

# Humber Sensory Processing Service

Community Services for Children  
aged 0-18 years



## Co-regulation



Co-regulation is an important concept in child development – especially for children under five. Co-regulation happens when a caring adult helps a child or young person manage their emotions, using comforting actions like cuddles, or suggesting ways to calm down. This support is important for the child to learn how to control their own emotions – a process called self-regulation.

We cannot separate the well-being of the child from the well-being of their caregivers; children often copy what they see around them. To support your child to be calm, you need to be calm. Through co-regulation, we connect with others and create a shared sense of safety.

## Development of regulation

Self-regulation develops as children grow and have more experiences. For most people, true self-regulation isn't fully developed until their mid-twenties! This shows how important it is to have supportive relationships that help with emotional growth throughout life.

Below are the stages of developing self-regulation:

Stage 1	I am aware that I can be in different states
Stage 2	I am noticing when I need to change states
Stage 3	I am aware that I can do something to change my state
Stage 4	I know a strategy that will help me
Stage 5	I can use this strategy now
Stage 6	I can regulate myself more of the time



## Interoception

Interoception helps us feel and understand what is going on inside of our bodies. It allows us to feel important sensations such as – hunger, thirst, pain, or needing the bathroom – as well as our emotions and therefore can have a significant impact on our emotional regulation. Developing your child’s interoceptive sense can have a positive impact on emotions as by paying attention to their body signals, children can develop healthier emotional responses and better manage their feelings in different situations. We have further information on this in the interoception resources section of our website.

## Sensory Thresholds

Sometimes, how we respond to sensory stimuli may differ depending on how well-regulated we are. If we are feeling tired, ill, or worried for example, this can influence our sensory thresholds and make things a little trickier. Sensory thresholds can affect how people react emotionally and behaviourally to their surroundings, for example – someone with a low sensory threshold might become anxious in noisy environments, whereas someone with a high threshold might be more relaxed, or even seek out more stimulation. Engaging in activities that your child enjoys that enjoy proprioceptive and deep pressure input can be calming and regulating, which can raise the sensory threshold.



## Co-regulation activities for under fives

### Sensory play

- Engage in sensory activities, like playing with Playdough, finger painting or exploring different textures with hands. Sensory play can help children regulate their emotions by providing a calming and engaging experience.

### Joint attention games

- Play games that involve joint attention, where both you and the child focus on the same object or activity. This could include playing with blocks, puzzles, or simple board games.

### Imaginative play

- Encourage imaginative play with dolls, action figures or stuffed animals. Join in the play, adding your own characters and stories. This fosters a sense of connection and shared experience.

### Music and movement

- Dance or move to music together; music has a powerful impact on emotions, and moving together can be a fun and regulating experience for both you and the child.

### Breathing and movement

- Introduce simple breathing exercises – you can blow bubbles together pretending to take deep breaths or use a soft toy as a breathing buddy. This helps teach the child self-regulation techniques.

### Cuddling and reading

- Share quiet moments of cuddling whilst reading books. Choose stories that explore emotions and discuss the character's feelings. This provides an opportunity to talk about and regulate emotions together.



## Nature walks

- Take a nature walk together – being outdoors can have a calming effect and exploring nature provides a variety of sensory experiences. Point out different sights, sounds and textures during the walk.

## Yoga for kids

- Explore child-friendly yoga poses and movements. There are many resources available that cater specifically to young children. Yoga promotes body awareness and relaxation.

## Building together

- Create structures with building blocks or make something together with art and craft materials. Cooperative activities that involve planning and working together can promote a sense of connection.

## Cooking or baking

- Involve the child in simple cooking or baking activities – let them help with stirring, pouring, or decorating. Cooking together can be a shared and rewarding experience.

## Mindful moments

- Introduce short mindfulness activities that are suitable for young children – this could include mindful breathing exercises or moments of quiet time.

## General co-regulation strategies

- Preparation/ predictability prior to sessions/ transitions.
- Be mindful of how you are viewing the behaviour.
- Awareness of your own sensory preferences.



- Use of positive feedback.
- Decreasing social demands at the beginning of a session.
- Consider the tone of voice you are using (low and slow).
- Changing pitch and intonation.
- Provide instructions using rhythm and numbers.
- Use of gestures and body position (below eye level of person).
- Modelling deep breathing.
- Managing physical proximity – be led by the person.
- Using known sensory strategies.

Co-regulation is an ongoing process that evolves as the child grows. Consistent and supportive caregiving forms the basis for a child's developing ability to self-regulate and navigate the social and emotional aspects of life.



For more advice and strategies like this, you can visit our website:  
**[sensoryprocessinghub.humber.nhs.uk](https://sensoryprocessinghub.humber.nhs.uk)**

Or you can contact us with a question on the email address below:  
**[hnf-tr.humbersensoryprocessingservice@nhs.net](mailto:hnf-tr.humbersensoryprocessingservice@nhs.net)**

