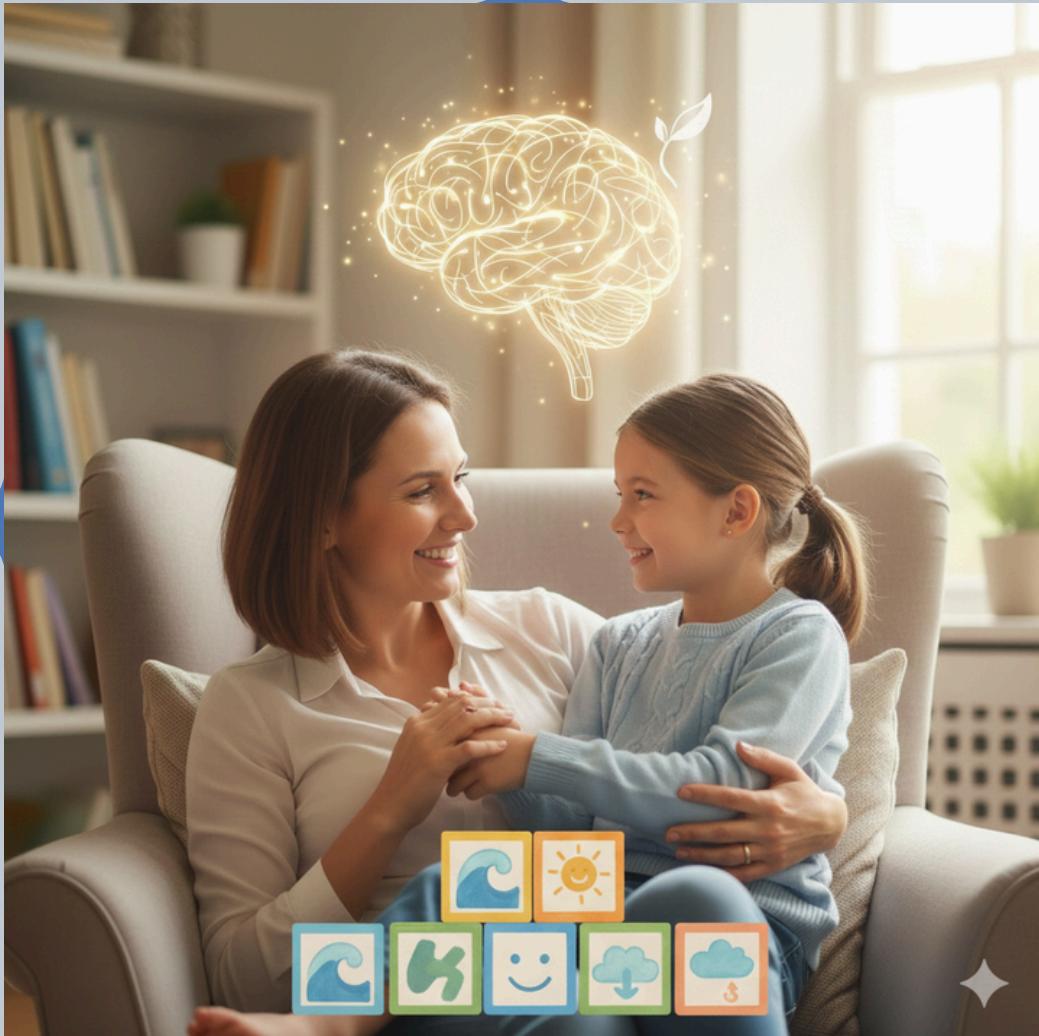


The Regulation, Confidence, Success Guide



**RELATIONSHIP-BASED GUIDE FOR HELPING
CHILDREN THRIVE EMOTIONALLY,
SOCIALLY, AND ACADEMICALLY
FOR PARENTS**

Dr. Caelan Soma



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The Regulation, Confidence, Success Guide for Parents is a practical, relationship-based guide for thoughtful parents who want to help their child thrive emotionally, socially, and academically through connection, not perfection.

Structure - Skills - Strategies

**THE REGULATION, CONFIDENCE, SUCCESS
GUIDE FOR PARENTS IS A PRACTICAL,
RELATIONSHIP-BASED GUIDE FOR
THOUGHTFUL PARENTS WHO WANT TO HELP
THEIR CHILD THRIVE EMOTIONALLY,
SOCIALLY, AND ACADEMICALLY THROUGH
CONNECTION, NOT PERFECTION.**

DR. CAELAN SOMA

Dr. Caelan Soma is a child and family psychologist with over 25 years of experience helping children and the adults who love them. Known for making complex topics such as emotions, behavior, and anxiety easy to understand, she uses simple analogies, visuals, and practical strategies that parents can use in real life.

Dr. Soma has written books, created curricula, taught thousands of professionals, and is currently in private practice in Michigan, where she continues the work she loves—helping families feel calmer, more confident, and more connected.

A NOTE FOR PARENTS: THIS GUIDE IS MEANT TO BE A SUPPORTIVE TOOL TO HELP YOU NAVIGATE YOUR PARENTING JOURNEY WITH CONFIDENCE. WHILE THE STRATEGIES SHARED HERE ARE BASED ON RESEARCH IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND MY WORK AS A CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST WITH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, THEY ARE NOT A REPLACEMENT FOR PROFESSIONAL THERAPY OR CLINICAL CONSULTATION. EVERY CHILD AND FAMILY IS UNIQUE; PLEASE USE YOUR BEST JUDGMENT AND CONSULT WITH A SPECIALIST IF YOU HAVE SPECIFIC CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT OR WELL-BEING.

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INTRODUCTION

Parenting a child who struggles with big emotions, social challenges, or school demands can feel confusing and exhausting. Many parents wonder:

***Why is this so hard for my child?
Am I missing something?
Am I doing something wrong?***



This guide is meant to gently shift the question from “What’s wrong with my child?” to “What skills does my child need support building?”

Children are not born knowing how to regulate emotions, navigate friendships, manage disappointment, or organize their thinking for school. These are learned skills that develop over time through supportive relationships, repeated practice, and environments that feel safe enough for mistakes. When children struggle, it is not because they are lazy, defiant, unmotivated, or “too sensitive.” It is because the demands placed on them exceed their current skills. Throughout this guide, you will see consistent themes.



**Regulation comes before learning.
Connection comes before correction.
Skills develop through practice, not pressure.**

You do not need to be a perfect parent to support your child's development. What matters most is being a steady presence. Your child needs to feel safe enough to try, fail, and try again. The strategies in this guide are designed to be practical, compassionate, and realistic for everyday family life. You can use them gradually, choosing what works best for your child and your home.



Progress happens in small moments.

This guide will help you notice them, support them, and build on them.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed for thoughtful parents who want to support their children through connection, not perfection. Begin this guide slowly, select one or two strategies, practice them consistently, and build on them from there. When children learn to ride a bike, we don't expect them to master it immediately. What do we expect and what do we do? We expect that it will take several afternoons of practice for our child to learn to ride their bike independently. We provide training wheels, hold the seat, and run along the side of them until voilà, they are balancing and pedaling all on their own.



Emotional and behavioral regulation develops the same way. Children need repeated opportunities to practice calming their bodies, naming their feelings, and choosing helpful behaviors, with adults providing guidance, modeling, and support throughout. **Skills develop through patience and practice.** When children are taught strategies, structure, and encouragement, regulation and confidence are strengthened.



This guide has three sections: **Building Emotional Regulation, Improving Social Confidence, and Supporting School Success.**

Each section provides specific strategies and quick practice tips for you to use immediately with your child. At the end of each section, you'll find reflection prompts to help you apply these ideas to your own child and family. Reflection prompts are most helpful when used as an opportunity to pause, not as a test. Read a section of the guide, then choose one or two prompts to think about quietly or write down responses.

The goal isn't to find the "right" answer, but to build awareness of patterns, strengths, stress points, and lessons learned. You can use prompts to identify what is already working, recognize when your child struggles most, and reflect on how your own responses influence outcomes. Revisit the same prompts over time, since insights often change as children grow and skills develop. When used consistently and without self-judgment, reflection prompts will help you move from reacting in the moment to responding intentionally, with confidence and empathy. Remember that you are practicing too.



REGULATION, CONFIDENCE, SUCCESS

**Build
Emotional
Regulation**



**Improve
Social
Confidence**

**Support
School
Success**



BUILDING EMOTIONAL REGULATION

Big emotions aren't a choice to be "bad". They're a sign that your child's nervous system is overwhelmed and dysregulated. When children are overwhelmed by stress, their brains shift into a stress response, making it difficult to think, listen, or regulate their behavior.

Support and regulation come first; learning and behavior change follow once the nervous system feels balanced again.



You might ask, "Stress? What stress? How does a child who doesn't have to make dinner, pay bills, and work 40 hours every week have stress?" Many everyday experiences can overwhelm a child's nervous system with stress, especially when demands exceed their coping skills. Below is a list of everyday stressors for children. Review these situations to determine whether any overwhelm your child.



Common stressors

- Transitions (waking up, leaving the house, changing activities, bedtime)
- Sensory overload (noise, crowds, bright lights, scratchy clothing)
- Fatigue, hunger, or illness
- Academic pressure or fear of making mistakes
- Social stress (feeling left out, conflict with peers, reading social cues)
- Big feelings they don't yet have words for (disappointment, jealousy, grief)
- Feeling rushed, criticized, or misunderstood
- Unexpected changes or lack of predictability
- Holding it together all day and releasing emotions at home

When these stressors accumulate, behavior often reflects a sense of overwhelm and signals a need for support, structure, and regulation. Behavior reflects **stress**.





What is Emotional Regulation?

Emotional regulation is the ability to recognize emotions, tolerate distress, and return to a calm, organized state. Children are not born with these skills, and do not develop them without co-regulation, practice, and supportive relationships.

Before children can regulate themselves, they need co-regulation from caring adults. Co-regulation means you calm down **with** your child. Children must borrow a parent's nervous system and the strategies they use to remain balanced until they can do so independently.

Imagine a mother koala bear with a new baby, called a joey. A joey lives in the mother koala's pouch for the first 6 months of life. The baby koala is entirely dependent on the parent for safety, warmth, and nutrition. Then, for the next several months, they move from the pouch and stay on their mother's back. When the joey feels scared, wobbly, or unsure, the mother koala's steady presence and gentle support help the joey feel secure. During this period, the joey learns skills such as climbing and foraging until it can move, balance, and explore with confidence.

Co-regulation works in the same way. Children (or anyone feeling overwhelmed) need a calm presence to help regulate their emotions. Any adult can act like the parent koala: offering steady support, reassurance, and guidance, without taking over or removing the child's opportunity to practice self-regulation. The goal is to help the child internalize these skills, much like the baby koala eventually learns to move independently.

Emotional Regulation Supportive Strategies

O1

NAME AND NORMALIZE
EMOTIONS

O2

MATCH EMOTIONS TO
BODY SENSATIONS

O3

TEACH AND PRACTICE
REGULATION SKILLS
WHEN CALM

O4

CO-REGULATE BEFORE
EXPECTING SELF-
REGULATION

O5

SEPARATE YOUR CHILD
FROM THEIR BEHAVIOR

NAME AND NORMALIZE EMOTIONS

CHILDREN (AND ADULTS!) OFTEN FEEL EMOTIONS INTENSELY BUT DON'T HAVE THE WORDS TO DESCRIBE THEM. NAMING THE EMOTION BRIDGES THAT GAP.

SAYING SOMETHING AS SIMPLE AS, "IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE FEELING FRUSTRATED BECAUSE THESE MATH PROBLEMS ARE TRICKY," IS HELPFUL.

JUST HEARING YOU LABEL AN EMOTION CAN HELP CALM YOUR CHILD'S NERVOUS SYSTEM. IT SIGNALS TO THEM THAT YOU SEE THAT THEY ARE UNCOMFORTABLE AND THAT WHAT THEY ARE FEELING IS VALID.

OVER TIME, CHILDREN LEARN TO RECOGNIZE THEIR EMOTIONS. ONCE A FEELING IS NAMED - IT BECOMES EASIER TO DECIDE WHAT TO DO NEXT.



PRACTICE

OBSERVE

**LOOK AT YOUR CHILD'S BODY
LANGUAGE AND FACIAL
EXPRESSIONS.**

**LISTEN TO THEIR TONE OF
VOICE.**

LABEL & VALIDATE

AVOID JUDGMENT.

**“YOU SEEM SAD.”
“THAT LOOKS FRUSTRATING.
“IT’S OKAY TO FEEL NERVOUS
ABOUT THE SOCCER TRYOUT.”**

CO-REGULATE

**STAY PRESENT.
MODEL CALM.
GUIDE YOUR CHILD TOWARD
REGULATION.**



MATCH EMOTIONS TO BODY SENSATIONS

WHEN WE FEEL BIG EMOTIONS, OUR BODIES OFTEN GIVE US CLUES.

OUR STOMACHS MIGHT FEEL TIGHT, OUR HEARTS MIGHT BEAT FAST, OR OUR HANDS MIGHT SWEAT.

BRING ATTENTION TO BOTH THE EMOTION AND YOUR CHILD'S BODY.

THIS HELPS THEM RECOGNIZE FEELINGS EARLY, ENABLING THEM TO REGULATE BEFORE THE FEELING BECOMES TOO INTENSE.



PRACTICE

PAUSE & NOTICE

“WHERE DO YOU NOTICE THAT FEELING IN YOUR BODY?”

NAME IT

“THAT TIGHT SENSATION IN YOUR CHEST SOUNDS LIKE WORRY.”

REFLECT

“WHEN YOUR BODY EXPERIENCES WORRY, THE TIGHTNESS IS THE MESSAGE IT SENDS YOU.”



TEACH REGULATION SKILLS DURING CALM TIMES

CHILDREN CANNOT LEARN NEW SKILLS WHEN THEY ARE DYSREGULATED.

PRACTICE THESE STRATEGIES WHEN YOUR CHILD IS RELAXED.

WHEN YOUR CHILD BECOMES OVERWHELMED, REMIND THEM OF THE STRATEGY.



PRACTICE

BREATHING SKILLS

**“TAKE SLOW BREATHS IN
THROUGH YOUR NOSE, OUT
THROUGH YOUR MOUTH.”**

REPEAT.

SOOTHING SELF-TALK

GROUNDING

**“NOTICE YOUR BODY.
TOUCH YOUR HANDS TO YOUR
LAP AND FEEL YOUR FEET ON
THE FLOOR.”**

**“NOTICE YOUR HEARTBEAT BY
PLACING ONE HAND ON YOUR
CHEST.”**

“I CAN DO HARD THINGS”

**“I’M LEARNING TO CALM
DOWN.”**



CO-REGULATE BEFORE EXPECTING SELF-REGULATION

CO-REGULATION IS WHEN YOUR CHILD FEELS YOU BEFORE THEY HEAR YOU.

IF YOU ESCALATE, THEY WILL ESCALATE.

IF YOU STAY STEADY, YOUR CHILD'S SYSTEM WILL SYNC TO YOURS.

CO-REGULATION IS NOT GIVING IN, LETTING BAD BEHAVIOR SLIDE, OR AVOIDING LIMITS.

CO-REGULATION IS MEETING YOUR CHILD'S NERVOUS SYSTEM FIRST, CREATING CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING, AND MAKING CONNECTIONS POSSIBLE.



PRACTICE

WHAT TO SAY

“I’M HERE.”
“YOU’RE SAFE.”
“THIS IS HARD.”
“WE’LL FIGURE IT OUT.”

WHAT TO DO

SIT NEARBY
GET ON YOUR CHILD’S LEVEL
KEEP YOUR BODY RELAXED
BREATHE SLOWLY

AVOID

LECTURES
IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES
TOO MANY WORDS





A regulated adult
can calm a
dysregulated
child. A
dysregulated
adult cannot.

SEPARATE YOUR CHILD FROM THEIR BEHAVIOR

ADDRESS WHAT A CHILD DID, NOT WHO THEY ARE.

CHILDREN LEARN BEST WHEN FEEDBACK IS SPECIFIC, CALM, AND FOCUSED ON SKILL-BUILDING RATHER THAN SHAME. THE GOAL IS LEARNING AND REPAIRING. ULTIMATELY, YOU WANT TO HELP YOUR CHILD UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF THEIR BEHAVIOR AND PRACTICE A BETTER CHOICE RATHER THAN PUNISHING THEM.

WHEN YOU KEEP BEHAVIOR SEPARATE, IT PROTECTS A CHILD'S SENSE OF SELF WHILE STILL HOLDING CLEAR BOUNDARIES.



PRACTICE

WHAT TO SAY

“THAT CHOICE WASN’T SAFE.”

**“LET’S TALK WHEN YOU ARE
CALM ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN
DO NEXT TIME.”**

WHAT TO SAY

**“DO YOU WANT TO TRY
RESPONDING AGAIN?”**

**“LET’S PRACTICE A DIFFERENT
WAY TO HANDLE THIS.”**

DO NOT SAY

“YOU’RE BEING BAD.”
“WHAT’S WRONG WITH YOU?”
“YOU’RE SO DISRESPECTFUL.”
**“WHY CAN’T YOU EVER
BEHAVE?”**

Parent Reflection

Emotional Regulation - Notes

Date

What situations tend to overwhelm my child the most?
How does my child typically show stress or big emotions?

What emotions are hardest for me to stay calm with?
What helps me regulate when things feel intense?

How comfortable am I sitting with my child's discomfort without trying to fix it right away?

What is one small shift I could try to better support regulation this week?

IMPROVING SOCIAL CONFIDENCE

Support your child's confidence in social situations.



Social confidence is often misunderstood as being talkative, bold, or naturally popular. In reality, it has much less to do with how a child appears on the outside and much more to do with how steady they feel on the inside. A socially confident child does not need to perform or impress; they feel permission to show up as themselves, even when that self feels unsure, quiet, or still learning.



At its core, social confidence is about flexibility. It is the capacity to tolerate uncertainty, adapt when interactions do not go as planned, and recover when things feel awkward or disappointing. Social situations are dynamic and unpredictable, and confidence grows from the ability to stay engaged even when emotions rise or expectations are unmet.

Children who develop social confidence are not immune to mistakes or misunderstandings. Instead, they are able to experience these moments without being flooded by shame or fear. They can pause, reflect, and try again, trusting that one uncomfortable interaction does not define them or their relationships.



This confidence is also supported by an emerging understanding of how conversations flow, how emotions are communicated without words, and how relationships require give-and-take. As children grow in these areas, they begin to feel more oriented and capable in social spaces, which further strengthens their sense of belonging.

IMPROVING SOCIAL CONFIDENCE



Most importantly, social confidence does not develop in isolation. It grows within relationships. When children carry an internal sense that someone has their back, a steady presence that helps them feel grounded and valued, they are more willing to take social risks.

Over time, this external support becomes internalized.

The child begins to believe:

*I can handle this.
I am allowed to learn.
I am not alone.*



With that internal sense of safety and competence, social connection becomes less threatening and more accessible. Children gain the freedom to explore friendships, express themselves, and participate socially with greater ease, not because fear is gone, but because it no longer dominates.



Social Confidence Supportive Strategies

O1

TEACH SOCIAL SKILLS

O2

HANDLING MAKING
MISTAKES

O3

CHALLENGE ALL OR
NOTHING THINKING

O4

CONFIDENCE BACKPACK

O5

SUPPORT WITHOUT
OVER-RESCUING

TEACH SOCIAL SKILLS

CHILDREN NEED DIRECT INSTRUCTION IN SKILLS JOINING A GROUP, HANDLING “NO” AND DISAPPOINTMENT, INCLUDING OTHERS.

CHILDREN DON’T “JUST KNOW” THESE SKILLS.

THEY LEARN SOCIAL SKILLS THROUGH DIRECT INSTRUCTION AND PRACTICE OPPORTUNITIES.

ROLE-PLAYING AT HOME BUILDS CONFIDENCE, ENABLING CHILDREN TO APPLY SKILLS EVEN WHEN EMOTIONS RUN HIGH IN REAL SITUATIONS.



PRACTICE

JOINING A GROUP

**“CAN I PLAY/HANG OUT WITH
YOU?”
“WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?
CAN I JOIN?”
“IS THERE A SPOT FOR ME?”**

HANDLING DISAPPOINTMENTS

**“I DON’T LIKE THAT ANSWER,
BUT OKAY.”
“I FEEL DISAPPOINTED.”
“CAN I CHOOSE SOMETHING
ELSE?”
“I NEED A BREAK.”**

INCLUDING OTHERS

**“DO YOU WANT TO PLAY WITH
US?”
“YOU CAN BE ON OUR TEAM.”
“WE CAN ADD YOU TOO!”
“WE HAVE ROOM FOR YOU.”**

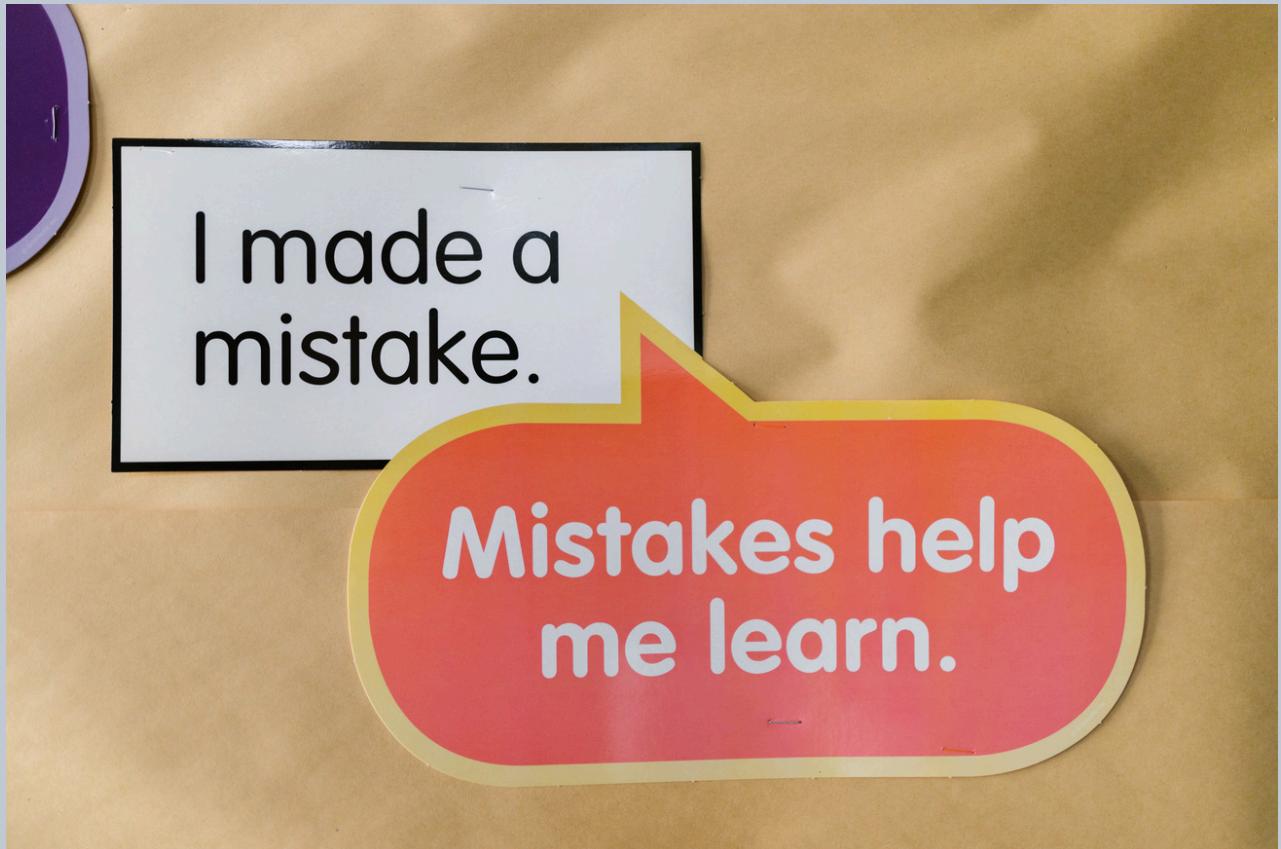


HANDLING “NO” & MAKING MISTAKES

CHILDREN OFTEN BELIEVE “I MESSED UP, SO I’M BAD AT THIS OR, IF I MAKE A MISTAKE, PEOPLE WILL THINK I’M DUMB.”

TEACH YOUR CHILD THAT MISTAKES AREN’T FAILURES; THEY ARE INFORMATION.

THOSE MOMENTS ARE LIKE BUILDING BLOCKS—EVEN THE ONES THAT FALL HELP YOU BUILD SOMETHING STRONGER NEXT TIME.



PRACTICE

NAME LEARNING.

“YOUR BRAIN JUST GOT NEW INFORMATION.”
“THAT DIDN’T WORK – WHAT DID YOU LEARN FOR NEXT TIME?”

ASK QUESTIONS

NORMALIZE STRUGGLE

“OH NO, THAT IS FRUSTRATING!”
“THAT IS REALLY HARD.”
“THIS FEELING WON’T LAST FOREVER.”

“WHAT PART WAS TRICKY?”

“WHAT MIGHT YOU TRY DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME?”

“WHAT MIGHT HELP YOU FEEL BETTER?”



CHALLENGE ALL-OR- NOTHING THINKING

IT IS COMMON FOR CHILDREN TO USE WORDS LIKE “ALWAYS OR NEVER” TO DESCRIBE THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES.

CHALLENGE THEIR ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING.

IF YOU HEAR YOUR CHILD SAYING SOMETHING LIKE, “I ALWAYS MESS UP.” YOU MIGHT SAY, “NOT ALWAYS – THERE ARE A LOT OF THINGS YOU DO WELL.”

THIS TYPE OF THINKING OFTEN SHOWS UP WHEN A CHILD IS STRESSED, ANXIOUS, OR OVERWHELMED—NOT BECAUSE THEY'RE BEING DRAMATIC OR RIGID, BUT BECAUSE THEIR NERVOUS SYSTEM IS SEEKING CERTAINTY.



PRACTICE

MOVIE SCENE

**“THIS IS JUST LIKE ONE SCENE
IN A MOVIE. ONE PART
DOESN’T RUIN THE WHOLE
THING.”**

TWO TRUTHS

**“YOU CAN BE DISAPPOINTED
AND PROUD OF TRYING.”
“THIS CAN BE HARD AND
TEMPORARY.”
“YOU CAN MAKE A MISTAKE
AND STILL BE A GOOD KID.”**

USE A SCALE

CONFIDENCE BACKPACK

CONFIDENCE ISN'T SOMETHING YOU'RE BORN WITH—IT'S SOMETHING YOU CARRY.

EVERY TRY, MISTAKE, AND BRAVE MOMENT ADDS TO YOUR BACKPACK.

IT IS COMMON TO HEAR CHILDREN SAY, “I'M JUST NOT CONFIDENT.” OR “OTHER KIDS ARE BRAVER THAN ME.”

IT DEVELOPS GRADUALLY THROUGH EXPERIENCES WHERE THEY FEEL SAFE TO TRY, MAKE MISTAKES, AND TRY AGAIN. SMALL SUCCESSES MATTER MORE THAN BIG PERFORMANCES.

WHEN CHILDREN PRACTICE NEW SKILLS REPEATEDLY IN SUPPORTIVE SITUATIONS, THEY LEARN THAT EACH TIME THEY SUCCEED, OR FAIL AND TRY AGAIN, THEY ARE CAPABLE. EXPERIENCING SMALL SETBACKS IN A SAFE CONTEXT HELPS CHILDREN BECOME RESILIENT AND FLEXIBLE.



PRACTICE

EFFORT, NOT OUTCOME

“THAT WAS A BRAVE TRY.”
**“YOU ADDED SOMETHING TO
YOUR CONFIDENCE
BACKPACK.”**
“THAT TOOK COURAGE.”
**“YOU TRIED EVEN THOUGH IT
FELT UNCOMFORTABLE.”**

PRACTICE

ORDER FOOD AT HOME BEFORE
GOING TO A RESTAURANT.
PRACTICE RAISING A HAND
DURING A PRETEND CLASS.
TRY A NEW ACTIVITY WITH A
TRUSTED ADULT PRESENT.

NORMALIZE DISCOMFORT

**“NEW THINGS USUALLY FEEL
UNCOMFORTABLE AT FIRST.”**
**“NERVOUS DOESN’T MEAN NOT
READY—IT MEANS YOU CARE.”**
**“CONFIDENCE OFTEN COMES
AFTER YOU TRY.”**



SUPPORT WITHOUT OVER-RESCUING

GUIDE CHILDREN THROUGH PROBLEM-SOLVING RATHER THAN STEPPING IN IMMEDIATELY.

THIS MAY BE THE HARDEST PART OF PARENTING; HOWEVER, SITTING WITH YOUR CHILD WHEN THEY ARE UNCOMFORTABLE IS ESSENTIAL TO BUILDING THEIR CONFIDENCE.

WHEN YOU FIX A PROBLEM IMMEDIATELY, OR REMOVE DISCOMFORT TOO QUICKLY, YOU ARE SENDING YOUR CHILD A MESSAGE THAT MAKES THEM BELIEVE THEY CAN'T HANDLE THINGS WITHOUT YOU.



PRACTICE

BE A COACH

BE A COACH, NOT A LIFEGUARD. A LIFEGUARD JUMPS IN AT THE FIRST SPLASH.

A COACH STAYS CLOSE, TEACHES SKILLS, AND STEPS IN ONLY IF SAFETY IS AT RISK.

SIT WITH DISCOMFORT

MODEL THAT YOU ARE NOT AFRAID OF DISCOMFORT AND THAT IT IS SURVIVABLE. INSTEAD OF “I’LL DO IT FOR YOU,” SAY, “I’LL STAY WITH YOU WHILE YOU TRY.”

STEP IN WHEN...

SAFETY IS AT RISK

A CHILD IS COMPLETELY DYSREGULATED AND CANNOT RECOVER

POWER DYNAMICS ARE UNFAIR (BULLYING, EXCLUSION BY ADULTS, HUMILIATION)





Confidence grows
from repetition
and small
successes.

Parent Reflection

Social Confidence - Notes

Date

· Which social situations feel most challenging for my child?

·

Does my child struggle more with starting interactions or recovering from setbacks?

How comfortable am I allowing my child to feel social discomfort while staying supportive?

What is one small way I can support practice without increasing pressure?

SUPPORTING SCHOOL SUCCESS



Academic success is often attributed to intelligence, motivation, or innate ability, but these factors tell only a small part of the story.

Learning is a complex process that asks children to manage far more than information. It requires them to sustain attention, tolerate frustration, shift strategies when something is not working, and organize their efforts over time. These demands place significant weight on underlying cognitive and emotional systems rather than on raw intellect alone.



When a child can control their attention, they decide what to focus on and what to filter out, especially in environments filled with distractions.

Emotional endurance supports their ability to stay engaged when tasks are challenging, boring, or emotionally uncomfortable.

Planning and organization help them hold multiple steps in mind, sequence their actions, and follow through even when the reward is delayed.

Flexible thinking enables them to adjust expectations, consider alternatives, and recover from mistakes.

Together, these capacities shape how effectively a child can access and use their intelligence.

These function as mental tools rather than fixed traits. They are processes the brain uses to regulate behavior, emotion, and thinking in real time.



SUPPORTING SCHOOL SUCCESS



When these tools are still developing or under strain, children may appear unmotivated, careless, or incapable, even though the underlying issue is one of skill development rather than effort or ability.

Understanding academic success through this lens shifts the focus from who a child is to what they are still learning.



These skills develop gradually and unevenly, influenced by brain development, stress, experience, and context.

As they strengthen, children gain greater access to their knowledge and creativity, allowing their true abilities to show up more consistently.

This perspective emphasizes growth, learning, and possibility rather than limitation, reinforcing that academic challenges are not reflections of character but signals of skills still under construction.

School Success Supportive Strategies

O1

CREATE PREDICTABLE
ROUTINES

O2

BREAK TASKS INTO
MANAGEABLE STEPS

O3

TEACH EXECUTIVE
FUNCTION SKILLS

O4

EMPHASIZE PROGRESS
OVER PERFECTION

CREATE PREDICTABLE ROUTINES

CONSISTENCY REDUCES ANXIETY AND IMPROVES FOCUS.

USE VISUAL SCHEDULES WHEN POSSIBLE.

PREDICTABLE ROUTINES HELP CHILDREN FEEL SAFE BECAUSE THEY KNOW WHAT COMES NEXT.

WHEN THE BRAIN DOESN'T HAVE TO WORK TO GUESS OR WORRY, IT HAS MORE ENERGY FOR LEARNING, REGULATING EMOTIONS, AND CONNECTING WITH OTHERS.



PRACTICE

KEEP STRUCTURE

KEEP THE STRUCTURE THE SAME, EVEN WHEN DETAILS CHANGE.

ALLOW FLEXIBILITY WITHIN THE ROUTINE.

VISUAL SCHEDULES

USE VISUAL SCHEDULES WHENEVER POSSIBLE. REVIEW THE DAY AHEAD OF TIME USING PICTURE SCHEDULES FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN AND WRITTEN CHECKLISTS FOR OLDER CHILDREN.

STRESS POINTS

BUILD ROUTINES AROUND COMMON STRESS POINTS. FOCUS ON WHERE REGULATION BREAKS DOWN, SUCH AS MORNINGS, HOMEWORK TIME, BEDTIME, LEAVING OR RETURNING HOME.

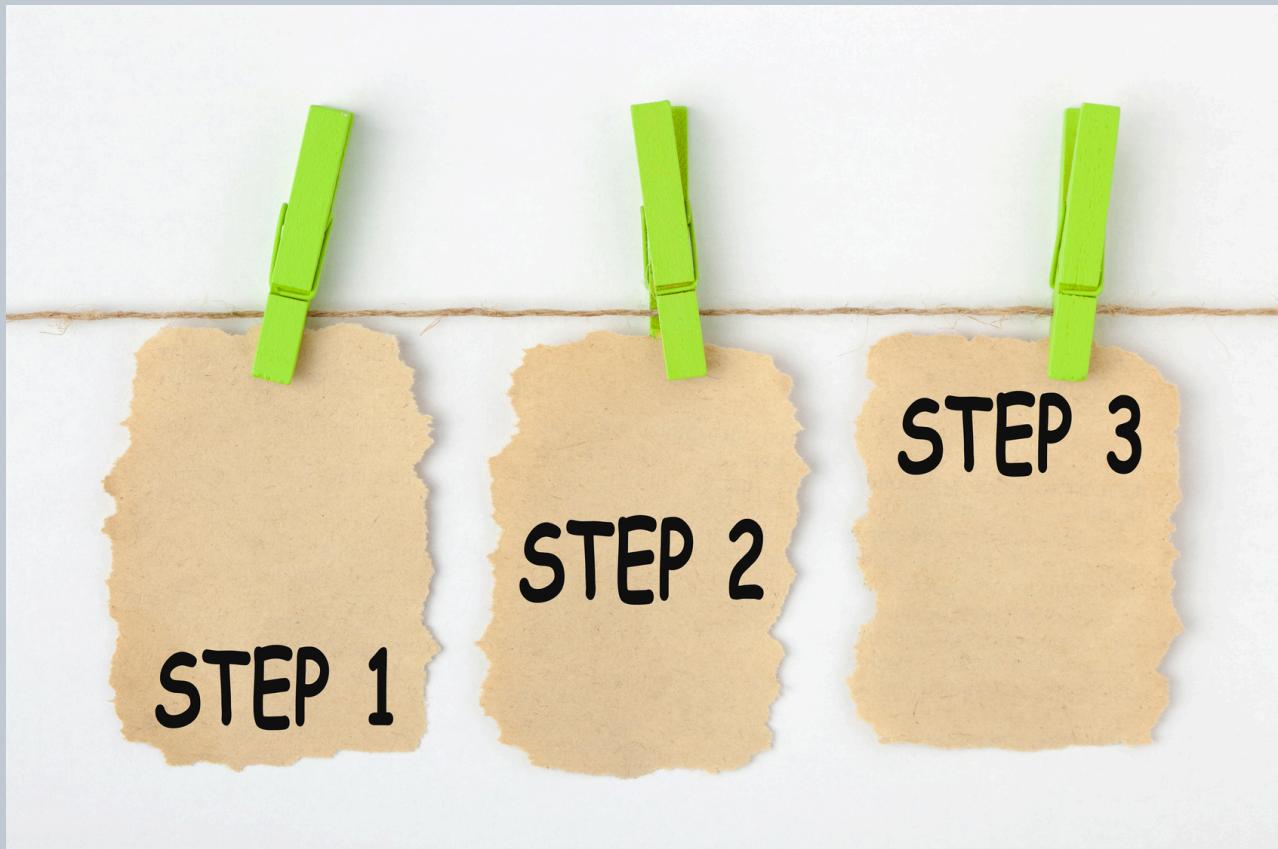


BREAK TASKS INTO MANAGEABLE STEPS

LARGE TASKS OVERWHELM DEVELOPING BRAINS.

TEACH CHILDREN HOW TO START SMALL AND BUILD MOMENTUM.

THIS WILL HELP REDUCE OVERWHELM.



PRACTICE

BREAK INTO STEPS

**PICK UP CLOTHES FROM THE FLOOR.
PUT DIRTY CLOTHES IN THE HAMPER.
MAKE THE BED.
PUT BOOKS ON THE SHELF.**

CHECKLIST

USE VISUALS
MAKE CHECKLISTS
CREATE A LIST

CELEBRATE SUCCESS

**“GREAT!
THE CLOTHES ARE IN THE HAMPER—NOW LET’S MAKE THE BED.”**



TEACH EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SKILLS

CHILDREN CAN'T USE SKILLS THEY HAVEN'T SEEN.

THEY NEED TO SEE SOMEONE MODEL THOUGHT PROCESSES AND STRATEGIES.

WITHOUT GUIDANCE, TASKS MAY FEEL IMPOSSIBLE, LEADING TO STRESS OR AVOIDANCE.

EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION HELPS CHILDREN INTERNALIZE STRATEGIES, SO THEY CAN APPLY THEM INDEPENDENTLY.



PRACTICE

THINK OUTLOUD

**NARRATE YOUR PLANNING
AND PROBLEM-SOLVING
PROCESS.**

**“I NEED TO PACK MY BAG FOR
SCHOOL. FIRST, I’LL CHECK MY
HOMEWORK FOLDER. THEN,
I’LL PACK MY LUNCH.”**

PRACTICE TOGETHER

**START BY GUIDING YOUR CHILD
THROUGH TASKS, THEN
GRADUALLY LET THEM TAKE
MORE RESPONSIBILITY.**

USE VISUAL SUPPORTS

**USE VISUAL SUPPORTS.
CHECKLISTS, CALENDARS, OR
STICKY NOTES MAKE
ABSTRACT SKILLS CONCRETE.**



EMPHASIZE PROGRESS OVER PERFECTION

FOCUS ON EFFORT, GROWTH, AND PROBLEM-SOLVING RATHER THAN GRADES ALONE. CHILDREN OFTEN FEEL PRESSURE TO GET EVERYTHING “RIGHT,” WHETHER IT’S COMPLETING HOMEWORK PERFECTLY, PERFORMING WELL IN SPORTS, OR NAVIGATING SOCIAL SITUATIONS.

THIS PRESSURE CAN INCREASE ANXIETY, REDUCE MOTIVATION, AND MAKE CHILDREN AVOID CHALLENGES.

INSTEAD OF FOCUSING SOLELY ON OUTCOMES LIKE GRADES OR PRAISE, CELEBRATE EFFORT, LEARNING, AND PROBLEM-SOLVING.

TEACH CHILDREN THAT SKILLS IMPROVE WITH PRACTICE, NOT JUST TALENT OR LUCK.



PRACTICE

NOTICE EFFORT

“I SAW HOW YOU KEPT TRYING, EVEN WHEN IT WAS TRICKY. THAT’S REAL PROGRESS.”

STRATEGIES

**HIGHLIGHT STRATEGIES, NOT JUST RESULTS.
“YOU BROKE THE PROBLEM INTO STEPS AND TRIED EACH ONE. THAT’S SMART THINKING!”**

DO NOT COMPARE

FOCUS ON THE CHILD’S PERSONAL PROGRESS, NOT SOMEONE ELSE’S PERFORMANCE.





When the brain
doesn't have to
work to guess or
worry, it has more
energy for
learning,
regulating
emotions, and
connecting with
others.

Parent Reflection

School Success - Notes

Date

How do I usually respond when my child feels overwhelmed by schoolwork?

.

Do I focus more on outcomes (grades, completion) or on effort and strategy?

Where does my child tend to struggle most with follow-through (starting, staying focused, finishing)?

What is one small structure or routine that might help my child feel more supported with school?

CONCLUSION

Parenting is not about raising a child who never struggles; it's about raising a child who learns how to handle struggle with support, flexibility, and confidence.

The strategies in this guide are tools you can return to repeatedly as your child grows. Small, consistent moments of connection, structure, and practice make the biggest difference over time.

Progress often appears quiet and gradual before it becomes apparent. Your role is not to eliminate discomfort or solve every problem for your child. Your role is to stay steady, provide guidance, and create learning opportunities when things feel hard.

When you lead with calm, predictability, and compassion, your child learns that challenges are manageable, mistakes are safe, and growth is possible. You are building skills that will serve your child far beyond childhood, into friendships, learning, and life.



REGULATION, CONFIDENCE, SUCCESS

Emotional regulation is learned through calm, supportive relationships.

Social confidence grows through practice, mistakes, and repair.

School success depends on skills that can be taught, not traits a child either has or doesn't have.