

EMOTIONAL CO-REGULATION

AVOIDING POWER STRUGGLES WITH YOUR KIDS

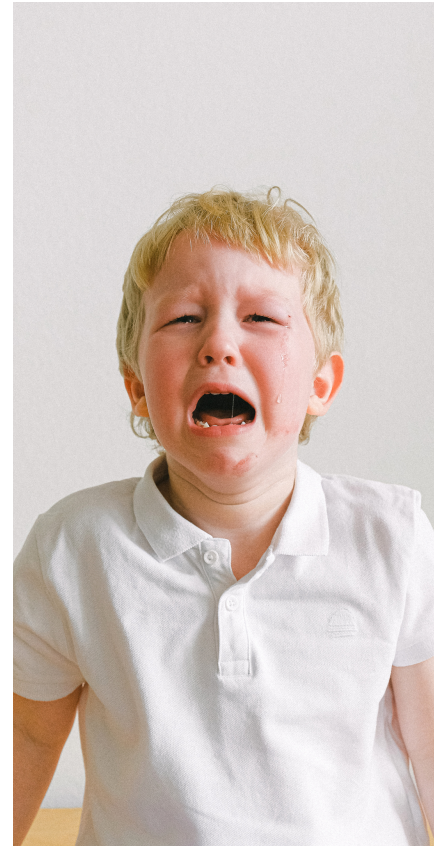
POWER STRUGGLES

A power struggle is when one party tries to control the power in the room by pulling on the other person to try to get something out of them resulting in an emotional response from the second party to try to get the first person to stop trying to control them. The root lies in one person feeling misunderstood by the other and begin attacking the other resulting in the other not feeling understood. This often looks like tantrums in younger children and rebelliousness and arguments in older children. So, how can parents achieve understanding with their children and avoid power struggles? Through emotional co-regulation!

A SKILL FOR PARENTS & CHILDREN

No one is born with the skill of self-regulation, so it is important to take time to cultivate that skill in order to be able to teach it to our children. Co-regulation, then is how we teach children to self-regulate.

Through self and co-regulation we teach our children the skill of emotional self-management, which is the ultimate goal. It is an important skill because it is a milestone in child development and the ability to regulate their emotions has an impact in their **family and peer relationships, academic performance, long-term mental health** and their ability to thrive in the world.



DEFINITIONS

- **Co-regulation**: Warm & responsive interactions that provide the support & modeling children need to understand, express & modulate their thoughts, feelings & behaviors.
- **Self-regulation**: Learned methods and techniques that help us balance our own emotions so that we may positively influence our social and professional environments. The key elements of self-regulation include practicing self-care and developing an awareness of yourself and others (emotional intelligence).
- **Emotional Self-management**: The ability to exercise and model both self-regulation and co-regulation behaviors and emotions.

HOW TO HELP CHILDREN SELF-REGULATE

We do this through three different ways: **parents modeling desired emotional regulation skills themselves, through warm & responsive parenting styles and by fostering a positive emotional family climate.**

MODELING EMOTIONAL REGULATION SKILLS (CO-REGULATION)

Modeling is the most important & effective way to teach self-regulation. Children sense parents' emotions & respond in similar ways. If a parent is calm and thinks critically to solve problems, the child is more likely to stay calm and look for solutions instead of blames. Avoiding power struggles then begins with the parent not escalating the situation. To help kids learn effective emotional control, parents can:

- Work to adopt better emotional regulation strategies themselves
- Model positive emotions and adaptive emotion regulation skills

WARM & RESPONSIVE PARENTING STYLE

Those who notice, accept, empathize with and validate their children's negative feelings tend to affect them positively. But if parents are dismissive or disapprove of emotional expressions, especially negative ones, children tend to develop destructive emotional regulation methods. Parents who respond negatively or punish children for their emotions can cause them to get even more worked up, further activating their "fight-or-flight" nervous system and making them harder to calm down. To adopt a responsive & warm parenting approach:

- Accept, support and show empathy to validate their negative feelings
- Be patient
- Do not ignore, dismiss, discourage, punish or react negatively to their child's emotions, especially negative ones

FOSTERING A POSITIVE EMOTIONAL FAMILY CLIMATE

Factors that affect emotional climate include the parents' relationship, their personalities, their parenting style, parent-child relationships, sibling relationships and the family's beliefs about expressing feelings. To create a positive family climate, parents can:

- Express genuine positive emotions
- Seek help to better handle marital conflicts
- Work on improving parent-child relationships and relationships among siblings

Try this:

- **Be aware of yourself:** Co-regulation begins with the parent being in tune and aware of their own feelings and sensations when the child begins to act up. Be aware of facial expressions and tone of voice. Be willing to regulate your own brain before acting. Try taking deep breaths, repeat an affirmation or stretch/move for a minute. This is especially important if the parent is feeling angry or irritated and is great modeling of self-regulation skills for the child.
- **Focus on the feelings and sensations beneath the behavior:** This will help the parent understand the causes and patterns of behaviors. Redirect the child to get a drink of water or take deep breaths before talking about a problem. This allows the child to calm down and begin to learn self-regulation.

SOURCES

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