

Module 4: Self-Regulation

Educating a child with autism often means looking beyond a purely academic focus. We have looked at how we need to compensate for the environment and adapting our teaching style.

Emotional Regulation

- What do we mean when we say a child is emotionally well regulated?
- Are there times when you have not been emotionally well regulated?
- Emotional regulation learning is lifelong

It is certainly true that emotions can be directly linked to a student's ability to learn. There is a close connection between a child's state of arousal and their capacity to learn.

We teach Math's, we teach English, we teach science, do we teach emotion? It is part of the health Curriculum. Why do we teach Emotion?

Put simply, if a student is frightened, anxious, frustrated, or depressed, that student will find it nearly impossible to learn.

Emotions and learning (managing self)

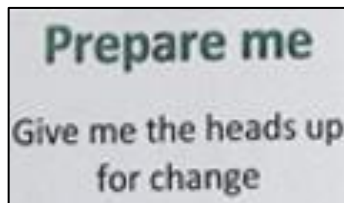
In a class of 30 students there are effectively 30 different emotional profiles to deal with. The best teachers appear to handle this with ease whilst remaining emotionally calm themselves!

For the student with autism we have already looked at how anxiety and fear may be a constant state.



My Voice: Tilting the seesaw to 'certain'

"Like many others with autism, it leaves me fearful and anxious whenever I must deal with new people, or strange situations. I know this anxiety is shared by countless others on the spectrum. I hide it well, but the fear and anxiety is always with me."



-John Elder Robison, Psychology Today

"The principal emotion experienced by autistic people is fear."

-Temple Grandin

Incorporate into the class

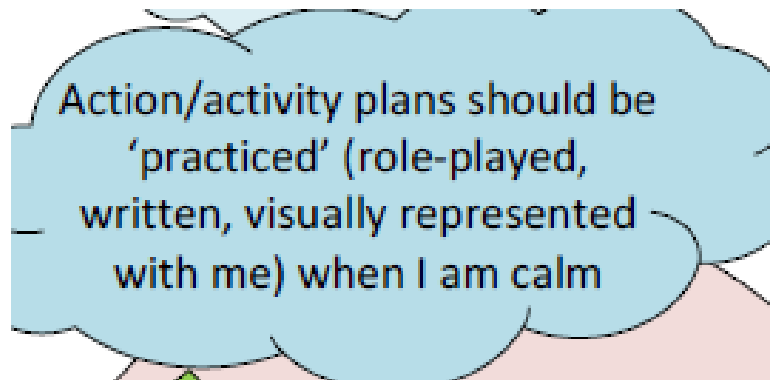
- All children benefit from learning about emotional regulation
- Things happen for all children that impact on their learning
- Purposeful communication and having someone to help you is essential for self-regulation.

Recognising how emotions play such a crucial part in learning, there are now a number of commercially available, highly visual programmes which all have common themes below for teaching:

<http://www.zonesofregulation.com/teaching-tools.html>

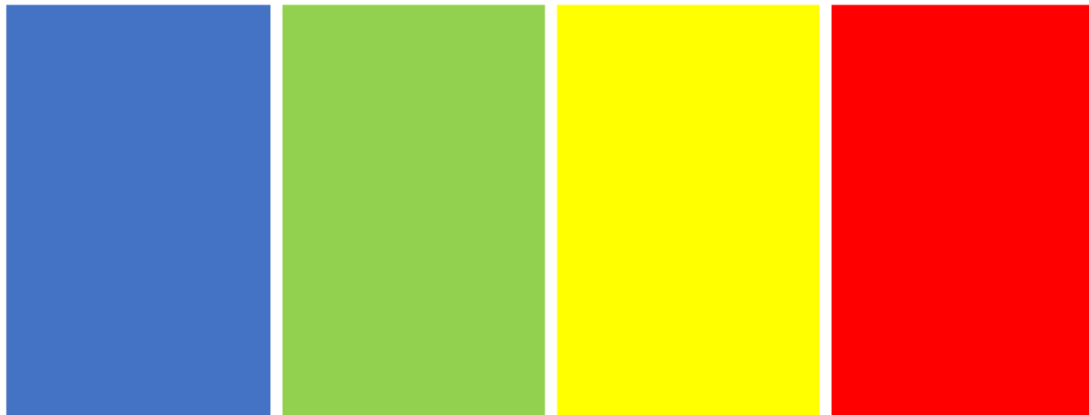
The keys to teaching emotional regulation

1. Self-awareness – the ability to identify your own emotional state.
2. Self-management – the ability to modulate your own emotional state.
3. Social awareness – the ability to understand others’ emotions.
4. Relationship management – the ability to regulate others’ emotions and manage interpersonal conflicts.
5. We understand that emotional regulation is lifelong learning for us all, we also know from research that teaching about emotions through the 4 stages above needs to be taught when the child and adult is calm, part of successful teaching these stages is modelling your emotions all the time, using visual ways to teach is also important



Zones of Regulation

One programme example is Zones of Regulation (www.zonesofregulation.com). All emotional states are grouped together under four zones.



First part of teaching emotion is identifying what it feels like in each zone. Note no Zone is a bad zone, doing this when we are calm is most effective

The **Red Zone** is used to describe extremely heightened states of alertness and intense emotions. A person may be elated or experiencing anger, rage, explosive behaviour, devastation, or terror when in the Red Zone.

The **Yellow Zone** is also used to describe a heightened state of alertness and elevated emotions; however one has more control when they are in the Yellow Zone. A person may be experiencing stress, frustration, anxiety, excitement, silliness, the wiggles, or nervousness when in the Yellow Zone.

The **Green Zone** is used to describe a calm state of alertness. A person may be described as happy, focused, content, or ready to learn when in the Green Zone. This is the zone where optimal learning occurs.

The **Blue Zone** is used to describe low states of alertness and down feelings such as when one feels sad, tired, sick, or bored.

- Stage 1 is to help students identify how it feels in each colour.
- Stage 2 is then to help the student realise what activities, situations, techniques can help them get back to the green zone.
- Stage 3 can incorporate social thinking techniques such as Comic strip conversations to understand others thinking and emotional states.

Using a child's special interests can enhance their learning about emotions too. Here are some examples:

What zone am I in?



WHAT ZONE ARE YOU IN?

BLUE		-Sick -Tired -Stressed	-Giddy -Lonely -Sad
GREEN		-Happy -Calm -Confident	-Hopeful -Feeling Okay -Excited
YELLOW		-Frustrated -Worried/Anxious -Loss of some control -Scared	-Annoyed -Disgusted
RED		-Angry -Out of Control -Frustrated	-Fitting -Awful -Mad

Sensory Regulation

Sensory overload sensitivities are part of the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum under DSM-5. (This does not mean that all students with autism will have sensitivities to sensory input.)

However, we know that many students have difficulty paying attention and taking part in lessons due to sensory processing difficulties, which in turn impacts on their emotional regulation and ability to work in class.

There are two main approaches to take when dealing with sensory sensitivities. One is to provide a sensory compensation for the student (such as ear muffs to combat noise sensitivity), and the other is to alter their environment to reduce sensory input (such as turning a student's desk to the wall to reduce visual distractions).

Sensory Supports

Following are some suggestions of ways to prevent different types of sensory overload for your student with autism.

Note that there is no 'one size fits all' in sensory supports. It is important that your strategies are:

- Individualised for your particular student.
- Derived from information from the student's parents/caregivers.
- Based on observations of your student in their classroom/s and the other environments around your school (especially the playground).

Acoustics

For students with sensitivity to sound, schedule some breaks in a quiet place during the school day. This strategy is discussed further in 'Scheduling Regular Breaks' below.

In noisy situations, such as assembly, allow the student to leave after a short period of time. This period can be gradually increased as the student becomes familiar with the situation. Another strategy is to provide ear muffs, which the student can put on when the noise becomes too much for them.

Lighting

Some people with autism report that some lights can be distracting and even painful. Fluorescent lights, which flicker at high speed, can often cause problems, but even bright sunshine can be uncomfortable for some.

If your student is sensitive to light, consider the position of their desk in relation to light fittings and windows. If moving the desk does not work or is not possible, consider whether they can be allowed to wear a cap in class to shade their eyes.

Low-Arousal Workspace

The classroom environment is busy, and often has different things going on in different areas. A structured, low-arousal environment can be supported by providing an individual work space.



Scheduling Regular Breaks – A ‘Sensory Diet’

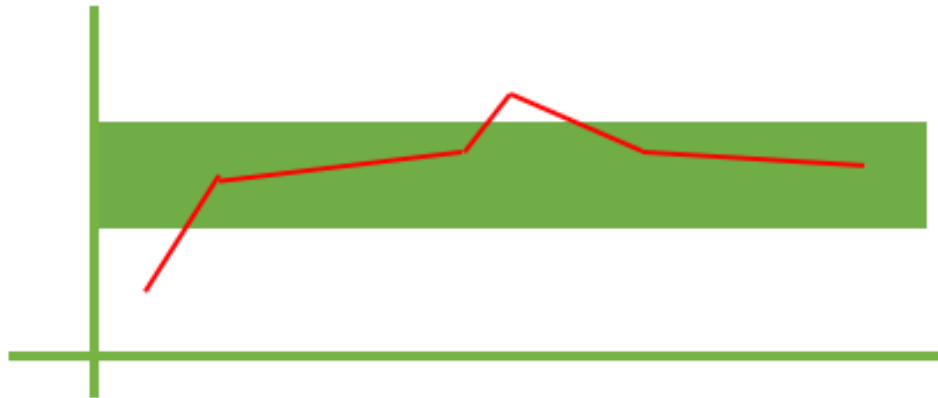
Scheduling regular breaks throughout the school day, and including some calming sensory activities, can often help a student with sensitivities to cope with the more stimulating activities and prevent overload occurring. Such schedules are sometimes called a ‘sensory diet’.

Examples of ‘sensory diets’ are:

- Every half hour, the student runs around the school playground.
- Five times during the day, the student takes a 5-minute break in a quiet part of the classroom (such as a cushioned reading corner) or in another, quieter room (such as the library or sickbay/health room).

Sensory Adaptations

Scheduling breaks during the day may be a helpful way to reduce anxiety.



Remember morning tea and lunch times are not usually are break for our kids.

Visual images of ideas for sensory breaks, include quiet activities





Video References

These 2 videos are from the National Autistic Society (UK);

The first one is about how change with everyday situations can have a big effect on emotional regulation

<https://youtu.be/Q6G-OpGgo3c>

This video is about an everyday trip on the bus experience and how it can be so overwhelming as the person with Autism gets too much information

<https://youtu.be/h2FCx3Y7-aU>