

Understanding Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation is the skill that helps our brains manage strong feelings without getting swept away by them. It does not mean staying calm all the time. It means noticing what is happening inside us, slowing things down and choosing a response we will not regret later.



For kids, this skill is still under construction. Their brains are learning how to handle frustration, disappointment, excitement and sudden changes. They feel things deeply and quickly. They also recover quickly, which is a strength.

For parents, it can feel like juggling your own stress while supporting a tiny human who is having a much louder version of their stress. Regulation for adults is not about perfect reactions. It is about modelling the comeback, showing kids how to pause, reset and try again.

Why Emotional Regulation Matters

Emotionally regulated brains can:

- switch tasks more easily
- handle surprises
- use problem solving skills
- recover from mistakes
- communicate more clearly

When regulation is low, everything feels harder. Kids may melt down faster, argue more or shut down completely. Adults may feel overstimulated or overwhelmed.

This is not bad behaviour. It is a brain that needs support.

What Helps The Brain Regulate

Emotional regulation improves through small, repeatable moments, not big conversations.

Helpful strategies include:

- Pausing before reacting
- Previewing what is coming next
- Moving the body for even 30 seconds
- Taking a breath that is longer on the exhale
- Using fewer words when someone is overwhelmed
- Keeping routines predictable when possible

These are universal strategies that work for neurotypical and neurodivergent brains.

📄 A Simple Way to Explain It to Kids

Your feelings are like waves. Some are small and easy. Some are big and loud. Regulation is the surfboard. It helps you ride the wave instead of getting knocked over by it.

We do not wait for the waves to disappear. We learn how to ride them.

The Takeaway

Regulation is not about staying calm. Regulation is about **recovering well**.

Kids learn this by practicing tiny moments of pause and reset, and by watching the adults around them do the same. When the whole family builds this skill, everyone's brain feels safer, steadier and more capable.