



## Mindful Moments Volume 7

### Teaching Children Emotional Self Regulation

As teachers in the school system, we recognize that a greater number of students entering school struggle with controlling their emotions and behaviors, as well as dealing with their emotions in a healthy and productive way. We refer to this as emotional self-regulation.

How well your child is able to control or regulate their emotions and behaviors will affect their school experiences. For example, the better they are able to control their emotions and behaviors, the more likely they will have more positive school experiences, such as making friends, completing school activities, and receiving praise and attention for their good choices.

Tips to develop emotional regulation in children:

#### **1. Develop Emotional Literacy in your child.**

Developing emotional literacy in your child means that you teach your child how to label and identify their feelings. Often children find it very difficult to express how they are feeling and this can result in greater levels of frustration and more extreme behaviors.

One great way to do this is by reading stories to your children. During your reading, talk to your child about how a character in the story may be feeling. Why would they feel that way? What clues in

the story help identify how they may be feeling? Ask what can the character do to solve the problem in the story?

## **2. Model positive emotional self regulation skills for your child.**

Your child learns best from watching you, rather than listening to you. And as we all know, our kids are ALWAYS watching us!

As adults, we need to be aware of how we respond to situations. For example, when your child has a meltdown, you may feel angry or even amused, but instead of yelling or laughing, you **regulate** your **emotions** in order to talk to your child calmly about how they could react instead.

## **3. Help your child identify triggers.**

Discovering situations or events that upset our children is essential in helping them learn how to respond in an appropriate and acceptable way.

If you're not sure where to start when finding situations that are challenging for your child, start by noticing when and where they demonstrate challenging behaviors such as whining, defiance or emotional meltdowns. Talk to your child about these behaviors in a calm manner, using words that simply describe the feelings and the behavior you see. For example: "I can see that you get really frustrated when your brother ignores you".

## **4. Explore coping strategies together.**

After your child has developed the vocabulary to label their emotions and are able to identify triggers, we need to help them find healthy

and productive ways to cope with their intense emotions. This can be tricky! So expect a LOT of trial and error, and also expect changes in what works over time. For instance, a strategy that works now, may not work in 6 months time, and a strategy that doesn't work now, may very well work in 6 months!

A few questions to get you thinking about what soothes your child: Is there a particular space your child finds calming? Where do they run when upset or frustrated? Do they seem to calm with physical touch or appear to avoid it? Do they prefer to be around others or respond better to quiet solitude? Can a walk help them calm down? Are there certain sounds or music which can help them relax?

## **5. Breathing practice and mindfulness.**

In order for your child to seek out a state of calm, *they need to know how it feels to be calm*. Teaching your child the effects of slow, steady breaths and how this soothes and calms their bodies is key to your child being able to emotionally regulate themselves.

## **6. Be supportive and encouraging.**

Help your child feel cared about, valued, and understood as they learn to regulate. Show genuine interest and engage with them as a coach and mentor. Let them know it's ok to make mistakes and that practice makes it easier!

