

Caring for Self, Caring for Children

On page 1, we talked about what social-emotional development is, and you might be wondering “how can I support my child’s social-emotional development? I understand what it is, but how do I help them in this area?” There are all kinds of ways caregivers can support children with their emotions and learning to care for themselves; we will explore some of the ways families do this, and you may find you’re already doing many of these things, or want to try something new.

The one thing that is the same for all families is that children’s social-emotional development is best supported by loving relationships, sensitivity, and curiosity. This requires us caregivers to be aware of our own emotions, our reactions to our children’s emotions and behaviors, and using our strategies that help us navigate all of this – this is part of *emotional regulation*. Emotional regulation is not always easy, in fact, it can be nearly impossible sometimes. Emotional regulation is not about being calm all the time. All emotions are valid and have good reason to be there. The goal is to increase our ability to notice what we are feeling and give ourselves what we need to care for our selves physically, emotionally, and spiritually. This is different for everyone, so it is good to explore what feel best to you.

It is also important to note that the ways in which children and adults regulate emotions are different. Adults have the ability to regulate emotions on our own (or with others if we choose), but children need *co-regulation*, which is getting help from a caregiver to regulate their emotions. This is why it is so important for us to care for our own emotions, because we are the way our children learn to regulate theirs. It takes years and years for children to develop the ability to regulate their emotions on their own (into the teen years, even adults are still learning this!), so please be gentle and compassionate with yourself and your children as you learn and practice together.

What kinds of activities do I like to do that feel like they restore my energy, soothe and comfort me, or make me feel like ‘me’ ?

What kinds of activities do I think my child likes? What seems to comfort them and help them feel safe?

Emotional Regulation Activities

Try some out or do it your own way... these are just some ideas of things we can do to help us and our children feel and express emotions. What would you add to the list?



- Tear paper
- Stomp feet
- Rest or sleep
- Bare feet in the grass or sand
- Deep breathing

- Walk, run, jump, or skip
- Splash cold water on your face
- Journaling
- Hug someone
- Dance

- Color, doodle, paint
- Squeeze play dough
- Cry it out
- Kickboxing or martial arts
- Swinging

- Mindfulness practices
- Fresh air & sunshine
- Swimming or playing in water
- Eat a crunchy snack