

# Emotional Regulation in Autistic Children

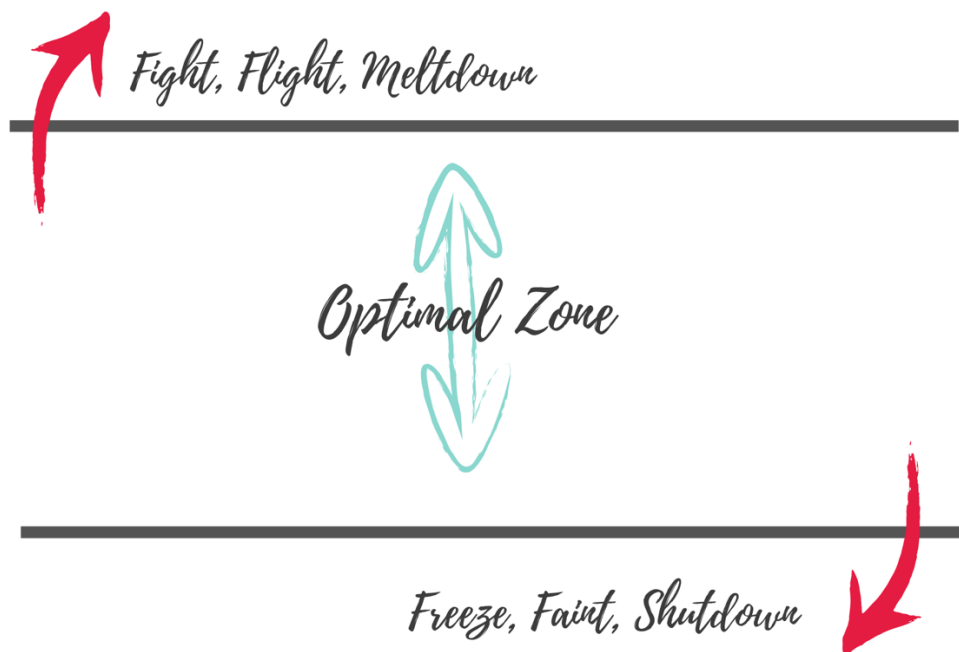
## Summary Notes

Life can be pretty challenging for autistic children as they try to fit within a world that doesn't always make sense to them on terms that don't quite work for them. Sometimes, anxiety, anger or sheer exhaustion can bubble over and result in challenging behaviour which is distressing both for the child and the adults supporting them. There is a lot that we can do to change the environment rather than the child, but this course focuses in on how we can support autistic children to recognise and regulate how they're feeling, to give them the best chance of managing alongside their peers because maybe the whole world needs to change, but until that happens, these simple ideas can change how the world feels for the child you're supporting.

## THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

In order to get by in day-to-day life, we all need to stay within our window of tolerance which basically describes how much we can handle before we lose it... There are things we can do to widen our window of tolerance, and things we can do to keep within in.

- Our emotions are in a constant state of flux
- Our window of tolerance describes the optimal zone; i.e. when we're managing
- Hyper-arousal can lead to a fight or flight response
- Hypo-arousal can lead to a freeze or faint response
- It's cumulative but micro adjustments can help us stay in the optimal zone



## UNDERSTANDING SHUTDOWN AND MELTDOWN

When a child feels overwhelmed sometimes things get big and shouty and sometimes the child seems to completely retreat within themselves.

- Meltdown tends to demand more attention because it's loud
- Shutdown is a lot quieter and easier to ignore
- Both shutdown and meltdown signal a child in significant distress who needs help
- We can help both in similar ways
- The child needs us to be: safe, soothing, supportive

## NAME IT TO TAME IT

We need to talk to children about their feelings and find ways of communicating them. When a child is able to indicate their rising anger, fear or sadness to an adult then an adult is far more likely to be able to offer the appropriate support before things escalate.

- Children need emotional literacy and can learn this vocab from a young age
- You can use age and stage appropriate language to start from very young
- Sometimes colours, numbers or animals can help
- Or you can use things like touch or play dough for non-verbal children
- Practice pulling faces and talking about feelings
- Explore the physiology of feelings too
- There are no good and bad feelings, it's what we do with them that matters

## SELF-SOOTHE AND SELF-CARE SUPER POWERS

There is a lot that we can do to support a child to regulate their emotions, but the most powerful lessons are those the child can learn for themselves. Building their skills to recognise and respond to rising emotions and also taking proactive steps to exercise self-care. This can help the child feel more in control and can significantly boost their self-esteem and wellbeing as well as providing them with the tools they can take with them wherever they go in life.

- It can feel like your feelings are controlling you; learning self-soothe skills flips that
- Breathing, relaxation or activities that get rid of anxious energy can really help
- It takes practice and we should practice at times of calm
- We will need to support a lot at first, but support the child to learn to self-soothe

## REGULAR RESETS AND PROACTIVE SOOTHING

Look for patterns and be inquisitive about why a child is more likely to struggle at certain points in the day or week and consider what can be done to proactively manage their feelings and get them to the best possible starting point before entering potentially tricky environments as well as bringing them back to a relatively calm baseline after situations that are draining or stressful.

- We don't have to be responsive all the time, we can proactively calm too
- Use mood journaling to look for patterns
- Build in resets or proactive soothing to manage tricky moments
- Distress is cumulative and sometimes we don't see the signs until it's too late
- Consider our emotional energy like a computer character's energy bar
- Try to be positive, proactive and inquisitive rather than judgemental



Name: ..... Day and date: .....

Time:		Where are you:				Who are you with:			
What is happening:									
Current mood: Very calm <span style="float: right;">Very anxious</span>									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Notes									

## IT STARTS WITH YOU: CO-REGULATION

One of the most powerful tools for calming a child is a calm adult. How can you be that cool calm collected adult when faced with a distressed (and often distressing) child?

- We need to be the swan
- Calm communication – slow - low - low
- Our own emotional regulation matters, how can we help ourselves?
- We can be emotional regulation role models to children when we regulate aloud
- Sometimes we'll get it wrong, that's okay so long as we apologise and learn from it