



Practitioners Co-Regulating with Caregivers

It is natural to experience feelings, sometimes very strong ones, that correspond with the situations we face. Being well-regulated means remaining aware of these feelings and any biases, while consciously managing how they are expressed through body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions. This ability is especially important when engaging with caregivers and children. Practitioners who are well-regulated can remain emotionally balanced, which helps them stay present, focused, and open to reflective practice. A well-regulated practitioner supports caregivers with managing their emotions by offering a calm, steady presence, which helps them achieve emotional balance.

To initiate co-regulation, a well-regulated practitioner helps caregivers identify their emotions and discusses existing strategies they use to manage them. If a caregiver is not yet regulated enough to engage in this reflection, the practitioner can assist by modeling regulation techniques, such as taking deep breaths or using a preferred calming method, while validating the caregiver's feelings like frustration, sadness, or anger. This approach reassures caregivers that the practitioner is present to help them navigate tense interactions with their child, promoting smoother and more productive moments together. The practitioner can use the **H-U-G-S** resources to remind/introduce the caregiver to effective strategies to regulate themselves during tense times.

Everyone has their own way of managing emotions, so it's essential to work alongside caregivers to find what feels right for them and fits their daily life. For caregivers who seek extra guidance, these simple strategies can be used anytime and anywhere, especially during tense moments. If a caregiver needs additional support, practitioners should help them connect with other more individualized resources. Below is a list of strategies to help adults with their own emotional regulation.

Breathing Strategies - Breathing exercises are effective tools for managing uncomfortable emotions. They work by regulating the breath, slowing the heart rate, and encouraging relaxation. When practiced, the body relaxes, heart rate and blood pressure decrease, stress levels are reduced, and breathing slows, helping to conserve energy and restore balance.

Box Breathing

- Inhale for a count of 4.
- Hold breath for a count of 4.
- Exhale for a count of 4.
- Hold for a count of 4.
- Repeat the cycle.

Belly Breathing

- Find a comfortable position, either sitting or lying down.
- Place one hand on the chest and the other on the belly.
- Inhale slowly through the nose, feeling the belly expand against the hand.
- Exhale slowly through the mouth, feeling the belly contract.
- Continue this pattern, focusing on the rise and fall of the belly.

Grounding Techniques - Grounding techniques help manage anxiety by anchoring individuals to the present moment, using the senses to redirect focus away from distressing thoughts and feelings. This can involve noticing the environment, touching objects with different textures, or listening to calming music. Grounding reduces anxiety by interrupting the cycle of anxious thoughts and shifting attention to the present. Regular practice of grounding techniques can build resilience and improve long-term coping with anxiety.

5-4-3-2-1 Method

- **5 Things to See:** Notice five things in the surroundings, like a window, chair, picture, lamp, and book.
- **4 Things to Touch:** Feel four different textures, such as clothing, a table, or the floor.
- **3 Things to Hear:** Listen for three sounds, like a refrigerator, traffic, or birds.
- **2 Things to Smell:** Identify two smells, such as coffee or fresh air.
- **1 Thing to Taste:** Focus on one taste, like the last meal or a mint. It can help to find a favorite flavor.

Think in Categories- Choose one or two broad categories, such as “musical instruments,” “ice cream flavors,” or “baseball teams.” Take a minute or so to mentally list as many things from each category as you can.

Gentle Movements- Gentle movements can effectively relieve anxiety by reducing physical tension and promoting relaxation. These practices help calm the nervous system and shift focus from anxious thoughts to bodily sensations.

- Take a walk.
- Do arm and shoulder rolls.
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation: Alternately tensing and relaxing different muscle groups can help identify and release physical tension associated with anxiety.
- Shake it off: Letting the wrist go limp, gently shake hands to release physical tension and anxiety.

Self-Talk- The inner voice that interprets and comments on experiences plays a powerful role in shaping thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Positive self-talk can boost confidence, reduce anxiety, and improve overall well-being, while negative self-talk often undermines these areas. Since the brain tends to focus on what’s wrong as a natural defense mechanism, it’s important to intentionally encourage positive self-talk. This practice helps manage stress and anxiety, enhances motivation and focus, supports resilience, and can even positively impact physical health.

To foster positive self-talk, individuals can become aware of negative or critical inner messages and consciously replace them with encouraging affirmations, such as:

- “This is hard, but I am strong.”
- “I don’t have to face this alone.”
- “I have overcome challenges before.”
- “I know strategies that can help me now.”
- “I can do difficult things.”

Additionally, taking moments throughout the day to notice small joys (e.g., smiles, successes, or moments of beauty) can reinforce a positive mindset. Incorporating more of these uplifting experiences and surrounding oneself with supportive people, inspiring words, music, and art further nurtures constructive self-talk and a resilient outlook.