

Helping our kids thrive: Supporting emotional regulation and behaviour



BUILDING BLOCKS THERAPY
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY FOR KIDS

Presenters:
Hilary Koolstra
Lize Roos
Building Blocks Therapy



Parenting – some initial thoughts

“The best inheritance a parent can give their children is a few minutes of their time each day.” — **A Battista**

“Having a parent who listens creates a child who believes he or she has a voice that matters in this world.” — **Rachel Macy Stafford**

“By loving them for more than their abilities we show our children that they are much more than the sum of their accomplishments.” — **Eileen Kennedy-Moore**

“Don’t worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you.” — **Robert Fulghum**



Workshop plan

Connection and relationship building with children

Emotional regulation skills and coaching children through emotions

Sensory processing and how differences in this area may impact participation

Physical environment considerations

Routines

Additional strategies to support emotional skill development and behaviour.

Being present

Showing interest in things they are interested in

Creating emotional safety

Spending quality time

Communicating with warmth and respect

Being playful

Being consistent and reliable

Modeling the behavior you want to see (There are intentional and unintentional components here)

Encouraging open communication

Relationship and connection



Emotions regulation skills

- What are emotional regulation skills?
- Emotional regulation skills support us in lots of ways.
- Parent views and experiences of emotions can impact on how we teach our children about emotions.
- Emotions and needs are often expressed through behaviour.



Emotions are a key opportunity for connection with your children.



What happens in the brain when emotions escalate.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm9CIJ74Oxw>



Co-regulation is foundational to emotional regulation skill development.



Emotion coaching

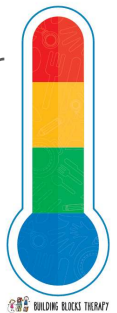
Coaching vs dismissing emotions
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhoEE2_Y2io

Building emotional regulation skills

Additional points and ideas for building emotional regulation skills



- Teach that all emotions are ok, but not all behaviour is.
- Limit setting is important.
- Help your child to label/name their emotions when they are having difficulty. Body signs can help with this.
- Model your own emotions, body signs and use of strategies for regulation (in an age appropriate way).
- Emotions check ins with use of visuals can increase emotional talk in your house.
- Zones of regulation:
 - Identification of emotions according to colours.
 - Identification of body signs for each emotions, including level of control.
 - Strategies to manage emotions and support regulation and participation.
- Try different emotional regulation strategies together with your child.
- Have a calm space at home.
- Anger and worry.



Emotional skill development

4-5 years:

- Begin expressing more complex emotions
- Better manage strong feelings
- May conceal the truth
- Experience anxiety
- Engage in cooperative play with peers

6-8 years:

- Sensitive to others' opinions and easily embarrassed
- Shows strong empathy for family and friends in distress
- Often self-critical, needing encouragement to focus on strengths
- Starting to grasp how actions affect others
- May focus on doing tasks the 'right way'
- Can sometimes seem overconfident

5-6 years:

- Can express feelings better but may need help recognizing strong emotions
- Improved emotional control with fewer outbursts
- Shows increased patience and reasoning
- May fear criticism, tests, and failure

Pre-teen:

- Emotions can feel stronger and more intense.
- Feelings like embarrassment, shame, and humiliation may become more powerful.
- They might know emotion words but still need help linking them to their feelings.
- Support is needed to understand and manage emotions.

When to ask for help

Children might need help if they:

- feel overwhelmed by their emotions
- feel very strong emotions that are out of proportion to the problem or situation or for a long time after whatever sparked the emotions
- often go from being calm to feeling an intense emotion like anger very quickly
- express emotions inappropriately – for example, laughing in response to bad news
- go very quiet, hide or push people away when they're overwhelmed

Source: Raising Children Network <https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/development/social-emotional-development/understanding-managing-emotions-children-teenagers>

Sensory Processing



Touch



Vestibular



Auditory



Smell



Taste



Visual



Proprioception



Interoception

Unpacking sensory processing

We all respond to our sensory environment in different ways.

Each person has sensory preferences and differences.

Four types of sensory processing – sensitive, avoidant, seeking and low registration.

A bucket/cup analogy can help us to think about our sensory preferences and needs: <https://youtu.be/V-kUKyfu0as>

What sensory preferences or challenges and strategies might look like

Quadrant	Description	What this may look like	Example strategies
Sensory Sensitivity (Small cup – passive response)	Able to quickly detect sensory input within the environment and may become distracted or feel uncomfortable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being distracted by noises like a ceiling fan. • Finding it hard to concentrate at a cluttered desk or in a room full of decorations and posters. • Prefers predictable, firm touch rather than light touch and may avoid some fabrics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on creating calm, consistent environments. • Reduce noise and background visual input • Create organisational systems • Reduce information on pages • Use items like headphones and sunglasses
Sensory Avoiding (Small cup – active response)	Bothered or overwhelmed by sensory input and will try to reduce the sensory input and control their environment to increase comfort.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preference for sedentary activities. • Rejects certain tastes or textures. • Finding loud or sudden noises painful or frightening. • Choosing darker environments or shielding their eyes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce sensory input in the environment and provide opportunities for breaks/retreat. • Use items like headphones, gloves and sunglasses to manage sensory input. • Create supportive routines
Sensory Seeking (Big cup – active response)	Seeks to create additional stimuli or find environments that provide the sensory input they are seeking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needing to run around before sitting down to do a task • Enjoying pushing, pulling, lifting heavy things, or climbing. • Needing music on to focus. • Seeking to experience a range of textures through touch. 	Incorporate sensory experiences into daily routine and/or specific activities. Eg. movement, music, tactile experiences and fidgets.
Low Registration (Big cup – passive response)	Misses sensory cues more than others and may take longer to respond to sensory stimuli	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being clumsy or bumping in to things. • Needing to get your child's attention by standing in front of them, before they hear you. • Not noticing a new poster on the wall or if a room has been rearranged. • Not noticing dirty hands or food on face without visual input. 	<p>Increase sensory components of tasks and environmental cues.</p> <p>Eg. make visuals colourful, label drawers, have a place for everything, increase sensory elements of tasks, use reminders, repeat verbal information.</p>

Sources:

Adolescent/Adult Sensory Profile Manual,

Building Blocks Therapy Block by Block: Unlocking Sensory Processing Workbook

Chronic Resilience OT:
<https://www.chronicresilienceot.com/blog/sensory-processing-systems-and-patterns>

The physical environment

General considerations include:

Having a place for everything.

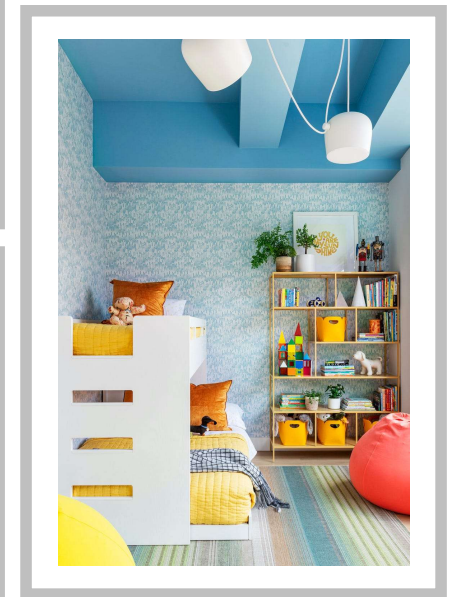
Creating spaces that support sensory preferences.

Visuals, eg:

Routine visual schedules.

Sequencing charts

A “finished” photo of what a room looks like when packed up



More on routines

Other considerations around routine:

Routines provide consistency and support regulation

Placement and timing of activities in routines

Flexibility and space in routines

Choice and control in routines

Supporting transitions



Source: vecteezy.com

**Additional
strategies to
support
emotions and
behaviour**

Parent modelling

Family rules/values

Observation and reflection

Collaborative and proactive
solutions – Dr Ross Green

Questions



Feedback

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References

- Adolescent/Adult Sensory Profile Users Manual (2002)
- Autism Toolbox: <https://www.autismtoolbox.co.uk/transitions/>
- Building Blocks Therapy Block by Block: Unlocking Sensory Processing Workbook
- Child Mind Institute: <https://childmind.org/article/what-is-co-regulation/>
- Chronic Resilience OT: <https://www.chronicresilienceot.com/blog/sensory-processing-systems-and-patterns>
- Circle of Security Parenting Program: <https://www.circleofsecurityinternational.com/>
- Hand Model of the Brain Dr Dan Siegel. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmgCIJ74Oxw>
- Mission magnets: <https://www.missionmagnets.com.au/>
- Raising Children Network:
 - <https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/development>
 - <https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/development/social-emotional-development/understanding-managing-emotions-children-teenagers>
- Ross Green's Collaborative and Proactive Solutions model: <https://cpsconnection.com/>
- Tuning in to Kids program: <https://tuningintokids.org.au/>
- Zones of Regulation Program: <https://zonesofregulation.com/>