**What Do I Do If My Child Is Struggling with Emotional Regulation?**

Like any area of development, some children find the task of self-regulating much harder than others. Children with lower impulse control, lower executive functioning ability, ADHD, autism, anxiety, and even some overly active children may struggle. Those who struggle to self-regulate may need more time, focused attention and guidance from an adult to slow down and choose more effective, less impulsive ways to react or behave.

Psychologists and teachers often use a teaching method known as ‘scaffolding.’ When children struggle to self-regulate they may need to be assisted with greater attention and assistance, in a more consistent or concentrated approach. Support and guidance can be given, to teach them how to make better choices. With consistent coaching in calm down methods and thought processes, and plenty of genuine praise a child may slowly build a framework where they are better able think before acting, with less support, allowing the adult to step back, little by little over time. It’s all about practice.

**Self-Regulation and Starting School**

As children start school they need to be prepared to regulate with a greater degree of independence. As primary school is a more structured setting, behavioural and emotional expectations are higher, and there is an increase in the pressure placed on children.
Just the ability to sit for lengthier periods, listen more attentively, follow directions and work independently requires much more self-monitoring, focus and composure. Being able to self-regulate is also linked to social success. If you have a child preparing for starting school, the following suggestions might help them develop greater levels of emotional regulation in the lead up to school;

* **Activities:** Slowly introduce activities that require greater levels of attention span and concentration. Create regular opportunities requiring your child to regulate and control their body and behaviour while also developing their attention span, for example, time spent sitting and reading, or sitting pasting and cutting at a table.
* **Maintain consistent and clear rules:** Children respond well to clear and consistent behavioural expectations and rules. Think about your own “house rules” and make a poster displaying them, like they might see at school. Talk about school rules too, for example, using inside voices, no running on the cement, raising your hand to speak, etc.
* **Encourage cognitive regulation:** Cognitive regulation is the skill of planning and preparing cognitively when you first hear an instruction, monitoring tasks, staying on task and inhibiting inappropriate impulses. Try this at home by giving your child a task and a time limit. Encourage their thought process by being their internal voice, “How are you doing with \_\_\_? Remember the first thing is to finish the \_\_\_, what can you do next to get that done?”
* **Positive self-talk and affirmations:** Teach your child to self-regulate internally by talking to themselves in their head. Positive self-talk and affirmations not only increases a child’s confidence, but can help them through tricky times and hard tasks. For instance, telling themselves “I can do this, I did something similar last time, I’ll stick with it” or “I really want to tell the teacher something, but she is speaking so I have to wait with my hand up.”
* **Adjust your daily routine:** When kids start school, they can be physically and mentally exhausted and morning can be SLOW. Big changes to routine can also trigger emotional meltdowns and behavioural outbursts. Adjusting your daily routine to mimic that of your chosen school can help your child transition more smoothly and it is a great way to get your child ‘school ready.’

Prepare also by;

* Adjusting your wake up time: Set a wake up time that allows plenty of time for you to prepare for the day.
* Healthy breakfast: A healthy breakfast is essential to sustain little school starters. They need that energy and can cope better emotionally.
* Eating routine: Copy the school recess/lunch times. Not being able to graze all day might be a big change and could cause a hangry child to be unable to self-regulate or concentrate.
* A structured routine: Make time for physical activities and make time for sitting, listening and concentrating activities. Add some structure to your routine slowly so that the mental workload of school isn’t overwhelming when they start.
* Appropriate school bedtime: Children need plenty of sleep when they start school because it is a big adaption for their little bodies and brains. It’s better to get into this routine sooner rather than later. A tired child cannot concentrate or learn to their full potential.