

Supporting Children with Meltdowns

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What is a meltdown?

- Might look like a temper tantrum – but not the same!
- Extreme emotional reaction: crying, screaming, aggression, breaking things, hurting people
- Difficult or impossible to calm down
- Some children instead 'shut down'

Meltdowns happen when a situation is SO overwhelming that children can not cope with it



Why do children (and some adults!) have meltdowns?

Lots of reasons!

- Diagnoses like autism or ADHD
- Anxiety and other mental health concerns
- Being under a lot of pressure or asked to do things
- Sensory difficulties
- Difficulty communicating worries
- Not having enough ways to cope
- Feeling scared or unsafe (emotionally as well as physically)
- Change and uncertainty
- Tiredness from masking



So what can we do about it?

- Try to understand & help your child to understand themselves
- Be aware of triggers and catch the 'warning signs'
- Use the 'three R's'
- Remove the child from the situation and help them to 'regulate' their feelings
- Be an 'emotion coach'
- Find times to 'unmask'



Try to
understand &
help your child
to understand
themselves



Try to understand & help your child to understand themselves

SENSORY SEEKING VS. SENSORY SENSITIVE



Try to understand & help your child to understand themselves

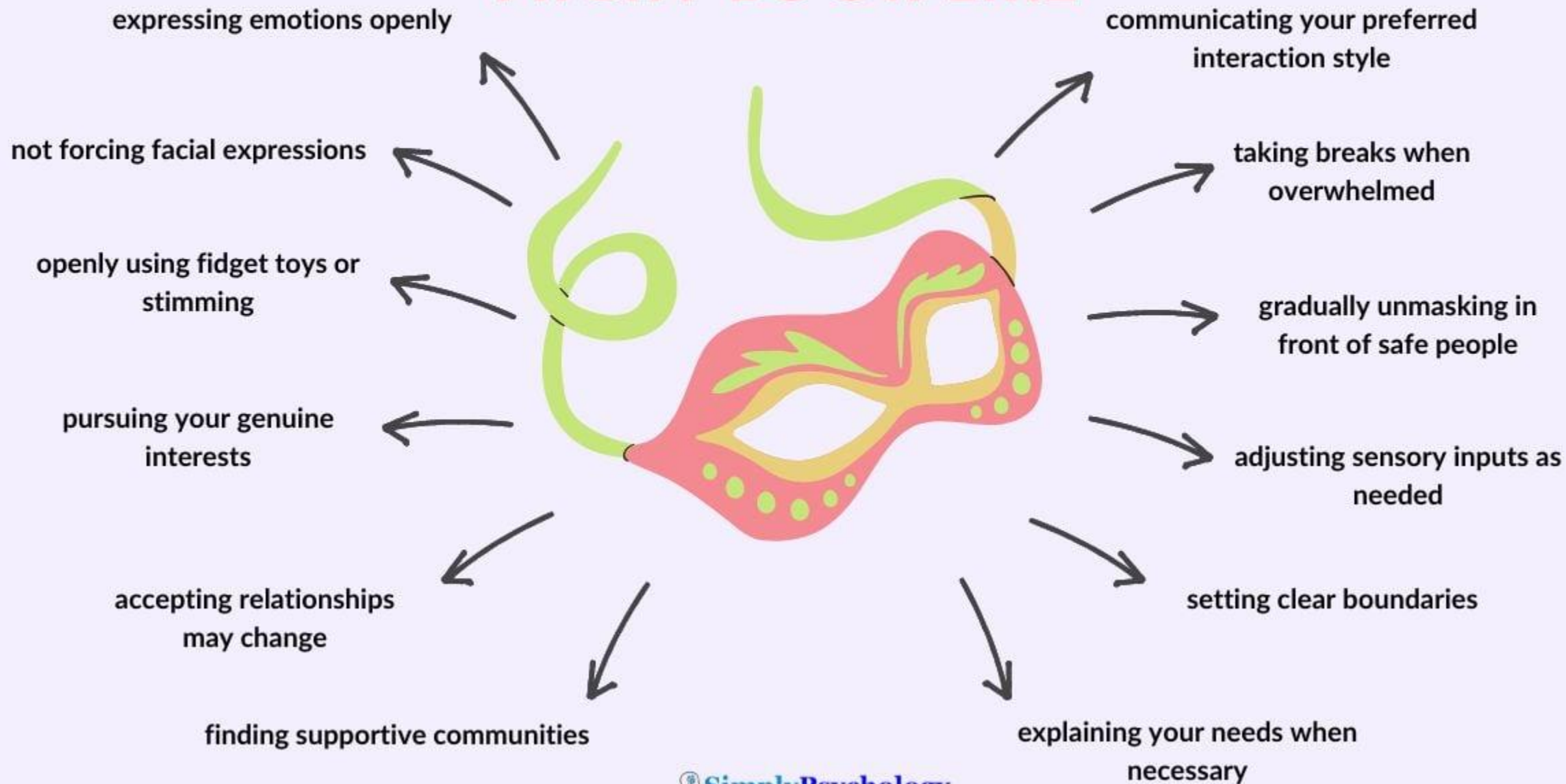


Masking



[Maria - Autistic Masking \(Animated Short Film\) - YouTube](#)

UNMASKING AUTISM MIGHT LOOK LIKE



Be aware of triggers and catch the 'warning signs'



Image based on Harper, G. (2004). *The joy of conflict resolution: Transforming victims, villains and heroes in the workplace and at home*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers

Be aware of triggers and catch the 'warning signs'

- Sensory overload
- Being asked to do something
- Feeling told off
- Feeling criticised
- Failure
- Not understanding
- Not having something they need e.g. food
- Tiredness
- Sickness
- Change to routine
- Being told 'no'

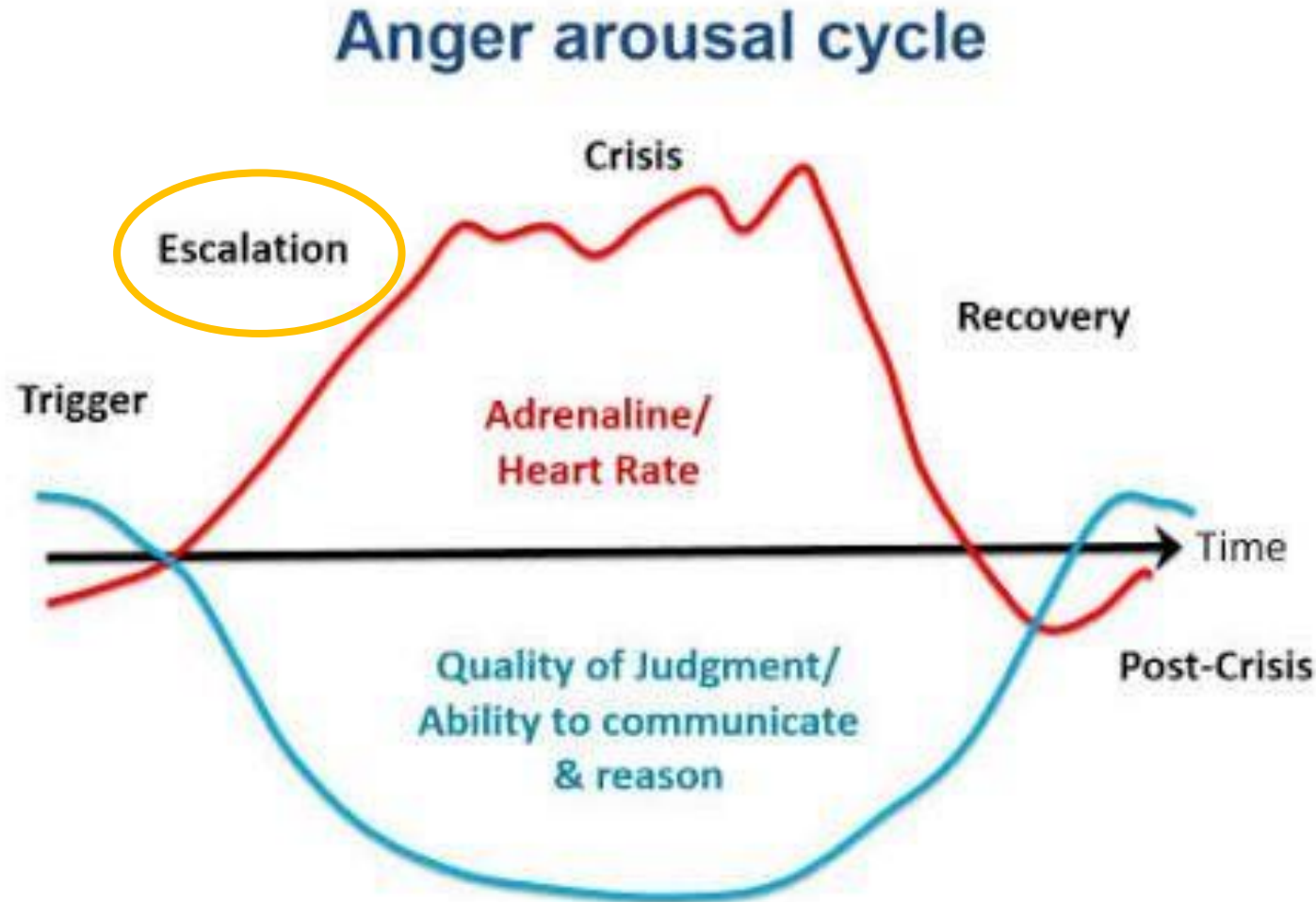


Try keeping a diary of where you were and what was happening right before the meltdown happened!

Image based on Harper, G. (2004). *The joy of conflict resolution: Transforming victims, villains and heroes in the workplace and at home*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers

Be aware of triggers and catch the 'warning signs'

You can still prevent the meltdown in the early stages



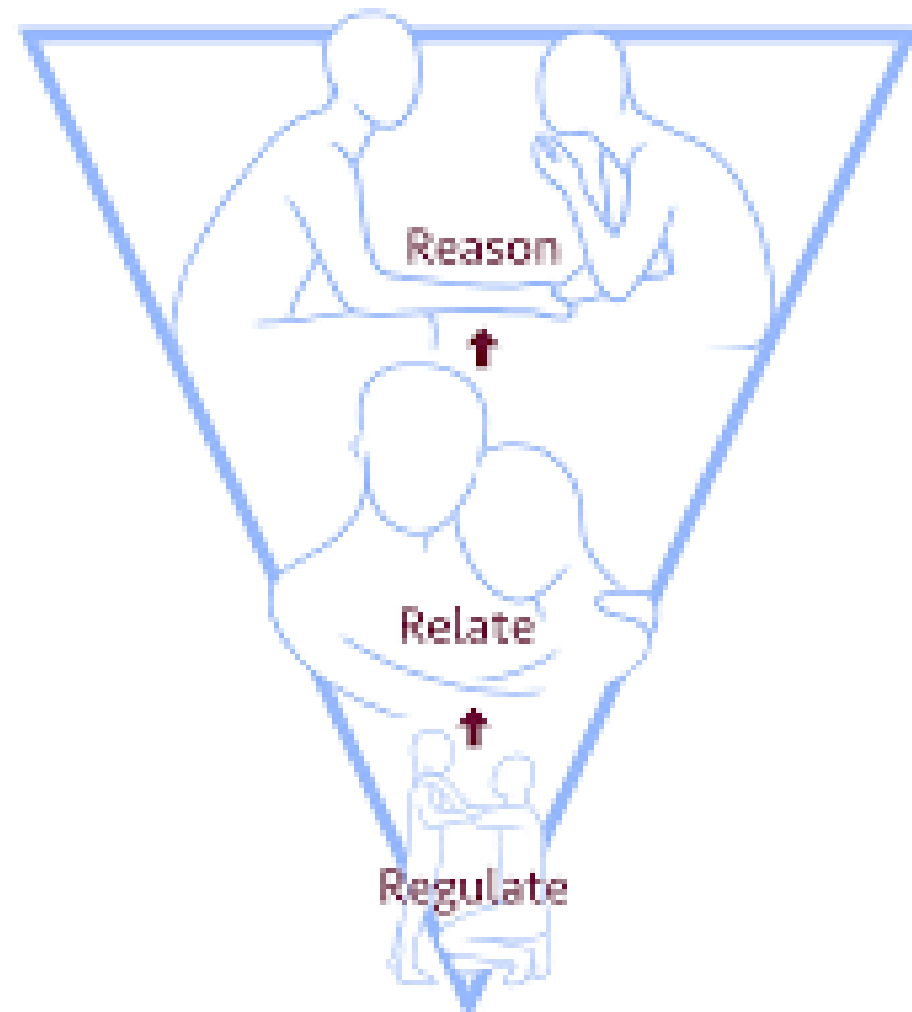
You might see:

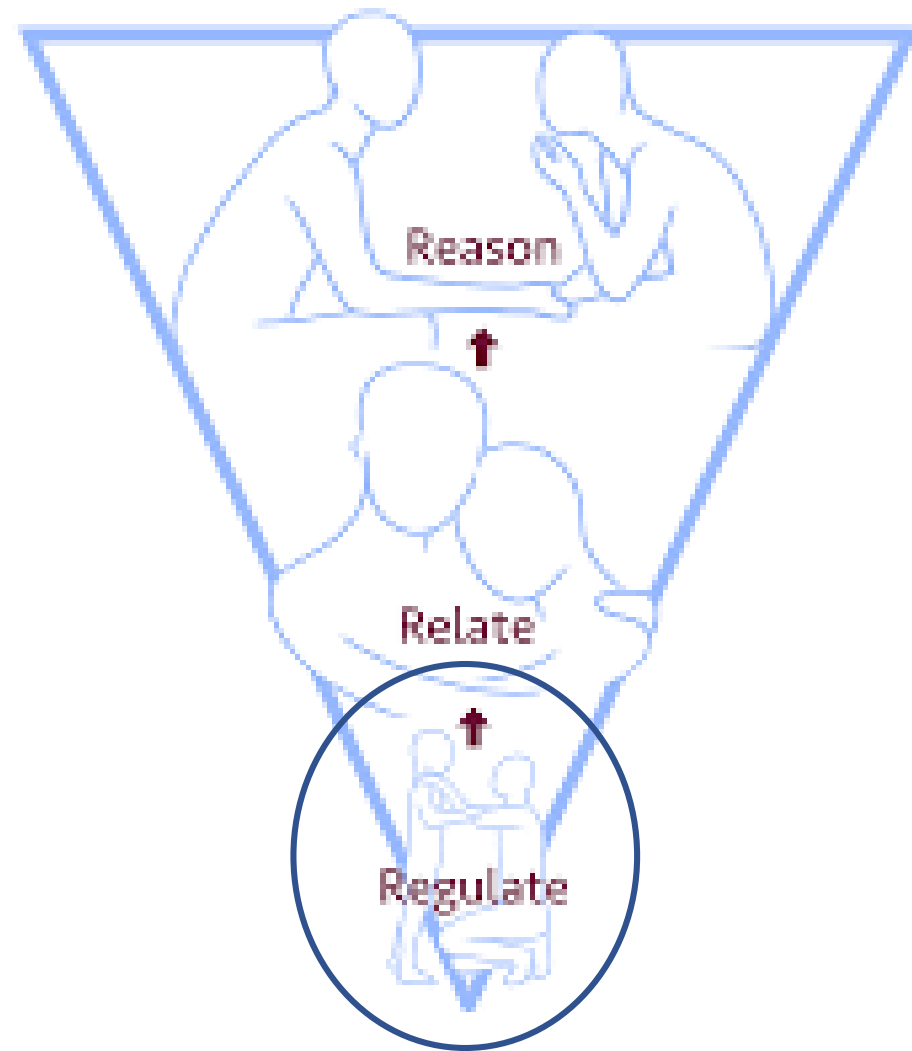
- Pacing
- 'Stimming'
- Asking repetitive questions
- Going quiet
- Looking upset
- Refusal
- Avoidance

Image based on Harper, G. (2004). *The joy of conflict resolution: Transforming victims, villains and heroes in the workplace and at home*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers



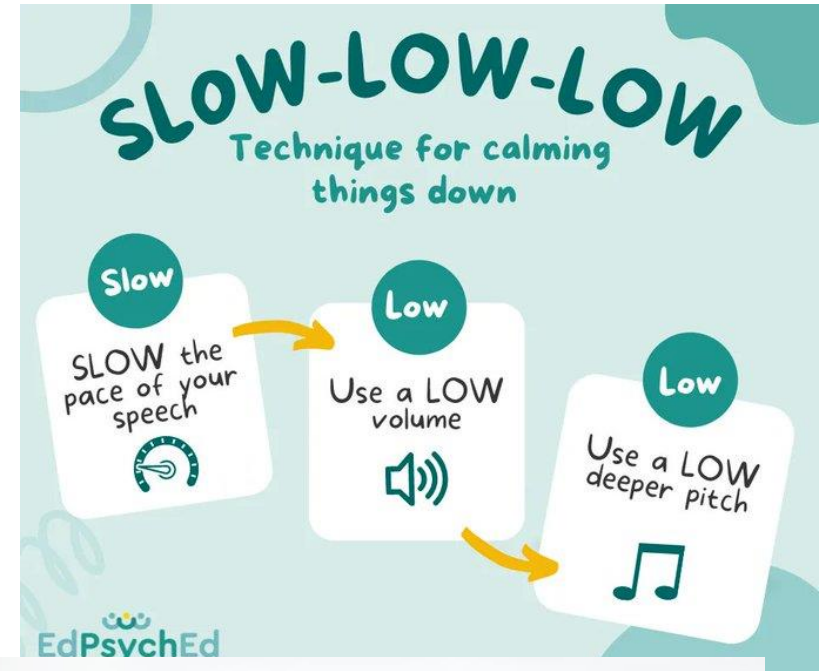
The Three R's

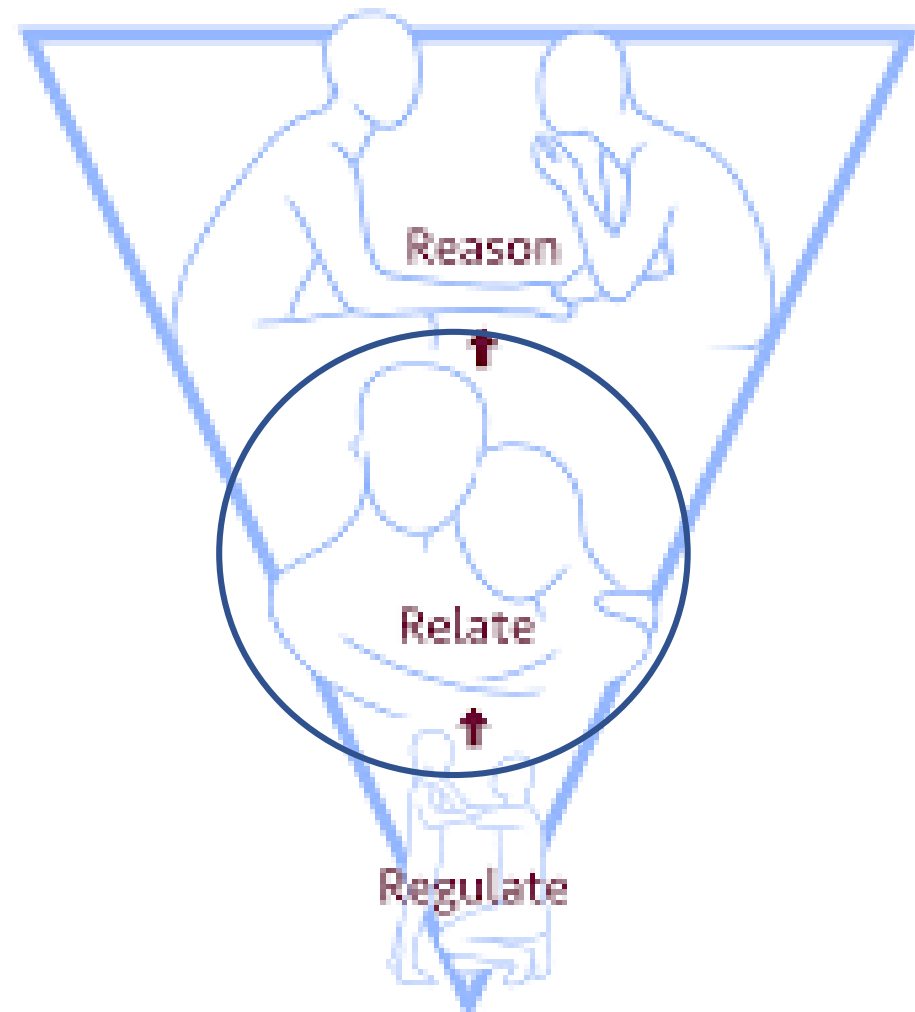


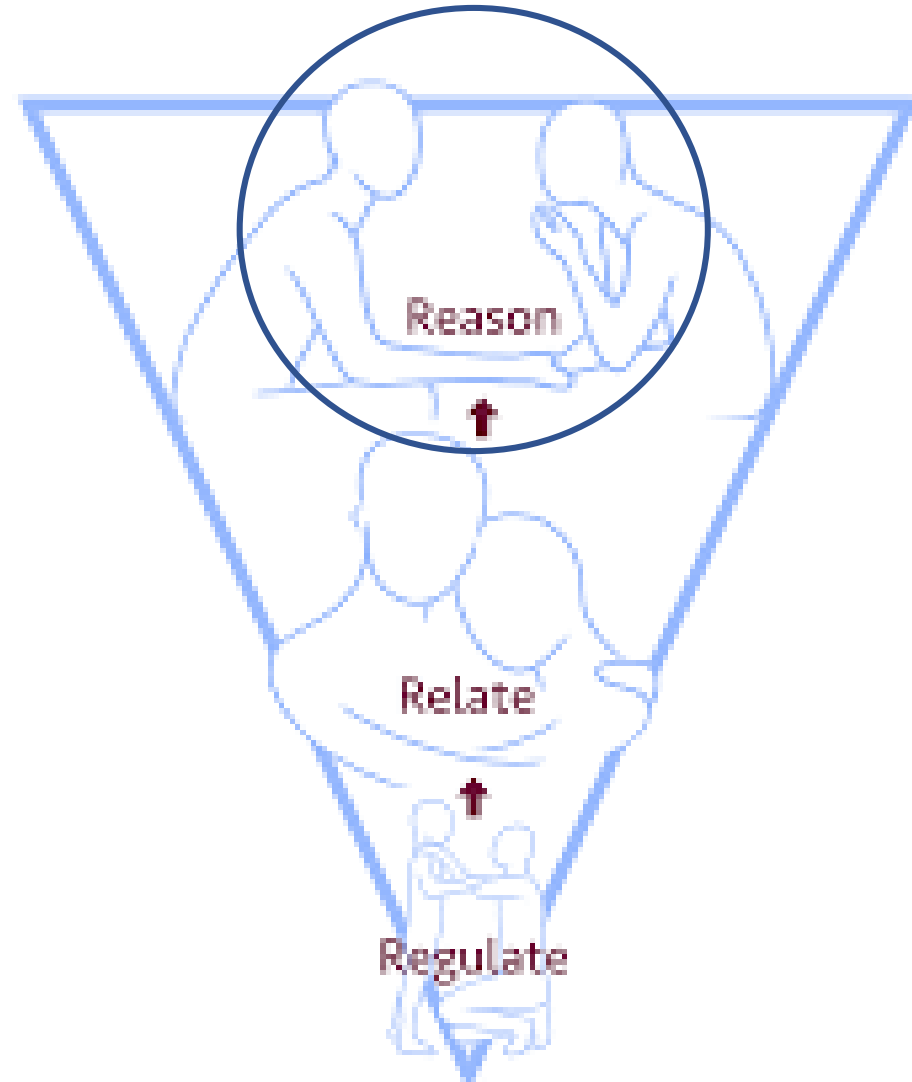


Helping children to calm down

- Distraction
- Escape the trigger
- Encourage stimming
- Hugs (if your child likes them!)
- A quiet space
- Name it to tame it
- Slow – low – low
- Stay calm! → be a swan







Emotion Coaching: 4 Steps

Step 1

Recognising the child's feelings and empathising with them

Step 2

Validating the feelings and labelling them

Step 3

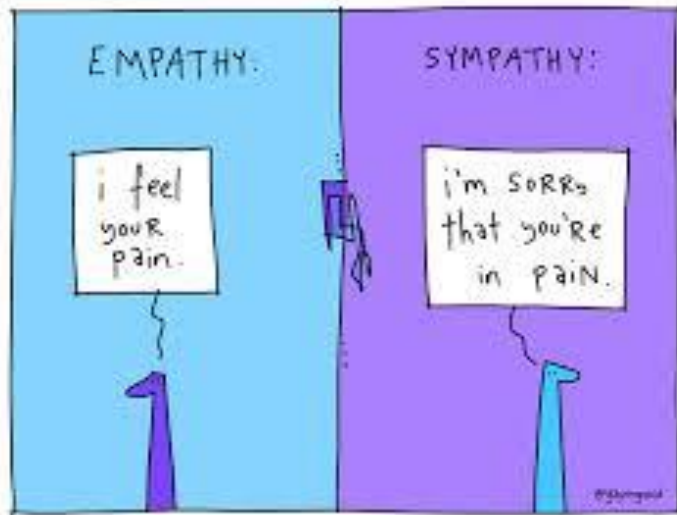
Setting limits on behaviour (if needed)

Step 4

Problem-solve with the child



Steps 1&2: Recognise, Validate & Label



- Need to genuinely empathise with the child from their point of view. This doesn't mean agreeing with them, just viewing things from their perspective
- Recognise all emotions as being natural and normal and not always a matter of choice
- Recognise behaviour as communication
- Look for physical and verbal signs of the emotions being felt and use words to reflect back child's emotion and help child to label emotion
- Simply observe – saying what you see rather than asking probing questions to which young people might not know answer e.g. 'how do you feel?' 'why did you do that?'



Examples of types of positive limit setting:

- I understand that you might have not felt listened to, we need to stay safe in the classroom, we use kind hands.
- Remember we try to use words to tell people when something is not right for us
- When you told Amber to go away, it made it difficult for everyone to keep playing, everyone likes to play in a group.
- In school, we have guidelines to follow that keep us all safe.
- When it is raining we need to wear our jackets to play outside

Step 3: Example Coaching Scripts for setting limits...

- **Step 3: Limit Setting (if needed)**
- Give guidance and positively explain boundaries by outlining what is acceptable behaviour.



Step 4: Problem- solve with the child...

- **Sharing Ideas**
- Identify alternative, more appropriate and more productive ways of expressing and/or managing feelings and behaviour/actions, through scaffolding
- Empower the C&YP to recognise feelings, behaviour and take ownership/responsibility of actions and finding ways to self-regulate in the future.

“Let’s think of what you could have done instead”

“Can you think of a different way to deal with your feelings at this time?”

“What about if you.....”

“Let’s put some ideas on paper of what you could do if you felt in the future”



Emotion Coaching



Thank you
for listening!

