

Tips for supporting emotional regulation.

Emotional self-regulation is a person's ability to manage their emotions, behaviours, and reactions in accordance with a situation. So, for example it is the ability to control your emotions by resisting a highly emotive response to a situation and being able to calm yourself down. But also, in this situation recognising your emotions in order for you to make the conscious decision to move away from a situation or remain calm as well as understanding what will happen if you react a certain way. Some autistic people can experience difficulties in the ability to regulate their emotions. Some considerations in relation to supporting emotional regulation include:

- Recognise and accept that all emotions are valid and meaningful to the person: They will probably be trying really hard to manage navigating through the day.
- Remember that when a person is feeling emotionally dysregulated, they will have difficulty carrying out everyday tasks that require executive functioning skills like planning what they need for school or choosing what they want for lunch.
- Understand that some autistic people may have a real difficulty connecting their feelings: When a person tells you they don't know how they are feeling, they may genuinely not know.
- Always consider past trauma and how this may have an impact on the person's ability to emotionally regulate.
- Sleep is vital for successful emotional regulation: When we are exhausted, we are less likely to be able to use our emotional regulation skills successfully. If the person is having difficulty sleeping, you may want to try and address this.
- Be aware that self-regulation strategies can be both healthy and unhealthy: Unhealthy strategies may include self-harm, dangerous behaviour, or misusing drugs/alcohol.
- When teaching emotional regulation skills, consider your own mood and behaviour: This may have an impact on the person in both a positive and a negative way.
- Develop a vocabulary of emotion labels: Label emotions in natural settings, you can also use favourite TV or storybook characters to discuss feelings. For example, "Peppa pig is sad, she is crying."

- 
- 
- 
- Recognise and accept that all emotions are valid and meaningful to the person: They will probably be trying really hard to manage navigating through the day.
 - Use a scaling system: Many parents express worries that their family member goes from a zero to a hundred in seconds meaning they seem to go from calm to angry/frustrated and stressed very quickly. Scaling is a tool that can be used to help people visualise the subtle changes in emotions. A useful resource for scaling is the 5-point scale, this can be personalised in a way that is meaningful and interesting to the person.
 - Think safety: Everyone needs to feel safe within their environment. Ask yourself, does the person feel emotionally and physically safe? If they don't, what can you do to make them feel safe?
 - Help the person to identify their emotions: Many autistic people have difficulty recognising and understanding their emotions you can help by labelling their emotions, explaining how they feel and describing them. One way to do this is to talk about physical feelings in the body. For example, "when I am anxious, I feel a pain in my tummy, or I want to cry". If the person can identify that they are getting anxious they can try to do something to calm themselves down or remove themselves from the situation before things escalate.
 - Use visual stories: These can be a great way of breaking down emotions into a format in which the person better understands.
 - Implement decompression time into routines: We all need time to relax and decompress after the pressures of daily life, having opportunities for relaxation can have a positive effect on the person's emotional wellbeing. These relaxation activities may include activities like mindfulness, yoga or may be more individualised like engaging in self stimulatory behaviour.
 - Teach replacement and distraction techniques: Provide the person with strategies or techniques that they can use when they are feeling a certain way for example chewing their chew toy or taking them off to a quiet space.
 - Be consistent: Try to be as consistent as possible with rules and expectations so the person feels safe and knows how to respond in certain situations.