



## Guide to Supporting Emotion Regulation



SCHOOL of EDUCATION  
and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT  
CASTL

### WHAT IS IT?

Supporting Emotion Regulation is a collection of techniques that teachers can use to support children to regulate their strong feelings. These strategies guide children through recognizing their emotions, describing these emotions, and choosing how to respond.

### WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

A child has become frustrated and is hitting classmates during center time. The teacher introduces the Turtle Technique so that the child has a strategy to manage their emotions. Their teacher then keeps an eye out during center time to catch the child *before* they get too upset. When the teacher notices the child appears frustrated, the teacher labels and validates the emotion, saying, “It looks like you’re feeling frustrated.” The teacher then gives the child the option of using the Turtle Technique calm-down steps.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Young children are learning how to regulate their emotions. Preschoolers often need additional support to cope with strong feelings (e.g., anger, frustration, sadness, fear, excitement). When teachers help children develop the skills to recognize *what* they are feeling and ways to *work through* these emotions, children become more able to regulate their behavior on their own. With this support, children are also more likely to remain engaged in activities and the classroom community.

The Supporting Emotion Regulation strategies are useful for all children. Teachers may need to provide additional scaffolding and practice for children who need them the most.

## Building Blocks for Supporting Emotion Regulation

### **Recognize** the emotion

To understand and work through their emotions, children need to know what to call them. When teachers encourage children to be aware of what they are feeling and connect it to language, children build the skills needed to recognize and communicate about their own and others’ emotions. Allow children with limited language skills to point to a visual of the emotion they are feeling.

### **Describe** the emotion

After naming the emotion, being able to describe its intensity is an important next step. The ability for children to recognize and label when they are starting to feel a “big emotion” can help them “own” or manage the emotion. This can prevent it from building up in the moment.

### **Regulate** the emotion

After recognizing what it is that they are feeling, children need to know what to *do* with the feelings. It is important for children to know that they have problem-solving strategies or ways to calm their bodies if an emotion becomes “too big” or if they are feeling overwhelmed. Children may need support to make the connection between an emotion and what caused it.



## TIPS FOR HELPING CHILDREN HANDLE EMOTIONS

### 1. Prepare children to handle strong emotions

- Teach how to RECOGNIZE emotions.
  - Read stories, sing songs, and play games that incorporate a full range of emotions.
  - Emphasize that *all* feelings are valid (e.g., we all feel angry, sad, etc., at times).
  - Help children recognize the physical signs when they are feeling frustrated or upset.
  - Recognize and acknowledge that there are differences in how emotions are described and expressed across cultures and within different families.
  - Reference the *Emotional Vocabulary* handout for tips on labeling emotions.
  - Introduce a classroom “Feelings Chart” or “Feelings Wheel” (see resources below).
  - Visit NCPMI’s website for practical strategies for teaching social emotional skills:
    - “Scripted Stories for Social Situations”
    - “Book Nook” activities
- Teach how to DESCRIBE emotions.
  - Introduce a “Feelings Chart” and “Feelings Thermometer” to guide children through describing emotions (see NCPMI resource below).
- Teach how to REGULATE emotions.
  - Use social stories and modeling to teach children how to regulate their emotions.
  - Read stories that incorporate calm down and problem-solving strategies.
  - Introduce and practice the “Turtle Technique” (see ECE Hub and NCPMI resources).

### 2. Guide children through strong emotions in-the-moment

- Anticipate and plan for situations that might bring up strong feelings for particular children.
- Get to know and look for each child’s warning signs (e.g., tensing, zoning out, fidgeting).
- Reflect and validate the child’s feelings using a calm and soft voice.
- Offer the child the opportunity to use a self-regulation technique.
- Acknowledge the child’s use of the technique.
- Once calm, think of ways to better anticipate triggers and plan for next time.
  - Make sure to do this as soon as possible! The more recent the situation, the better able children are to connect what you are saying with their behavior.

## RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT HELPING CHILDREN HANDLE EMOTIONS

Fostering Emotion  
Regulation

[ECE Resource Hub](#)

CASTL ©

Scripted Stories, Book  
Nook, Tucker Turtle,  
and Feelings Charts

[Available as PDFs](#)

NCPMI©

Enhancing Emotional  
Vocabulary in Young  
Children

[Available as PDF](#)

NCPMI©

Control Anger and  
Handle Disappointment

[Available as PDF](#)

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