

A Parents' Guide to the Zones of Regulation




The Zones of Regulation is an internationally renowned intervention which helps children to manage difficult emotions, known as 'self-regulation'.

Self-regulation can go by many names such as 'emotional regulation', 'self-control', 'impulse management' and 'self-management'. Self-regulation is best described as the best state of alertness for a situation, or the ability to maintain a well regulated emotional state to cope with everyday stress and to be most available for learning and interacting. For example, when your child is taking part in a sporting competition, they need to be in a higher state of alertness than when reading a book in the library.

From time to time, all of us (including adults) find it hard to manage strong feelings such as worry, anger, restlessness, fear or tiredness, and this stops us from getting on with our day effectively. Children who feel these emotions often find it hard to learn and concentrate in school.

The Zones of Regulation aims to teach children strategies to help them to identify their emotions and cope with these feelings so they can get back to feeling calm and ready to learn. These coping strategies are called 'self-regulation'.

The ZONES of Regulation®

BLUE ZONE	GREEN ZONE	YELLOW ZONE	RED ZONE
   	   	   	   
Sad Sick Tired Bored Moving Slowly	Happy Calm Feeling Okay Focused Ready to Learn	Frustrated Worried Silly/Wiggly Excited Loss of Some Control	Mad/Angry Terrified Yelling/Hitting Elated Out of Control

At St Laurence Church Junior School, we are using the Zones of Regulation throughout the whole school. We want to teach all of our children good coping and regulation strategies so they can help themselves when they experience anxiety and stress.

In the classroom, sometimes children panic when faced with a tricky learning problem or challenge. By teaching them how to cope with these feelings might make them better at tackling learning challenges and build better resilience so they don't give up so easily when faced with difficulty.

We want children to grow into successful young people and then adults. Teaching the children at a young age about managing their feelings will support them in later life so that they don't turn to negative coping strategies which affect their mental and physical wellbeing.

We aim to help children to:

- Recognise when they are in the different Zones and learn how to change or stay in the Zone they are in.
- Increase their emotional vocabulary so they can explain how they are feeling.
- Recognise when other people are in different Zones, thus developing better empathy.
- Develop an insight into what might make them move into the different Zones.
- Understand that emotions, sensory experiences such as lack of sleep or hunger and their environment might influence which Zone they are in.
- Develop problem-solving skills and resilience.
- Identify a range of calming and alerting strategies that support them (known as their personal 'toolkit').

What are the different Zones?

Blue Zone: low level of arousal; not ready to learn; feels sad, sick, tired, bored, moving slowly.

Green Zone: calm state of alertness; optimal level to learn; feels happy, calm, feeling okay, focused.

Yellow Zone: heightened state of alertness; elevated emotions; has some control; feels frustrated, worried, silly/wiggly, excited, loss of some control.

Red Zone: heightened state of alertness and intense emotions; not an optimal level for learning; out of control; feels mad/angry, terrified, yelling/hitting, elated, out of control.

	Blue Zone	Green Zone (Safe to Learn)	Yellow Zone	Red Zone
How we feel	We feel down or moving slow.	We feel comfortable and in control. We may find it safer to listen and learn.	We feel stronger emotions and have more energy.	We feel really big, powerful emotions.
Examples	sad, sick, tired	happy, calm, thankful, focused	excited, worried, confused, frustrated	angry, overjoyed, terrified, panicked
Tools - What can I try?	Talk to an adult Stretch	Drink water Complete work	Take a short break	Talk to an adult Get fresh air

	Draw a picture	Listen Help others	Drink water Squeeze or press something	Deep breaths Count to 10 or 20
How do these tools help?	These tools help us to wake up, feel better and are comforting.	These tools help us to stay focused and feeling safe.	These tools help us to feel calmer and regain focus.	These tools help us start to gain control, feel calmer and feel safer.

We will teach the children that everyone experiences all of the Zones. The Red and Yellow zones are not 'bad' Zones. All of the Zones are expected at one time or another. We will show them that the Blue Zone, for example, is helpful when you are trying to fall asleep.

How can you help your child use The Zones of Regulation at home?

- Identify your own feelings using Zones language in front of your child (e.g.: "I'm frustrated. I think I am in the Yellow Zone.")
- Talk about what tool you will use to be in the appropriate Zone (e.g.: "I need to take four deep breaths to help get me back to the Green Zone.")
- At times, wonder which Zone your child is in. Or, discuss which Zone a character in a film / book might be in. (e.g.: "You look sleepy. Are you in the Blue Zone?")
- Engage your child in discussion around Zones when they are in the Red Zone is unlikely to be effective. You need to be discussing the different Zones and tools they can use when they are more regulated / calm.
- Teach your child which tools they can use. (eg: "It's time for bed. Let's read a book together in the comfy chair to get you in the Blue Zone.") • Regular Check-ins. "How are you feeling now?" and "How can you get back to Green?"
- Modelling It is important to remember to show the children how you use tools to get back to the green zones. You might say "I am going to make myself a cup of tea and do some breathing exercises because I am in the blue zone" and afterwards tell your child how using those tools helped you get back to the green zone.
- Share how their behaviour is affecting your Zone. For example, if they are in the Green Zone, you could comment that their behaviour is also helping you feel happy / go into the Green Zone.
- Put up and reference the Zones visuals and tools in your home.
- Praise and encourage your child when they share which Zone they are in.

Tips for practicing the Zones of Regulation

- Know yourself and how you react in difficult situations before dealing with your child's behaviours.
- Know your child's sensory threshold. We all process sensory information differently and it impacts our reactivity to situations.
- Know your child's triggers.
 - Be consistent in managing your child's behaviour and use the same language you use at home.
- Empathise with your child and validate what they are feeling.
 - Have clear boundaries/routines and always follow through.
- Do not deal with an angry, upset child when you are not yet calm yourself.
 - Discuss strategies for the next time when you are in a similar situation.
- Remember to ask your child how their choices made you feel (empathy).
 - Praise your child for using strategies. Encourage your child to take a sensory break to help regulate their bodies.
- Create a 'calm' box full of things which help to keep your child calm and alert.



Can my child be in more than one zone at the same time?

Yes. Your child may feel tired (blue zone) because they did not get enough sleep, and anxious (yellow zone) because they are worried about an activity at school. Listing more than one Zone reflects a good sense of personal feelings and alertness levels.

Should children be punished for being in the RED Zone?

It's best for children to experience the natural consequences of being in the RED zone. If a child's actions/choices hurt someone or destroys property, they need to repair the relationship and take responsibility for the mess they create. Once the child has calmed down, use the experience as a learning opportunity to process what the child would do differently next time.

Can you look like one Zone on the outside and feel like you are in another Zone on the inside?

Yes. Many of us “disguise” our Zone to match social expectations. We use the expression “put on a happy face” or mask the emotion so other people will have good thoughts about us. Parents often say that their children “lose it” and goes into the Red Zone as soon as they get home. This is because children are increasing their awareness of their peers and expectations when in the classroom. They make every effort to keep it together at school to stay in the Green Zone. Home is when they feel safe to let it all out.

The Parent Zone – You are important too. In order to help your child to self-regulate, you need to take some time for yourself. Here are some strategies that may help you in your zones.

Blue Zone <i>Feeling sad, tired, bored and moving slowly</i>	Green Zone <i>Feeling happy, calm, ok focussed and ready to get to work</i>	Yellow Zone <i>Feeling frustrated, worried, agitated or excited in an unhelpful way</i>	Red Zone <i>Feeling angry, terrified, acutely stressed</i>
Talk to someone	Tackle difficult tasks	Use positive self-talk	Take deep, calming breaths
Prepare some healthy food that will have the right nutrients to get you back on track	Make the most of the time to get through your to do list	Put all those things you need to do in your diary to bring order, including self-care	Do something physical that dissipates the adrenaline – gym or High Intensity Interval Training
Grab a cuppa on the couch and take some time out	See the friend or relative you’ve been meaning to, but haven’t got around to	Make lists to get things out of your head onto paper	Talk to someone unconnected and rehearse a conversation with the person that is the source of your frustration
Read a book or watch a film	Work, but don’t push yourself too hard!	Do some yoga or go swimming	Write down your feelings
Get outside in the fresh air	Try new things	Talk to someone	Count to 10
Speak to your therapist/coach	Write in a journal	Get outside for a walk – get grounded	Have a hug
Do some yoga or other gentle stretching	Be positive and help others	Meditate or do mindfulness exercises	Do something a bit different / creative
Wait it out and don’t beat yourself up – everyone needs some down time	Get some exercise	Take a shower	Remind yourself of all the things that you are grateful for

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Some useful websites

[An Overview of Zones of Regulation for parents](#)

[Zones of Regulation Welcome Site](#)

[Zones of Regulation – The OT Toolbox](#) – This includes activities to help with self-regulation

[Activities and games to help children manage their emotions](#)

[Parents with Confidence – Calming strategies](#)