

# Emotion Regulation Tip Sheet for parents

## The Zones of Regulation®

### What is Emotion Regulation and Why is it Important?

Emotion Regulation Skills are really important, for all of us. It involves a few different things. First, being aware of our emotions in our bodies – being able to identify and work out what we are feeling. Second, the ability to link how we are feeling in our bodies to what is going on around us. Third, the ability to work out how best to express or not different emotions in ways that we can be proud of.

Everyday, we will all experience lots of different emotions – some easier, some more difficult. We want to work together to help children develop skills to become confident in spotting and expressing their emotions in ways they can be proud of.

Research tells us that these Emotion Regulation skills are linked to overall wellbeing, how we get on with others and friends, and also our academic progress over time. This is why together we see Emotion Regulation as an important part of school and home life.

### Introducing - The Zones of Regulation®

The Zones of Regulation® was created by Leah Kuypers (Occupational Therapist) as a tool for helping us work out how we are feeling, and do something about it to help us get to a place where we are more in control, and to reflect on times where we have been in trickier places or lost control of our emotions. The Zones of Regulation has good evidence backing, and has sold over 270,000 copies. It is a simple tool used with all children, including children with neurodiverse needs including Sensory Differences, ADHD and ASC. It fits well as within whole schools and families, creating a common language that can be used both at home and school.

Reference: <https://www.zonesofregulation.com/index.html>

**Next – The Zones of Regulation® in a Nutshell and three stages**

## The Zones of Regulation® in a nutshell

### Stage 1: How am I feeling inside?

Emotions are complicated and tricky. There are so many of them, and sometimes they are all mixed up. It can be a lot to expect a child (and all of us) to clearly and easily describe how they are feeling, particularly in times of pressure or stress.

Instead, we recommend as a starting point thinking about Emotions as ‘Energy-in-Motion’ or ‘E-Motion’ – thinking about how fast or slowly emotions are running through our body. Starting with the slowest to fastest, The Zones of Regulation® splits this into Four Zones.



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### The Four Zones:

**Blue Zone** – slowest zone, this is spotting when we are feeling tired, sad, bored or lethargic (technically called out hypoarousal zones). When we are in this zone we may be resting or recuperating, or if we are in this for a long time, we may be shutting down a bit.

**Green Zone** - active zone, this is spotting when we are feeling alert, happy, generally in a good place and ready to carry on with the things that are important to us. When we are in this zone, we feel in a good place and in control of our emotions.

**Yellow Zone** – building up zone, this is spotting when some more feelings are starting to be around and move a bit quicker. This could be worry, feeling excited, frustrated or nervous. We are still in control, but there is a build up and we may before long need to start slowing down.

**Red Zone** – this is where we have lost control, emotions are moving really quickly. We feel out of control, it is hard to think, we may be feeling angry, overwhelmed or really stressed – this can look different for different people and at different times.

**(Extra White Zone** – for some children, after losing control and if they did things they will regret- some children have called this Ghost or White Zone where they have wanted to be invisible or felt bad for what happened).

### **How is this useful and key tips?**

Finding a common language for talking about how we are doing in a quick way is really useful. It helps to identify what's going on inside and being able to label our emotions (interoception). It normalizes different emotions and shows that it is normal to go through different zones on different days and in different situations. It also allows us to create different ways to help or express ourselves based on which zone we are in.

**Parent/Teacher tips** – at home and school, parents and teachers can model using the Zones. For example, talk about which zone being in traffic put you in, which zones you were in today, you can relabel zones as 'a bit stressed (yellow), very stressed (red), a bit in control (yellow) or lost control (red)' depending on your child's age – the message and skills are still the same. This helps to make it normal and OK to talk about emotions.

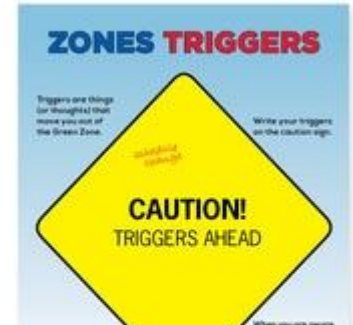
**Remember** – there is no such thing as a bad zone. We cannot choose what emotions we are feeling, or how much they are moving. We can over time develop skills at spotting our emotions and working out as best as possible how we want to express our emotions, ways to get to the green zone, and reflect together or repair if we have made mistakes.

## The Zones of Regulation® in a nutshell

### Stage 2: working out why I am feeling the way I am?

Usually, our emotions are triggered by something or lots of different things. This can be things big or small that happen at school, online, on tv, in the world, at home, or when out and about. Our brains fight/flight system treats lots of different things like life-threats or sabre tooth tigers when they are not, this could be an argument with a friend or losing at a computer game – they can create quite a lot of emotion in our brain and body.

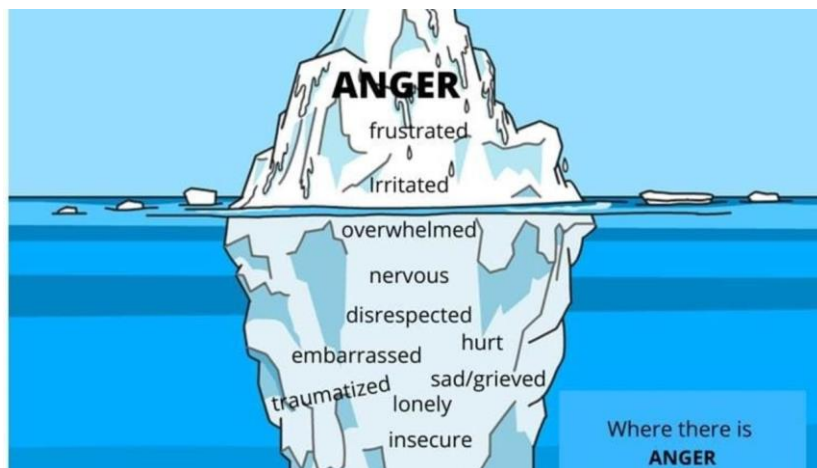
Being able to link what is going on in our bodies to things going on around us, helps us work things out, it helps make our emotions more predictable and understandable – especially when teachers and parents do their best to listen and understand and connect with these emotions, rather than immediately correct them.



Ret from google images

**Parent/Teacher tips** – connect before you correct.

Ask – 'I wonder what sorts of things might have been going on that put you in the yellow zone? I'm wondering if it may have been something in the playground / on the way to school?' Being curious and guessing are great ways to connect and open conversation for lots of children, take time to work out the best way for both of you – it is best to have these conversations where we reflect ONLY once we are regulated, we cannot reason or think very well when emotions are moving very quickly (dysregulated).

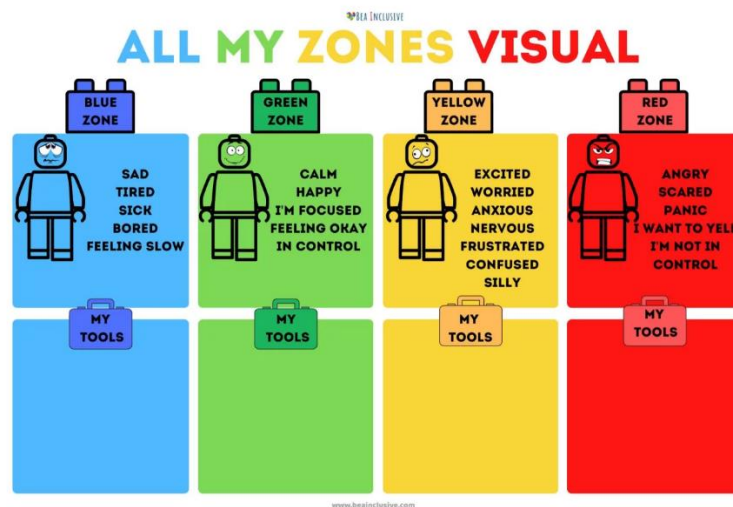


Emotional iceberg. Ret from google images.

## The Zones of Regulation® in a nutshell

### Stage 3: Tools for helping get back to the Green Zone

For each zone, you can work out what works best for you and your child to help them get back to where they would most likely like to be – the green zone when they are feeling in a good place and in control of emotions. You can also work out what are the best things to try and do if we get in the yellow, or red zone – so we can act in ways that we can be as proud as possible of how we acted. If things go wrong, that’s OK, we can always work out a bit of a plan for next time.



#### Creating Child and Family Tools:

**Blue Zone** – when in this zone for a while, some children and adults will want to get the energy-in motion back up a bit. This can involve stretching, a bit of exercise, picking an activity, spending time with others, doing something to increase energy in the body to support us back to the green zone.

**Green Zone** – when in this zone, carry on and spot what things help you keep in this zone.

**Yellow Zone** – work out what works for you and your child. This could be some relaxing activities, burning off steam then relaxing, a cold drink, some breathing exercises or tensing and relaxing, talking things through to help release some of that extra energy-in-motion that may be creating some worry, frustration or nervousness.

**Red Zone** – work out a plan to press the pause button. A safe and relaxing place, moving away from a source of stress, squeezing something, ripping something, move to yellow tools when ready.

**(White Zone** – some children will say things like ‘I’m bad’ after losing control or have a tendency to self-punish., Helping children move to a place of ‘I made a mistake in

this situation or this time' and 'I can do something to repair it', can help create learning over time – give your child ways to make up and show remorse for mistakes, and remind them of your care).

**Parent/Teacher tips** – we all need our own emotion regulation tools. It can be good to work out what you already do and what works for you. The zones apply to all of us and they are based on what happens to us neurobiologically when triggered at different levels. In situations of stress or when approaching your child if they are dysregulated, we recommend to everyone to always pause and breathe before reacting – usually things always end up that bit better when we take a breath, it also models this for our child. Take time to connect with your child's experience and regulate together, before expecting to think things together. When we do this, we are helping our own and our child's brain to regulate which will then allow us eventually to reason.

Remember – Emotion Regulation skills take time to develop, the brain is developing well into our late 20s at a fast rate, it is worth the investment. Be kind to ourselves.

#### **Resources and recommendations:**

**Book: *Little Meerkat's Big Panic***: A Story About Learning New Ways to Feel Calm – Jane Evans – A story about a meerkat, monkey and elephant based on the different parts of our brains, and how we can support emotion regulation for all these different parts. Strategies and tips at the end

**Book: *Binnie the Baboon – Anxiety and Stress Activity Book*** – Karen Treisman – series of books for different emotions and also a book 'Neon the Ninja' for activities for nightmares and sleep difficulties.

**Book: *Don't Worry, Be Happy: A Child's Guide to dealing with feeling anxious*** – Poppy O'Neil – an activity book for older primary children with ideas and strategies for supporting anxious feelings.

***No Worries! Mindful Kids: An activity book for children who sometimes feel anxious or stressed*** – Dr Sharie Coombes – series of activities for older primary children with more artistic strategies and tools for supporting different feelings.

**Who are we? Merton's NHS Emotion Wellbeing Service in Schools** also offers 1-1 parent-based guided self-help sessions for supporting common childhood worries or supporting tricky and challenging behavior. This preventative and early help support is currently recommended by 100% of parents who have accessed the service, helping all make progress with parents own rated goals. Speak to your school for a one-page application form and to find out what help is available through your school. We also provide workshops for parents and schools each term.

**Our NHS Children and Young People's Wellbeing Service Youtube channel:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrRkV84Ib8Jr69Z7ZhjSjCg/about>

*Created by Merton's Emotion Wellbeing Service for Merton Mental Health Support Team Primary Schools – October 2021*