

# Finding the Calm

## A Parent's Guide to Emotion Regulation

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Emotion Regulation is a vital life skill that takes a lot of practice, so much so that it has been said that schools should teach the four R's: **R**eading, **W**Riting, **A**Rithmetic and **R**egulation!



The reality is, that most adults are still trying to learn how to regulate emotions effectively not least trying to teach their children. It can be tough to know what to do when we feel any strong emotions such as frustration, anger, or sadness and even tougher to know what to do when our child experiences such emotions.



Children are like sponges in the way they learn; they often learn from watching how other people handle things. This resource aims to provide some learning and support on helpful ways to respond to children's emotions and to help equip them. This can help children learn over time good ways to manage their emotions which is an important tool for their general wellbeing.



It might be helpful to go through some of the pages of this leaflet together with your child and discuss the different techniques which might work best.



## The Theory

Emotions are another way of describing feelings. Below are 5 common emotions but there are lots more. Some emotions feel good, some feel bad. They can feel small and quiet or big and loud.

- **Anger**
- **Disgust**
- **Fear**
- **Sadness**
- **Joy**

This is a great clip to watch to understand more about your emotions:

**'Inside Out'** get to know your emotions -

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEUzQ7yL9A0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEUzQ7yL9A0)



## Think, Feel, Do.

It is helpful to understand that thoughts, emotions, and actions are all very linked as shown in the diagram below. Put simply: what we think affects what we feel which affects what we do!



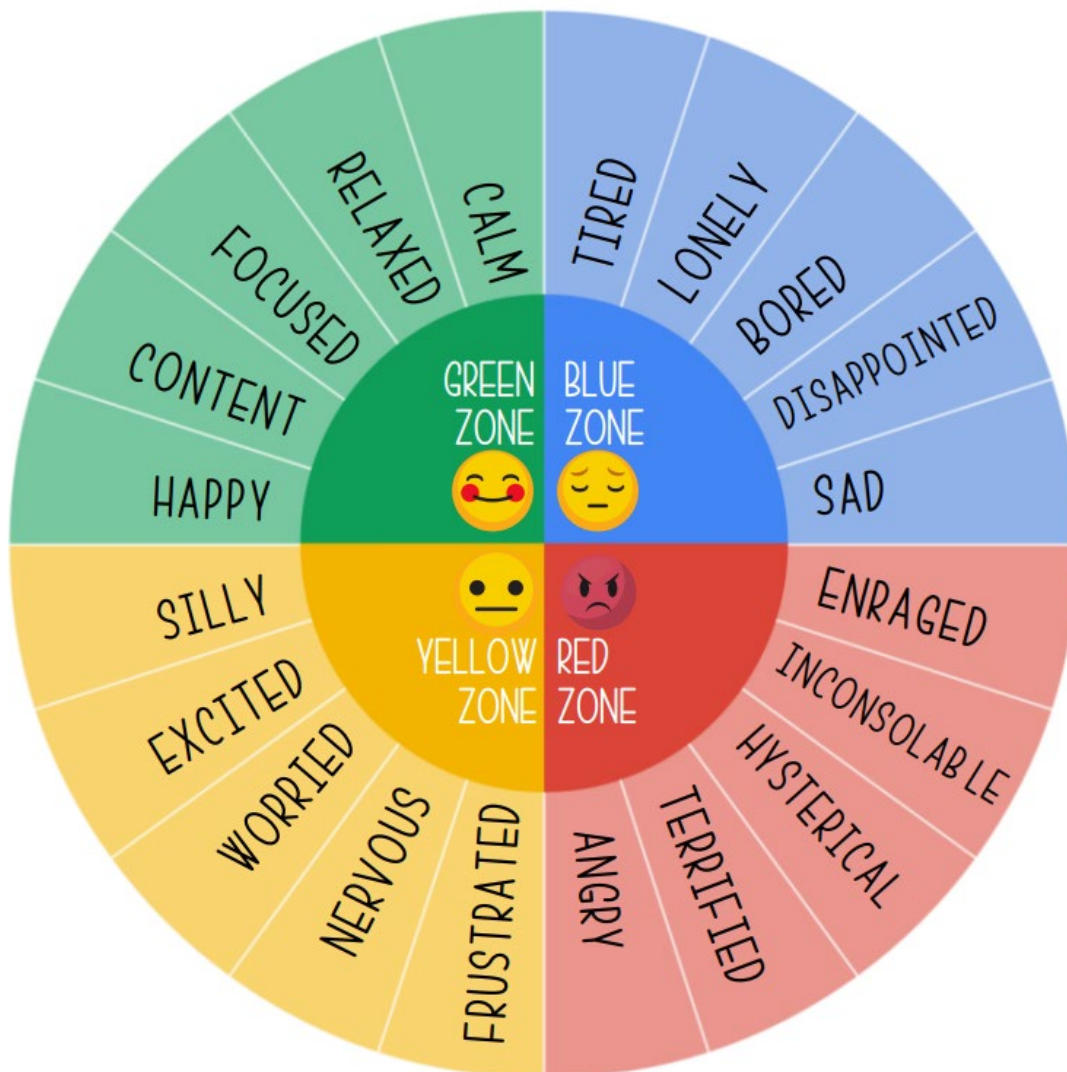
Sometimes we act unhelpfully or unexpectedly when our emotions feel big or strong. This is what we want to learn more about and start to learn helpful ways to respond to the emotions we feel and in turn be able to help our children.

There are 5 helpful steps listed below to help support your child. They will each be discussed and will hopefully help you to support your child.

## 1. Be aware of your child’s emotions

Learn to label the emotions you feel and to label your children’s emotions with them and for them. If you do this repeatedly you will help your child manage their feelings better. For example: **“I noticed you have been quiet today I wonder if you are worried about something?”**.

It could be helpful to use these zones below to label emotions. This enables you to start to identify what colour or zone you and your child might be in. For example, **“This morning I am feeling worried, I think I am in the yellow zone”**.



### Stop and Think

What helps you be in the green zone?

What helps your child be in the green zone?

What might trigger you to go into the red zone?

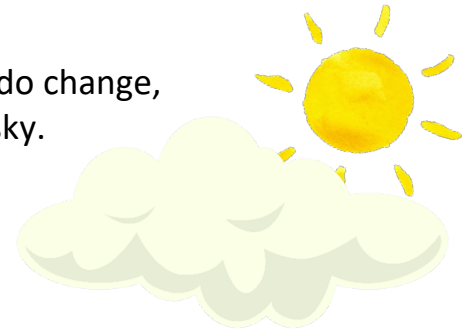
At what points of a school week is your child likely to be in the blue zone?

## 2. Recognise your child's expression of emotion as a perfect moment for bonding with them and teaching them new skills

It is helpful to remember that there is no right or wrong emotion or zone to be in. Sometimes children (and adults!) will act unexpectedly or unhelpfully when they have strong emotions, but all emotions are valid.

It is ok therefore to feel sad, worried, or angry. Our emotions do change, feelings pass through our body like clouds moving across the sky.

Remember that the sun is always shining, it is just that sometimes clouds get in the way: a bit like tricky emotions.



### Example:

Steven (11) feels a mixture of being in the blue (low energy) and yellow zone (worried/anxious) each Sunday night. He starts noticing he is usually in the green zone by lunch time on Mondays once he has done a morning back to school and sees his friends. His mum starts to remind him of this on a Sunday night.

## 3. Listen with empathy and validate your child's feelings

This step is like laying a firm foundation for a house before building the frame of the house. The foundation is empathy and the frame is like offering solutions.

You can do this by naming your child's expressed feelings and matching your tone of voice. For example: **"That was so tough for you, I can see that you were becoming cross."** Or **"It makes sense you are upset about that."**

Aim to say this in a calm way that demonstrates you care.

This will help them to recognise their emotions and help them to feel understood by you. Listen to what your child is saying and pick up on their facial expressions and body language – try to interpret their behaviour as this will show that you are trying to understand how they feel and what they might be thinking.

Using the phrase "I wonder if" and then guessing how they might be feeling can be helpful, for example: **"I wonder if you are worried about starting back to school"**.

## 4. Help your child to label their emotions with words

Naming feelings is a big step for children to feel better and be better understood. It can be hard to know what we are feeling so having a word list on your fridge/wall or using it when you have some time to talk with your child is a great tool. Here are some examples:



- **Happy Words:** Happy, joyful, satisfied, fortunate, content, cheerful, merry, lucky, jolly, delighted, smiling, sunny, cheery, joking, grinning, thrilled, chuffed, excited, friendly, loving, fantastic.
- **Sad Words:** Sad, unhappy, sorrowful, depressed, tragic, unfortunate, awful, miserable, down, gloomy, blue, heartbroken, sorry, glum, hurt, low, weepy, out of sorts.
- **Surprise Words:** Surprise, shock, amaze, stun, startle, astound, unusual, wonderful, mind-blowing, astonish, unexpected, remarkable, breath-taking.
- **Fear Words:** Fear, afraid, terror, frightened, horror, alarm, panic, dread, anxiety, worry, unease, nervous, timid, suspicion, cringe, shudder, uncomfortable, tense, concerned, scared, the creeps.
- **Anger Words:** Anger, annoy, irritate, frustration, rage, fury, bored, crabby, temper, displease, bug, drive crazy, mad, hassle, cross, embarrassed, jealous, overwhelmed.

## 5. Set limits when you are helping your child solve problems or deal with upsetting problems appropriately

Limit setting with our children helps them learn and feel safe. They may not always agree with the limits and boundaries that we set but it is vital that they have them.

Big emotions from children in response to tricky situations are very normal and it is ok for children to experience them. It can be helpful to limit when and how long the child talks about particular things.

For example, if your child has a sensitive temperament, they might regularly want to share worried thoughts with you. It can be helpful to have a “worry time” that is set aside to discuss worrying thoughts each day and then limit discussion about worries to this time only.

## Managing Emotions Toolkit

### Physical tools

These are activities that give a quick release of energy (use up adrenaline) and can be particularly helpful when we are in the yellow and blue zone.

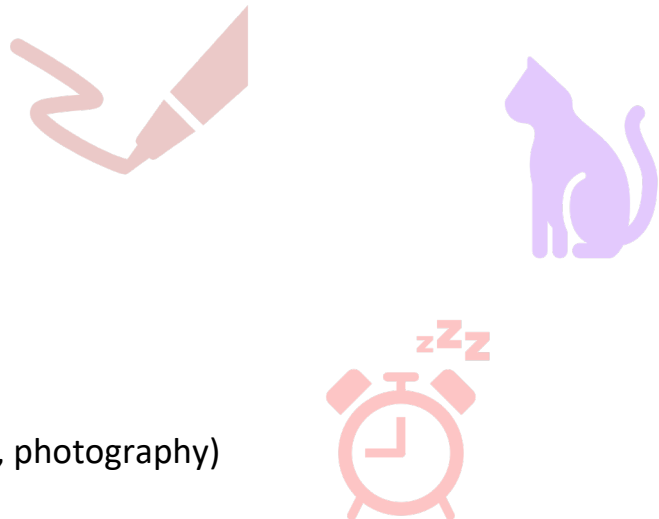
- Exercise (walk, run, trampoline etc)
- Sport (basketball, football dance etc)
- Trampolining
- Swimming
- Running
- Creative destruction (e.g. crushing recycling).



### Relaxation tools

These give a **slow** release of emotional energy, especially good for the yellow zone, also red and green.

- Relaxation techniques
- Solitude (positive time alone)
- Drawing
- Massage
- Sleep
- Time in nature (e.g. walking, cycling, photography)
- Being with animals
- Breathing techniques - (try using the heart rate monitor on Fitbit as visual feedback of what “calm” feels like) – see below for some ideas!

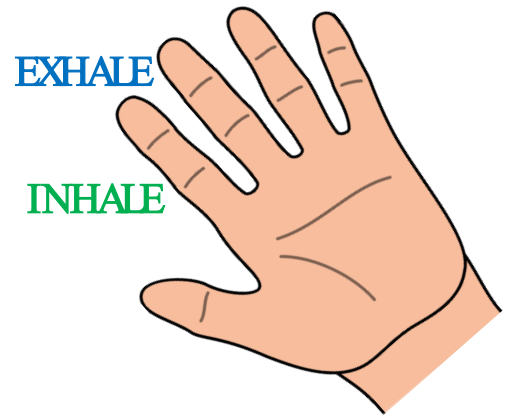


**Focus on your tummy moving in and out by taking deep breathes, in through your nose and out through your mouth slowly and gently like you are blowing out a candle or are a balloon or ball that is slowly deflating.**

## Breathing Exercises

Hold one hand out in front of you:

- Use your fingers to count
- Breathe in through your nose for 3 fingers
- Hold your breath for 2 fingers
- Breathe out through your mouth for 5 fingers.



## Positive Self-talk

This is helpful for the yellow zone especially.

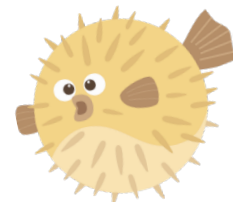
Think of positive & coping thoughts and teach them to your child, such as:

- Stop and breathe, I can do this
- This will pass
- I can be anxious/angry/sad and still deal with this
- I have done this before, and I can do it again
- This feels bad, but it's okay to feel this way, it's a normal body reaction
- Thoughts are just thoughts – they're not necessarily true or facts.

## Relaxation Links

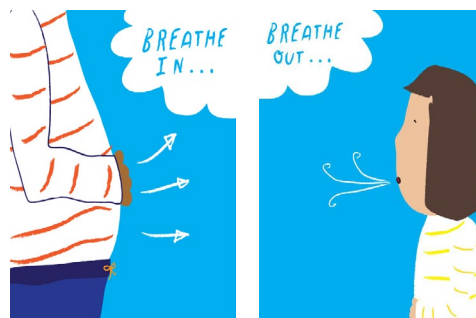
**Puffer Fish Breathing:**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLbK0o9Bk7Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLbK0o9Bk7Q)



**Relax like a cat:**

[www.moodcafe.co.uk/media/26933/Relax like a cat leaflet.pdf](https://www.moodcafe.co.uk/media/26933/Relax_like_a_cat_leaflet.pdf)





## Social tools

These strategies are for coping with worry that often will involve others. These are helpful for the blue, yellow, and red zone.

- Time with family member or friend (someone they like)
- Disclosure (email/typing, music, poetry, google image)
- Seek advice (problem solving)
- Validate the feeling
- Being with a pet.

## Sensory tools

When your child is over-stimulated or feeling anxious, these activities/strategies may help them feel calmer. These are good strategies for blue, yellow and red zones.

- Hold firmly for a hug
- Slow rocking
- Rhythmical swinging
- White noise to filter out background noise
- Sustained movement – weight bearing activities
- Classical / relaxation music
- Soft, muted or natural colours
- Pull/Push activities
- Wrap in a soft, warm blanket/duvet
- Deep pressure/massage
- Tuck in tight/sleeping bag in bed
- Dim the lights
- Reduce visual stimuli
- Slow blowing activities
- Suck mild flavours
- Chewing.

### Stop and Think

Are there any of these tools that your currently use?

Which ones might be helpful for you and your child to try?

When would you try out some of these tools?

At what points of a school week is your child likely to be in the blue zone?



## Count to 10 Breathing Technique

*Breathe in One*

1

*Exhale Two*

2

*Inhale Three*

3

*Exhale Four*

4

*Inhale Five*

5

*Exhale Six*

6

*Inhale Seven*

7

*Exhale Eight*

8

*Inhale Nine*

9

*Exhale Ten*

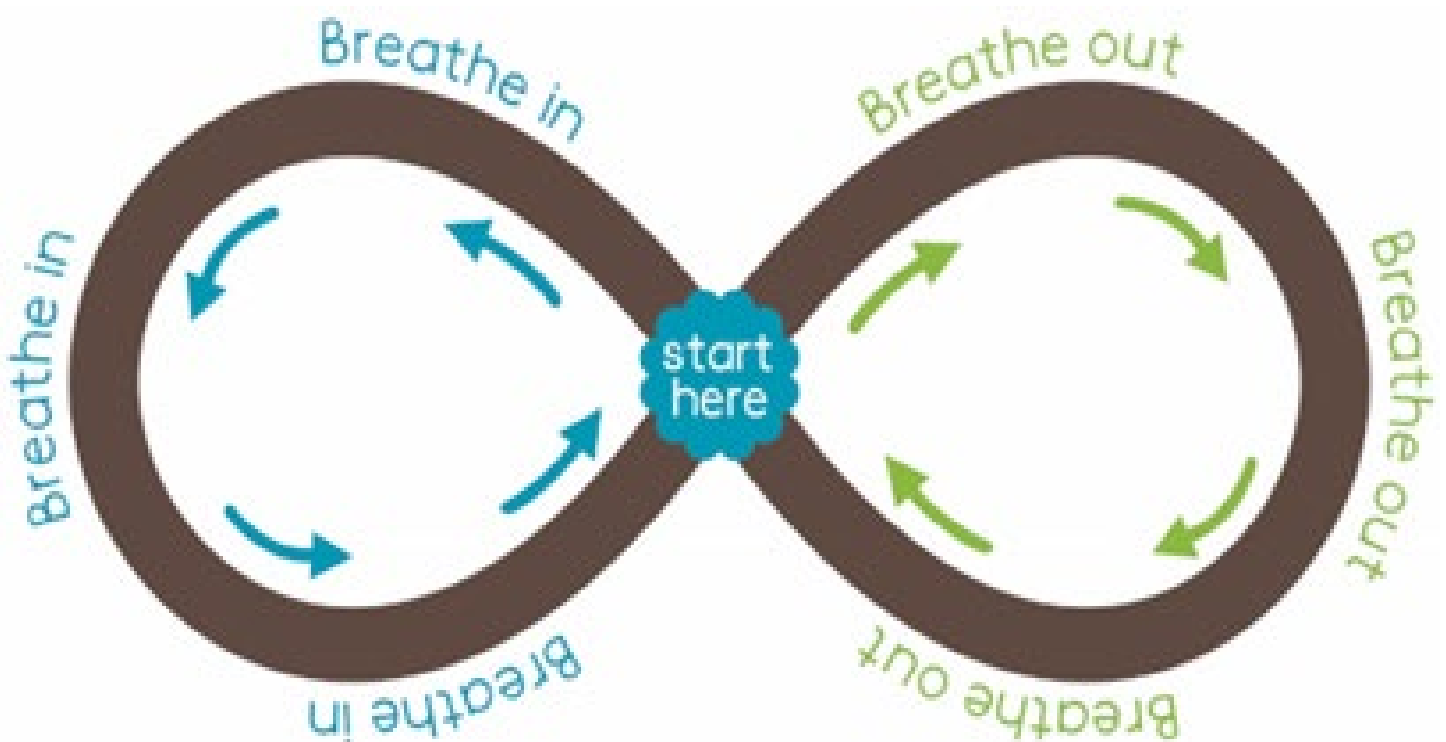
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## Figure of 8 Breathing Technique

Start with the eight on its side and start in the middle.

Go up to the left and trace the left part of the 8 with your finger while you breathe in.

When you get to the middle of the eight again, breathe out while you trace the right part of the 8 with your finger.



## **Squeeze the Lemon Breathing Technique**



**Breathe In**

**Squeeze Lemons**

**Breathe Out**

**Relax**

**Repeat**

## **Cat Stretch Technique**

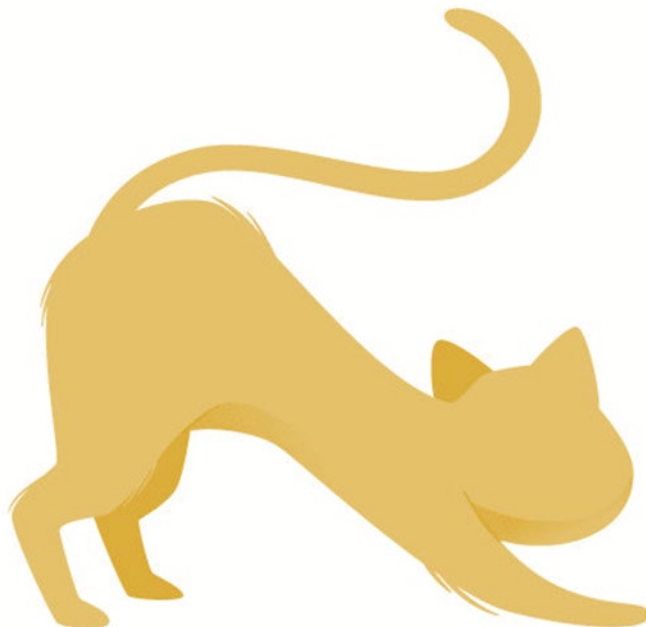
**Breathe In**

**Stretch Like a Cat**

**Breathe Out**

**Relax**

**Repeat**



## Helpful Resources

**Emotion Regulation Toolkit:** <https://srhd.org/media/documents/Emotional20Regulation1.pdf>



**CAMHS Lothian online resources:** [www.camhs-resources.co.uk/downloads](http://www.camhs-resources.co.uk/downloads)



Creswell, C & Willets, L (2019). Helping Your Child with Fears and Worries. A Self-help guide for parents. UK: Robinson. (Book)

## Apps

<p><b>Headspace</b> Learn the basics of meditation and mindfulness to help you rest, sleep and move well using easy to follow resources.</p> <p><a href="http://www.headspace.com">www.headspace.com</a></p>	
<p><b>Insight Timer</b> Free app with thousands of free meditation tracks, relaxing music, body scans, tension release, emotion management, activities and much more. Download the app 'Insight Timer'.</p> <p><a href="https://web.insighttimer.com/download-app">https://web.insighttimer.com/download-app</a></p>	
<p><b>Daylight</b> (an App for young people, aged 16+). Daylight is a confidential app that can help you take control of anxiety.</p> <p><a href="https://onboarding.trydaylight.com/daylight/nhs/144#1/1">https://onboarding.trydaylight.com/daylight/nhs/144#1/1</a></p>	
<p><b>Happify</b> Happify's science-based activities and games can help overcome negative thoughts, stress, elevate happiness and deal with life's challenges.</p> <p><a href="http://www.happify.com">www.happify.com</a></p>	
<p><b>Calmopens</b> is the #1 app from Sleep, Meditation and Relaxation. A mindfulness app for beginners and also has a section specifically suited for children and young people.</p> <p><a href="http://www.calm.com">www.calm.com</a></p>	
<p><b>Moodnotes</b> is a mood tracker and journaling app to capture your mood and help improve thinking habits. It is grounded in CBT and positive psychology, empowering you to track your mood over time and increase your wellbeing.</p> <p><a href="http://www.thriveport.com/products/moodnotes/">www.thriveport.com/products/moodnotes/</a></p>	
<p><b>NHS App 'Feeling Good'</b> Free access to the app is given out usually by GP's to help learn about and manage anxiety and low mood. Referral user name – coboost1, Referral password – positive</p> <p><a href="http://www.feelinggood.app/download/">www.feelinggood.app/download/</a></p>	

**Acknowledgements:** This resource was adapted with information from The Gottman Institute. [Emotion Coaching: The Heart of Parenting - Online - The Gottman Institute](#)

