

Emotional Regulation and Sensory Processing



WHAT IS EMOTIONAL REGULATION?

The ability to manage our emotional responses.

Is impacted by environment, task/activity, and relationships.

An important part of developing relationships and thriving in a community or setting.

HOW DOES EMOTIONAL REGULATION DEVELOP IN CHILDREN?



In infancy: Caregivers teach infants emotional regulation skills through use of calming voices, rocking, anticipating needs, and modeling coping strategies.

Toddlers & young children: Caregivers teach them to label emotions to better understand their needs.
"Co-regulation"

As children grow older, they learn to use strategies independently to manage their emotions.
"Self-regulation"



HOW IS EMOTIONAL REGULATION RELATED TO SENSORY PROCESSING?

Sensory processing is how our bodies interpret information that is taken in through our senses (visual, sounds, textures, smells, movement, etc).

Sometimes sensory information can cause a stress response in our bodies (fight or flight) and other sensory information may not stress or alert our system at all.

Big stress responses to sensory information can result in big emotional responses.

Lack of a stress response can result in disengagement from the world around us.

Just the right amounts of stress can lead to optimal learning & growth.

Teaching Self-Regulation & When to Seek Therapy

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING SELF-REGULATION



Speaking in comforting tones, gently rocking them, and making changes to the environment such as lowering noise volume, reducing lighting, or changing the temperature.

Labeling emotions, teaching rules and boundaries in age-appropriate ways, and drawing attention to self-regulatory behaviors such as using words to express feelings.



Modeling behaviors such as pausing before reacting, diaphragmatic breathing, asking for breaks, and asking for help.

WHEN TO SEEK ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

The following characteristics may indicate a need for additional support from a healthcare provider:

- Big emotional responses multiple times a day or most days of the week when other physiological needs are met
- Bigger emotional reactions to conflict, rules, or boundaries than other same-age children
- Picky eating
- Difficulty with sleep
- Difficulty with transitions
- Poor tolerance to certain textures or fabrics
- Difficulty making or keeping friends
- Difficulty sustaining attention or sitting still during age-appropriate tasks



HOW OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY CAN HELP

Occupational therapists use sensory integration and cognitive behavioral strategies to treat individuals with emotional regulation difficulties. These treatments are provided through meaningful everyday activities such as play. Treatment strategies are adjusted to the individual's needs, abilities, and preferences.

Have questions about Occupational Therapy, interested in an evaluation, or curious if OT may be helpful for your child or a child you work with?

Contact us to find out more information.

