

Co-Regulation Strategies for the Classroom

Initial Considerations

- Remember, we are all different - respect diversity - sensory habits/routines that do not interfere with function do not need to be remediated.
- Consider if the student has the ability to do the task - is it that they won't do the task or that they can't do the task? The task may need to be modified or broken down into small steps.
- Repetition is required to create a habit; the student will need support even after a system has been put in place - aim for at least 21 days of consistent use across all settings and staff before determining effectiveness.

Many of these tips are familiar but sometimes undervalued. They are first-line strategies that need to be tried before more complex approaches are introduced. In many cases, they are all that is needed. Consider trying 1-2 strategies at first and add others later. If a specialist consult is still required after trying these, continue to use the strategies and track progress until the consult can be scheduled.

1. Structure/Routine

We all feel more settled when we know what our day or an activity is going to look like. As adults, we often use daytimers/calendars to know what is planned. Creating environments that are consistent and predictable can help to decrease the processing load and allow the student to focus attention on the functional task rather than constantly having to evaluate the environment for stressors. Remember that some of these may need to be pre-taught.

- When possible, provide consistency in routines and give advance notice when changes are necessary.
- Visual schedule of the day in the classroom (easily seen – less visually distracting area). Even if a student understands the schedule, s/he will benefit from a visual reminder.
- Visual task strips of activities; could be in a checklist format to encourage self-monitoring.
- Use an auditory or visual timer so the student has a concrete idea of how long the activity will last.
- Let student know when an activity is going to be over (e.g. 5 minute warning).
- Transition times are often when problem behaviours occur and can result in a significant amount of lost teaching time. Use transition activities (e.g. songs, rhymes, clapping rhythms).



2. Realistic & Consistent Expectations

If you ask a student to do something, make sure that it is something s/he is capable of doing and that you are willing to follow through to ensure it gets done regardless of what behavior you might see. Giving in teaches the student that by acting out, s/he can avoid the activity which therefore reinforces and even strengthens this negative behavior.

- Keep expectations brief and clear.
- Expectations should tell the student what TO DO instead of what NOT TO DO.
- Consequences to not meeting expectations should be non-punitive, instructive and logical.
- Break expectations and tasks down into small steps.
- Social narratives/scripts can help students understand expectations. These can be informal and individualized to each student; students can be a part of developing these if appropriate.
- Vary high and low demand tasks.

3. Keep it Positive

Catch them being good - giving specific positive attention to the behaviour that you want to see will increase the likelihood that this behavior will occur again and again.



- a. When giving feedback, try to give more positive messages than corrections. Aim for at least 4 positive messages for every one correction given, especially for students with challenging behaviours. (e.g. As a reminder to him/herself, the teacher could hold onto 4 tokens and each time s/he gives a positive message to the student, s/he puts a token away, with the goal being that all of the tokens are away by the end of the activity.)
- b. Praise should be meaningful and specific. Instead of "Great job" try "I like the way you hung your jacket on the hook" or "You used good spaces between your words".
- c. Look at effort and not just task completion.
- d. Try to stay calm - acting calm with a minimum of attention will reduce the risk of strengthening the very behavior you wish to discourage.

4. Offer Reasonable Choices

Choice gives people a sense of control. Give choices that will result in the same overall outcome.

- a. Provide reasonable choices that you are able to follow through on.
- b. Avoid "yes/no" questions for choices. Instead of:
 - "Do you want to colour?" try "Would you prefer the red or blue marker?"
 - "Do you want to go up the stairs?" try "Do you want to take 5 or 7 steps?"
 - "Do you want to get dressed?" try "Do you want to put your shoes on first or your coat?"

5. Give Breaks

We all need breaks to clear our heads and stretch our legs. Some breaks are naturally scheduled (e.g. lunch) but others may need to be added.

- a. Whole class movement breaks can be scheduled by a teacher. Think about the purpose of the break and timing. Is your class looking sluggish after listening to a story? Try a movement break. Are the students wound up after recess? Try a deep breathing or mindfulness activity. There are a lot of activities available on-line or in resource books. Ensure that all students are able to participate so that they get the benefit (e.g. some may need specific pre-teaching sessions to learn the actions and be able to follow along).
- b. Individual student breaks can be scheduled or self-selected as needed (with consideration of cost-benefit to missing scheduled school activities). Set a time limit.
 - Within the classroom (e.g. quiet area with a tent, rocking chair or beanbag chair and calming activities such as books, music, fidgets).
 - Outside the classroom (e.g. walk to the office, quiet area in Learning Centre, movement break routine in the hallway).
 - Monitor occurrence of breaks to ensure they are be used appropriately and not simply as work avoidance. When possible, the student should return to the task s/he was doing prior to taking the break.

6. Talk Less...and when a student is dysregulated: TALK even LESS

In a meltdown, the part of the brain that controls emotions is in overload and the part of the brain that controls thinking isn't accessible; therefore, the student is not able to process a lot of language.

- a. Use simple language and/or visuals when the student is out of control.
- b. Minimize eye contact.
- c. Monitor for safety.
- d. Wait until the student has calmed down before re-establishing communication and moving on.

