**Supporting your child to manage emotions at home**

**Emotional regulation**

Emotional regulation is the ability we all have to recognise how we are feeling at any particular moment and to know how to manage any difficult emotions we may feel in more helpful way. It can help us to deal with situations more effectively. Children with language and communication difficulties can, at times, need support to develop this ability to manage their emotions. Some children have difficulty recognising how they feel, and sometimes lack the vocabulary to communicate this to another person, so end up using less helpful ways to express themselves (e.g. behaviours we find challenging).

**Labelling emotions**

The first step is to help your child understand the word that explains the feeling they are experiencing. You can do this in a range of ways:

* Discuss emotions at home. If you see someone on TV or in a book who looks upset, use the word to describe how they are feeling, “they look upset” or “they seem upset because…” and describe the reason
* Label the emotions of yourself and others around you. If someone in your family appears worried, you can say “you seem really worried”. Also label your own emotions “I’m feeling really happy now, we enjoyed a lovely game together”
* Label the emotions your child may be feeling, “you seem really frustrated right now, can I help you?”

Labelling emotions frequently as they come up in the everyday environment is a helpful way for your child to learn the meaning of these words, to understand the real-life situations in which they apply, and to learn to recognise when they are feeling these emotions themselves.

**Managing emotions**

Once your child is beginning to recognise emotions, they can then start to manage them. It can help to categorise emotions into colour groups:

**Screaming**

**Angry**

**Terrified**

**Out of Control**

**Silly**

**Worried**

**Excited**

**Confused**

**Anxious**

**Fearful**

**Calm**

**Happy**

**Ready to learn**

**Feeling ok**

**Sad**

**Tired**

**Sick**

**Bored**

It is important to note there is no judgement attached to the emotions above – there are no ‘good’ or ‘bad’ emotions. It is perfectly normal for us all to experience a wide range of emotions, even some of the red ones, at times. The aim is not to avoid these feelings, but to manage them more effectively.

*Adapted from Leah M Kuypers (2011) The Zones of Regulation; Think Social Publishing, Inc.*

**Getting back to Green**

Green is the emotion colour group in which we are happiest and most productive. We might have a moment where we feel in the Blue, or when we can feel ourselves getting a little out of sorts in the Yellow. This is the point to use a strategy to get us ‘back to green’ so we don’t get stuck in the blue, or our yellow emotions don’t become red ones, and we can feel calm and relaxed again. Helpful calming strategies are often unique to each individual, so it is important to find the ones that work for your child. Some ideas are:

* Breathing, counting to ten, breathing slowly, focusing on breathing
* Deep pressure, such as a hug, being wrapped up in a tight blanket, gentle massage, hand squeezes, wall push ups, animal walks
* Alone time in a safe, quiet, space. It is important this is not seen as a punishment, but an opportunity to relax, regroup, and calm down
* Drawing or fiddling with something
* Drink of water
* Opportunity to talk to someone
* Going for a walk
* Inner coach – saying positive things to themselves to help them feel better
* Think about things that make them feel happy
* Listening to music

**Putting it in place at home**

* You can build up your child’s understanding of which emotions belong in which colour groups by using their toys, superheroes or cartoon or favourite TV show characters. This helps your child to explore emotions in a way that it not personal to them at the moment. Ask your child how the toy / character is feeling, using the emotions cards to help as a cue, and then put the emotion card into the colour category. Talk about what might help the toy / character to get back to green. Act out the character putting this strategy into place and then talk about how the character is now feeling back in the green.
* Use your own emotions to model this approach: “I am feeling quite frustrated with opening this jar at the moment. I’m in the yellow. I’m going to focus on my breathing for a bit, to help me get back to green. Right, now I’m in the green, and feel ready to have another go. I might also ask someone to help me…”
* Place the colour groups and emotions on a wall in a prominent place in the home, for example, in the kitchen, or living room. Refer to them throughout the day when you are talking about emotions, e.g. if you feel in the green, point to the green and say you feel ‘calm’ or ‘happy’.
* Have daily check-ins, where everyone in the family checks in and says how they are feeling. For those in the yellow, red, or blue, support them to do what they need to do to get themselves back to green.
* Support your child to identify when they are in the yellow or red. Encourage them to use a calming strategy to bring themselves back to green.

