

The Four Principles of Co-Regulation



Calm Parents Calm Kids

- Get down on their level: kneel, crouch, heck, you can get on the floor; just get at their eye level
- Use a gentle, reassuring touch to let them know you're there
- Try to offer "a hug" with your facial expressions: the same thing you'd convey with a warm hug is what your face should try to convey when co-regulating your child
- Verbally validate their feelings: Connect what you're observing in your child with the name of a feeling and say it out loud. You can even display the feeling on your own face so they know you get it. Validate that it's a natural way to feel and that it makes sense to you
- Verbally share that you're there: Tell them that you're there for them and that you'll be there for as long as they need - sometimes your silent, close presence is all they need
- Use a warm, responsive, and soothing tone of voice: sound like the calm, caring CEO
- Verbally communicate that you'll help them find a way to solve the problem
- Model the reaction you want them to be having in the moment: don't *tell* them how to feel; *show* them how to feel yourself
- Make sure you are regulated too: if a child's frustrated, it's natural for the adult to start to feel frustrated too, but only calm parents can calm kids, so make sure you really are calm and regulated



Modify the Environment

- Minimize exposure to the stressor: move farther away from the speakers at a concert, ask to be sat outside at a restaurant instead of inside by the bar, move farther away from the fireworks show
- Remove from the stressor entirely: leave a movie that's too scary, leave the vicinity of a barking dog
- Lower audio stimulation: turn down loud music, cover their ears by large trucks, reduce the volume of your voice when disciplining, reduce the speed at which you give directions
- Clear up visual stimulation: clean up all the crayons and coloring books before lunch, cover their eyes during a scary commercial, keep fewer, simpler toys in their room
- Add visual aids to support functioning: using a visual countdown timer on your phone before transitioning to nap time, count the different steps in a set of directions on your fingers as you give them, add gestural cues when giving multi-step directions

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Give Full Attention

- Children need attention just like a car needs gas
- At least once a day for a few minutes, but more if you can:
- Get down on their level: interact with your child at their eye level, in their world
- Get obstacles out of the way: put the iPad away, leave the dishes in the sink at the island, and have unimpeded, one-on-one time with them
- During this time, give them your *full* attention: no thinking about what needs to go on the grocery list, if you switched the laundry, or what you'll ask your boss tomorrow, just fully committed, in-the-moment time with them
- Let *them* pick what gets played with and how it gets played with. Follow them wherever they go, leaning into them
- Give them as much unhurried time as they need to get their thoughts and words out: look patient, attentive, and encouraging (This can feel extremely uncomfortable at first, but sometimes we need to get more comfortable being uncomfortable; sit in it; it's okay)
- Care more about *what* they're saying instead of *how* they're saying it, *their message* over their messaging



Provide Predictability and Healthy Habits

- A stable base camp is the best place from which to explore the world
- Have a stable routine for most days so your child knows what to expect: breakfast, morning activities, lunch, rest time, play, dinner, bathing, bedtime
- In that larger daily routine, embed smaller routines so they know what's coming up: like a wake up routine that includes putting on a new outfit, brushing teeth, combing hair, and putting on glasses
- You can use a visual schedule with pictures and words for each routine in the day so they can see what's coming up next
- Verbally forecast what's coming up, multiple times, before the actual transition (visual timers can help here, too)
- Share your expectations for your child in a certain situation explicitly so they know what to do. Actually say, "I expect you to..."
- As you go about your routines, verbally narrate what you're doing as you do it: if your child has a hard time waiting for their waffles to bake, narrate the the steps you're taking as you take them to keep them up to speed
- When adding new things into the routine like new activities or new foods, change only one facet a time, while trying to keep all other aspects the same
- Eat healthy food at predictable times
- Get good, kid-friendly exercise every day
- Get good, consistent sleep