



Zones of Regulation and Feelings

'Life is 10% what happens to us and 90% how we react to it'. Charles Swindoll

The Zones of Regulation is an internationally renowned intervention which helps children to manage difficult emotions, known as 'self-regulation'. Self-regulation can go by many names such as 'self-control', 'impulse management' and 'self-management'. Self-regulation is best described as the best state of alertness for a situation. For example, when your child takes part in a sports game, they would need to have a higher state of alertness than when, for example, they were working in a library. From time to time, all of us (including adults) find it hard to manage strong feelings such as worry, anger, restlessness, fear or tiredness, and this stops us from getting on with our day effectively. Children who feel these emotions often find it hard to learn and concentrate in school. The Zones of Regulation aims to teach children strategies to help them cope with these feelings so they can get back to feeling calm and ready to learn. These coping strategies are called 'self-regulation'.

We are launching the Zones of Regulation throughout the whole school. We want to teach all our children good coping and regulation strategies so they can help themselves when they experience anxiety and big emotions. In the classroom, sometimes children panic when faced with a tricky learning problem or challenge. By teaching them how to cope with these feelings might make them better at tackling learning challenges and build better resilience so they don't give up so easily when faced with difficulty.

What are the Zones?

The Zones teaches self-regulation by categorizing all the different ways we feel and the states of alertness we experience into four coloured zones. It provides strategies to teach children how to become more aware of and independent in controlling their behaviour. Children learn to identify their feelings/level of alertness, understand how their behaviour impacts those around them and learn what tools they can use to manage their feelings and states.

The Zones can be likened to traffic lights:

- Green:** you are 'good to go!'
- Yellow:** slow down or take warning
- Red:** stop and regain control
- Blue:** rest area where you pull over when you're tired and need to recharge.

The Four Zones: our feelings and states determine our zone.

The Red Zone is used to describe extremely heightened states of alertness and intense emotions (angry, frustrated).

The Yellow Zone is also used to describe a heightened state of alertness and elevated emotions. However, one has more control when they are in the Yellow Zone (worried, nervous).

The Green Zone is used to describe a calm state of alertness. This is the zone where optimal learning occurs. (All children can achieve high standards- happy, calm)

The Blue Zone is used to describe low states of alertness and down feelings (sad, tired, bored, sick).

It is important that children learn to label their feelings and emotions. Relating to the zones is a way of helping them to do this. But ultimately it is about ensuring children learn and use feelings words and vocabulary and having that open dialogue around emotions. It is also important for children to recognise that it is ok not to feel happy and calm (in the green zone) all the time or all day and that our feelings and emotions will change and move in and out of different zones in different situations and that's ok and completely normal. What is important is how we help children cope and deal with the big emotions.

How can you help your child use The Zones of Regulation at home?

- Identify and label your own feelings using Zones language in front of your child (e.g.: I'm frustrated, tired, calm).
- Model and talk about what strategy or tool you will use to be in the appropriate Zone. It is important to remember to show the children how you use tools to get back to the green zone. You might say "I am going to make myself a cup of tea and/or do some breathing exercises because I am in the blue zone" and afterwards tell your child how using those tools helped you to feel better.
- At times, wonder which Zone your child is in. Or, discuss which Zone a character in a film / book might be in. (e.g.: "You look sleepy. Are you in the Blue Zone?")
- Engage your child in discussion around Zones when they are in the Red Zone feeling angry or frustrated is unlikely to be effective. You can talk about the different Zones and tools they can use to help them feel better and be more regulated/calm.
- Talk about how their feelings affect their body- butterflies in their tummy, feeling fidgety, sweaty or hot, facial expressions, tears, physical excitement and wanting to jump around etc.
- Teach your child which tools they could use. (eg: "I can see you're tired, it's time for bed. Let's read a book together to help you feel more calm" or "I can see you are a bit upset, why don't you get your favourite cuddly toy/do some drawing/play with lego and I can come and talk to you in a few minutes).
- Regular Check-ins. "How are you feeling now?" and "How can you get back to Feeling happy and calm in the green zone?"
- Share how their behaviour is affecting you. For example, if they are in the Green Zone, you could comment that their behaviour is also helping you feel happy.
- Put up and reference the feelings/zones/visuals and tools in your home.
- Praise and encourage your child when they share their feelings/zone they are in.

Tips for practicing the Zones of Regulation

- Know yourself and how you react in difficult situations before dealing with your child's feelings and behaviours.
- Know your child's sensory threshold. We all process sensory information differently and it impacts our reactivity to situations.
- Know your child's triggers such as new situations, challenging work, sitting for a long time, over excitement etc.
- Be consistent in managing your child's behaviour and use the same language you use at home.
- Empathise with your child and validate what they are feeling- its ok to feel cross/sad, I feel cross/sad sometimes too and give example.
- Have clear boundaries/routines and always follow through.
- Do not deal with an angry, upset child when you are not yet calm yourself.
- Discuss strategies for the next time when you are in a similar situation.
- Remember to ask your child how their choices made you feel (empathy).
- Praise your child for using strategies. Encourage your child to take a sensory break to help regulate their bodies.
- Create a 'calm' box full of things which help to keep your child calm and alert- bubbles, books, lego, shells, gems, favourite things to hold etc.

Good resource links

<https://northshorefamilyservices.com/calm-down-box/>

<https://www.theotttoolbox.com/mindfulness-for-kids/>

<https://youtu.be/L0e-oMZi000> - Inside Out video clip

<https://cosmickids.com/five-fun-breathing-exercises-for-kids/>