

AVP Emotional Regulation Toolkit

Helping Children Name, Notice & Navigate Feelings

Purpose

To help families understand how emotional regulation develops, how AVP supports it through co-regulation, breathing, and emotional language, and how to mirror those supports at home.

Introduction

At Ark Valley Preschool, we believe big feelings are not something to fix — they're something to understand.

Emotional regulation is a lifelong skill, and in early childhood, it begins with relationships. Children learn to manage their emotions by borrowing calm from the adults around them until they can find it within themselves.

Our role as teachers and caregivers is to model this calm and to welcome emotions — all of them — as part of being human. A stormy day doesn't mean something is wrong; it means a child feels safe enough to let it rain.

Why This Matters Developmentally

- **Connection before correction:** Emotional regulation develops through safety and relationship, not punishment or control.
 - **Co-regulation builds the brain:** Young children can't self-regulate until they've been co-regulated repeatedly by calm, trusted adults.
 - **Naming emotions builds understanding:** When we help children name what they feel, it activates brain pathways that support empathy and problem-solving.
 - **All emotions are welcome:** Anger, sadness, and frustration are just as valid as joy — they are signals, not misbehavior.
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Age-by-Age Development

Age 1–2: Borrowing Calm

At this stage, children rely entirely on adults to soothe and regulate. They express feelings through body language — crying, clinging, arching, or seeking comfort.

How We Support at AVP: Teachers hold, rock, and speak softly, labeling simple feelings (“You’re sad. You miss Mom.”).

What Helps at Home: Predictable routines and gentle tone. Children learn from your rhythm more than your words.

Age 2–3: Emerging Awareness

Toddlers begin to recognize their feelings but don’t yet have the words or control to manage them. Frustration shows up as “big energy.”

How We Support at AVP: We model language (“You’re mad. It’s hard to wait.”) and use breathing and sensory play to release tension.

What Helps at Home: Offer short phrases and comfort — “You’re safe. I’m here.” Let them know feelings come and go.

Age 3–4: Practicing Tools

Children start using language to express feelings but still need adult guidance. They begin connecting actions to emotions and learning calming strategies.

How We Support at AVP: The *Energy Friends* help children “name, notice, and navigate” their energy. Teachers coach breathing strategies — Bunny Breath, Star Breath, Whale Breath — and invite reflection (“What helps your body feel calm?”).

What Helps at Home: Use visuals or familiar breathing names. Model how you calm down yourself — “I’m feeling wiggly, I’m going to take a Whale Breath.”

Age 4–5: Building Self-Awareness

Older preschoolers can begin recognizing patterns in their emotions and noticing others’ feelings too. They’re learning empathy and how to repair after conflict.

How We Support at AVP: Teachers model reflection and repair — “It looks like you’re feeling frustrated. How can we help make it right?” We practice turn-taking, problem-solving, and mindfulness during *Breath & Belonging*.

What Helps at Home: Encourage reflection: “What made your heart feel sunny today?” or “What helped your storm cloud pass?” Help them see that feelings are temporary, and calm always returns.

Our Approach at AVP

- **Energy Friends Visuals:** Tools that help children *name, notice, and navigate* their energy — from stormy and overwhelmed to calm and ready.



- **Weekly Breath & Belonging:** Every day begins with mindfulness and breathing practices that teach children to connect body and mind.
 - **Modeling Calm:** Teachers describe their own feelings out loud — “I’m feeling a little rushed, I’ll take a deep breath.” This normalizes emotion and shows healthy coping.
 - **Safe Reflection:** Reflection circles invite children to talk about emotions using story, movement, or art.
 - **Environment as Support:** Soft lighting, sensory tools, cozy corners, and consistent routines help children feel safe to express and reset.
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Teacher Language in Action

These are examples of the real words our staff use at AVP to guide emotional awareness:

- “It’s okay to feel mad — I’ll help you find calm.”
- “Let’s take a Bunny Breath together.”
- “You wanted that toy too. That’s hard.”
- “Your body looks like a wiggly star — do you need to move or rest?”
- “I can tell you’re feeling stormy. Let’s see what helps the storm pass.”
- “You can try again when your body feels ready.”

This consistent language helps children feel understood and teaches them that emotions are safe, normal, and manageable.

How to Support at Home

- **Model calm.** Your tone and breath are your child’s anchor.
 - **Keep language simple.** “You’re frustrated. Let’s take a breath together.”
 - **Create a cozy spot.** A blanket, stuffed animal, or weighted pillow can become a “calm-down corner.”
 - **Use shared visuals.** Display *Energy Friends* or simple feeling faces for daily check-ins.
 - **Normalize emotions.** “Everyone feels sad sometimes. You can tell me when your heart feels stormy.”
 - **Reflect together.** End the day with one “rose and thorn” — a joyful moment and a tricky one.
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Suggested Resources

- *The Whole-Brain Child* — Dan Siegel & Tina Payne Bryson
 - *No-Drama Discipline* — Dan Siegel & Tina Payne Bryson
 - *The Rabbit Listened* — Cori Doerrfeld
 - *Janet Lansbury: Unruffled* podcast
 - *Zero to Three* — Emotional Development Resources
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Why It Works

When children are met with calm instead of correction, they learn that emotions are safe and manageable.

Co-regulation builds trust.

Trust builds safety.

And safety builds the foundation for lifelong empathy, confidence, and resilience.

