

Helping your child cope with change

Transitions can be difficult for everyone. Children, just like adults, can react in different ways to transitions in their life. Helping your child learn how to react to a transition can strengthen their ability to self-regulate and cope with change in the future. How **we** react during times of change is vitally important in supporting our children and youth.

Self-regulation

Self-regulation allows us to manage our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours when faced with tough situations. Although it sounds like this is something internal to each of us, self-regulation actually develops slowly over time through our interactions with our caregivers. Parents, guardians, teachers, coaches, and mentors all play a key role in the development of self-regulation in children and youth.

How to help your child develop self-regulation skills

- Make sure children receive developmentally appropriate information related to the change.
- Listen to them and validate their feelings. Reassure children that they are safe and the adults in their lives have things under control.
- Teach the use of words to express emotions. Help them understand that it is okay to feel all emotions.
- Model helpful regulation strategies (words and actions) when you are dealing with your own emotions.
- Help your child develop regulation strategies that work for them. Practice when they are calm.

The importance of co-regulation

A caregiver's warmth, responsiveness, and sensitivity may buffer the effects of stressful experiences on children and youth. Focus on creating an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for children and youth. To successfully co-regulate, caregivers must pay attention to their own feelings and reactions during stressful times.

When you are interacting with your child, pay attention to what you are communicating verbally and nonverbally.

- **Affect** - your tone and expressions convey your emotions. In times of stress, is your affect loving, supportive, and soothing?
- **Gestures** - facial expressions and gestures, body movement, and posture all reflect your emotions and are felt by others in your interactions.

Self-care

To co-regulate successfully, caregivers must focus on their own capacity for self-regulation.

- Make eating well and getting quality sleep a priority
- Find ways to get outside daily (take your dog for a walk, go for a run)
- Make time to engage in preferred activities (read a book, take a bath)
- Remain connected. Reach out to family and friends through technology (phone calls, video chats)
- Use strategies to self-calm. Take a moment for some deep breaths or engage in positive self-talk

Predictability makes transitions easier and allows children and youth to feel safe, secure, and cared for. Consistent routines and expectations help them manage transitions effectively and increase their self-confidence to handle future changes.