

# How Big is the Feeling? - Zones of Regulation

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Emotional intelligence is vital to a child's lifelong success and happiness. Recognizing the emotions of others helps them build relationships and get along with others. Recognizing and managing their own emotions helps them stay focused at school or work, and keeps them out of trouble. Rather than assuming your child will "figure that stuff out", it helps to spend time actively teaching about emotions.

You can teach that there are different *types* of emotions. I call these the sads, the mads, the glads, the scareds. (Note that many psychologists argue that "mad" is a secondary emotion, and that usually someone who appears to be angry is actually either sad or scared underneath that angry surface.)

I also teach that there are different levels of intensity of emotion. Some feelings are small and easy to ignore. Some are challenging but manageable. Some are so big they overwhelm us. When you teach your child words for feelings, help them understand how the words describe different levels of feelings.

## Sad Feelings

Wistful  
Disappointed  
Regretful  
Hurt  
Grieving  
Heartbroken

## Mad Feelings

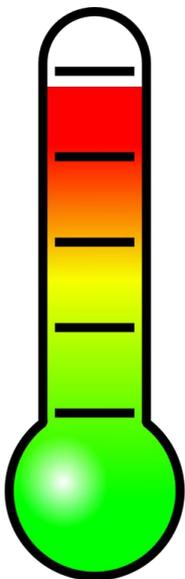
Miffed  
Frustrated  
Annoyed  
Angry  
Furious  
Outraged

## Glad Feelings

Content  
Pleased  
Cheerful  
Happy  
Excited  
Ecstatic

## Scared Feelings

Uncertain  
Apprehensive  
Worried  
Anxious  
Frightened  
Terrified



Some children may find the thermometer image helpful.

When they're generally feeling "fine", they're in the green zone.

When feelings start to stir - they're a little disappointed, frustrated, or apprehensive - they're moving toward the yellow zone. They may be able to just distract themselves with an activity or do some calming self-talk to get back in the green zone.

When the feelings start getting bigger - they're hurt, angry, anxious, or overexcited - they may need to actively work to calm down: take some deep breaths, count to 10, or talk about their feelings. If a child has moved into a red zone, and is feeling heartbroken, or outraged, or terrified, they will typically need an adult to help them to calm down.

You might find it helpful to have a visual tool to work with - you can print out or draw a thermometer image so the child can point out where they're at on the thermometer.

At first, after you teach this idea to your child, you will label for your child where *you* think they are. Gradually, you'll ask them to tune into their own moods and describe how they're feeling. Eventually, our goal is for them to notice when they're "heating up" and use soothing strategies to "cool down."

Another helpful tool is the "[Zones of Regulation](#)", developed by Leah Kuypers. Again, this is a tool for helping children identify the feelings they're having and the intensity of those feelings.

# The ZONES of Regulation®

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

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From *The Zones of Regulation*® by Leah M. Kuypers • Available at [www.socialthinking.com](http://www.socialthinking.com)

Some parents / professionals have found it helpful to compare the zones of regulation to characters from the movie *Inside Out*, by creating charts like this. (Note: all images copyright Pixar.)

<b>BLUE ZONE</b> 	<b>GREEN ZONE</b> 	<b>YELLOW ZONE</b> 	<b>RED ZONE</b> 
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Once your child has a vocabulary for discussing these ideas, then we can work on problem-solving. I think of these stages of development of emotional literacy.

1. Noticing the symptoms. For very young children, point out to them “it seems like you’re sad” or “I see your eyes are big, and you’re rubbing your hands together – it looks like you’re worried.”
2. Diagnosing feelings. As they get older, ask them to use words to describe their own feelings, and use the thermometer image or the zones labels to describe the intensity of those feelings.
3. Learning concrete strategies for calming down. Teach them a number of strategies, and have them make lists of what is helpful to them in each zone. For example: if they’re in the blue zone, they might stretch, drink water, or talk to someone. In the yellow zone, they might take deep breaths, count to 10, or write about how they’re feeling. In the red zone, they may move away from the situation that’s upsetting them or ask for help. Practice these skills when they’re calm.
4. Being able to implement calming strategies when upset. This is hard work. We can’t expect them to learn overnight! We first work on how to self-soothe the smaller upsets in the yellow zone, and as they get better at that, they might be able to tackle red zone feelings. Until they can, they’ll need support from adults to help with this.
5. Understanding what triggers big emotions, taking actions to prevent problems, and use self-care strategies to stay calm when hard things happen. Many adults are still learning this step!

# My Zones of Regulation - Sample

	<b>BLUE ZONE</b>	<b>GREEN ZONE</b>	<b>YELLOW ZONE</b>	<b>RED ZONE</b>
<b>How I look or act</b>	<p>I sigh or pout</p> <p>I yawn, stretch, rub eyes</p> <p>I have a sad face, I cry</p> <p>I move slowly and rest</p>	<p>I sit up straight</p> <p>I look around me</p> <p>I make eye contact</p> <p>I smile</p>	<p>I wiggle and squirm</p> <p>I frown and glare</p> <p>I act silly or wild</p> <p>My muscles get tight and my heart beats faster</p>	<p>I cry</p> <p>I yell or scream</p> <p>I stomp or bang on things</p> <p>I lose control</p>
<b>What do I need to do?</b>	<p>Get my energy up.</p> <p>Get more engaged.</p>	<p>I'm good. I'm ready to learn and connect.</p>	<p>Use some strategies to settle back down into the green zone.</p>	<p>Use some strategies to calm down!</p>
<b>What could I do that would help me?</b>	<p>Stretch</p> <p>Walk around</p> <p>Get a drink of water</p> <p>Ask for a hug</p> <p>Tell someone how I feel</p> <p>Think happy thoughts</p>	<p>I'm doing well</p> <p>I can play or learn</p> <p>I could help a friend</p> <p>I could help a grown-up</p> <p>I can practice a calming strategy so I'm better at using it when I need it</p>	<p>Count to 20</p> <p>Take deep breaths</p> <p>Think about a safe place</p> <p>Squeeze/press something</p> <p>Jump or dance or run</p> <p>Tense &amp; release muscles</p> <p>Write, draw, talk about it</p>	<p>Stop what I'm doing</p> <p>Walk away</p> <p>Be safe</p> <p>Ask for a break</p> <p>Get help</p>

# My Zones of Regulation

	<b>BLUE ZONE</b>	<b>GREEN ZONE</b>	<b>YELLOW ZONE</b>	<b>RED ZONE</b>
<b>How I look or act</b>				
<b>What do I need to do?</b>	Get my energy up.	I'm good. I'm ready to learn and connect.	Use strategies to settle down into the green zone.	Use strategies to calm down!
<b>What helps me?</b>				