

Self-Regulation Techniques for Parents

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By [Triple P Team](#)

As parents, our focus tends to be on teaching our children healthy ways to manage (or regulate) their “big” feelings. We teach them ways to calm their breathing, slow down their thoughts, and release explosive feelings in positive outlets, such as drawing or taking a walk.

But when’s the last time you checked in with your own self-regulation techniques?

Being a parent is one of the most important jobs you will have in your lifetime—and one of the most challenging. Without proper attention paid to our own needs and feelings, the stress can become overwhelming and we might not always respond to that stress in healthy ways.

But knowing what self-regulation techniques work best for you in stressful situations can help you work through those moments.

What is self-regulation?

As adults, we are constantly practicing self-regulation skills. Another way to think of it is “self-control.” Did you purposefully put the donut down and choose oatmeal for breakfast? That’s your self-regulation at work! You are also flexing your self-regulation muscle when you:

- Keep your emotions in check
- Resist impulsive behavior
- Act in a way that promotes your long-term best interest
- Talk yourself out of a bad mood
- Calm yourself down when you feel angry

Stress builds over time, and we all need to remember to do something regularly to “let off some steam.” Whether it is walking with a friend, dancing with your kids, bike riding or meditation, a regular way you cope with stress can prevent you from getting to the boiling point.

How self-regulation connects to parenting

A parent’s day is full of ups and downs. One minute your cup is overflowing with joy; the next your patience is being tested at every turn. Your children need

guidance when it comes to managing their own emotions and behaviors. This is hard to do when your own self-regulation skills need support. Think about the parenting moments when your own self-regulation skills are required:

- Rushing out the door to get your child to school
- Siblings struggling to share a toy
- Toddler upsets or meltdowns over anything from itchy socks to their peas touching their mashed potatoes.
- Stubbornness at bedtime
- Newborn and infant crying
- Listening to crying in the car from your infant or toddler

Ways to practice self-regulation

Being able to identify what triggers an emotional response in you is a great first step in self-regulation. You could even make a list of these triggers and assign a healthy way to respond in each situation.

- Practice deep belly breathing. Take a deep inhale through your nose, pause at the top, before releasing a slow exhale through your mouth. Repeat 3-4 times or more as needed.
- Listen to upbeat music when you are feeling down, or calming music when you are feeling tense.
- When unhelpful or negative thoughts enter your mind, acknowledge them, then move on. Think of it as changing your thought pattern. Search for a positive spin you can take on the situation or something encouraging you can say to yourself: "I don't like the tone I used with Hunter when he spilled his cereal bowl on the floor. Next time, I will take a deep breath and use a calm voice to help him learn to clean up his messes."
- Think before acting. This involves taking a pause between your feelings and an action. Feel your feelings and name them. Are you angry, frustrated? Once you can name the feeling, you can tame it. This will help you access the thinking part of your brain. Ask yourself: Could there be any negative consequences to my action or reaction?
- See if you can find the humor in the situation. Messes can be really funny.
- Spend some time thinking about what happens in your body when you start to feel upset. Does your heart pound faster or your stomach churn? What helps you notice those feelings and remain calm? There

are as many techniques as there are parents, so it is important that you have a “go to” strategy or two.

Modeling self-regulation

We learn self-regulation techniques as early as infancy. It’s the reason we no longer have meltdowns in the middle of the grocery store when our favorite snack food is out of stock. When our babies are infants, picking them up and holding them when they are upset is the first step in teaching regulation. They learn that the world is a safe place, and their parents will help them contain and work through their feelings.

As a toddler, your child is learning to manage big feelings. Naming feelings is important in teaching your child to identify and calm. If you can name it, you can tame it. When toddlers are given words for feelings, they can eventually learn to recognize them, and cope with them. By holding your infant and toddler and supporting them through tough feelings, you are building social emotional competence.

Share your feelings with your child. If someone cuts you off in traffic, you may say that it made you scared. When you need to wait to see the doctor, you may tell your child it is frustrating to have to wait, and then talk about what we can do to help us wait patiently.

Keep in mind that our children learn self-regulation techniques through the way we parent and how we manage our feelings. You will see your child act like you do, and say what they hear you say. Let’s strive to be the best role models we can be!

This article is brought to you by Parenting Now Parenting Educators and authors Amanda Bedortha, Claire Davis and Lynne Swartz and consultant Jay Thompson (andupdatemywebsite.com). Parenting Now is passionate about happy, healthy families. For more information about Parenting Now please visit their website (<https://parentingnow.org/>) or contact us at info@parentingnow.org