us.

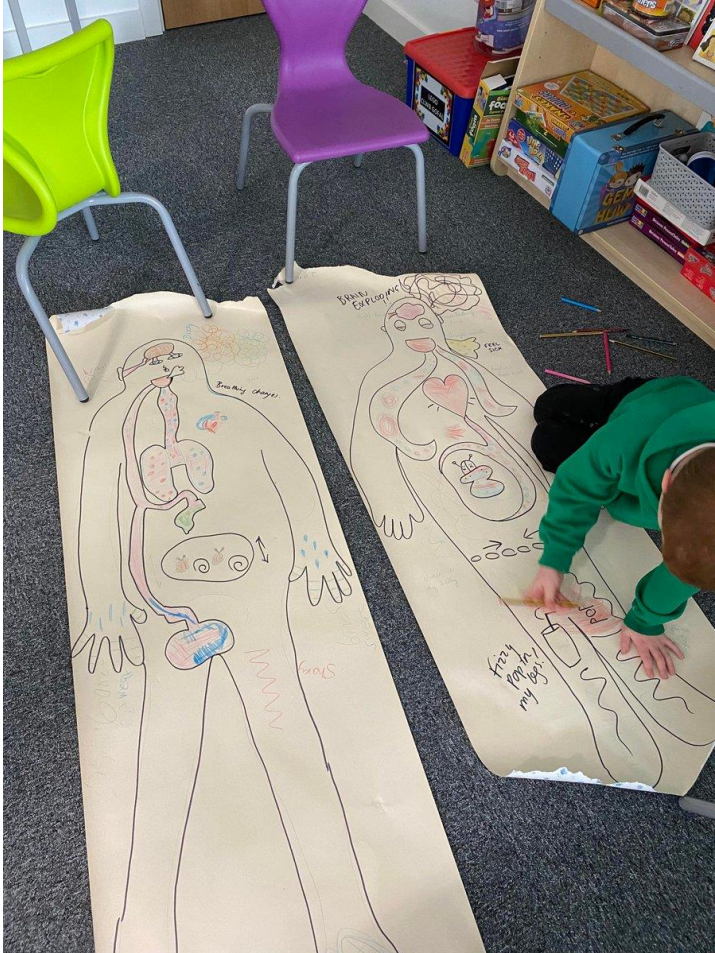
When we experience intense emotions – *both positive and negative* – our body sends us signals and prepares to respond.



The first step of **emotional regulation** is noticing these sensations within our body and responding in a way that manages these sensations.

Emotions and the Body

We need to try to *feel* our **feelings** – literally.



Sometimes, the **thoughts** and **actions** that come along with emotions mean that we don't notice what is happening in our body.

If we notice the early signs, we can do things that **stop becoming overwhelmed** by them or **acting impulsively**.

Emotion Check-in

WORRIED

SURPRISED

CALM

SCARED

EMBARRASSED

SAD

HAPPY

CONFUSED

ANGRY

What Zone Are You In?			
Blue	Green	Yellow	Red
Sick Sad Tired Bored Moving Slowly	Happy Calm Feeling Okay Focused Ready to Learn	Frustrated Worried Silly/Wiggly Excited Loss of Some Control	Mad/Angry Mean Yelling/Hitting Disgusted Out of Control

How Are You Feeling Today?

What colour is your feeling?

How BIG is your feeling?

Where do you feel this colour in your body?

Does it feel as BIG as a mountain?

Or does it feel middle-sized... like the size of a chair?

Or as small as a button?

If you could touch your feeling, how might it feel?

wibbly wobbly

huggy

flat

prickly

soft

hard

twisty

What else would you like to say about your feeling?

How are you feeling?

Happy

Excited

Loved

Calm

Okay

Confused

Amokous

Sad

Angry

My Insights | Mood Journal

How are you feeling today?

1

2

3

4

calm
relaxed
happy
peaceful
positive

annoyed
upset
sad
frustrated
angry

unsure
bored
confused
unusual
tired

nervous
worried
anxious
sick
grumpy

The Zones of Regulation

What Zone Are You In?

Blue	Green	Yellow	Red
			
Sick Sad Tired Bored Moving Slowly	Happy Calm Feeling Okay Focused Ready to Learn	Frustrated Worried Silly/Wiggly Excited Loss of Some Control	Mad/Angry Mean Yelling/Hitting Disgusted Out of Control

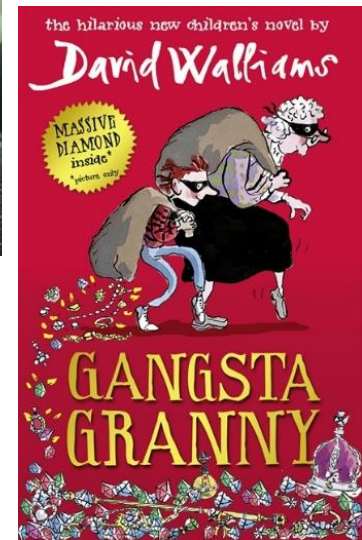
Normalising Emotions

Opportunities for conversations about emotions

Which **emotion** do you think the person is experiencing?



Chat about **emotions** that book and TV characters feel



Name it to Tame it

Young children feel strong emotions and struggle to express this with words. We can support them by naming the emotion they're feeling.

'It sounds like you are feeling angry about...'

'I imagine that you're feeling annoyed...'

'I wonder if you're angry because...'

'I can see that this is making you feel really frustrated...'

We can walk beside them through these feelings – acknowledging and normalising all emotions.

Reflecting on that fact that we as adults often need this before any advice or problem solving.

Validation

To support children with their emotions you can:

- Talk about the emotions they are feeling, actively listening to what they say.
- Label the emotions that they feel.
- Respect, accept and empathise with how they are feeling.
- Talking calmly about the situations that have sparked the emotions.
- Talking about goals and strategies for managing in these emotions, by scaffolding and joint problem solving.

“Proposing solutions before empathising is

like trying to build the frame of a house before you lay a firm foundation.” - Gottman

Validation

Young children can be unpredictable, irrational and dramatic, but it does not mean that their feelings aren't valid.

Seemingly minor issues can become all consuming for a child and prevent them from moving on and focusing on a different task/situation.

Don't be silly now.

Just forget about it.

Come on, forget about it.

It's nothing you'll be fine.

You look upset, shall we chat about it?

That must be hard for you.

I can understand why you'd be disappointed.

De-escalation

The ultimate goal of any de-escalation method is to bring your child **'down' from their heightened fight, flight or freeze response.**

Children lose rational thought, morality, fear of consequence and conscious control over their behaviour!

Until this is achieved, there is **no point** trying to establish consequences, explore emotions, repair relationships... anything!
Their brain cannot process information in this state.

We need to support children to **take control over their body** and return to a physical state where they can **engage with you and the situation.**



De-escalation

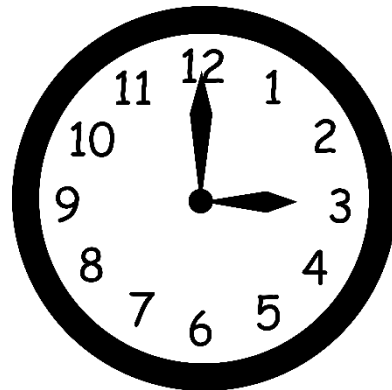
If your child is old enough, simply **giving them space** for their body to naturally return to a calm state is often the best method to de-escalate any situation!



Even if they need to have consequences for their behaviour, they will much better understand this after they have had time to cool off.

You can even tell them what time you will be back to discuss it.

*This gives you time
to cool off too!*



De-escalation

Language – calm, clear and concise

Try to **keep your voice quiet**. Try your best not to sound panicked, urgent or angry with the child when they are in a heightened state of arousal.

Speak in a **measured and slow manner** using as **few words** as possible. If your child has done something very serious, try to use **tone** rather than volume or complex sentences.

De-escalation Breathing



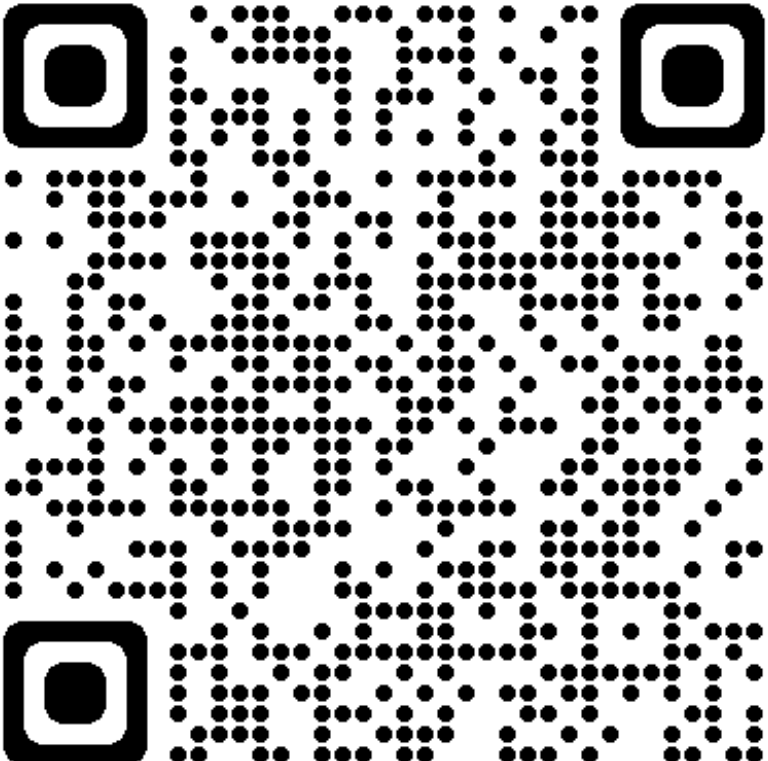
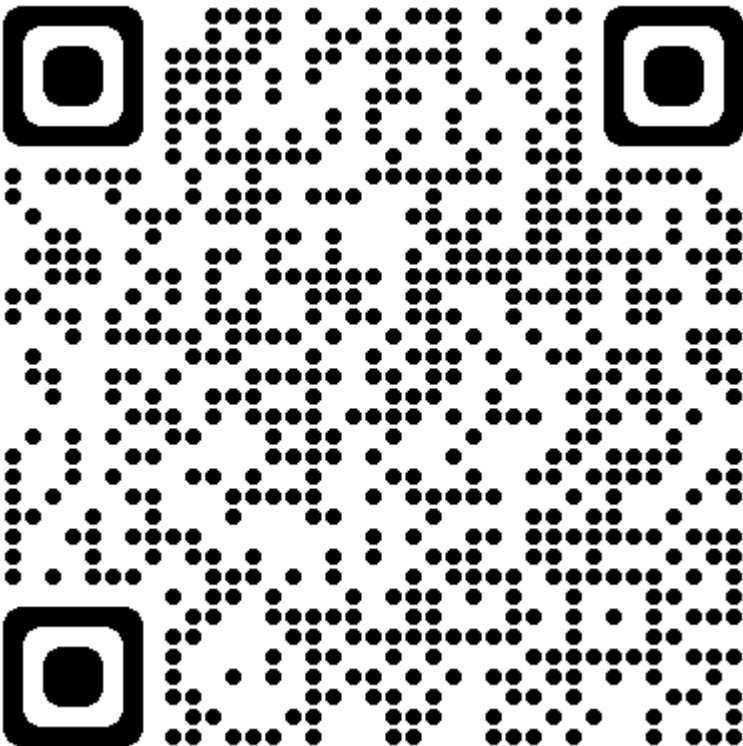
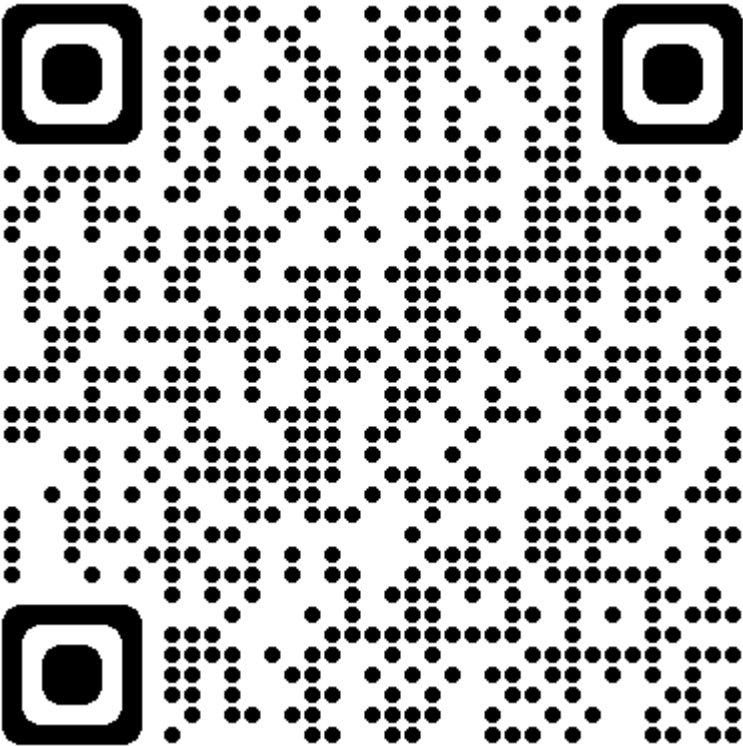
[#supersoulsunday](#) [#OWNTV](#) [#Oprahwinfrey](#)

What Children Can Teach Us About Dealing with Anger | SuperSoul Sunday |

Managing Bodily Sensations



Breathing – under 11s



Cake and Candle Breathing

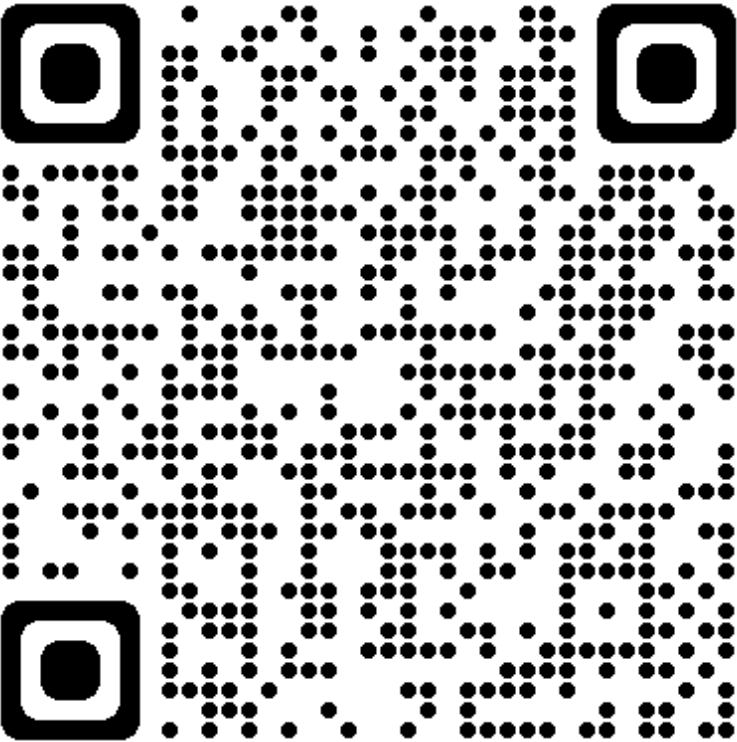
Square Breathing

4-7-8 Breathing

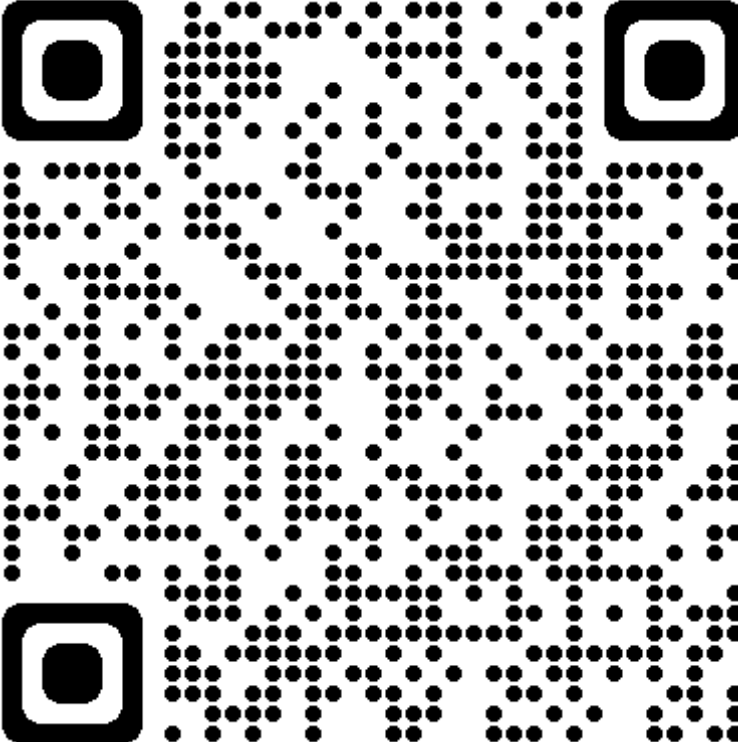
Managing Bodily Sensations



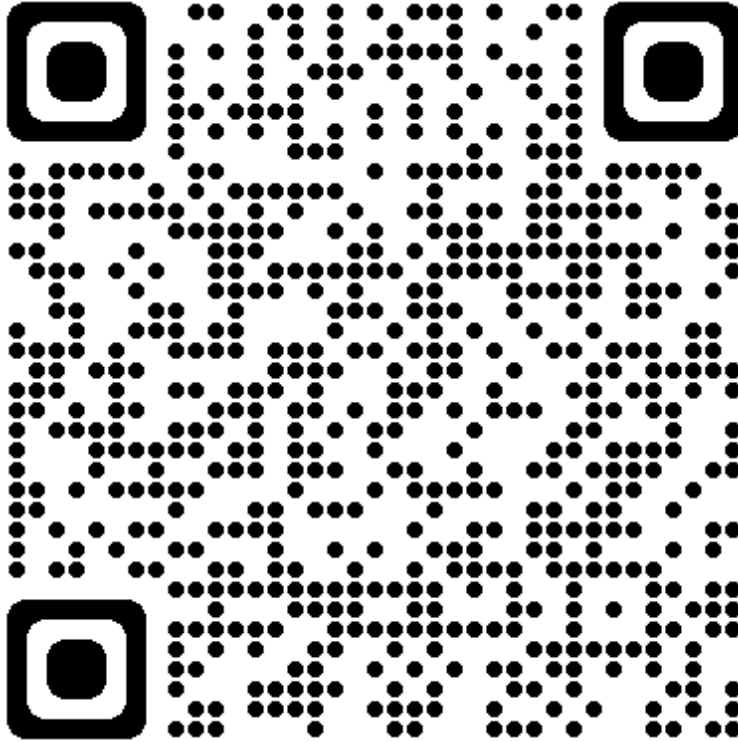
Breathing – Over 11s



5-4-3-2-1 Method



Square Breathing



4-7-8 Breathing

De-escalation Calm Down Steps

5 Senses Grounding Tool

Name:



5 things you can see



4 things you can feel



3 things you can hear



2 things you can smell



1 thing you can taste

Rest and Relax

Sit on the floor, close your eyes and cross your legs.

Feel your whole body relax.

Breathe in and out slowly.

Notice the sounds around you.

Listen to your breathing.

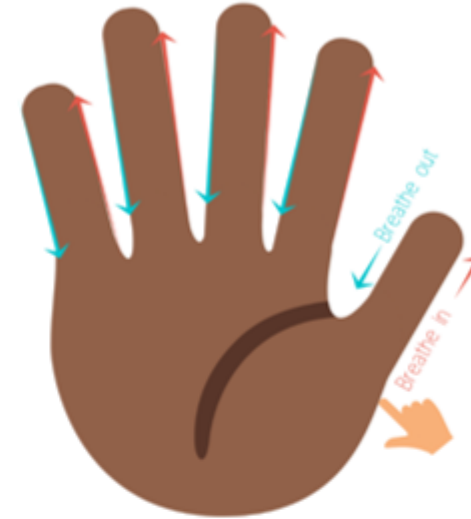
Feel your body on the floor.

Count to 30 slowly in your mind.



Open your eyes when you feel calm.

5 Finger Breathing



Wash it Away

Take some cold water and splash it over your face.

Now do the same with warm water.

Finish by splashing cold water again.



Stretch to the Sky

As you take a deep breath in, stretch up as high as you can.

Now breath out and bring your arms back down to your side.



Repeat 5 times

Balloon Belly Breathing



Inhale Fully

Place your Hands on your Belly.
Inhale and Blow Up your Balloon.
Feel your Belly and Lungs Expand.



Exhale Fully

Blow Out all of the Air in your Belly and Lungs.
Feel Your Balloon Deflate.
Notice how you Feel.

De-escalation Calm Down Steps

Spiral Swirling

Take your finger and slowly follow the swirl to the middle and out again 5 times.



Mind Garden

Close your eyes and imagine a beautiful garden. Walk around it. What is there? What can you hear? What colour are the flowers? **Make the garden yours by adding things that you like.** Picture yourself here until your body relaxes.



Cake and Candle Breathing

Face your palms towards you. Imagine you have a tasty cake in one hand and a candle in the other. Take a breath in and smell the cake. Now breathe out and blow out the candle.



Category Quiz

Choose a category and think of 3 names or items for it.

Films



Cereal



City



Books



Colour



Fruit



Vegetables



Sports



T.V Show



Name It

Spell out your name. Now think of something that begins with each letter of your name.

N

Netflix

NETFLIX

A

Apple



M

Mouse



E

Electricity



Still as a Statue

Lie down somewhere comfy. Breathe in and out slowly. **Make your body as still as you can.** Count to ten...

Start to move your body by wiggling your toes. Then move your ankles. Wiggle your legs. Move up your body moving each part at a time.

When you get to your head, roll it side to side gently.

Now gently sit up.



De-escalation Progressive Muscle Relaxation

A GUIDE TO PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

01 Find a quiet environment where you can get into a relaxed position either sitting or lying down. If you have any injuries, consult your doctor before engaging in this process.

02 You will slowly be working through major muscle groups, tensing and relaxing them one by one. You will learn to identify tension in your body/muscles and release it to help you relax.

03 Begin by getting your breathing into a natural soothing rhythm. Take a deep breath in through your nose and hold it for a couple of seconds. Now breathe out slowly through your lungs and breathe in again. Let the air gently fill your lungs and breathe out slowly releasing any tension in your own steady rhythm. As you breathe out, imagine the tension in your body being released and flowing out of your body. Breathe in and out and feel your body relaxing more and more.

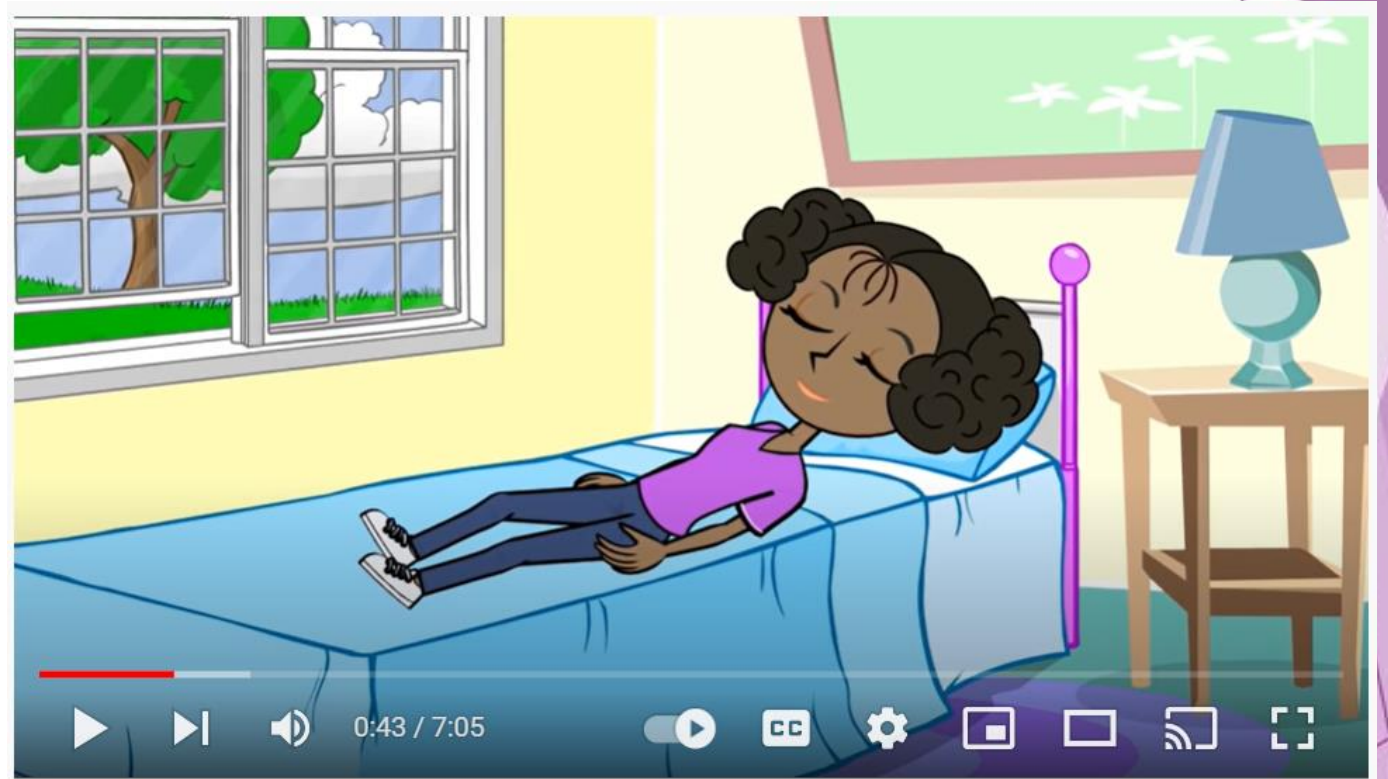
04 You will start the exercise at the top of your body and work all the way down to your feet. As you tense each muscle group, hold for a couple of seconds and then relax slowly. After each relaxation have a 10 second pause and then move onto the next part of your body. Work slowly through the following parts of your body. Slowly tense each group and slowly release the tension. If you feel that your mind wanders try to refocus on the muscle group.

05 Forehead (Raise your eyebrows upwards)
Eyes & Cheeks (Squint your eyes)
Mouth & Jaw (Open mouth widely)
Neck (Tilt head backwards)
Shoulders (Raise your shoulders up high)
Arms (Stretch out your arms)
Biceps (Flex your biceps)
Forearms (Arch lower back)
Buttocks (Tense buttocks)
Legs (Stretch them out, tensing thighs)
Calves (Pull your toes towards feet)
Feet (Curl toes under)

06 Enjoy the feeling of the waves of relaxation going through your body and muscles. Slowly continue to breathe.

07 When you have finished slowly come back to the previous position. Count to 5 and feel more awake with each number.

Follow the steps as a guide to help you engage in some progressive muscle relaxation. You might find it useful to listen to an audio tape with this advice.



Progressive Muscle Relaxation for Kids

De-escalation Letting it Out!

We say: “Big emotions have three rules...”

You must not hurt yourself.

You must not hurt someone else.

You must not cause damage.





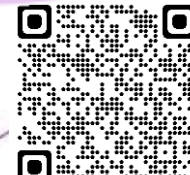
Looking After Ourselves



As we move from parenting our children during a pandemic to resuming a bit of normality it is only natural to feel that we have been swept with the flow of life again. We know that meeting our own emotional wellbeing needs is important to be able to fulfil our children's but how many of us do this consistently, without guilt and worry.

Giving yourself, permission to spend small frequent amounts of time to re-charge your batteries with allow you to meet your own emotional wellbeing needs and that of others. If you are finding it difficult to make time for self-care, some helpful tips are; set a date with yourself, schedule this on your calendar, set a reminder on your phone or do frequent, small acts of self-care.

Remember, while practicing compassion, kindness and love towards our children and others it's also essential that we direct some of the same towards ourselves.



Fostering Self-Regulation

Children are sponges, they watch and take in everything that we do – even if it doesn't directly involve them.

Show your child what you do to calm down when you feel stressed. **Talk about what things you enjoy** and **explain that you need to look after yourself** to be healthy.

Rest doesn't need to be earned.



Modelling Self-Regulation



When dealing with an immediate ‘meltdown’, **swan-parenting** is the best approach so that you can be seemingly **calm, collected and open** to deal with your child’s emotions.

Children pick up on irony! If you are displaying the very same behaviour that you would reprimand your child for, they are less likely to correct their own behaviour.

Instead, **have the upper ground** by relaxing your shoulders, taking deep breaths and using tone rather than volume to show seriousness.

Co-regulation

When supporting your child to regulate their emotions, you need to be aware of; your own emotions, your reaction to these emotions, and how they may affect your child's emotions (also known as co-regulation).

Younger children in particular will need your support to regulate their emotions. This can also be true of older children, particularly in times of crisis.



Steps for offering co-regulation

Using your presence and calm to reset your child's distressed brain.

1

Regulate yourself



2

Get close



3

Make eye contact



4

Listen



5

Be curious and seek to understand



6

Show empathy



7

Listen again



8

Offer warm affection
(with consent)



Modelling Reflection

Children mirror your language, interactions and attitude.

They hear more than we give them credit for.

Model how to reflect on behaviour.

We were arguing earlier, we both felt frustrated.

I shouted in the car earlier, that's because I was scared about...

I think you heard me slam the door, I was feeling really upset. I should have _____ instead.





Reflection

What could you have done instead?

How do you think that made me/other person feel?

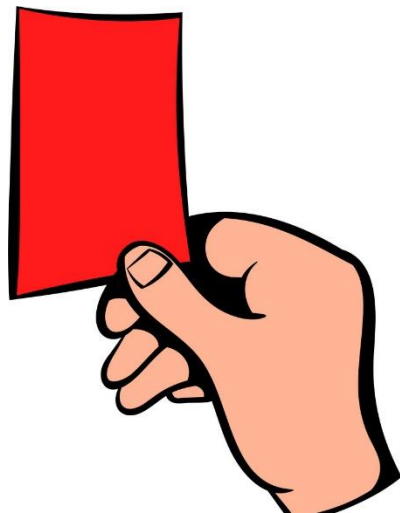
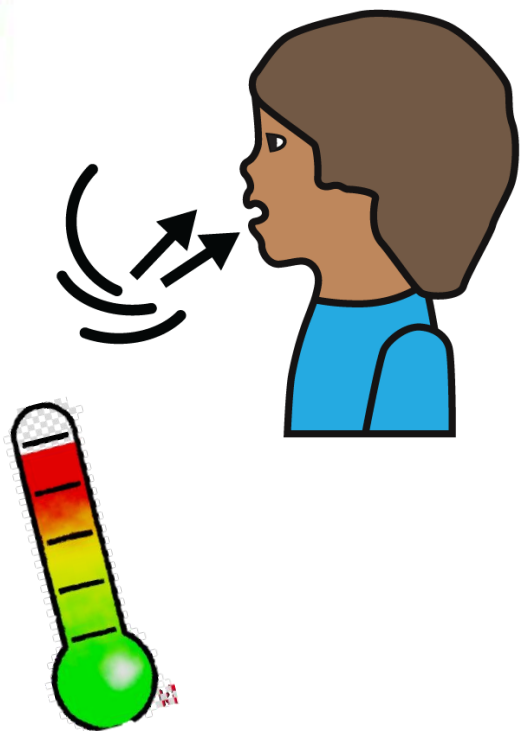
What could you do next time this happens/you feel this way?

What do you want me to know/do?

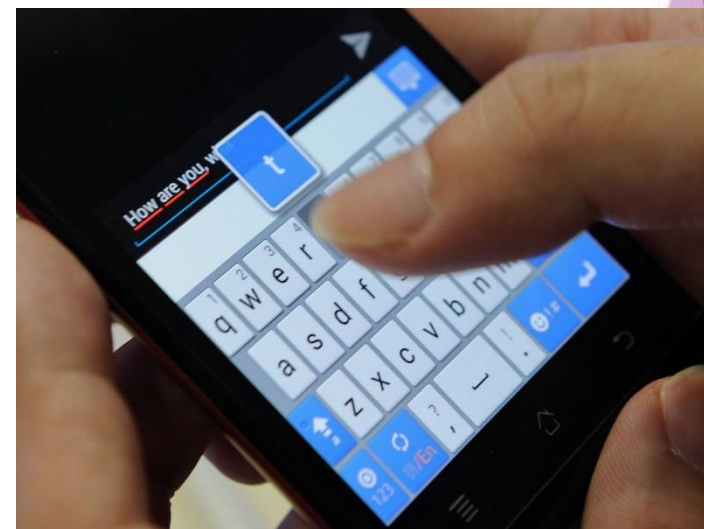
A Calm Down Plan

Planning **BEFORE** a meltdown or outburst happens helps children to utilise methods to calm down when they're overwhelmed without having to think about it in the moment – **we know they can't do this!**

Take deep breath



Code Word



My Calm Down Plan

What will I wear to feel better?



Where will I go to be calm?

How will I manage my emotions?



Who will I speak to?



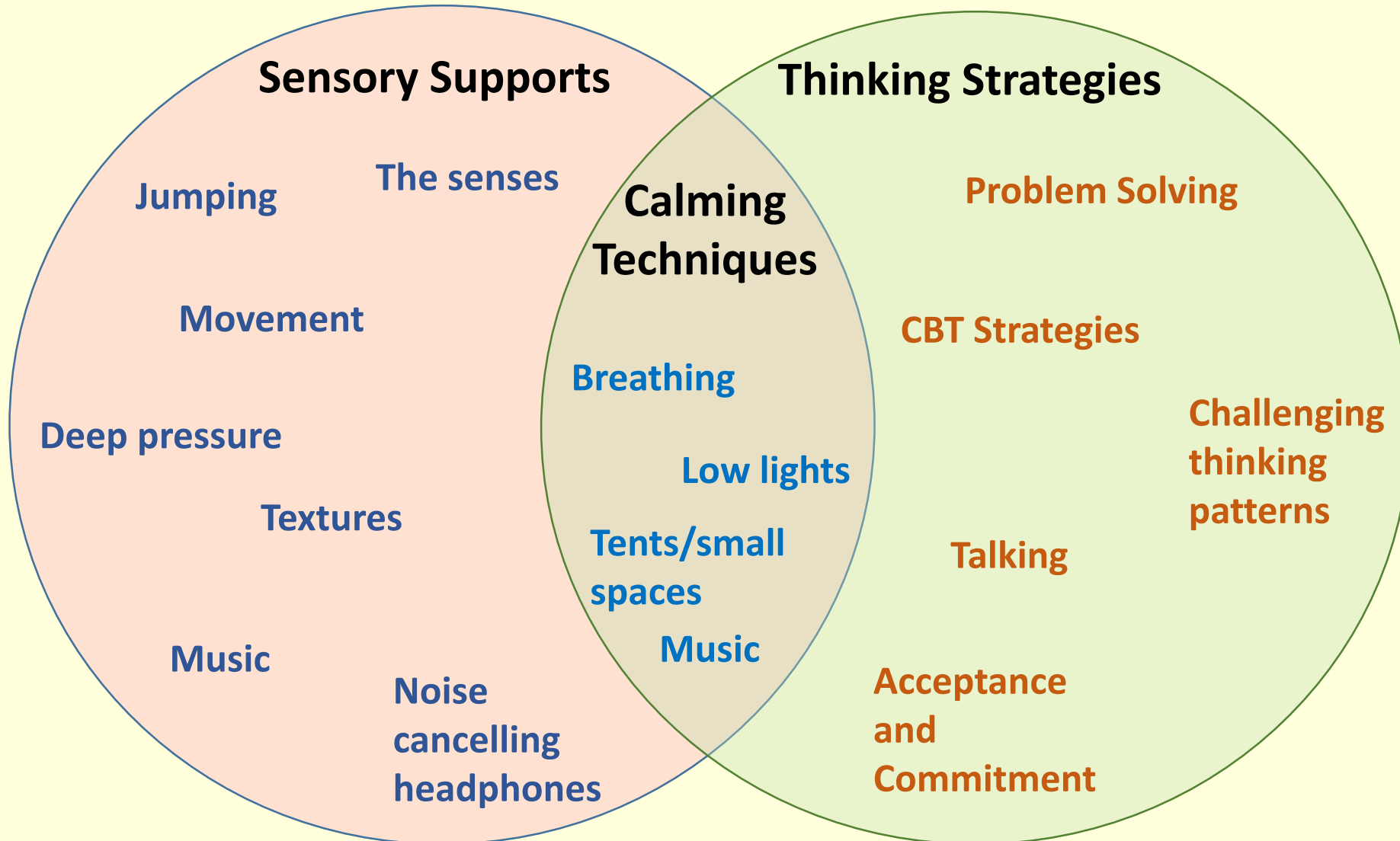
I can calm myself down in 3 steps...



How will I tell someone I am angry?



How can you help children to regulate





If you're feeling **anger or frustration...**

You could distract yourself by:

- exercising
- hitting cushions
- shouting into the bath tub
- shaking your body
- tearing up paper



If you're feeling **sadness or fear...**

You could distract yourself by:

- wrapping yourself up in a blanket
- walk in nature
- let yourself cry or sleep
- talk to someone
- relaxation techniques



If you're feeling **shame...**

You could distract yourself by:

- spend time with people who treat you kindly
- self-acceptance: you are only human
- remind yourself of some times you achieved something good
- write down three things you're looking forward to



Emotional Regulation

Making Safe Choices



If you're feeling **numb or disconnected...**

You could distract yourself by:

- holding ice cubes
- have a very cold shower
- smell something with a strong odour
- hold your wrists under cold, running water



If you're feeling **self-hatred and want to punish yourself...**

You could distract yourself by:

- writing a letter to yourself from the part that hates yourself, then write a letter back from to point of view of someone who loves you
- Try to be creative. Try art, songs or dancing
- doing physical exercise that increases your heart rate



If you're feeling **the need to control...**

You could distract yourself by:

- writing lists
- tidy up/declutter
- rearrange your space
- write a letter expressing your feelings then rip it up.
- clenching your body then releasing





How to bring yourself back from the blue zone

Get your body moving, dance to some lively music or go for a run



Do something that makes you laugh: listen to a podcast, watch a funny film

Tell someone what is making you feel down and see how they can help



Have a cold shower, wake your body up and get your blood pumping

Listen to music and focus on the lyrics rather than the thoughts in your head



Have a cry, sometimes we need to get our emotions out before we start to feel better!



Bringing yourself out of the red zone

Exercise: Focus all your angry energy on exercise, go for a run, lift weights, dance. Get your body moving



Communicate: Sometimes we need to get our thoughts and feelings out in. But try and do this with a calm, trusted person



Shouting into a pillow or duvet (so no one hears you!)



Tense and relax your muscles, to feel more in control of your body



Take a break: stop and think or walk away before responding with anger



Breathe: slow your breathing down, breathe in for 3 counts, and out for 4 counts



Put headphones in and listen to music, preferably calm music



An Emotionally Open Home

Open discussions
around all
emotions.

Self-reflect.

Good sleep/eat
routines.

Time to talk through
thoughts and
feelings.



Emotion 'check ins'.

Modelling how to
emotionally
regulate.

Feelings chart on
the fridge.



Headspace | Meditation Tips | Letting Go of Effort

Headspace | Mini Meditation | Let Go of Stress

10 Minute Sleepcast: Rainday Antiques from Sleep by Headspace



Headspace | Meditation | Underlying Calm

10-Minute Meditation to Reframe Stress

Sunday Scaries? Identify Anxious Thoughts with this Mini-Meditation



MoodKit
Uses CBT principles to help with low mood and anxiety.



HappiMe
Free app that helps to raise self-esteem, self-confidence and happiness levels in children and young people



Chill Panda
Chill Panda helps children better understand their stress and shows them ways to feel better using breathing techniques, yoga, exercise and calming games.



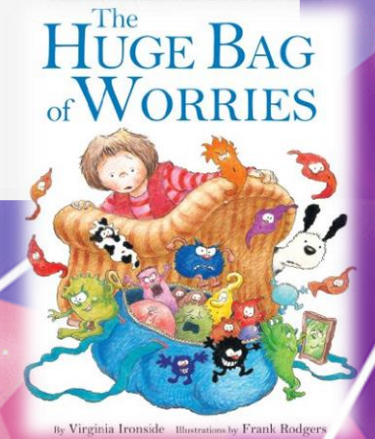
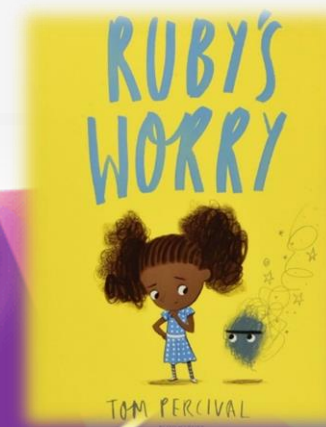
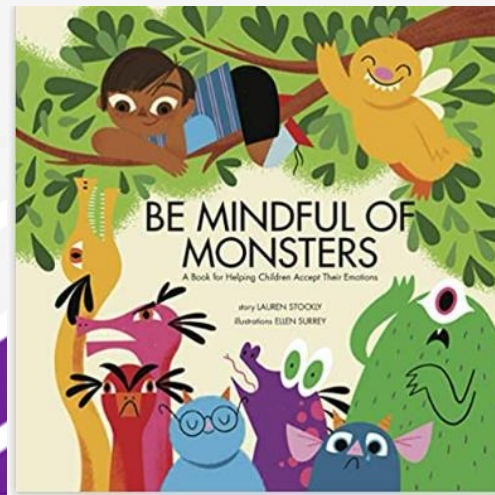
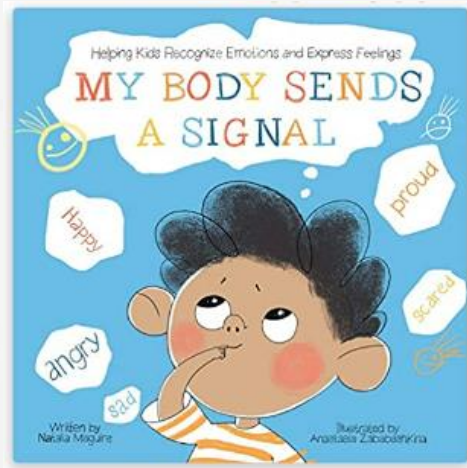
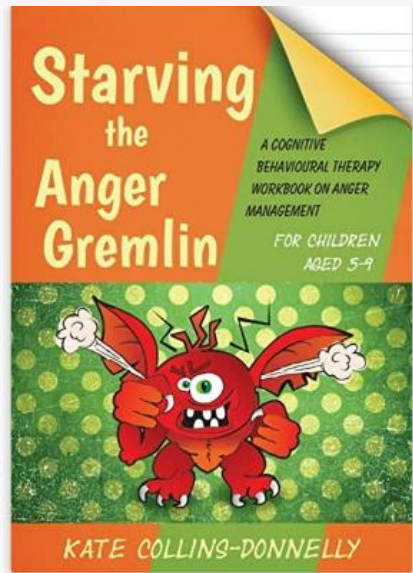
SAM
SAM is an app to help you understand and manage anxiety.



Stop Breathe Think
Check in with how you're feeling, and try short activities tuned to your emotions.



Virtual Hope Box
The Virtual Hope Box (VHB) is an app that contains simple tools to help with coping, relaxation, distraction, and positive thinking.





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tidyminds.org.uk – Coping with common issues > anger
camhs-resources.co.uk – Books, apps and websites

Search: ‘NVR for Parents Oxleas NHS Foundation’



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Diolch am wrando!

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feedback.



All Emotions are Valid

We are not here to stop children feeling big emotions.

E.g. Anger is an important emotion that is natural and to be expected.

We should never discourage anger or associate anger with shame or being 'in trouble'.

What we **do** when we are angry is what we can be held accountable for.



The Angry Brain



When a child is in such a heightened state of arousal, they have huge deficits in executive functioning.

They cannot rationalise, make good decisions, follow complex instructions or express themselves articulately. They may take risks with behaviour and forget rules and boundaries.

This is **not** an excuse for their behaviour, rather an insight into the processes within their brain and why they need help with emotional regulation until they develop this skill independently.

What is our goal?

Value and explore their **feelings** while guiding and correcting their **behaviour**.

We need to **support them** as they explore their emotions and learn to understand and manage them, but we also need to **live with them and keep them safe** in the mean time! We need to encourage healthy emotional development that allows children to **delight in the happy times** and **recover quickly from bad times**.



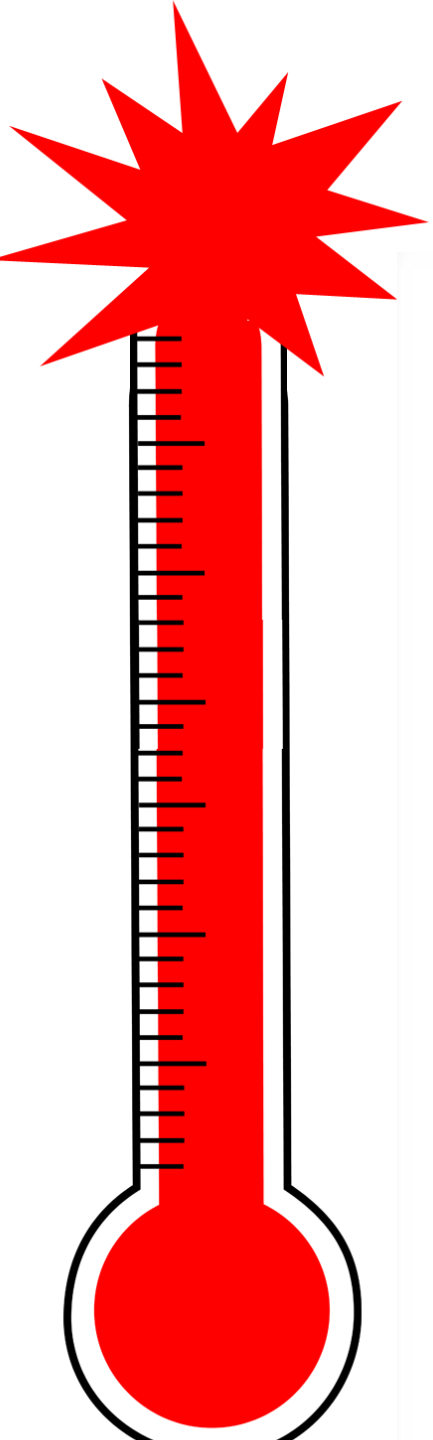
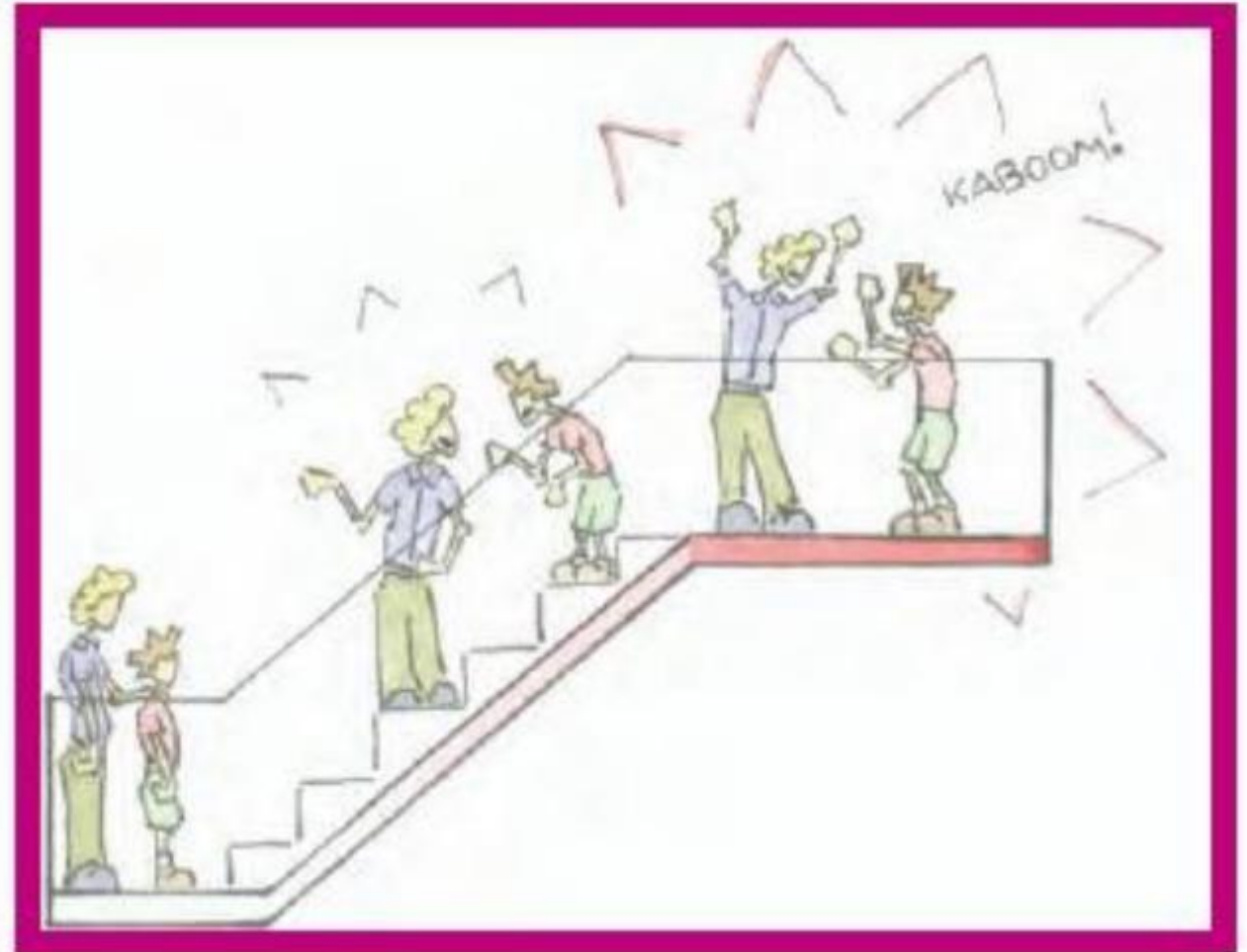
Escalation

The best way to manage an anger outburst is to not allow it to happen in the first place.

Joint escalation

Your child raises their voice, you raise your voice, your child shouts, you shout, your child shouts louder, you shout louder. The argument can end in violence on both sides.

Pattern 1



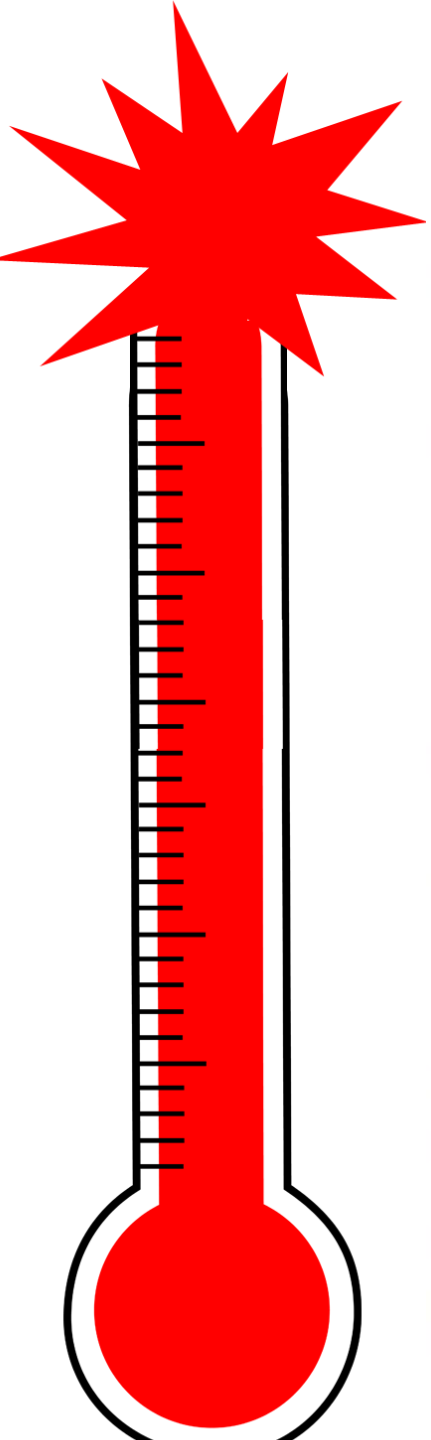
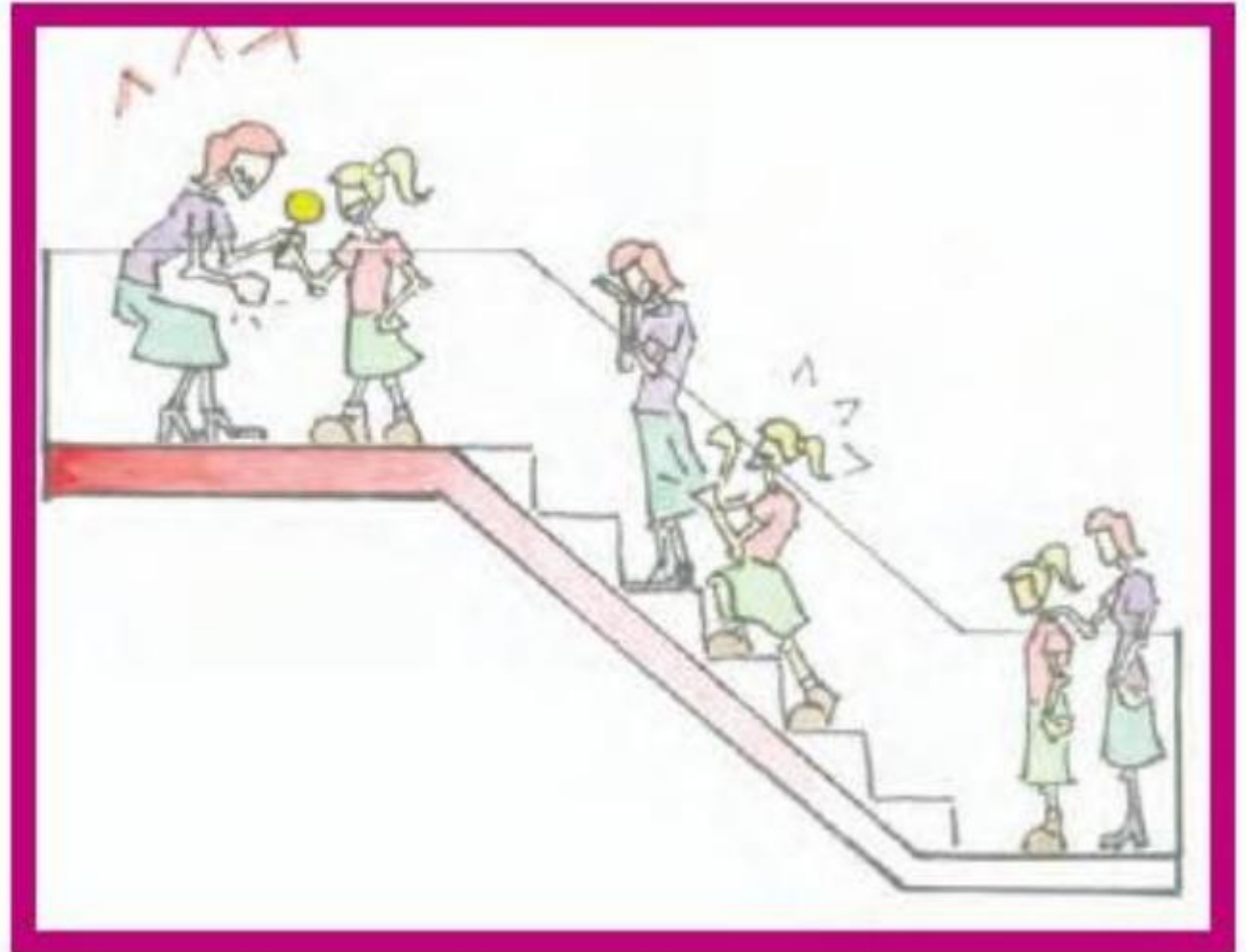
Escalation

The best way to manage an anger outburst is to not allow it to happen in the first place.

Giving-in escalation

Pattern 2

Your child shouts and demands, after a while you give in and let your child have their way. Your child learns that they get their own way if they make enough fuss and will repeat this pattern as often as they can.



Reinforcing Cycle of Behaviour

Behaviour that is reinforced is more likely to occur again.

If we see all behaviour as a means of gaining or removing something, we need to think about what is happening as a consequence of their behaviour...

Positive Reinforcement

What are they gaining?

Attention

What they want

Affection

Stimulation/Sensory

Negative Reinforcement

What is being removed?

Stress

Something they
don't want

Responsibility

School

A feeling

Escalation Quick Wins

WIN!

Tactical Ignoring

This can seem like you are letting your child 'get away' with behaviours, but it is more about **picking your battles** and **avoid being overly critical**.

You ask your child to tidy away their toys into the toybox.

They roll their eyes and huff.

They take their time.

Throw something into the box a little bit too hard.

Eventually the toys are away.

Good job. Thank you for putting everything away.

Escalation Quick Wins



WIN!

Partial Agreement

Acknowledge their point of view, but reemphasise what you expect.

Time to come off the PlayStation now, you'll be tired.

I've been on this late before! I'm not tired.

That might be true, but today you need to come off now. I can see you're not tired now but you will be in the morning.

Escalation Quick Wins

WIN!

Partial Agreement

Acknowledge their point of view, but reemphasise what you expect.

You can't have sweets now, we need to have dinner first.

I can eat sweets and dinner!

Okay, I agree you might be able to eat sweets and dinner, but we need to eat dinner first.

Escalation Quick Wins



Observing the Positives

Negative or unwanted behaviours, evoke the most emotional response in us as adults so it is easy to focus on these. We should, however, try to create a praise focused environment.

Well done for sitting at the table so nicely.

Good job going to school this morning.

Thank you for being kind to your sister.

You're such a good girl for being in your own bed.

Escalation Quick Wins

WIN!

Observing the Positives



Praise needs to be genuine and without condition.

Thank you for sitting nicely at dinner. See how easy it is when you listen, why don't you do that every day?

You've been so calm and played nicely today – look how much happier everyone is when you behave!

Good job with tidying up, if you'd done that yesterday you wouldn't have been on trouble last night!

You've done so well going to school, my life would be easier if you just went without tears all the time.

