



Get in the ZONE:

Helping Children Manage Big Feelings

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Tired, annoyed, excited, silly, embarrassed, frustrated... These are just a few of the feelings our children experience throughout the day. For some children, they may all be felt in the span of an hour. However, despite being in the midst of this whirlwind of feelings, our expectations often demand that children be polite, behave appropriately, and learn new things. Children need a way to make sense of what they are feeling so they can remain in control. The Zones of Regulation® is a self-regulation model created by occupational therapist, Leah Kuypers, MA Ed. OTR/L, that is becoming more widely recognized in homes, schools, therapy clinics, and other locations that serve children. It helps children to classify their emotions based on color coded and easy to understand “zones.”

“Is any zone bad?”

No! Some children and adults are under the impression that the blue, yellow, and red zones are undesired and we should strive to be in the green zone all day. In reality, life would be boring if we lived in one zone exclusively. For example, at a funeral or before bed, being in the blue zone can help us to show empathy or wind down. If we’re playing tag at recess with friends, we will probably run faster if we embrace the excitement of the yellow zone. A wide range of feelings is normal and a child should never be punished for being in a particular zone. When children learn and accept that all zones are OK and experience the natural consequences that come with them, they will be more willing to try tools for moving between the zones.



The Zones of Regulation

The Blue Zone
Feelings: Tired, bored, sad, etc.
Actions: Yawning, frowning, head down, etc.

The Green Zone
Feelings: Calm, happy, focused, etc.
Actions: Sitting still, making eye contact, smiling, etc.

The Yellow Zone
Feelings: Excited, frustrated, silly, nervous, etc.
Actions: Fidgeting, pacing, bouncing, etc.

The Red Zone
Feelings: Angry, terrified, out of control, etc.
Actions: Yelling, hitting, crying, etc.



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“I’m in the blue zone and can’t focus. What should I do?”

There are plenty of tools that could be used to achieve greater alertness when in the blue zone. Strategies with a typically alerting effect include:

- Running
- Jumping Jacks
- Getting out of your seat and moving around
- Bouncing on a ball
- Eating a crunchy snack

“My child would not understand this.”

The Zones of Regulation® program can be introduced at any time starting around the age of 4 and with varying developmental levels. Lessons can be kept fairly basic for young children. The wide variety of visual tools the authors of the program have published makes it possible to implement with children who are non-verbal or have other disabilities that impact their communication or social skills. It is recommended that the zones concepts are discussed as a family. This not only helps improve a child’s understanding of the material, but also normalizes the zones so that kids don’t feel like they are expected to discuss it as a form of consequence.

“We understand the zones, what’s next?”

The Zones of Regulation® program also includes a wide variety of lessons to increase understanding of facial expressions and body language, understanding others’ perspectives, recognizing triggers that move us quickly to another zone, understanding the scale of a problem we’re faced with and how to react accordingly, thinking positively, being flexible, and exploring sensory tools.

Additional Resources:

- www.zonesofregulation.com
- The Zones of Regulation® A Curriculum Designed to Foster Self-Regulation and Emotional Control

“I’m in the red zone, now what?”

Through the Zones of Regulation® program, children learn various sensory and coping tools and strategies for moving to a more appropriate zone for the situation they are in. In the red and yellow zones, the best tools typically have a calming effect. Some great ideas to try include:

- Asking for a hug
- Rocking or swinging
- Chewing gum
- Taking a drink of water
- Going to a quiet space
- Listening to music
- Taking deep breaths

Easterseals Central Illinois is here to be your partner in raising healthy, happy children. If you have questions about your child's development contact us today at (309)686-1177.

virtual

DAP

Disability Awareness Program



THE ZONES OF REGULATION™

Think about a time today, or recently when you were in each zone. What was going on? How did you feel? Write or draw your answers in each box

The Red Zone
Feelings: Angry, terrified, out of control, etc.

The Blue Zone
Feelings: Tired, bored, sad, etc.

The Yellow Zone
Feelings: Excited, frustrated, silly, nervous, etc.

The Green Zone
Feelings: Calm, happy, focused, etc.