

HOW TO CO-REGULATE WITH A CHILD



REDUCE DEMANDS

When a child is overwhelmed, their thinking brain is not fully working. Take away instructions, questions, and pressure until they settle.



SHOW SAFETY WITH YOUR BODY LANGUAGE

Soft posture. Relaxed shoulders. Slow movements. Your body shows the child that they are safe.



HELP THEIR BREATHING MATCH YOURS

Model slow, steady breaths. Children often copy slow breathing when they see it.



YOU ARE THE ANCHOR. REGULATE YOURSELF FIRST.

Children borrow the adult's calm. Slow your breathing. Lower your voice. Settle your body before you try to help them.



USE A CALM, STEADY VOICE

Speak slowly and simply. Your pace helps guide their pace. Short sentences work best.



STAY CLOSE, BUT NOT TOO CLOSE

Some children want you close. Others need space but want you to stay nearby. Follow their cues.



OFFER COMFORT THEY CAN ACCEPT

Comfort can be a blanket, a quiet space, a favourite object, or a hug if they choose it. Comfort helps the child's brain calm down.



NAME THE STATE, NOT THE BEHAVIOUR

Say things like: "You are feeling overwhelmed." or "This feels too much for your body." This helps them feel understood and not judged.



WAIT FOR THEIR BODY TO CALM BEFORE TALKING

Do not teach or correct the child while they are upset. Once settled, talk through what happened in simple steps.



BUILD COPING SKILLS WHEN CALM

When the child is calm, teach simple breathing, taking breaks, moving their body, and asking for help. Co regulation comes first, and self regulation grows with time and practice.

CO-REGULATION ACROSS THE DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM

The amount of adult support changes over time, but the importance of relationship does not.
Development is the gradual internalization of capacities that were first experienced within supportive relationships.

	 EARLY CHILDHOOD Approx. 3–5 years Young children rely on adults to help regulate their bodies, emotions, attention, and behavior.	 ELEMENTARY Approx. 6–11 years Children develop skills with adult guidance, practice, and support. They are learning to regulate.	 ADOLESCENCE Approx. 12–18 years Teens seek independence while still needing supportive relationships to navigate big emotions and challenges.
	 ADULT PROVIDES I regulate for you.	 ADULT SCAFFOLDS We regulate together.	 ADULT PARTNERS You regulate—with my support.
 Brain Development	Rapid brain growth. Regulatory systems are immature. Emotion drives behavior.	Prefrontal cortex is developing. Skills are emerging but inconsistent.	Brain continues maturing into mid-20s. Emotions are intense; impulse control still developing.
 Primary Need	Safety, comfort, connection, and predictable routines.	Belonging, competence, and guidance.	Respect, autonomy, identity, and meaningful connection.
 Adult's Primary Role	Nurturer and protector. Provide external regulation.	Coach and teacher. Scaffold skills and problem-solve together.	Collaborator and mentor. Partner while preserving dignity and autonomy.
 Student's Capacity	Limited ability to regulate emotions, attention, and behavior.	Developing awareness and skills. Needs support to use tools.	Growing self-awareness and self-control. Needs support for complex situations.
 What Co-Regulation Looks Like	- Soothing voice and calm presence - Physical proximity and comfort - Simple language and repetition - Sensory and movement supports - Consistent routines and transitions	- Emotion coaching and naming feelings - Teaching strategies and coping tools - Guided practice and modeling - Visual supports and reminders - Problem-solving conversations	- Active listening and validation - Collaborative problem-solving - Choices and shared decision-making - Respectful boundaries and natural consequences - Restorative conversations
 Language That Helps	"I'm here with you." "You are safe." "Let's take a deep breath together." "You can do hard things."	"What are you feeling?" "What might help right now?" "What could you try next?" "Let's figure this out together."	"What do you think happened?" "How can I support you?" "What are your options?" "I trust you to make good choices."
 Common Pitfalls	- Expecting independence too soon - Using too many words during overwhelm - Inconsistency with routines - Overstimulation and chaotic environments	- Assuming skills are mastered - Over-directing or over-correcting - Focusing on behavior instead of skill-building - Ignoring the need for movement	- Power struggles and ultimatums - Public correction and shaming - Discounting emotions as "drama" - Confusing independence with isolation
 The Ultimate Goal	Build a secure foundation of trust and safety so the child can explore and learn.	Develop self-regulation skills through supported practice.	Foster resilient, self-aware, autonomous young people who can self-regulate.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRESSION



Relationships are the pathway. Skills are the destination.

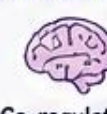
THE UNCHANGING PRINCIPLES



Connection comes before correction.



Safety is the foundation for learning.



Co-regulation today builds self-regulation tomorrow.



Every child needs at least one trusted adult.



Growth happens in relationship, not in isolation.



WHAT DOES CO-REGULATION LOOK LIKE DURING A LESSON?

A Teacher's At-a-Glance Guide



Co-regulation is not something we “stop teaching” to do. It is how we teach. Every interaction either increases or decreases students’ capacity to engage, think, and learn.



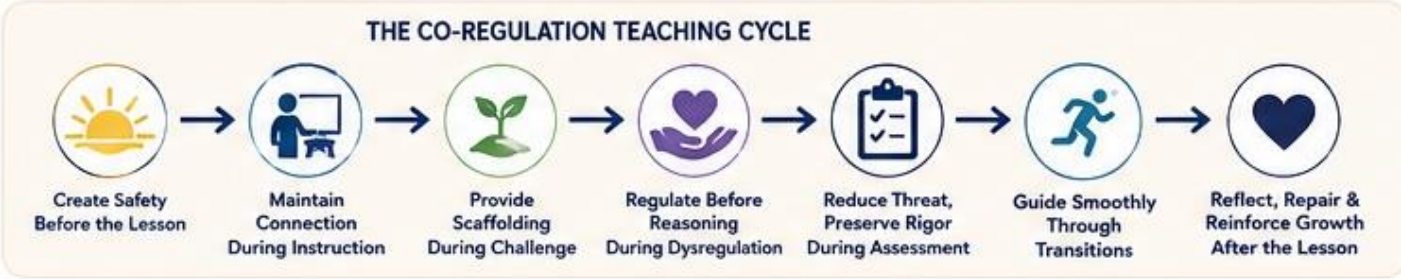
WHAT STUDENTS MAY BE EXPERIENCING 	• Anxiety about the day • Difficulty transitioning • Social concerns • Fatigue • Sensory overload • Uncertainty about expectations	• Fear of making mistakes • Cognitive overload • Embarrassment • Frustration • Confusion • Self-doubt	• Overwhelm • Perfectionism • Avoidance • Difficulty initiating tasks • Executive functioning challenges	• Social anxiety • Conflict • Fear of rejection • Unequal participation • Frustration	• Test anxiety • Fear of failure • Perfectionism • Comparison with peers	• Difficulty shifting tasks • Anxiety about change • Disappointment • Sensory overload	• Need for belonging • Uncertainty about progress • Emotional residue from the day • Desire to feel successful
WHAT THE EDUCATOR CAN DO 	• Greet students warmly by name • Make eye contact • Display agenda and expectations • Share the plan • Use calming routines • Offer brief movement • Normalize feelings	• Speak calmly and at an appropriate pace • Pause for processing • Check for understanding • Model mistakes • Think aloud • Normalize uncertainty • Invite questions	• Break tasks into steps • Provide visual checklists • Offer quiet encouragement • Help students organize • Reinforce effort • Notice early signs of frustration	• Establish norms • Assign meaningful roles • Model respectful disagreement • Coach conflict resolution • Reinforce listening • Ensure every voice is heard	• Clearly explain expectations • Allow time and breaks • Normalize mistakes • Emphasize growth • Maintain a calm environment	• Provide countdowns • Use visual schedules • Give advance warnings • Create routines • Incorporate movement • Use consistent cues	• Celebrate effort • Reflect on learning and strategies • Invite student voice • Normalize challenges • End with encouragement • Repair when needed
SAMPLE LANGUAGE THAT HELPS 	“I’m glad you’re here.” “Let’s get ready together.” “You don’t have to be perfect—just begin.” “What do you need to be ready?”	“It’s okay not to know yet.” “Learning means your brain is growing.” “Let’s figure this out together.” “What questions do you have?”	“Let’s start with the first step.” “Show me where you’re stuck.” “You’ve solved difficult problems before.” “Take your time.”	“Let’s hear everyone’s ideas.” “Different perspectives help us learn.” “Can someone build on that idea?” “How can we solve this together?”	“This assessment is information, not a judgment.” “Do your best with what you know today.” “One mistake does not define your ability.”	“In two minutes we’ll switch activities.” “Let’s finish this together.” “Here’s what comes next.”	“What helped you learn today?” “What was challenging?” “What are you proud of?” “What might help tomorrow?”

ACROSS EVERY PHASE, STUDENTS ASK THEMSELVES:

- Am I safe?
- Do I belong?
- Can I do this?
- Will someone help me if I struggle?
- Do I matter here?

EDUCATORS CAN ANSWER THROUGH THEIR POSTURE:

- ✓ You are safe.
- ✓ You belong.
- ✓ We will figure this out together.
- ✓ Mistakes are part of learning.
- ✓ You matter here.



THE CORE PRINCIPLE Co-regulation is not a pause in teaching. It is the relational process that makes teaching and learning possible. The most effective classrooms are not those in which students never struggle. They are classrooms in which students know that when they struggle, they will encounter calm, attuned, and trustworthy adults who help them remain engaged until they can move forward on their own.

Relationship is the Pathway to Learning.