

Co-Regulation

What is Co-Regulation?

A guide for parents and carers

What does co-regulation mean?

Co-regulation is how adults help children manage big feelings before they can calm themselves.

When children feel upset, angry, worried, or overwhelmed, their brains are still developing.

They need a calm, caring adult to help them feel safe and settled.

In simple terms: children borrow our calm until they can find their own.

Why is co-regulation important?

Young children cannot yet manage strong emotions on their own.

When emotions feel too big, behaviour is a way of communicating a need for help — not being naughty.

Co-regulation helps children:

- Feel safe and understood
- Calm their bodies and emotions
- Learn that feelings are okay
- Gradually develop self-regulation skills

Self-regulation grows from co-regulation — it doesn't come first.

What does co-regulation look like at home?

Co-regulation can be simple and gentle, such as:

- Staying calm and patient
- Using a soft, steady voice
- Getting down to your child's level
- Naming feelings: "I can see you're feeling really upset."
- Offering reassurance: "I'm here. You're safe."
- Supporting a calming strategy:
- Slow breathing together
- A cuddle or sitting close
- Quiet time with an adult Children often need connection before correction.

What co-regulation is NOT?

Co-regulation is not:

- Telling children to "calm down"
- Ignoring or dismissing feelings
- Punishing emotional behaviour
- Expecting children to cope alone Children learn best when they feel supported.

A helpful way to remember it

Calm → Connect → Teach

1. Calm the body and emotions
2. Connect with kindness and understanding
3. Teach coping skills once the child is calm Learning cannot happen when emotions feel overwhelming.

The long-term benefit

When children experience co-regulation repeatedly, they learn to:

- Understand and name feelings
- Calm themselves over time
- Build confidence and resilience
- Feel secure in relationships This support now helps children manage emotions for life.