



THE NURTURE
NETWORK

Supporting Emotional Regulation in Young Children



ONE HOUR TRAINING



Training Overview

This training will help childcare providers understand how young children experience and express big emotions. Participants will explore emotional development, triggers for dysregulation, and practical strategies to help children build self-regulation skills.

Learning Objectives:

- By the end of this training, participants will be able to:
- Identify common causes of big emotions in young children.
- Recognize developmentally appropriate emotional regulation skills.
- Implement strategies to support children through emotional outbursts.
- Foster a calm and responsive environment that promotes self-regulation.

Materials Needed:

- Printed training manual
- Pen/Pencil
- Access to online resources (optional)



Understanding Big Emotions

Big emotions refer to intense feelings that children may struggle to manage. These can include both positive and negative emotions, such as excitement, frustration, anger, fear, and sadness. While it's natural for young children to experience strong emotions, they may not yet have the skills to understand, express, or regulate them. "Big emotions" often manifest as emotional outbursts like tantrums, crying, yelling, or other intense reactions.

Emotional Development Milestones

Infants (0-12 months):

- At birth, babies experience basic emotions such as distress, comfort, and excitement.
- Emotional regulation is entirely dependent on caregivers. Babies rely on co-regulation through soothing actions like rocking, nursing, or gentle touch.
- By 6 months, babies start to express a range of emotions such as joy, fear, and anger through facial expressions and body language.

Toddlers (1-3 years):

- Toddlers are beginning to develop emotional vocabulary and can express basic feelings such as "mad," "sad," or "happy."
- However, their ability to regulate these emotions is still very limited. They may have difficulty handling frustration when things don't go their way, leading to tantrums or meltdowns.
- The development of empathy and understanding of others' emotions begins, but it is still emerging.

Preschoolers (3-5 years):

- Preschoolers gain more control over their emotions but still require guidance. They can start to identify emotions in themselves and others more accurately.
- At this stage, children can begin using coping strategies (e.g., deep breathing, taking a break) with support from caregivers or teachers.
- Social interactions become more complex, and emotions can be triggered by issues such as social conflict, fear of failure, or unmet desires.



Common Triggers for Emotional Dysregulation

Children may experience emotional dysregulation due to various factors, including:

- **Physical Needs:** Hunger, tiredness, illness, or discomfort can lead to frustration or meltdowns.
- **Transitions:** Moving from one activity to another or being separated from a caregiver can provoke big emotions.
- **Social Conflicts:** Struggles with peers, such as sharing, waiting for a turn, or feeling excluded, can trigger emotional outbursts.
- **Unmet Expectations:** When children cannot do something they want to or have trouble achieving a goal, it can lead to frustration.
- **Changes in Routine:** New or unfamiliar situations, such as a change in caregivers, school environment, or family structure, can unsettle children.
- **Overstimulation:** Too much noise, too many people, or excessive sensory input can overwhelm a child, leading to emotional outbursts.

Recognizing Emotional Regulation

What Self-Regulation Looks Like at Different Ages

Self-regulation is the ability to manage emotions, behavior, and impulses in appropriate ways. It develops gradually as children grow and gain experience with emotional responses.

Infants (0-12 months):

- Rely entirely on caregivers to help them calm down (co-regulation).
- May self-soothe by sucking on fingers, looking away from overstimulating situations, or seeking comfort from a caregiver.

Toddlers (1-3 years):

- Begin to show early signs of self-regulation but still need significant adult support.
- May use simple coping strategies like hugging a favorite stuffed animal or seeking comfort from an adult.
- Tantrums are common when emotions become overwhelming.



Preschoolers (3-5 years):

- Can use basic strategies to regulate emotions, such as taking deep breaths or expressing feelings with words.
- Begin to recognize emotions in others and attempt to adjust their behavior accordingly.
- Still need guidance and support when handling big emotions.

Signs of Emotional Dysregulation

Emotional dysregulation occurs when a child struggles to manage their emotions in a way that is appropriate for their age. Some common signs include:

- Frequent or intense tantrums beyond what is developmentally typical.
- Aggressive behaviors such as hitting, kicking, or biting.
- Difficulty calming down after becoming upset.
- Overreacting to minor frustrations or changes in routine.
- Shutting down, withdrawing, or becoming unresponsive when upset.

The Role of Co-Regulation in Early Childhood

Co-regulation is the process in which adults help children regulate their emotions by providing comfort, guidance, and modeling appropriate emotional responses. This is an essential part of emotional development because young children are not yet capable of self-regulating on their own.

Ways to support co-regulation include:

- Staying calm – Modeling a calm response helps children feel secure.
- Providing comfort – Physical reassurance like a hug or soothing voice can help calm a distressed child.
- Labeling emotions – Helping children name their feelings ("I see you're feeling frustrated") builds emotional awareness.
- Offering coping strategies – Teaching techniques like deep breathing, counting to ten, or using a calm-down corner.
- Being patient and consistent – Children learn self-regulation over time through repeated positive interactions.



Strategies to Support Emotional Regulation

Responsive Caregiving Strategies

Responsive caregiving involves recognizing and responding to children's emotional needs in a supportive and nurturing way. This helps children feel safe and builds trust, making it easier for them to develop emotional regulation skills.

Key responsive caregiving strategies include:

- Validating emotions – Acknowledge children's feelings by saying things like, *“I see you’re really upset right now.”*
- Providing comfort and reassurance – Offer a calm presence, a soothing voice, or physical comfort like a hug.
- Helping children identify emotions – Use emotion words like “happy,” “frustrated,” and “disappointed” to help children name their feelings.
- Encouraging problem-solving – Guide children to find solutions instead of simply reacting to their emotions.

The Importance of Modeling Emotional Regulation

Children learn how to regulate emotions by watching the adults around them. Modeling self-regulation in your own responses helps children develop these skills.

Ways to model emotional regulation:

- Use calm self-talk – Say things like, *“I’m feeling frustrated, so I’m going to take a deep breath before I respond.”*
- Express emotions appropriately – Show children that it's okay to have big feelings, but they can be managed in healthy ways.
- Demonstrate coping strategies – When feeling overwhelmed, say, *“I need a moment to take some deep breaths before I continue.”*
- Apologize and repair – If you lose patience, model accountability by saying, *“I raised my voice, and I’m sorry. Let’s start over.”*

Teaching Calming Techniques

Teaching children simple self-regulation strategies gives them tools to manage their emotions.

Some effective techniques include:

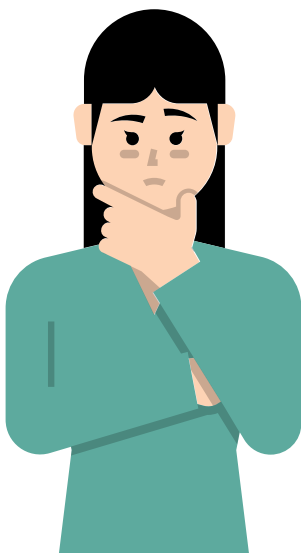
- Deep breathing – Encourage belly breathing (inhale for 4 seconds, exhale for 4 seconds).
- Sensory breaks – Let children use fidget tools, stress balls, or a cozy corner to calm down.
- Movement-based regulation – Activities like stretching, yoga, or jumping in place help release excess energy.
- Using visual aids – Emotion charts or “calm-down choice” boards help children identify and select a regulation strategy.

The Role of Routines and Predictable Environments

Consistency and structure help children feel safe, reducing emotional outbursts.

Ways to create a predictable environment:

- Establish clear routines – Maintain consistent meal, nap, and play schedules.
- Use transition warnings – Give advance notice before changes (e.g., “*Five more minutes, then we clean up.*”).
- Set up calming spaces – Create a designated quiet area with soft pillows, books, or sensory items.
- Provide clear expectations – Use simple language and visuals to help children understand behavioral expectations.



Think about a recent situation where a child in your care experienced big emotions. What strategies did you use to support them?

How might you incorporate one or more of the techniques discussed in this section to improve your response in similar situations moving forward?



Creating a Supportive Environment

Setting Up a Calm-Down Space

A calm-down space is a designated area where children can go to self-soothe and regulate their emotions when feeling overwhelmed. It provides a safe and quiet space for children to take a break from the group or activity and calm themselves down before rejoining.

Features of a calm-down space:

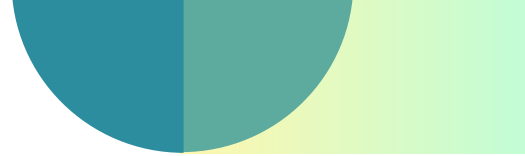
- Comfortable and inviting – Soft cushions, pillows, or a cozy chair help create a calm atmosphere.
- Sensory tools – Items like stress balls, fidget toys, weighted blankets, or noise-canceling headphones can help children self-regulate.
- Calming visuals – Use calming images, such as nature scenes or gentle colors, to promote relaxation.
- Emotion charts or books – Provide visual tools that help children recognize and label their emotions.
- Clear rules and guidelines – Teach children when and how to use the calm-down space. For example, “*When you feel frustrated, you can come here to take a break.*”

Using Visual Supports and Emotional Check-ins

Visual supports can help children understand and manage their emotions, especially when words are difficult to find. They also provide structure and clarity for young children, who may need more concrete ways to understand expectations and emotions.

Types of visual supports:

- Emotion charts – Display pictures that show various emotions (happy, sad, angry, etc.) to help children label their feelings.
- Feelings thermometer – A visual scale that shows different levels of emotional intensity (e.g., calm, frustrated, angry).
- Behavior charts – Use a chart with clear expectations to help children understand desired behaviors and the consequences for actions.
- Visual schedules – A daily schedule with pictures that help children understand what to expect throughout the day.



Emotional Check-ins:

Regular emotional check-ins can help children become more aware of their feelings and practice expressing them. This can be done through:

- Mood cards – Children select a card that shows how they're feeling at the beginning of the day or after an emotional event.
- Morning or afternoon circle time – Ask each child to share how they're feeling, either verbally or with a picture.
- One-on-one check-ins – Provide a private opportunity for children to express their feelings and talk through their emotions.

Encouraging Positive Communication and Problem-Solving

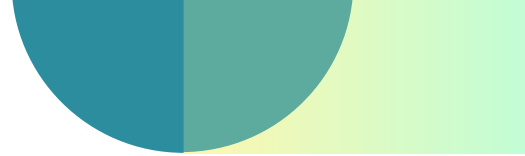
Helping children communicate their feelings in a positive way and solve problems independently is key to developing emotional regulation skills.

Ways to encourage positive communication:

- Teach emotion words – Help children expand their emotional vocabulary so they can express themselves more clearly (e.g., *"I'm feeling frustrated because I can't reach the toy."*).
- Role-playing – Practice social scenarios where children can practice using "I feel" statements or asking for help.
- Active listening – When children express emotions, listen attentively and validate their feelings before offering a solution.
- Model respectful communication – Show children how to express needs and emotions calmly, using "please," "thank you," and other respectful phrases.

Promoting problem-solving:

- Ask guiding questions – Help children think through solutions by asking questions like, *"What do you think we can do to solve this?"* or *"What could we try if that doesn't work?"*
- Offer choices – Give children options for how to solve a problem, such as *"Would you like to take a deep breath or use a fidget toy to calm down?"*
- Praise problem-solving efforts – Reinforce positive behavior by acknowledging when children come up with solutions on their own.



Emotional Check-ins:

Regular emotional check-ins can help children become more aware of their feelings and practice expressing them. This can be done through:

- Mood cards – Children select a card that shows how they're feeling at the beginning of the day or after an emotional event.
- Morning or afternoon circle time – Ask each child to share how they're feeling, either verbally or with a picture.
- One-on-one check-ins – Provide a private opportunity for children to express their feelings and talk through their emotions.

Encouraging Positive Communication and Problem-Solving

Helping children communicate their feelings in a positive way and solve problems independently is key to developing emotional regulation skills.

Ways to encourage positive communication:

- Teach emotion words – Help children expand their emotional vocabulary so they can express themselves more clearly (e.g., *"I'm feeling frustrated because I can't reach the toy."*).
- Role-playing – Practice social scenarios where children can practice using "I feel" statements or asking for help.
- Active listening – When children express emotions, listen attentively and validate their feelings before offering a solution.
- Model respectful communication – Show children how to express needs and emotions calmly, using "please," "thank you," and other respectful phrases.

Promoting problem-solving:

- Ask guiding questions – Help children think through solutions by asking questions like, *"What do you think we can do to solve this?"* or *"What could we try if that doesn't work?"*
- Offer choices – Give children options for how to solve a problem, such as *"Would you like to take a deep breath or use a fidget toy to calm down?"*
- Praise problem-solving efforts – Reinforce positive behavior by acknowledging when children come up with solutions on their own.



Conclusion

By understanding the stages of emotional development and learning effective strategies to support emotional regulation, you're equipped to help children navigate their big emotions and build important skills for self-regulation.

Key Takeaways:

- Emotional development is a gradual process, and children will need guidance to manage their emotions effectively.
- Co-regulation plays a crucial role in helping children develop emotional regulation skills.
- Responsive caregiving and modeling emotional regulation are essential for fostering a supportive environment where children can learn to manage their emotions.
- Calm-down spaces, visual supports, and positive communication all contribute to creating an environment that promotes emotional well-being.

What's Next?

- **Implement the Strategies:** Begin integrating the strategies discussed in this training into your daily routine. Start with simple techniques like setting up a calm-down space or using emotion charts, and gradually build upon them.
- **Reflect and Adjust:** After trying out the strategies, reflect on their effectiveness. Are children using the calm-down space? Are they able to identify their emotions more easily? Adjust your approach based on what works best for the children in your care.
- **Continue Learning:** Emotional regulation is a complex process that takes time to develop. Continue to explore resources and training to deepen your understanding of child development and refine your caregiving skills.
- **Collaborate with Others:** Share your insights and strategies with colleagues or parents. Working together to create consistent emotional support for children is key to their growth and development.

Additional Resources

To further your knowledge on emotional regulation in young children, explore the following resources:

Websites

- Zero to Three – www.zerotothree.org Provides research-based articles and tools on early childhood development, including emotional regulation.
- Center on the Developing Child – Harvard University – developingchild.harvard.edu Features articles, videos, and research on child brain development and emotional regulation.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) – www.naeyc.org Offers resources for educators on supporting children's social-emotional development.

Books

- The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind by Daniel J. Siegel & Tina Payne Bryson
- Self-Reg: How to Help Your Child (and You) Break the Stress Cycle and Successfully Engage with Life by Stuart Shanker
- Breathe Like a Bear: 30 Mindful Moments for Kids to Feel Calm and Focused Anytime, Anywhere by Kira Willey

Videos

- "How to Help Children Calm Down" – Pathways.org
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2L3NU2gDswQ>
- "The Science of Emotional Regulation in Early Childhood" – Harvard University <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/>
- "Why Co-Regulation is Key to Helping Kids with Big Emotions" – Dr. Mona Delahooke <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwbJLoWlq3c>

Podcasts

- "Unruffled" with Janet Lansbury – Focuses on respectful parenting and emotional development.
- "Raising Good Humans" with Dr. Aliza Pressman – Offers insights from child development experts.
- "Little Sprigs" – Discusses early childhood development with a focus on emotional intelligence.

Sources

1. Gottman, J. M., & DeClaire, J. (2018). *Raising an emotionally intelligent child: The heart of parenting*. Simon and Schuster.
2. Miller, R. M. (2015). *The emotional child: Understanding the emotional life of children*. American Psychological Association.
3. Siegler, R., Deloache, J., & Eisenberg, N. (2011). *How children develop* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.
4. Shanker, S. (2016). *Self-Reg: How to help your child (and you) break the stress cycle and successfully engage with life*. Penguin Books.
5. Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., & Bornstein, M. H. (2016). *The development of emotional regulation in children: Implications for parenting and education*. *Child Development Perspectives*, 10(3), 160–165.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12188>

Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____
Last Four SSN: _____ Date Completed: _____

Multiple Choice Questions

1. Which of the following best describes "big emotions" in young children?

- a) emotions that only occur when a child is overtired
- b) strong emotional reactions that children have difficulty regulating
- c) emotions that children display when they are being defiant
- d) feelings that only occur during toddlerhood

2. What is an example of co-regulation?

- a) ignoring a child's tantrum until they calm down on their own
- b) providing comfort and modeling calming strategies when a child is upset
- c) giving a child a reward for calming down quickly
- d) telling a child to stop crying without offering support

3. Which of the following is not a common strategy for helping young children regulate their emotions?

- a) creating a predictable daily routine
- b) teaching children deep breathing exercises
- c) expecting children to manage their emotions independently at all times
- d) using visual supports to help children identify their emotions

4. What is a key reason why modeling emotional regulation is important for young children?

- a) children learn how to manage their emotions by observing caregivers
- b) it ensures that children will never have tantrums
- c) it prevents children from experiencing any negative emotions
- d) it allows caregivers to control children's feelings

5. How can a calm-down space benefit young children?

- a) it gives children a quiet area to practice self-regulation
- b) it is used as a time-out space for discipline
- c) it ensures that children do not experience big emotions
- d) it prevents children from expressing their feelings

Completed trainings can be submitted to: connect@thenurture.net
