

A Parent's Guide to The Zones of Regulation

The Zones of Regulation is an internationally renowned intervention which helps children to manage and express difficult emotions. This is known as 'self-regulation'.

Self-regulation can go by many names such as 'self-control', 'impulse management' and 'self-management'. Self-regulation is best described as the optimum state of alertness for a situation. For example, when your child takes part in a sports game, they would need to have a higher state of alertness than when, for example, they were working in a library. This will look different for different children and different ages.

From time to time, all of us (including adults) find it hard to manage strong feelings such as worry, anger, restlessness, fear or tiredness and this stops us from getting on with our day effectively. Children who feel these emotions often find it hard to learn and concentrate in school. The Zones of Regulation aims to teach children strategies to help them cope with these feelings so they can get back to feeling calm and ready to learn.



At Ashton Gate Primary School, we are launching the Zones of Regulation throughout the whole school. We want to teach all of our children good coping and regulation strategies so they can help themselves when they experience anxiety and stress. In the classroom, sometimes children panic when faced with a tricky learning problem or challenge. In the playground children have to learn to manage conflict and differences of opinion. The Zones of Regulation shows children that everyone has big feelings sometimes and offers a range of strategies to help them navigate them. By teaching children how to cope with these feelings we hope they will in turn become better at tackling learning challenges and build stronger resilience so they don't give up so easily when faced with difficulty. We want children at Ashton Gate to grow into successful teenagers then adults. Teaching the children at a young age about managing their feelings will support them in later life so that they don't turn to negative coping strategies which would affect their mental and physical wellbeing.

We aim to help children to:

- Recognise when they are in the different Zones and learn how to change or stay in the Zone they are in.
- Increase their emotional vocabulary so they can explain how they are feeling.
- Recognise when other people are in different Zones, thus developing better empathy.
- Develop an insight into what might make them move into the different Zones.
- Understand that emotions, sensory experiences such as lack of sleep or hunger and their environment might influence which Zone they are in.
- Develop problem-solving skills and resilience
- Identify a range of calming and alerting strategies that support them (known as their personal 'toolkit')

What are the different Zones?





Blue Zone: low level of arousal; not ready to learn; feels sad, sick, tired, bored, moving slowly.

Green Zone: calm state of alertness; optimal level to learn; feels happy, calm, feeling okay, focused.

Yellow Zone: heightened state of alertness; elevated emotions; has some control; feels frustrated, worried, silly/wiggly, excited, loss of some control.

Red Zone: heightened state of alertness and intense emotions; not an optimal level for learning; out of control; feels mad/angry, terrified, yelling/hitting, elated, out of control.

The ZONES of Regulation®

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| BLUE ZONE Sad Sick Tired Bored Moving Slowly | GREEN ZONE Happy Calm Feeling Okay Focused Ready to Learn | YELLOW ZONE Frustrated Worried Silly/Wiggly Excited Loss of Some Control | RED ZONE Mad/Angry Mean Terrified Yelling/Hitting Out of Control |

We teach the children that everyone experiences all of the Zones. The Red and Yellow zones are not 'bad' or 'naughty' Zones. All of the Zones are expected at one time or another. We will show them that the Blue Zone, for example, is helpful when you are trying to fall asleep.



How will my child learn about the Zones of Regulation?

We have introduced the Zones through discrete teaching lessons, through our PSHE curriculum and during carpet sessions. We are using the Zones language as part of daily school life so all staff will be referring to them, not just their class teacher. Many adults carry visuals with them to support the teaching and understanding.

Some children may prefer not to use the 'Zones language' but label the emotions directly – this is fine!

How can you help your child use The Zones of Regulation at home?

- Identify your own feelings using Zones language in front of your child (e.g.: I'm frustrated – I can feel it in my chest. I think I am in the Yellow Zone.)
- Talk about what tool you will use to be in the appropriate Zone (e.g.: "I need to take four deep breaths to help get me back to the Green Zone.")
- At times, wonder which Zone your child is in. Or, discuss which Zone a character in a film / book might be in. (e.g.: "You look sleepy – you are all floppy. Are you in the Blue Zone?")
- Engage your child in discussion around Zones when they are in the Red Zone is unlikely to be effective. You need to be discussing the different Zones and tools they can use when they are more regulated / calm.
- Teach your child which tools they can use. (eg: "It's time for bed. Let's read a book together in the comfy chair to get you in the Blue Zone.")
- Regular Check-ins. "How are you feeling now?" and "How can you get back to Green?"
- Modelling It is important to remember to show the children how you use tools to get back to the green zones. You might say "I am going to make myself a cup of tea and do some breathing exercises because I am in the blue zone" and afterwards tell your child how using those tools helped you get back to the green zone.
- Share how their behaviour is affecting your Zone. For example, if they are in the Green Zone, you could comment that their behaviour is also helping you feel happy / go into the Green Zone.
- Put up and reference the Zones visuals and tools in your home.
- Praise and encourage your child when they share which Zone they are in.

Tips for practicing the Zones of Regulation

- Know yourself and how you react in difficult situations before dealing with your child's behaviours.
- Know your child's sensory threshold. We all process sensory information differently and it impacts our reactivity to situations.
- Know your child's triggers- are there reasonable adjustments that can be made?
- Be consistent in managing your child's behaviour
- Empathise with your child and validate what they are feeling.
- Have clear boundaries/routines and always follow through.
- Do not deal with an angry, upset child when you are not yet calm yourself.

- Discuss strategies for the next time when you are in a similar situation.
- Remember to ask your child how their choices made you feel (empathy).
- Praise your child for using strategies. Encourage your child to take a sensory break to help regulate their bodies.
- Create a 'calm' box full of things which help to keep your child calm and alert. Advice about what could go in the box can be found on our website in the 'Zones Toolkit' section.

FAQs on the Zones of Regulation

Can my child be in more than one zone at the same time?

Yes. Your child may feel tired (blue zone) because they did not get enough sleep, and anxious (yellow zone) because they are worried about an activity at school. Listing more than one Zone reflects a good sense of personal feelings and alertness levels.

Should children be punished for being in the RED Zone?

It's best for children to experience the natural consequences of being in the RED zone. If a child's actions/choices hurt someone or destroys property, they need to repair the relationship and take responsibility for the mess they create. Once the child has calmed down, use the experience as a learning opportunity to process what the child would do differently next time.

Can you look like one Zone on the outside and feel like you are in another Zone on the inside?

Yes. Many of us "disguise" our Zone to match social expectations. We use the expression "put on a happy face" or mask the emotion so other people will have good thoughts about us. Parents often say that their children 'lose it' and go into the Red Zone as soon as they get home. This can be because children are increasing their awareness of their peers and expectations when in the classroom. They make every effort to keep it together at school, home is where they feel safe to let it all out.

How does the ZOR fit with the school behaviour policy?

With the Iceberg model of behaviour, we can start to unpack the behaviours we see and the underlying emotional needs. This allows us to continue to have high expectations of our children, whilst being empathetic and validating the emotional needs of each individual.

If a child has 'flipped their lid' (i.e. got into the red zone and lost control) we will follow the behaviour management policy in order to ensure that the child is able to repair what has happened and that due consideration is given to all affected. The zones work alongside this, allowing us to treat such incidents as opportunities for the child to learn new strategies to meet their emotional needs thereby breaking negative cycles of behaviour.



If a child is triggered into a red zone by asking them to do something they don't want to do – how do you handle that?

If a child is in the red zone, this means they are feeling overwhelmed and out of control. This is a really unpleasant feeling for the child and our focus in that moment is to de-escalate.

At this point we want to make sure everyone is safe and try to be as calm as possible. Ideally we want to use minimal language and offer a coregulation strategy such as a quiet space for the child to go or a hug.

Once the child is feeling regulated, you can return to the task – with clear and simple instructions of what needs to be done (can it be broken down into something more manageable?) and what will happen after it is done.

If your child regularly struggles with some aspects of the day you can discuss more strategies with your SENCO or teacher.

Can the yellow zone be a good place for learning especially in a child with ADHD. If they are hyper focussed or on a bit of a high how could that be channelled into learning?

We recognise that every child experiences the zones differently.

For a child who fits the ADHD profile, their green zone may look different – I.e. they may need to fidget and move around more than other children in order to stay focused. If they are engaging in a task this high level of energy would still be considered green. The Zones of regulation helps the child to recognise what works for them in this zone and to be able to advocate for themselves and ask for what they need.

What characterises the yellow zone is that the child has too much energy to be able to engage in a given activity. If we notice that this is happening we might support the child by offering a movement or brain break or by breaking down the tasks into shorter more manageable chunks so that the child can 'reset' and return to their own individual green zone.

