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University Health Board

Supporting Children with Emotional Regulation

Identifying, exploring and de-escalating the feeling of anger.

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Why are we here today?

- ***Develop/Enhance Insight***
- ***Validation and Reassurance***
- ***Empowerment***
- ***Practical Strategies***

Language to Describe Behaviour

Think about which word you use in your family…

Meltdown

‘Kicking off’

Outburst

Tantrum

Red mist

Aggression

A Wobbly

Common Behaviours Driven by Apparent Anger

Kicking

Hitting

Biting

Scratching

Head banging

Spitting

Squeezing

Swearing Screaming Threats

Growling Shocking statements Shouting



Withdrawal

Hiding

Silence

Refusal

Curling in a ball

Crying

Running away

Climbing

Running around

Challenging Behaviours are Common

Being a family around a child who struggles with their feelings and behaviour can put a strain on everyone around them.



It is important that you **take care of your own well-being** so that you are in the best position to deal with challenging behaviours. Even as adults, our own tempers can be tested in difficult situations.



It can test anyone's patience to deal with meltdowns, particularly when there are siblings to consider too. One child's behaviour can affect their sibling/s and lead to conflict within the home.

All Emotions are Valid

We are not here to stop children feeling angry.

Anger is an important emotion that is natural and to be expected.



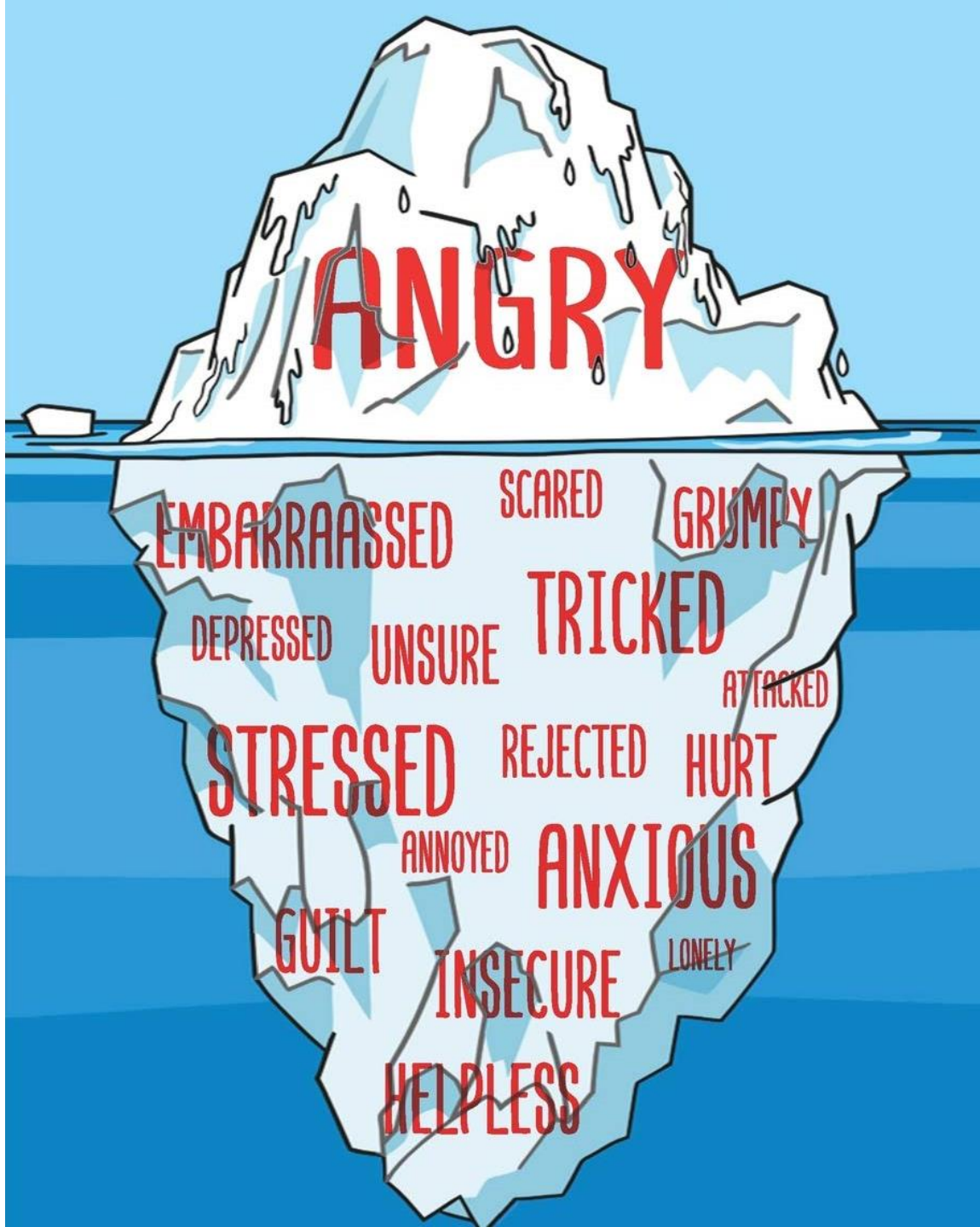
We should never discourage anger or associate anger with shame or being ‘in trouble’. What we **do** when we are angry is what we can be held accountable for.

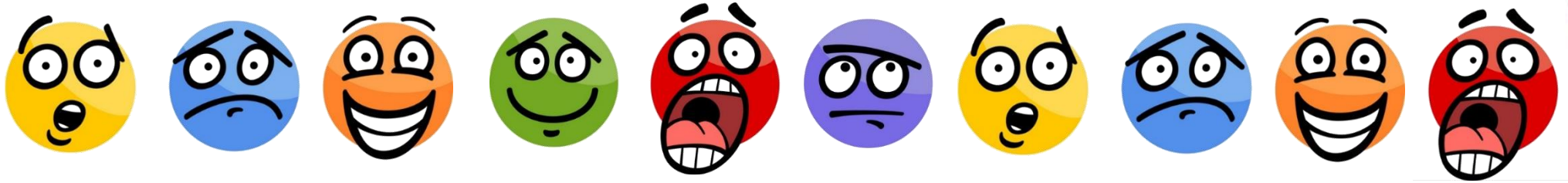
The Anger Iceberg

Anger is a strong emotion that leads to many outward behaviours.

It is so important to support emotional awareness in children, that we **understand what emotion the child is specifically feeling** and not simply allow them to use the term ‘anger’ to cover lots of emotions.

Anger can ‘mask’ true feelings and lead to difficulty in resolving issues and expressing feelings effectively.





Emotional Regulation

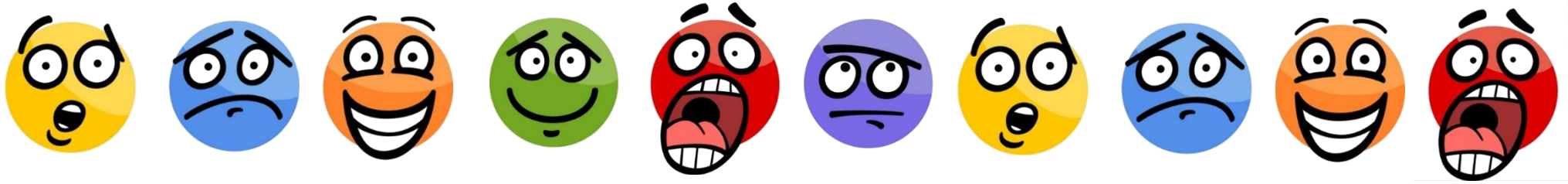
The ability to exert control over one's own emotional state.

This may involve processes such as rethinking a challenging situation to reduce anger or anxiety, focusing on reasons to remain calm or be happy and containing our emotions until a more appropriate time.









Emotional Regulation

Children will develop the ability to emotionally regulate at different stages. This ability continues developing well into adulthood.

A child cannot usually emotionally regulate to any great effect until **at least** the age of 8.

Without this ability being fully developed, children often display greater conflict, are very ‘emotion driven’, can be unpredictable and switch quickly between emotions.

Emotional Regulation Window of Tolerance

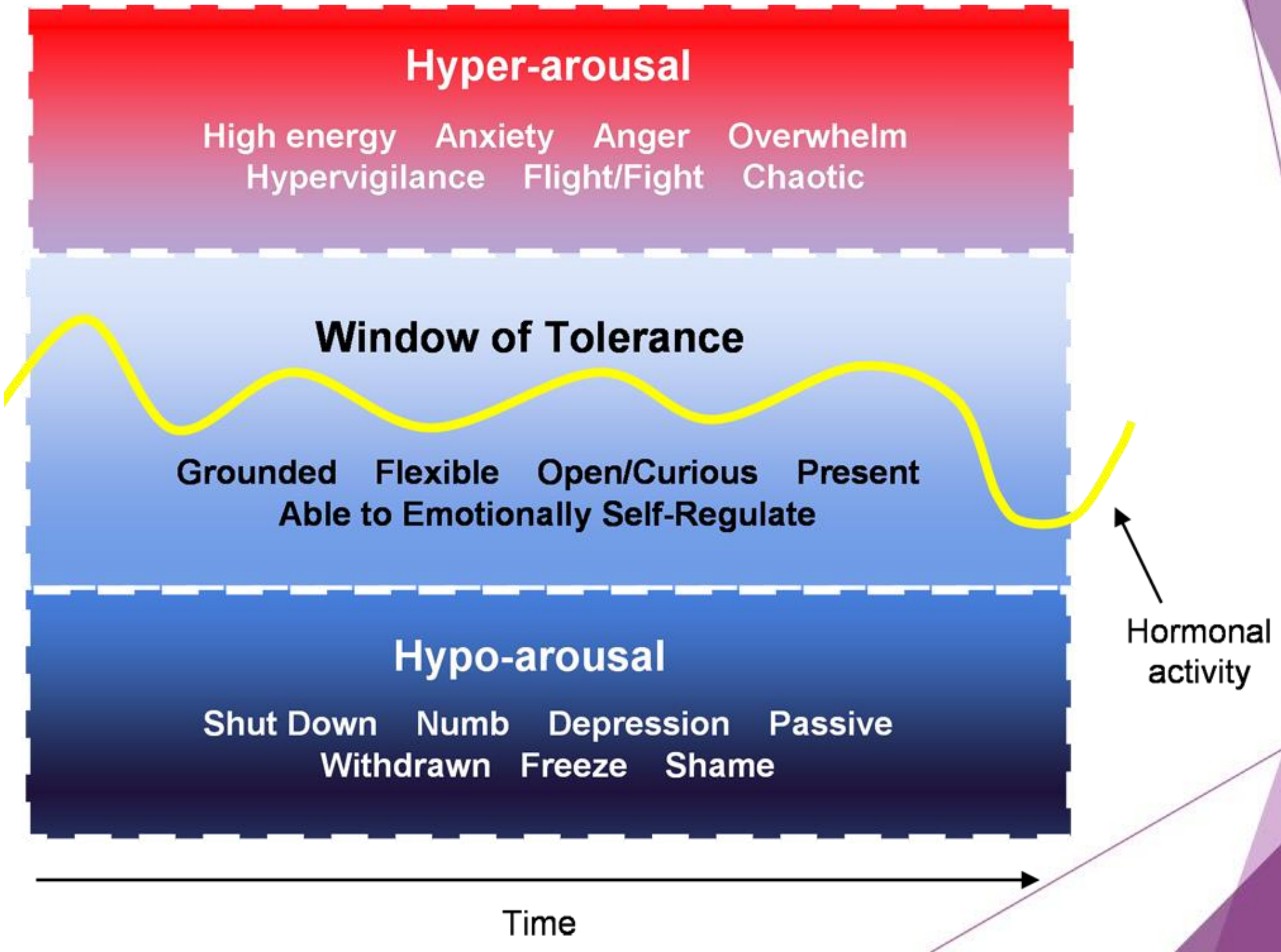




Everyone has an emotional cup. When we wake up, most of our cups already have something in them.

Throughout the day, emotions, events, tasks and physical need fill our cup. For some children this happens slowly, for others seemingly ‘simple’ events can cause the cup to fill up quickly.

Eventually the cup will overflow if we do not do things to empty our cup along the way.


Hyper-arousal
High energy Anxiety Anger Overwhelm
Hypervigilance Flight/Fight Chaotic
Window of Tolerance
Grounded Flexible Open/Curious Present
Able to Emotionally Self-Regulate
Hypo-arousal
Shut Down Numb Depression Passive
Withdrawn Freeze Shame
Hormonal activity
Time

Emotional Regulation Window of Tolerance

What does this look like?

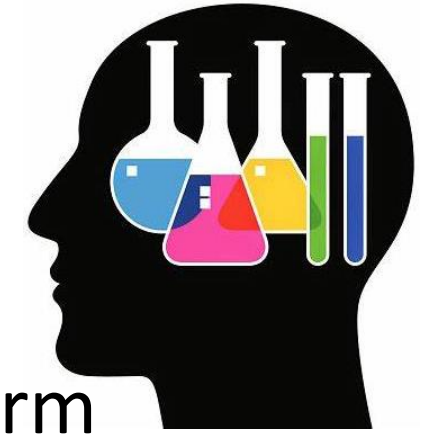
Children working within their brain's window of tolerance show good, age-appropriate self-control, are engaged, can problem solve, respond to instructions and appear calm.

When a child is above their window of tolerance they may appear agitated, conflict often arises, they may disengage, seem anxious, distressed or angry. They can no longer effectively process information.

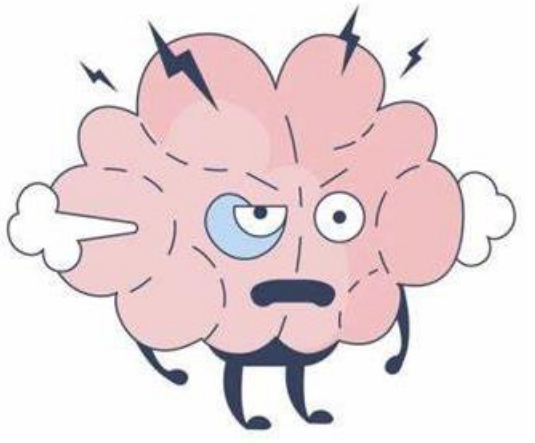
When a child is below their window of tolerance they may disengage, refuse to respond or move, seem sleepy, not respond verbally or seem to 'shut down'.

Vital Role of Chemistry

Anger is a reactive emotion that triggers lots of innate processes in our brain.



Adrenaline is released by the adrenal gland when any form of stress or anger is felt. This is an essential chemical that allows us to **react quickly without thinking processes**. This speeds up our heart rate to ready us to react and protect ourselves.



An ‘adrenaline rush’ results in a surge of strength, energy and motivation to ‘fight’. Your child might **know how to behave**, but their rationality is battling against this very *physical response* in their bodies.

A Physical Response

Anger is very visceral and can be overwhelming and confusing for children.

Headaches

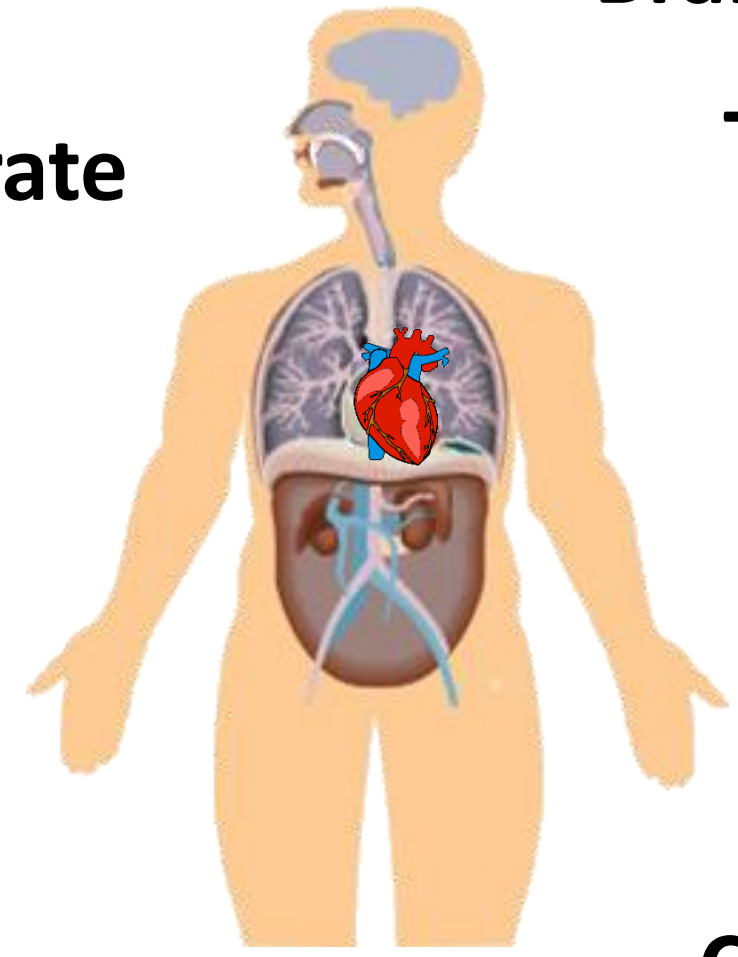
Increased heart rate

Tense muscles

Blurred vision

Fast breathing

Sweating



Brain fog

Tense jaw

Stomach ache

Sickness

Shaking

Redness

Cold hands

Fight, Flight or Freeze

This is an innate response that is triggered by acute stress.

The amygdala sends signals to the nervous system and triggers all of the physical responses that we have discussed.



The body will return to a state of rest within 20-30 minutes. The body cannot maintain this level of intense response for a significant period of time.

"Acute stress" can be being asked to share, bedtime, change, not having cake for breakfast…
It's all about **perception**.

The Angry Brain



When a child is in such a heightened state of arousal, they have huge deficits in executive functioning.

They cannot rationalise, make good decisions, follow complex instructions or express themselves articulately. They may take risks with behaviour and forget rules and boundaries.

This is **not** an excuse for their behaviour, rather an insight into the processes within their brain and why they need help with emotional regulation until they develop this skill independently.

Anger as a Learned Behaviour

Everything I have mentioned so far, has been linked to **feelings** and **emotional regulation**. These are linked directly to emotional wellbeing.

It is possible however, for aggressive and disruptive behaviours to be a **learned behaviour.** This can either be as a result of witnessing it presented by adults or when they've previously shown genuine anger and it has resulted in a positive outcome.



When an outburst results in a child 'getting their own way' or the cause of the anger being removed, this aggressive behaviour is reinforced. This means it is **much more likely to occur again**.

Anger as a Learned Behaviour

Anger is one of the most widely recognised emotions. Studies have shown that even animals can detect anger in humans.

Children watch and absorb every interaction that we have – even if it's not directly with them. Whether it's responding to someone in traffic, a T.V. programme, a cold caller or dropping your phone… children are watching and learning how to respond.



All Behaviour is Communication

Children's language skills are **often behind the development of their complex emotions**, therefore they do not have the capacity to truly **explain** how they are feeling.

Their language development may even affect how they **understand their own emotions**.

Without appropriate language skills, it is incredibly difficult to **share our thoughts and feelings with others**, to make lasting friendships, to give and receive information and to learn about the world in which we live.



What Can We Do?

Are we simply at the mercy of children in ‘fight or flight?’ who are fuelled by adrenaline and led by developing brains?!



NO!



Fostering Self-Regulation

Children are sponges, they watch and take in everything that we do – even if it doesn't directly involve them.



Show your child what you do to calm down when you feel stressed. **Talk about what things you enjoy** and **explain that you need to look after yourself** to be healthy.

Rest doesn't need to be earned.

Modelling Self-Regulation



When dealing with an immediate ‘meltdown’, **swan-parenting** is the best approach so that you can be seemingly **calm, collected and open** to deal with your child’s emotions.

Children pick up on irony! If you are displaying the very same behaviour that you would reprimand your child for, they are less likely to correct their own behaviour.
Instead, **have the upper ground** by relaxing your shoulders, taking deep breaths and using tone rather than volume to show seriousness.

What is our goal?

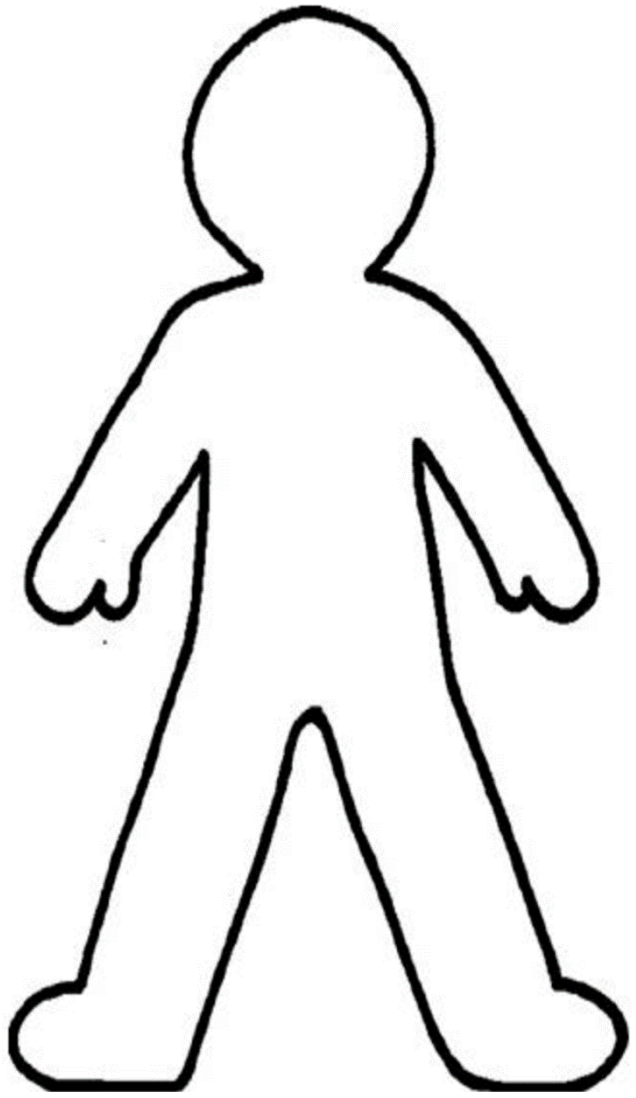
Value and explore their **feelings** while guiding and correcting their **behaviour**.

We need to **support them** as they explore their emotions and learn to understand and manage them, but we also need to **live with them and keep them safe** in the mean time! We need to encourage healthy emotional development that allows children to **delight in the happy times** and **recover quickly from bad times**.



Escalation

Psychoeducation



Education around anger can give your child **insight into what is happening to their body**. A child noticing the **very first signs that they may be angry**, can help them to become self-aware and regulate their body before they become uncontrollably angry.

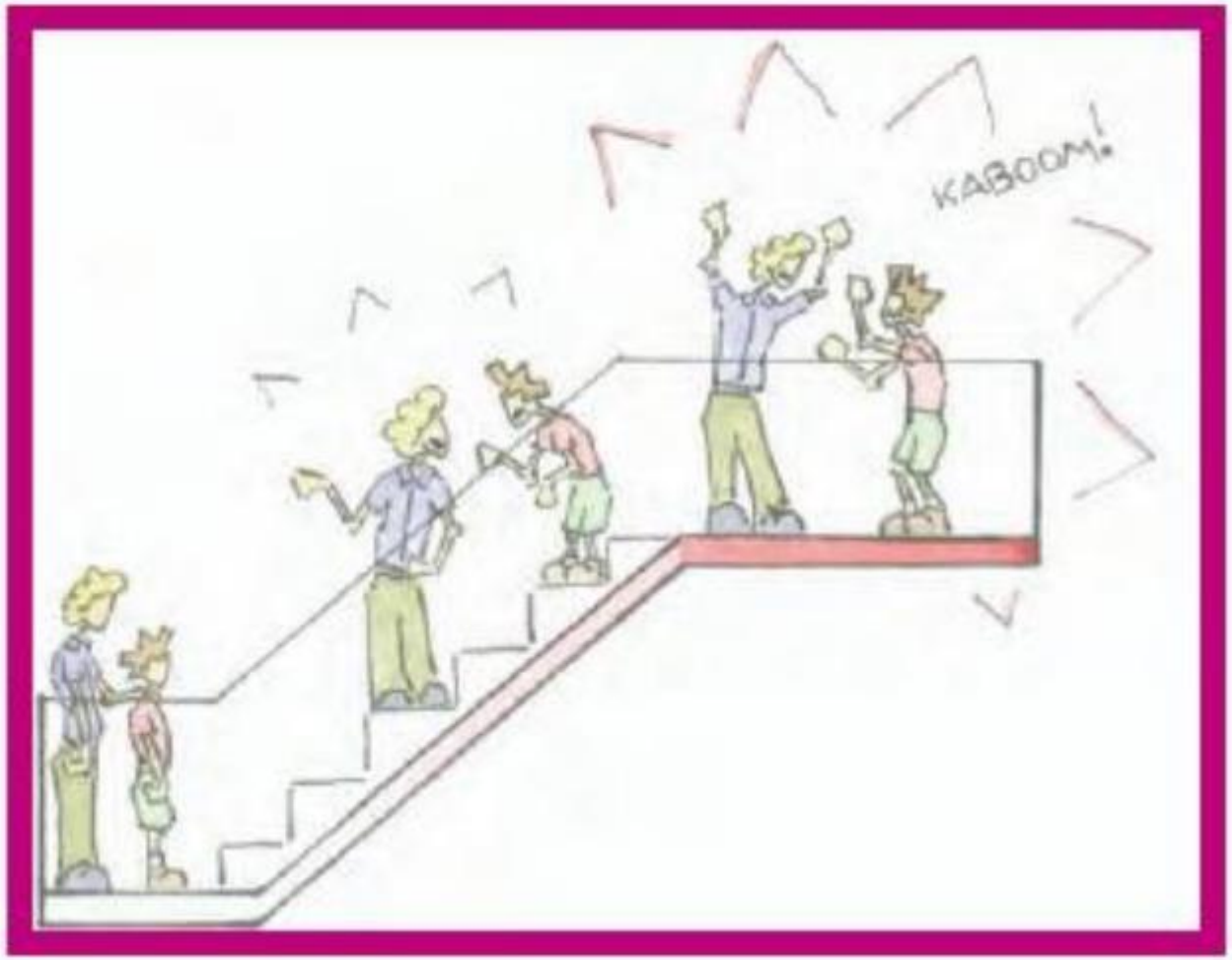
Escalation

The best way to manage an anger outburst is to not allow it to happen in the first place.

Joint escalation

Pattern 1

Your child raises their voice, you raise your voice, your child shouts, you shout, your child shouts louder, you shout louder. The argument can end in violence on both sides.



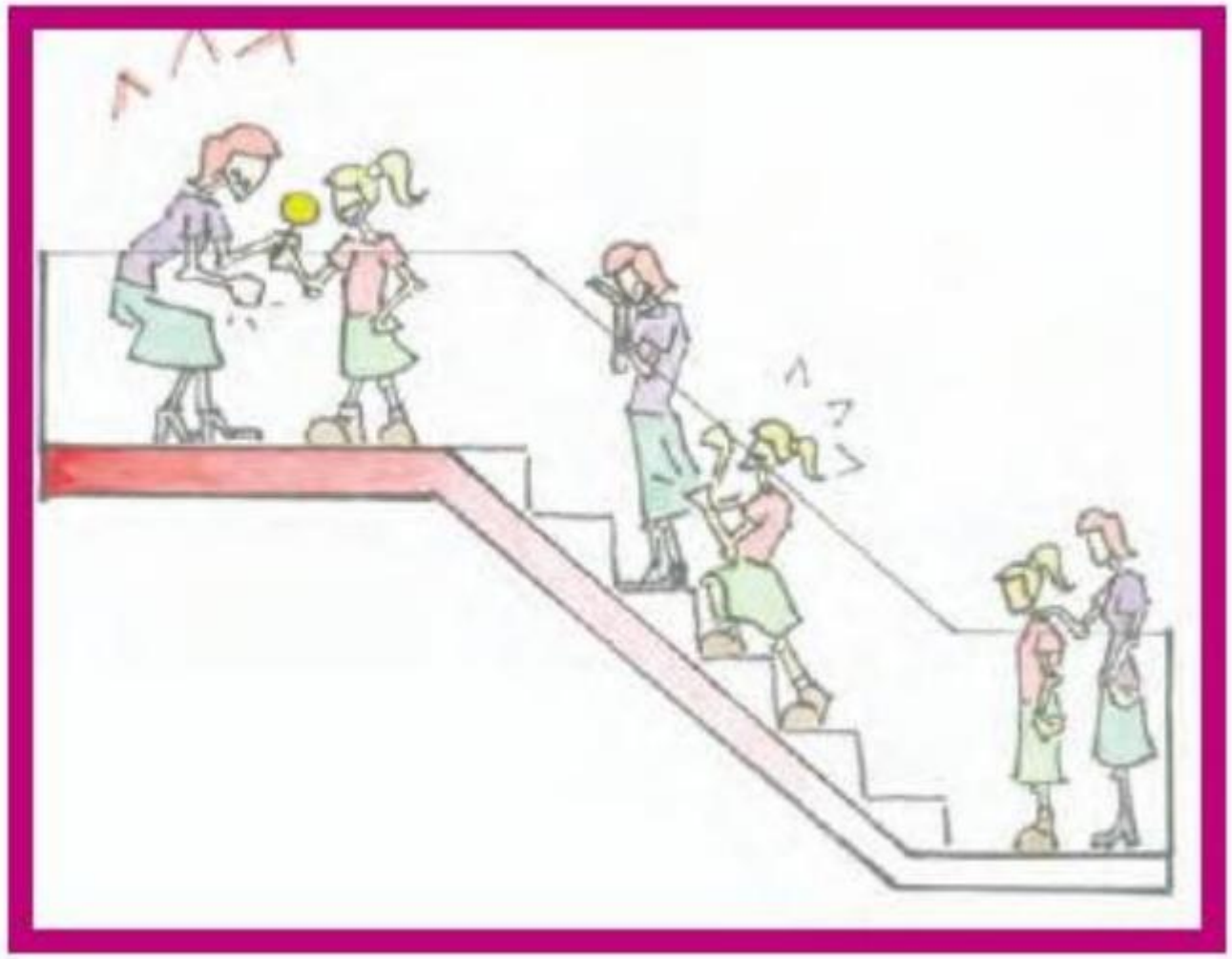
Escalation

The best way to manage an anger outburst is to not allow it to happen in the first place.

Giving-in escalation

Pattern 2

Your child shouts and demands, after a while you give in and let your child have their way. Your child learns that they get their own way if they make enough fuss and will repeat this pattern as often as they can.



Reinforcing Cycle of Behaviour

Behaviour that is reinforced is more likely to occur again.

If we see all behaviour as a means of gaining or removing something, we need to think about what is happening as a consequence of their behaviour…

Positive Reinforcement

What are they gaining?

Attention

What they want

Affection

Stimulation/Sensory

Negative Reinforcement

What is being removed?

Stress

Something they don't want

Responsibility

School

A feeling

Escalation Quick Wins



Tactical Ignoring

This can seem like you are letting your child 'get away' with behaviours, but it is more about **picking your battles** and **avoid being overly critical**.

You ask your child to tidy away their toys into the toy box.

They roll their eyes and huff.

They take their time.

Throw something into the box a little bit too hard.

Eventually the toys are away.

Good job. Thank you for putting everything away.

Escalation Quick Wins



Presumed Compliance

This puts your child in a position where they almost feel obligated to do it! Most children want to do what's expected of them.

Take these things up to your room, thank you.

Time to come in now then, good boy for coming in on time.

Lay this cutlery on the table, thank you, you're so helpful.

Put you school shoes on, thank you, on time today!

Escalation Quick Wins



Partial Agreement

Acknowledge their point of view, but reemphasise what you expect.

Time to come off the PlayStation now, you'll be tired.

I've been on this late before! I'm not tired.

That might be true, but today you need to come off now. I can see you're not tired now but you will be in the morning.

Escalation Quick Wins



Partial Agreement

Acknowledge their point of view, but reemphasise what you expect.

You can’t have sweets now, we need to have dinner first.

I can eat sweets and dinner!

Okay, I agree you might be able to eat sweets and dinner, but we need to eat dinner first.

Escalation Quick Wins



Observing the Positives

Negative or unwanted behaviours, evoke the most emotional response in us as adults so it is easy to focus on these. We should, however, try to create a praise focused environment.

If you have a ‘walking on eggshells’ atmosphere, this can be good to allow you to praise your child without an interaction.

If you have several children, this can be good to avoid criticising a child. Children are more likely to copy positive behaviours than change their own negative ones.

Escalation Quick Wins



Observing the Positives

Negative or unwanted behaviours, evoke the most emotional response in us as adults so it is easy to focus on these. We should, however, try to create a praise focused environment.

Well done for sitting at the table so nicely.

Good job going to school this morning.

Thank you for being kind to your sister.

You’re such a good girl for being in your own bed.

Escalation Quick Wins



Observing the Positives



Praise needs to be genuine and without condition.

Thank you for sitting nicely at dinner. See how easy it is when you listen, why don't you do that every day?

You've been so calm and played nicely today – look how much happier everyone is when you behave!



Good job with tidying up, if you'd done that yesterday you wouldn't have been on trouble last night!

You've done so well going to school, my life would be easier if you just went without tears all the time.

De-escalation

The ultimate goal of any de-escalation method is to bring your child **'down' from their heightened fight, flight or freeze response.** Children lose rational thought, morality, fear of consequence and conscious control over their behaviour!

Until this is achieved, there is **no point** trying to establish consequences, explore emotions, repair relationships… anything! **Their brain cannot process information in this state.**

We need to support children to **take control over their body** and return to a physical state where they can **engage with you and the situation**.



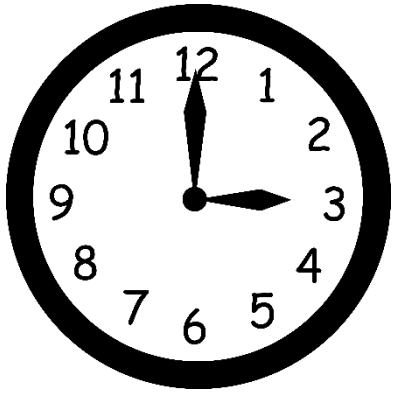
De-escalation



If your child is old enough, simply **giving them space** for their body to naturally return to a calm state is often the best method to de-escalate any situation!

Even if they need to have consequences for their behaviour, they will much better understand this after they have had time to cool off.
You can even tell them what time you will be back to discuss it.

This gives you time to cool off too!



De-escalation

Language – calm, clear and concise

Try to **keep your voice quiet**. Try you best not to sound panicked, urgent or angry with the child when they are in a heightened state of arousal.

Speak in a **measured and slow manner** using as **few words** as possible. If you child has done something very serious, try to use **tone** rather than volume or complex sentences.

De-escalation Breathing





De-escalation Calm Down Steps

5 Senses Grounding Tool

Name:


5 things you can **see**


4 things you can **feel**


3 things you can **hear**


2 things you can **smell**


1 thing you can **taste**

Rest and Relax

Sit on the floor, close your eyes and cross your legs.

Feel your whole body relax.

Breath in and out slowly.



Notice the sounds around you.

Listen to your breathing.

Feel your body on the floor.

Count to 30 slowly in your mind.

Open your eyes when you feel calm.

5 Finger Breathing



Wash it Away

Take some cold water and splash it over your face.

Now do the same with warm water.

Finish by splashing cold water again.



Stretch to the Sky

As you take a **deep breath in**, stretch up as high as you can.

Now **breath out** and bring you arms back down to your side.



Repeat 5 times

Balloon Belly Breathing



Inhale Fully

Place your Hands on your Belly.

Inhale and Blow Up your Balloon.

Feel your Belly and Lungs Expand.

Exhale Fully

Blow Out all of the Air in your Belly and Lungs.

Feel Your Balloon Deflate.

Notice how you Feel.

De-escalation Calm Down Steps

Spiral Swirling

Take your finger and slowly follow the swirl to the middle and out again 5 times.



Mind Garden

Close your eyes and imagine a beautiful garden. Walk around it. What is there? What can you hear? What colour are the flowers? Make the garden yours by adding things that you like. Picture yourself here until your body relaxes.



Cake and Candle Breathing

Face your palms towards you.

Imagine you have a tasty cake in one hand and a candle in the other.

Take a breath in a smell the cake.

Now breathe out and blow out the candle.



Category Quiz

Choose a category and think of 3 names or items for it.

Films 

Cereal 

City 

Books 

Colour 

Fruit 

Vegetables 

Sports 

T.V Show 

Name It

Spell out your name. Now think of something that begins with each letter of your name.

N Netflix 

A Apple 

M Mouse 

E Electricity 

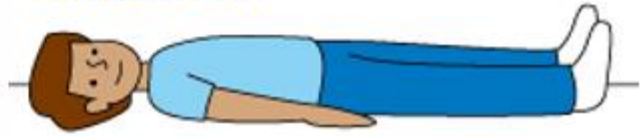
Still as a Statue

Lie down somewhere comfy. Breathe in and out slowly. Make your body as still as you can. Count to ten...

Start to move your body by wiggling your toes. Then move your ankles. Wiggle your legs. Move up your body moving each part at a time.

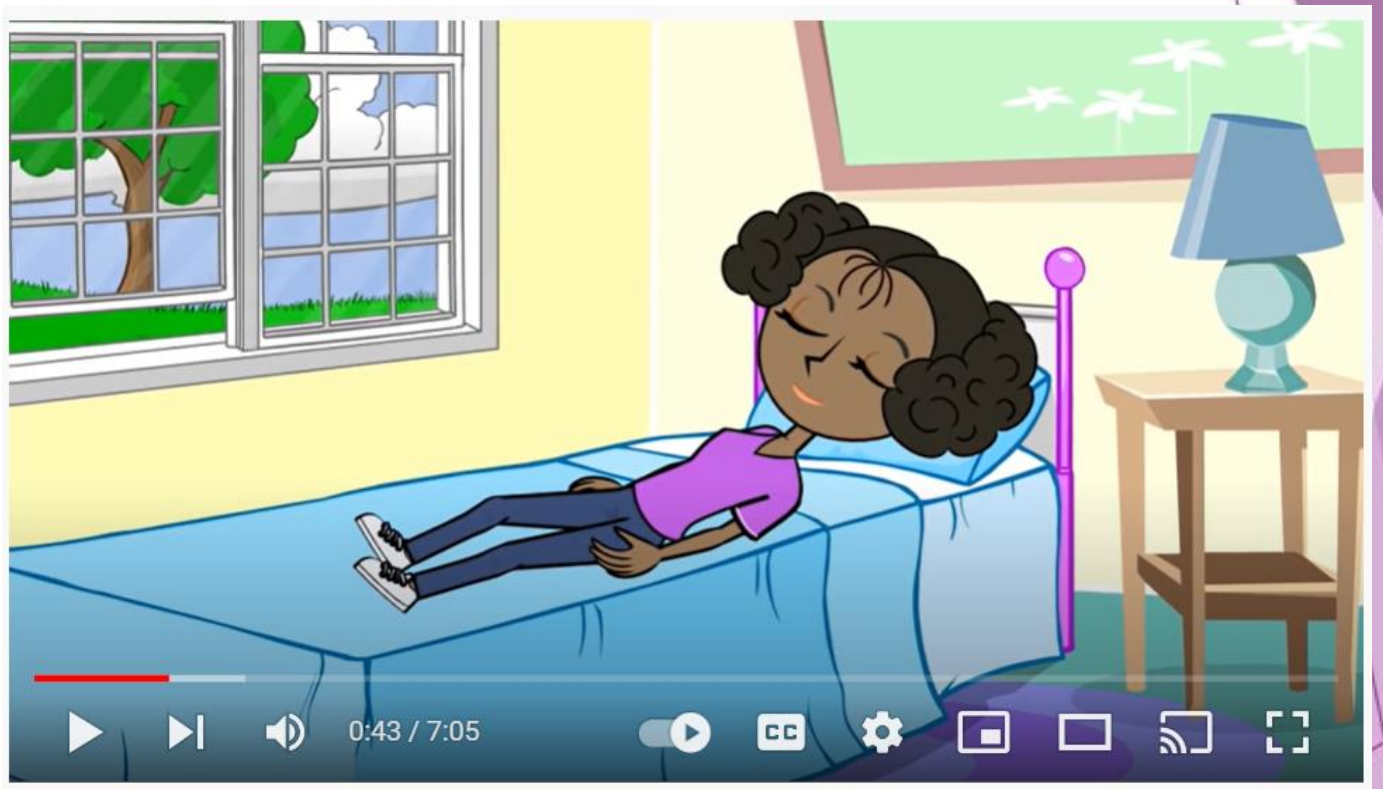
When you get to your head, roll it side to side gently.

Now gently sit up.



De-escalation Progressive Muscle Relaxation





Progressive Muscle Relaxation for Kids

De-escalation Letting it Out!

We say: "Anger has three rules…"



You must not hurt yourself.
You must not hurt someone else.
You must not cause damage.











Consequence and Reflection



This is arguably the most important part.

How you provide a consequence for the behaviour, resolve an issue then allow the child to reflect will be integral to your child's emotional literacy and influence the likelihood of a behaviour happening again.



Consequence



A consequence is not a ‘punishment’ – it is simply what happens after a behaviour.

Consequences should be:

Timely

Proportionate

Consistent

Consequence should either give or remove.

Consequence

Consequences should be:

Timely – Children need to establish cause and effect i.e. how their behaviour results in something happening. Children find it hard to hold feelings and actions in mind, they need to remember it!

Proportionate – This can include not 'over rewarding' for positive behaviour but also keeping in perspective how much of an 'issue' an undesired behaviour actually caused.

Consistent – Children like rules and boundaries. They feel safe and supported when they know what to expect. Inconsistency can cause confusion.

Modelling Reflection

Children mirror your language, interactions and attitude.

They hear more than we give them credit for.



Don’t make anger the elephant in the room.

Model how to reflect on behaviour.

We were arguing earlier, we both felt frustrated.

I shouted in the car earlier, that’s because I was scared about…

I think you heard me slam the door, I was feeling really upset. I should have _____ instead.



Identify, Label and Explore

Children often find it difficult to identify what they have done, **label** how they felt and **explore** why they behaved/felt that way.

You threw the toys on the floor. You looked **frustrated**. I think you're telling me that you **need me to help you build the tower**, is that okay?

We don't hit in this house. When you did that, you looked **angry** to me. Is that right? Can you tell me **why/what** happened?"

You have just run away, we don't do that. You looked **excited**, is that right? Can you tell me **why you felt that you needed to run away**?

Give Them a Voice…



Always ask a child to recount what happened before and during a meltdown. This doesn't necessarily mean you are agreeing with them, but they feel valued and heard when you give them a chance to recount and explain.

Allow them to speak first. You may then disagree or offer your point of view, but allowing them to speak first removes their emotion from their mind and allows them to vent.

1. So, you're telling me… which made you feel…
2. What I saw was… this made me think/feel…



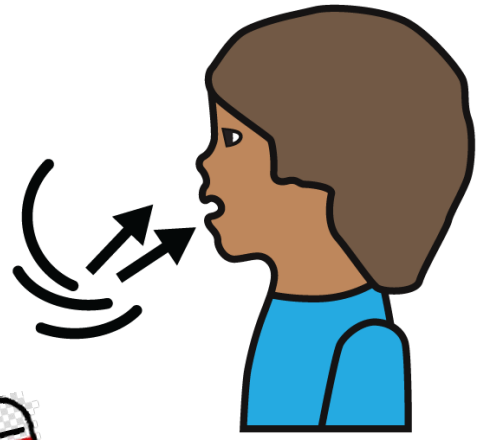
Reflection

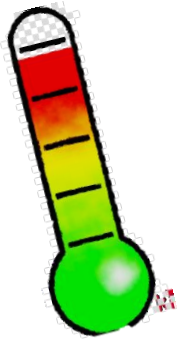
What could you have done instead?
How do you think that made me/other person feel?
What could you do next time this happens/you feel this way?
Is there anything you wish to say about it?
What do you want me to know/do?

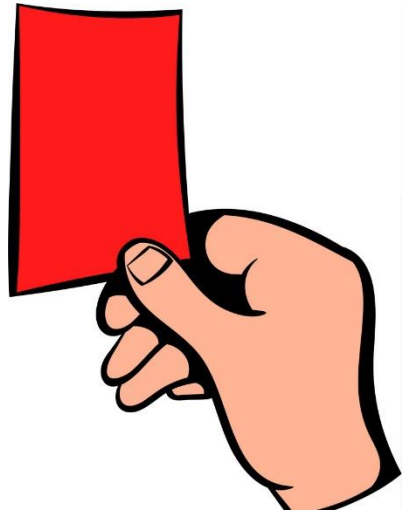
A Calm Down Plan

Planning **BEFORE** a meltdown or outburst happens helps children to utilise methods to calm down when they are angry without having to think about it in the moment – **we know they can't do this!**

Take deep breath

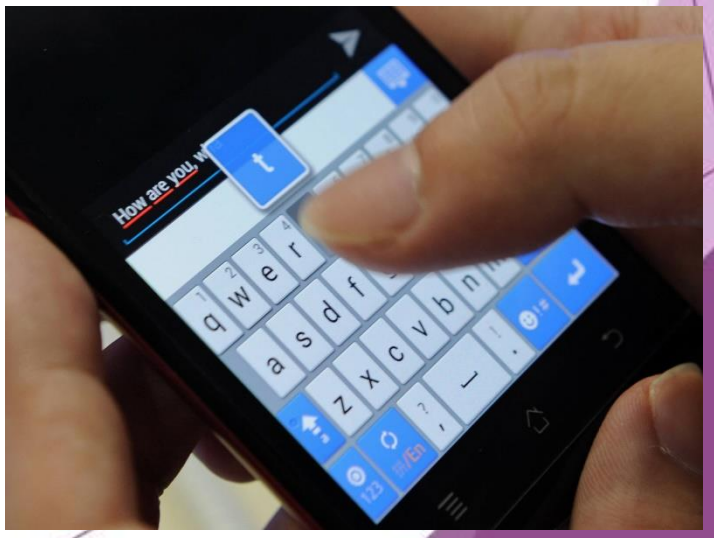








Code Word



A Calm Down Plan

My Calm Down Plan

What will I wear to feel better?





Where will I go to be calm?



How will I manage my emotions?

Who will I speak to?



I can calm myself down in 3 steps...







How will I tell someone I am angry?

