SSCY Centre

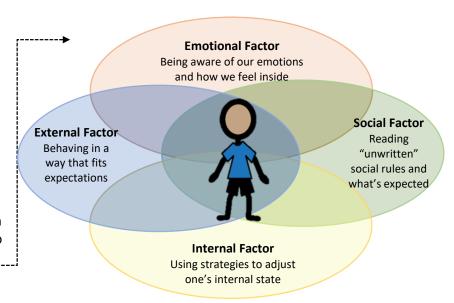
1155 Notre Dame Avenue Winnipeg, MB, Canada R3E 3G1 T (204) 452-4311 F (204) 477-5547 rccinc.ca
f in 🖸 💆

What is REGULATION... and why is it SO HARD?

An Occupational Therapy Perspective

What Is 'Regulation'?

Regulation is the ability to monitor and change your level of arousal to be appropriate for the task at hand.
Regulation can seem like one skill gained at a particular time along a child's developmental path. This can make us think that as children get older, they'll also get better at regulating. In fact, regulation is a lot more complex and dynamic! Many different things must come together in order for a child (or adult) to be able to regulate. These include...



How Regulation Develops

There's a lot going on! No wonder regulation is so tricky. Early experiences, interactions with and modeling from caregivers, and the child's own temperament create the blueprint for regulation. Regulation is a skill that develops over the life span as children grow, learn, interact with others, and collect life experiences. This is supported by ongoing development of communication skills that equip children with more strategies to process, understand, and express emotions – behaviour is communication!

Development of Regulation (developmental stages, not ages) Elementary to Adulthood Preschool Early years Infants Middle School to Middle School Highschool -Building blocks of -Burst of skills, -Time to practice: -Begin to develop -Regulation skills - Now a true seeing what regulation start leading to more the ability to have sense of "self"tend to dip as a shortly after birth independence two competing works or doesn't, regulation burst of brain -Dependent on with regulation feelings in social moving from big becomes development and caregiver to four feelings -Still highly reliant situations and attainable; hormones occur regulate on co-regulator weighing them (happy, mad, sad however the -As teens take on -Connecting and and scared) to -Have difficulty out against each brain is still additional roles in building secure more nuanced with impulse other maturing as it life, they are able attachment emotions control, labeling -Becoming better takes three to practice and through emotions, equipped to -Gain greater decades to fully hone their skills, interactions with independence interpreting inhibit emotiondevelop these learning what is caregiver through practice thoughts and driven impulses skills appropriate in -Start learning to feelings of others but still requires a based on social different contexts self soothe and co-regulator at goals as they control impulses times mature

While it takes until adulthood for all the pieces to come together, even adults can find it hard to manage big feelings and cope with stressors depending on the day and what is going on in their lives. Think of how you behave when you are...



SSCY Centre

1155 Notre Dame Avenue Winnipeg, MB, Canada R3E 3G1 T (204) 452-4311 F (204) 477-5547 rccinc.ca
f in 🖸 💆

The Role of the Co-regulator

Not every child will follow the developmental path outlined above and this is okay. Every child is unique and there really is no such thing as 'normal' development. As parents, teachers, and caregivers, it can be easy for us to see where the child could be or where we want their skills to be. However, we need to meet our children where they're at, while accepting them as they are and learning together. This is where co-regulation comes in! A co-regulator is a role model who guides a child through the process of:

- recognizing their emotions/body states,
- looking for and understanding context clues (i.e., answering the question "Why might I feel this way?"),
- coming up with calming strategies, and
- reflecting on the impact of those strategies.

Co-regulation can help at *all* stages of development. What you do will change over time and depend on the individual child. Our job as a co-regulator is to be observant, mindful, engaged, responsive, and adaptable. *Come from a place of curiosity - you might be surprised! There is always a 'why'*. An important part of being a co-regulator is to 'hold space' for someone's emotions, which can be difficult and uncomfortable. It is important for the caregiver to do a self-check, to see if they are in the best emotional state to help regulate the child. If you feel like you are not in the 'just right state', having another team member to help or having a back-up plan is a good strategy.

Consider the analogy, 'co-regulation is like paddling a canoe' - along a river which is constantly flowing, changing, and influenced by the environment.

REGULATION MILD DYSREGULATION What it looks like: What it looks like: -The child is interested and -The child may refuse/avoid tasks, not engaged respond to directions, may become physical or vocal about how they're feeling because As the smooth The water is calm and Strategies for Co-Regulator: of a change in the environment or routine, waters become choppy, the child is doing most -Challenge the child's learning; transition, or unfamiliar tasks paddling can get tricky for of the paddling. one degree past 'just right' the child. As the co-regulator, you -Practice old and new strategies As the co-regulator, you Strategies for Co-Regulator: are watching for -Provide specific feedback identify the obstacle and -Validate emotions obstacles ahead. -Celebrate and connect take a larger role in paddling. -Offer familiar strategies for regulation -Encourage problem solving with coregulator **CO-REGULATION** RECOVERY **DYSREGULATION** The water has returned What it looks like: The child cannot What it looks like: -The child may look tired, to calm and together you paddle. As the co-- The child is overwhelmed and not are floating in the canoe. low energy regulator, you are As the co-regulator, you fully in charge of - The child appears anxious, agitated, are watching for Strategies for Co-Regulator: paddling. upset, withdraws or can be physical obstacles but focused on -Wait and watch the child. Paddling is not -Share your calm, continue to be Strategies for Co-Regulator: with the child, provide praise a priority. -Create a safe physical space - Model and practice breathing or -Communicate with body language, calm muscle relaxation tone of voice, use of language (use -Assess how 'ready' the child is to debrief fewer words) or move on -Redirect if the child is unable to function -Now is the time for reconnection and recovery -Be aware of triggers in the environment -It is a time to give the child, and yourself, a chance to reset before the next expectation -Wait and watch, adult models breathing, muscle relaxation