

Tips for Being a Co-Regulator

Self-regulation is hard! Learning the skills to self-regulate takes practice, maturity, and guidance. Adults can help by acting as **co-regulators**. 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 noticing the impact of those strategies. Here are some general co-regulator tips:

- **Take note of what Zone the child appears to be in. This will inform your approach...**

The **ZONES** of Regulation®

			
BLUE ZONE Sad Sick Tired Bored Moving Slowly	GREEN ZONE Happy Calm Feeling Okay Focused Ready to Learn	YELLOW ZONE Frustrated Worried Silly/Wiggly Excited Loss of Some Control	RED ZONE Mad/Angry Mean Terrified Yelling/Hitting Out of Control

Green: The child is ready to play and participate. This is a good time to teach skills and try new strategies.

Blue or Yellow: The child’s level of arousal does not match the task. The child is not ready to play or participate and may be starting to lose some control over their behaviour. This is a good time to practice familiar strategies – avoid introducing new tools. Make sure your expectations are realistic for the child, to avoid escalation.

Red: The child’s nervous system is overwhelmed. They are in fight / flight/ freeze and are no longer able to control their behaviour. Protect safety, avoid talking, and wait. Model a calm body and slow, deep breaths.

- **If not in the Red Zone, try using a guided script – kind of like “thinking out loud” alongside the child...**

Steps of a guided script:

1. **Identify the issue** – say out loud what you observe
2. **State the reason** – notice clues in the environment, make a smart guess about the issue
3. **Invite a strategy** – can involve the child or be more directive, depending on the moment
4. **Give feedback** – what was the impact?

Here are some examples of guided scripts...

Situation: sensory overload

Your group is doing messy play in their room. The kids are excited and everyone's crowded around the messy bin. Voice volumes are getting high. One of the campers (Jane) appears to want to play, but keeps retreating away from the group. She seems more frustrated each time she tries to join in.

1. **Identify the issue:** *"Jane, I see you want to play but it's hard to join in such a busy game. That's frustrating!"*
2. **State the reason:** *"I wonder if it's because of how loud it is?"*
3. **Invite a strategy:** *"We have ear protectors."*
4. **Give feedback:** *"You chose ear protectors and it sure helped you play with the group."*

Situation: missing social cues

The group is sitting at circle time. One of the kids (Jeff) really wants to sit by his friend (Carmen). He sits too close, but doesn't notice. Every time Carmen moves to create space, Jeff moves closer. Carmen is starting to look annoyed.

1. **Identify the issue:** *"Hmm, Carmen doesn't look very comfortable right now...I see she's leaning back and her mouth is in a frown"*
2. **State the reason:** *"Something tells me you might be in her personal space...you seem to be closer than an arm's length away."*
3. **Invite a strategy:** *"Why don't you check if you are too close or too far"*
4. **Give feedback:** *"Aha! You were too close! You moved further away and wow – Carmen looks way more comfortable now."*

Guided scripts are a good way to "talk the talk"... remember, it's equally (or more!) important to "walk the walk"...

✓ **Be a role model for the children** – describe out loud your own inner experiences and the processes /strategies you use to solve problems and stay calm.

- ✓ **Be aware of what Zone you are in, and what Zone you are expressing** - pay attention to your own body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice. Use strategies when you need them, too, so that you can be a calming presence for the kids.

