

CO-REGULATION

Understanding Co-Regulation in The Early Years

Co-regulation is a vital process through which you, as a parent or caregiver, help your child manage and understand their emotions and behaviors. By actively engaging with your child during moments of distress, you provide the external support they need to **develop their own self-regulation skills.**

BY HALEY TURNER

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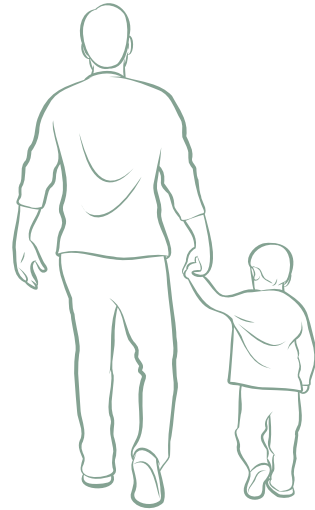
Co-regulation starts from the earliest moments of a child's life.



start here...

WHO IS CO-REGULATION FOR?

Just like our little ones, we as adults also need co-regulation. When life throws its curveballs, how often do we reach out for a comforting hug from our partner, sit down over coffee with a friend, or pick up the phone to hear our mom's voice? Rarely do we choose to face tough emotions by retreating to cry alone in our room. This instinct to seek connection is a fundamental human need, and it underscores the importance of co-regulation across all ages.



For children, co-regulation isn't just about cuddles (though those are great too!). It happens in various ways throughout the day. It could be a shared laugh that cuts through a moment of frustration, a calm voice explaining the steps to tie shoelaces, or even a quiet sit-down together after a minor mishap with spilled juice. Each of these moments is an opportunity to teach our kids how to manage their emotions and behaviors, mirroring the many ways adults seek and provide support in our own relationships. Co-regulation is an ongoing process, subtly woven through our daily interactions, supporting our children's emotional growth and resilience.

“Emotional
regulation flows
naturally from
being in the
presence of
someone we
trust”

— Bonnie
Badenoch, The
Heart of Trauma

SOME OF THE MANY BENEFITS

One of the most profound gifts we can offer our children is the foundation of a healthy and strong attachment. This deep-rooted connection provides them with the security and confidence needed to explore and grow. True independence springs from a solid base of dependence. By nurturing their need for closeness and support early on, we empower them to venture into the world boldly and independently. This paradoxical truth—that to soar in independence, one must first be firmly grounded in dependable relationships—is at the heart of raising resilient and self-assured individuals.

Co-regulation plays a pivotal role in a child's development, particularly in cultivating self-regulation skills essential for lifelong success. Research underscores the importance of these skills, including patience, impulse control, and empathy, which are foundational for navigating complex social environments and personal challenges. Studies in developmental psychology suggest that children who master these skills through consistent co-regulatory interactions tend to perform better academically, have lower levels of stress, and exhibit healthier social behaviors. For example, the ability to manage impulses allows children to make thoughtful decisions and fosters resilience in frustrating situations, directly impacting their emotional and mental health.

Effective co-regulation enhances communication between children and their caregivers, laying the groundwork for more responsive and understanding relationships. This improved communication is crucial in reducing behavioral issues, as children feel more understood and less inclined to act out to express their needs or emotions. According to research from the fields of psychology and child development, children who experience a nurturing environment where caregivers actively engage in co-regulation are more likely to develop secure attachment styles. These styles are associated with positive outcomes in various areas of life, including personal relationships and professional success, demonstrating the long-term benefits of a co-regulatory approach to child-rearing. This evidence strongly supports the idea that the skills and emotional intelligence gained through co-regulation are invaluable assets that contribute significantly to a child's ability to thrive in adulthood.

CO-REGULATION ISN'T COMING NATURALLY FOR ME. WHY IS THIS?

Parenting certainly isn't without its hurdles, and among these are societal pressures and deep-rooted personal experiences that can shape how we respond to our children. There's a common myth floating around that if we're too responsive to our kids, they might end up overly dependent or "too attached." This idea can really throw us off, making us second-guess our gut instinct to comfort and connect with our children when they need us. However, child development experts are pretty clear on this—kids need a strong, supportive connection with their parents to grow into independent and emotionally resilient adults.

Then there's our own childhood to consider. Not everyone grew up in an environment where emotions were openly discussed or handled in healthy ways. If showing emotion was discouraged in your own family, it might feel unnatural or even uncomfortable to see your child express big feelings like anger or sadness. This discomfort can make it tricky to stay calm and supportive in the heat of the moment. Our own upbringing plays a huge part in the ways that we feel safe and comfortable in showing up as a parent. There is nothing wrong or broken in you if co-regulation is hard. This, in the simplest way, is just a response from your nervous system which always did its best to adapt and protect you in any given situation as a child. Now though, as adults, we have the opportunity to heal and grow for ourselves and every generation to come after us.

But here's the good news: there are some really practical tools you can use to help manage these moments better. Simple techniques like practicing mindfulness, taking deep breaths before responding, or even stepping away for a quick meditative break can be game-changers. These help us stay centered, so we can approach our children's emotions with the calm and support they need. And it's okay (more than okay) to seek help too—parenting classes, therapists, or support groups can offer guidance and reassurance that you are able to deeply engage with our children's emotional lives.

Tackling these societal myths and personal barriers with a bit of knowledge and the right tools can make a world of difference in strengthening our ability to co-regulate with our kids. It's all about learning as we go and giving ourselves the space to grow into the supportive parents our children need us to be.

SENSORY SYSTEMS

The sensory system is like your body's control panel, helping you figure out how to interact with the world around you. It's super important in both calming ourselves down (self-regulation) and helping others do the same (co-regulation), especially for kids who are still learning the ropes. Understanding different types of sensory input and how they can soothe or stimulate is key to managing emotions and reactions.

Some Different Types of Sensory Input:

Deep Pressure: Think of how great it feels to get a firm hug or snuggle under a heavy blanket. This kind of pressure can really help chill out an overstimulated nervous system, making you feel secure and grounded.

Vestibular Input: This is all about balance and movement. Activities like swinging, rocking, or spinning help some kids feel more in control and less anxious. It's like finding calm in motion.

Tactile Input: This involves anything to do with touch. Playing with different textures—smooth, scratchy, squishy—can be a great distraction and help redirect or focus attention.

Proprioceptive Input: This refers to activities that involve muscle resistance and awareness of body position. Think climbing, jumping, or pushing against something. These actions tell your brain where your body is in space and can be really grounding.

Auditory Input: For some, calming music or certain sounds can be just the trick to mellow out. Others might need a quieter environment, as too much noise can crank up the stress.

Visual Input: Calming visual scenes, like watching fish swim in an aquarium or clouds drifting in the sky, can also help soothe the mind. On the flip side, clutter or bright lights might be overwhelming for some.

SENSORY SYSTEMS

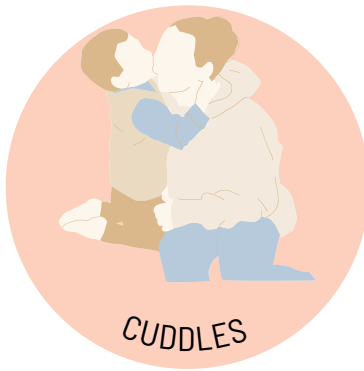
Why It Matters:

Every person, big or small, has their own set of sensory likes and dislikes, and these can change based on what's happening around them or how they're feeling. It's crucial to figure out what kind of sensory input works best for you and your kids, especially during those tougher moments. For instance, if your child is getting antsy in a noisy, crowded place, a quick bear hug might help them feel more secure and less chaotic. Or maybe a few minutes on a swing will do the trick after a tough day.

Being aware of these sensory tools not only helps you tailor your approach to meet your child's needs in real-time but also supports their journey toward becoming calm, happy kiddos. Plus, it's a great way to strengthen your connection, showing them you're there and you get what they need.

We can also find our sensory TRIGGERS. Like as a parent have you ever felt like if one more person touches you, you might just literally explode. Yeah, your sensory system is in overdrive. Or how about the auditory overload of hearing the TV, the oven timer beeping, a child crying, and the sink running all at the same time. That one will personally do me in. It is helpful to know this for ourselves to get ahead of things, like putting in some ear plugs! And it is also helpful to observe our won kids and see when they're having a visceral response to the input around them so that we can better support them, as well.

WAYS TO CO-REGULATE



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REFLECTIONS

1. REFLECT ON A RECENT SITUATION WHERE YOU HELPED YOUR CHILD MANAGE THEIR EMOTIONS. WHAT STRATEGIES WORKED BEST? WE EXPLORE THESE BECAUSE EVERY HUMAN SEEKS REGULATION IN DIFFERENT WAYS - IT IS HELPFUL TO OBSERVE AND REFLECT ON WHAT YOUR LITTLE HUMAN FEELS MOST SOOTHED BY!

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REFLECTIONS

2. WHAT EMOTIONS DO YOU FIND MOST CHALLENGING TO MANAGE IN YOURSELF WHEN YOUR CHILD IS UPSET? WHAT HAVE YOU FOUND THAT CAN HELP SOOTHE YOU'RE OWN NERVOUS SYSTEM SO THAT YOU CAN RESPOND TO THEM WITH CALM?

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REFLECTIONS

3. HOW WERE YOUR EMOTIONAL NEEDS MET AS A CHILD? DID YOU FEEL THERE WAS SOMEONE WHO HELPED YOU CO-REGULATE? WHO WAS THAT PERSON FOR YOU? IF THESE NEEDS WERE NOT MET, WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE NEEDED FROM YOUR ADULTS AS A CHILD? CLOSE YOUR EYES AND IMAGINE WHAT LITTLE YOU WOULD HAVE NEEDED BACK THEN. WRITE IT DOWN. IN MOMENTS WHERE YOU FEEL DIFFICULTY IN FINDING YOUR CALM, SPEAK TO YOURSELF WITH THE KINDNESS YOU WOULD HAVE NEEDED BACK THEN - AS WE ALL STILL NEED IT TODAY.

well...

WHAT NEXT?

Are you ready to dive deeper after soaking in our free printable on co-regulation? If you're nodding 'yes', our Peaceful Montessori Parenting courses are the perfect next step for you. Our courses are expertly created for parents like you who want to nurture a calm, joyful, and enriching environment for their little ones.

Why Peaceful Montessori Parenting? 🌈

It's all about fostering independence, respect, and lifelong love for learning in your children. Imagine not just reacting to your child's needs but anticipating them, understanding them, and meeting them with love and intention.



Courses:

- Parenting with Intention 4 Week Transformational Parent Course
- Raising Siblings with Intention
- The Independent Child
- The First Year

LOOKING FOR MORE SUPPORT?

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COACHING CALL

www.kindlyhaley.com