

Behaviors Are Hard!

Responsive Strategies for Behaviors

Reactive strategies are things you do after the behavior has started. While it's great to prevent a behavior, it's not always possible. This module will look at things you can do after a behavior is underway. The first two strategies focus on helping your child calm down or regulate their emotions. If you haven't read the module, *Why is My Child Doing This?* — it's a good time to do so. Problem behaviors often occur when a child is distressed or scared, leading to emotional dysregulation. *Why is My Child Doing This?* covers what happens when a child becomes dysregulated.

Reactive Strategies

Co-regulation. Young children often have a hard time regulating their emotions. This is true for all children, not just children behind in their development or children with a disability. We can teach children how to manage their emotions and calm down through co-regulation. You can think of co-regulation as sharing your good emotional regulation with your child.

Over time as a child's social-emotional development increases, they learn how to regulate their own emotions without adult support. We call this self-regulation. Self-regulation is a child's ability to manage their feelings, impulses and attention. When a child can self-regulate, they can better manage their behavior, follow directives, learn new things, focus on play and solve problems. But when a young child is first learning these self-regulation skills, they often need support from their caregivers. If your child is struggling with self-regulation, you can support your child through co-regulation. The first step in co-regulation is to understand your own emotional regulation.

Your regulation. How you regulate your emotions is key to helping a young child stay calm. If you do not feel in control of your emotions and feel dysregulated, you won't help your child regulate themselves.

Here are some questions to ask yourself about your self-regulation abilities: How do you regulate your own emotions?

Example: Make sure to get enough sleep or get 30 minutes of exercise each day

How does your ability to regulate your emotions change over the course of the day?

Example: Harder to regulate if I'm very tired at the end of the day

What causes your ability to regulate your emotions to change?

Example: Something upsetting happened earlier in the day

Keep in mind that you can't co-regulate if you are dysregulated yourself. Remember to do things that help you stay grounded and regulate your own emotions and behavior. For most people, this means getting enough sleep, exercising or taking some "me time" each day. It might also mean finding others who can support you, talking with friends and family or other activities that help you control your emotional responses.

Mindfulness, Sleep and Other Ways to Improve Your Emotional Regulation

Mindfulness is one of the activities shown to help people regulate their emotions. Research on parents of children with ASD or other developmental disorders has shown that practicing mindfulness a little each day lowers parent stress levels.

Other tips for improving your own emotional regulation:

- 1. Get enough sleep.** You can improve your sleep by practicing good sleep habits but getting a good night's rest can be difficult if your child's sleep is poor. Talk to your Chat Clinician about ways to improve sleep habits for both you and your child.
- 2. Exercise.** Exercise decreases stress and anxiety and even reduces depression. Exercise doesn't have to be an hour at the gym. A 20-minute walk works too.
- 3. Join a support group or find another parent to talk to.** Through myBrightlink, you can connect with other parents who have a child with ASD or other developmental disorder. Talking with someone who understands your parenting experience can help you feel less alone.
- 4. Make time for yourself.** Yes, this is hard, but it's important. Even a few minutes of "me time" each day can help.
- 5. Keep a journal.** Make a note of when you feel less stressed, then think about what you did that helped you feel less stressed. Writing down your thoughts can help you learn what works for you.

