

Before You Correct the Behavior

A co-regulation guide for adults supporting young people under stress. Regulation and accountability can work together, but timing matters.

Your nervous system enters the interaction before your words do.

Co-regulation is not making feelings disappear, avoiding limits, or excusing harm. It is using your presence, pacing, language, and predictability to reduce unnecessary threat so the young person has a better chance of thinking, communicating, and responding.

1 REGULATE YOURSELF FIRST

1

Check your voice, pace, face, body position, and urgency. If you are escalating, your correction will carry that

Ask yourself: "Am I bringing calm, or am I bringing more heat?"

2 REDUCE THE LOAD

2

Use fewer words. Lower the social and performance pressure. Move away from an audience when possible.

Try: "We can make this smaller. One thing at a time."

3 MAKE SAFETY AND LIMITS CLEAR

3

Use short, concrete boundaries without shame, threats, or a power contest.

Try: "You can be angry. I cannot let anyone get hurt."

4 OFFER REALISTIC CONTROL

4

Give one or two choices that are genuinely available. Choice works best when it is not a disguised command.

Try: "Do you want to talk here or take two minutes and then come back?"

5 TEACH AFTER CAPACITY RETURNS

5

Reflection, repair, consequences, and problem-solving work better after enough regulation has returned for

Ask: "What happened, what do we need to repair, and what will help next time?"

Co-Regulation in the Moment

A compact reference for deciding what the interaction needs before you add more words, demands, or consequences.

IF YOU NOTICE...

- voice getting louder
- rapid questioning
- repeating the demand
- public correction
- arguing facts
- your own urgency rising

TRY...

- slow your pace
- use one sentence
- increase physical space
- move away from the audience
- offer one safe choice
- pause before repeating yourself

AVOID...

- "calm down"
- sarcasm or shame
- threats in the heat of the moment
- cornering or crowding
- forcing eye contact
- demanding insight before capacity returns

THE 5-SECOND CHECK BEFORE YOU RESPOND

LOWER

Is my voice slower and quieter than theirs?

SHORTEN

Can I say this in one sentence?

SPACE

Am I crowding, cornering, or performing for an audience?

CHOICE

Can I offer one safe, realistic choice?

After regulation returns

Teach, repair, problem-solve, set consequences, or revisit expectations. Regulation is not the absence of accountability. It creates better conditions for accountability to actually work.