



A WAY OF BEING WITH CHILDREN

Co-Regulation

Tips to Promote Child Well-Being and Resilience

What is Co-Regulation?

Co-regulation involves the back-and-forth exchange between two people as each participant adjusts their emotional state and response based on the state (also called the 'arousal level') of the other. It is an interactive experience where both individuals provide moment-to-moment feedback to each other using verbal expressions and body language. This is not just a technique between an infant/child and parent/caregiver; co-regulation can occur between any two people where there is a relationship based on communication and trust.



Why is Co-Regulation Important?

- It is the foundation for learning self-regulation skills later on in a child's development
- It promotes self-efficacy and empowerment
- It creates secure relationships within which to practice skills and safely make mistakes
- It encourages resilient behaviors
- Co-regulation boosts the potential for future success at home, school, and work



Serve and Return

Serve and return interactions form the basis of co-regulation. Like in a tennis match, when one player serves the ball then the other player returns it, an adult assists a child in co-regulating by having a secure relationship with the child – learning, understanding, and watching for the child's cues, and showing the child consistent, warm, and supportive responses.

A baby's ability to begin to self-regulate and manage the tasks of self-soothing, waiting, and transitioning between activities begin to emerge in response to experiencing supportive interactions with primary caregivers.

A child who is able to self-regulate is able to effectively calm him/herself down when faced with frustrations. This skill will impact a child's ability to make and maintain lifelong relationships, improve focus and concentration, foster better problem-solving skills, enjoy higher academic/workplace performance, and experience an improved sense of wellbeing and happiness.



Bring Self-Awareness to Co-Regulation

Check-In With Yourself

If you find yourself dismissing the child, making threats, or constantly rescuing the child, pause and regulate yourself first.

Pay Attention to the Way You Are Being:

Note and adjust these aspects of your behavior, as needed:

- Affect (the observable physical responses to an emotion)
- Body language (facial expressions and other physical cues)
- Intonation (the volume and tone of your voice)
- Processing pause (give yourself time to think before speaking/acting)
- Engagement (genuine, focused interactions that show you care)

Tips for Using Serve-and-Return Co-Regulation Every Day

Notice the serve and share your child's focus of attention.

Is your child looking at something? Making a sound or facial expression? Moving his or her arms or legs? Pointing at something? That is a serve - get ready to return! The key is to pay attention to what the child is focused on. Allow them to be the leader of the interaction.

Return the serve by supporting and encouraging.

You can offer your child comfort with a hug or gentle words, help them, play with them, or acknowledge them. It can be as simple as observing what has captured your child's attention and just smiling, nodding, or saying "I see" to let your child know you are noticing the same thing he or she was focused on.

Give it a name.

When you name what a child is seeing, doing, or feeling, you make important language connections in their brain, even before your child can talk or understand your words. You can name anything - a person, thing, action, feeling, or combination of the above. For example, if your child looks or points at his feet, you can say "Yes, those are your feet." If a child is kicking her feet, you can say "You are having so much fun kicking your feet."

Take turns. . . and wait. Keep the interaction going back and forth.

Every time you return a serve, give the child a chance to respond. Infants and young children need time to take everything in and formulate a response, so do not rush the interaction. Go at your child's pace and follow his or her lead. Sometimes these interactions will only go on for a short period of time, but other times, they may go on for many turns.

Practice endings and beginnings.

Children signal when they are done or ready to move on to a new activity. They might let go of a toy, pick up a new one, turn to look at something else, or simply announce "all done" and walk away. When you are tuned in or share your child's focus, you will know when they are ready to end one activity and begin something new. You can let them lead the interaction and continue your serve and return with whatever your child's new interest or focus may be - this helps to keep the serve and return interaction going.



Get more resources at: www.centerforchildcounseling.org/awayofbeing