

# Emotional Regulation

## What is emotional regulation?

- Emotional regulation is how we manage all of our emotions to function in our world.
- Emotion drives behavior
- Emotional regulation processes can be **voluntary** or **involuntary**
  - Voluntary emotional responses-there is *thought* and *intent* behind the behavior. An example of this would be a child taking a toy away from another child and responding by intentionally hitting
  - Involuntary emotional responses-*automatic* and *uncontrolled* response to the environment. An example of this would be cries in response to a sudden noise.
- **Nurturing** and **responsive** parental relationships are pivotal in building the capacity of children to respond to their world in an adaptive way.
- The goal of addressing emotional regulation skills is to equip children with the skills needed to *understand their emotions* and *respond to their everyday demands* in an adaptive way.

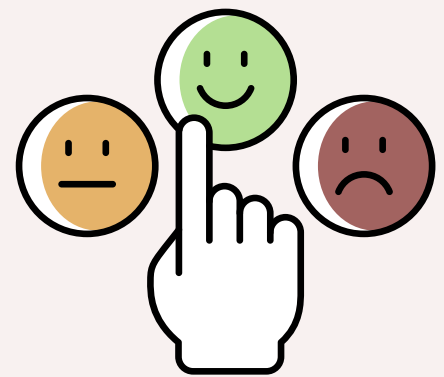
## Challenges with emotional regulation

- Emotional regulation challenges happen when a child is unable to cope with demands or changes in the environment.
- These often present as *adverse* behaviors
  - Screaming
  - Crying
  - Running away
  - Tantrums or meltdowns
  - Difficulty playing with others
- Behaviors are a **form of communication**
- While on the outside, we may see aggression, impulsive behaviors, tantrums, etc. This is only a disguise to deeper feelings of fear, insecurity, jealousy, or feeling unsafe, for example.
- We have to *shift our perspective* from focusing on the behavior to **WHY** that behavior is happening, what triggered this behavior, and what is our role in this moment to help soothe and support.



# Predicting the Unpredictable

- There are a handful of situations where challenging behaviors are due to the presence of unpredictable circumstances.
- When children are not able to predict what is next in their day, it can seem threatening and feel unsafe.
- Below are a few supports that can help prepare our children on the front end for their daily routine and new experiences
  - **Visual Schedules**
    - Outlines steps/activities of what is expected of a child in their daily life through familiar pictures
  - **Social Stories**
    - Frames novel experiences in a positive way through stories to ease fear and worry
  - **Sensory Diet**
    - A plan that involves utilizing sensory input throughout the daily routines of a child to help them stay regulated in order to tackle demands of the day.
- The **Zones of Regulation** serve as a tool to help children understand their feelings and communicate them. In turn, it helps others understand what their needs are and how we can best support them in the moment



## How can we further support these skills?

According to research, there is evidence that nurturing relationships with parents and caregivers, play, and occupation-based intervention supports the acquisition of emotional regulation skills. Below are a few examples of how we can support these skills across environments:

- Be responsive to the needs of your student or child
- Observe for characteristics of dysregulation or potential triggers
- Create a dynamic environment when each child feels safe
- Model naming your own feelings out loud
- Create opportunities for social interaction with peers
- Provide supports that help children prepare for their routine or novel experiences
- Offer calming toys or breaks in tasks when a child is feeling overwhelmed or stress
- Work collaboratively with the therapy team to see if an individualized sensory diet embedded within the child's daily routines would be beneficial.



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