

# SELF-REGULATION FOR CAREGIVERS

Self-regulation is the ability to manage your own emotions, thoughts, and behaviours, particularly in stressful situations. To co-regulate with children, you need to pay attention to your own state of regulation or dysregulation. Learning what calms you down, alerts you, or dysregulates you is helpful to access the right strategies for yourself. Noticing and getting curious about the physical signs of stress (e.g., a tight chest, zoning out, unintentional escaping, irritability) can help you learn what you need.

There are many daily practices, environmental supports, and body-care tools that can help you manage your ability to self-regulate. What self-care practices work in one moment or stage of life may not work for you in another. Keep exploring to find what works best for you.

## Daily Practices

- Layer clothing appropriately to adjust for changes in your body temperature.
- Take time outside, especially during the winter months.
- Use somatic practices like body scans or breathwork (see links below).
- Remember that it is okay to say no and to set boundaries on your offerings.
- Ask for help from a colleague or other parents.
- Do self-regulation exercises with children (e.g., saying "I feel wiggly. I feel like I need to move. Let's do superhero yoga to move our bodies!").
- Use gentle movement like stretching, walking, or rocking.
- Practice self-compassion and mindfulness (see links below).
- Take time to orient yourself to your workspace at the start of a shift.
- Practice self-care when possible. Explore what this means for you (e.g., being creative, doing yoga, going for a walk, reading, having a cup of tea, exercising).

## Environmental Support

- Debrief with colleagues or other parents.
- Reduce overstimulation (e.g., reduce items on walls, use soft lighting).
- Add plants to your home or workplace.
- Take a mental health day from work or caregiving at home.
- Join a community group.
- Communicate with your supervisor or manager if you are finding yourself consistently overwhelmed. There may be schedule changes or modifications possible.
- Add visual reminders to your environment (e.g., affirmations or quotes in the bathroom or by the sink).

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## Body-Care Tools

- Use comfortable earplugs to reduce auditory input.
- Set up your environment in a way that reduces the need to lift and carry (e.g., using small storage containers).
- Stay hydrated and nourished with foods that contain complex carbohydrates, fat, protein, and fibre to reduce sugar spikes and crashes.
- Use supported seating during gathering or circle time or other “floor time” activities (e.g., camping chairs, cushions, yoga blocks or meditation cushions).
- Engage in soothing sensory experiences (e.g., sand, clay, bubble baths with essential oils).

## Need More Support?

### Local Resources:

- Family Physicians
- Counsellors
- Art Therapists
- Physiotherapists for ergonomic ideas to lift and move in a safe way
- Supported Child Development Consultants

### Podcasts:

- Taking Care of Yourself Parent Caregiver Wellbeing – Where You Are, Kelty Mental Health

### Resources Available at WKCCRR Library:

- Parenting from the Inside Out by Daniel Siegel
- Parenting with Patience by Judy Arnall
- Raising Good Humans by Hunter Clarke-Fields and Carla Naumburg

### Online Resources:

- Somatic Self-Care – Hopkins Medicine
- Self-Compassion Exercises – Dr. Kristin Neff
- The Importance of Early Childhood Educator Mental Health and Well-Being
- Bounce Back – Provincial Health Authority
- Boundaries, Burnout and the 'Goopification' of Self-Care – YouTube (video)