

November 2020

Pondering Parenting

Every month SMFCSD's Counselor Wellness Team will share with you stories and guidance based in the 3R's: Routines, Relationships and Regulation, to help your family navigate the everyday puzzles that arise in supporting your learner(s).

Coping Skills

By Christopher Wong and Jennifer Ramberg, School Counselors

The Challenge:

Is your child losing their temper at home with distance learning? Are you losing your temper with your child? "Flipping our lids" happens for all parents and children, but for many, it is a more frequent challenge during this unusual year with distance learning combined with the stress of a global pandemic. We are here to help.

When we lose control of our temper and find ourselves yelling, slamming doors and feeling like a victim to our emotions, we are dysregulated. This dysregulation is actually a normal human response connected to our survival instincts. As our brains take in information, the first place it goes is through an ancient part of our brain called the amygdala. Here we can easily get stuck in a state called, "Fight, Flight, or Freeze." When this happens, we literally respond to our feelings of anger, frustration and exasperation by lashing out, trying to get away or shutting down. This can be a scary place to be, especially when we don't know how to get out.

There are ways to get out of this state of dysregulation by using coping skills to calm ourselves down. As parentsCo, it is important to model these coping skills so that our children also learn how to deal with their own extreme feelings like anger and frustration. Additionally, bodies respond to the regulation of other bodies, so your children are more likely to calm down if you can calm down. However, that's not always easy to do.

Remember the amygdala - that ancient part of the brain that makes us react quickly in order to better ensure our survival? It does not respond so well to logic and words. The language of the amygdala is **the language of our senses**. We can help ourselves and

our children calm down more effectively when we engage our senses — through sights, touch, tastes, scents and sounds.

Regulation

Here are some examples of how to engage your senses for self-calming that you can try on your own and with your children:

- Take a break and drink a glass of water. Notice what it feels like in your mouth. Is it warm or cold? What other characteristics do you notice?
- Go outside and find ways to feel the environment. Observe how the sun touches your skin or the way in which the breeze grazes your face.
- Smell something you find pleasant and comforting. Perhaps it's a candle, a bar of soap or the aroma of your coffee. Even noticing unpleasant smells can help regulate us and brings us back to the moment.
- Squeeze your arms, hands, legs and shoulders. This is a great way to ground yourself and activate the autonomic nervous system.
- Place an ice cube on the back of your neck, in your hand and even on your face to 'shock the system.'
- Sit in a comfortable position, place one hand on your chest and one on your abdominal area. As you breathe in, notice how your stomach expands while your chest remains still. Exhale and repeat.

Relationships

Responsive, warm and accepting parenting practices can help your child develop healthy emotional self-regulation skills.

- If you overreact and your child sees it, consider having an honest conversation with your child about how you would handle the same situation differently the next time.
- Children are keen observers of their parents and often internalize and mimic the behaviors of their caregivers. When you find yourself on the cusp of losing your temper, say what emotion you are feeling and what you plan to do as a response. For example, "I am feeling angry. I am going to go outside to take five deep breaths to calm myself down."

Routines

Consistent and regular routines can help your child feel more secure and ready to take on new, unexpected challenges.

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- Allowing your child to play an active role in establishing self-care routines gives them a sense of control and ownership over their days.
 - Observe what coping strategies help your child most effectively and gently nudge them in that direction when needed.
 - Consider helping your child set up a “peace corner” in your space of living. A peace corner is a small space where your child can self-regulate and manage big emotions by utilizing objects that engage their senses. Your child can gather items they can smell, touch, look at, etc. Items can be as simple as a tea bag with a scent they love or something you make or purchase such as a stress ball, glitter jar and bean bag chair.

Additional Resources

Videos:

English

- Why Do We Lose Control of Our Emotions?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bKuoH8CkFc>

Spanish

- Autorregulación de emociones y conducta
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOFHCzeXDXI>

Articles and Websites:

English

- 21 Sensory Activities for Focus and Calm
<https://heartmindonline.org/resources/21-sensory-activities-for-focus-calm>
- Helping Your Child with Self-Management Tips
<https://www.today.com/parenting-guides/4th-grade-self-management-tips-t178665>
- 15 Tips to Stop Shouting at Your Children
<https://www.handinhandparenting.org/2016/03/15-tips-stop-shouting-children/>

Spanish

- SMFCSD Recursos Familiares
<https://sites.google.com/smfc.k12.ca.us/apoyoparapadres/emociones>
- Salud emocional de los niños
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhZPzK49e0o&feature=emb_logo
- Recomendaciones para mejorar el estado emocional de sus hijos
<https://www.unicef.org/mexico/ni%C3%B1as-ni%C3%B1os-y-adolescentes-durante-el-covid-19>