



Co-Regulation in Parent-Child Relationships

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Children learn how to manage big feelings by first **borrowing the organized and regulated state** of a safe adult. This process is called **co-regulation**. It's not about teaching children to "calm down" on their own right away — it's about showing them what regulation feels like, so they can gradually internalize those skills.

Co-regulation builds the foundation for **emotional safety, trust, and resilience**.

✨ Key Ideas

1. Regulation starts in relationship

Children cannot regulate in isolation — they need connection with a calm, supportive adult first.

2. Your nervous system matters

When you steady yourself, you become the anchor that helps your child return to balance.

3. Co-regulation looks different across ages

- Infants: holding, rocking, soothing voice, gentle touch
- Young children: calm presence, play, shared breathing, simple words
- Older children/teens: listening, validating, sitting nearby, co-problem-solving

4. It's not about "fixing" feelings

The goal is not to make big emotions disappear but to stay present through them, so your child feels safe and understood.

5. Do what works for your child

Some children want a hug. Others may need space, no touch, or quiet presence nearby. Co-regulation means being responsive, not prescriptive — following your child's cues while staying emotionally available.

6. Co-regulation builds self-regulation

Over time, children internalize your support and begin to use these strategies themselves.



Simple Co-Regulation Practices

- **Stay close — but in the way your child prefers** (sitting nearby, being quietly present, or offering physical comfort if welcomed)
- **Soften your voice and body**
- **Acknowledge feelings:** “I see you’re upset. I’m right here.”
- **Offer calming rhythms:** slow breathing, humming, rocking, walking together
- **Wait and watch** — let your child show you what helps



Reflection Prompts

- When my child is upset, what helps me stay calm?
- What signals show me that my child is seeking co-regulation?
- What co-regulation strategies already work well in our family?
- How does my child show me when they *don’t* want touch or closeness, and how can I respect that?
- What new strategies might I try?



Remember

Children don’t learn to regulate by being left alone with their feelings — they learn by being **met, held, or simply accompanied** through them in the way that feels safe for *them*. Your calm presence — whether close or nearby — is the most powerful tool you have.