



SEL Toolkit: Emotional Regulation

Helping You and Your Child Navigate Big Feelings with Calm and Confidence

Emotional regulation is a skill—and it starts with you.

When children learn to manage their emotions, they handle stress better, build stronger relationships, and bounce back from challenges. And one of the most powerful ways they learn? Research shows they learn by watching you.

How you manage your own emotions teaches your child how to manage theirs.

This easy-to-use toolkit will help you stay calmer during challenging moments, teach your child how to name and express feelings, and create a more peaceful, connected home. Use it to build more empathy, self-awareness, and emotional strength—for you and your family.

This toolkit is for YOU if:

- You often react emotionally in challenging parenting moments
- You struggle to stay calm when your child is upset
- You want practical strategies to manage your own emotions
- You're looking to model healthier emotional responses for your child

This toolkit is for your FAMILY if:

- Your child has intense or overwhelming emotional reactions
- Your child struggles to express or identify feelings
- Emotions often escalate conflicts at home
- The emotional tone in your home feels tense or reactive

Questions?

Visit www.thinkgiveproject.org or reach out to us directly.

We hope this toolkit sparks meaningful connection in your family.



Tool 1: Hand-on-Heart Exercise

Parents/Guardians-only

A quick way to calm your body and mind
in moments of stress



Feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, or emotionally drained?

The Hand-on-Heart Exercise is a simple, research-backed way to calm your body and mind. Just a few moments of this practice can make a real difference. By placing your hand on your heart, taking deep breaths, and offering yourself kind words, you activate your body's calming system—specifically the vagus nerve—which helps slow your heart rate, release tension, and restore balance.

Research shows that self-compassion practices like this one reduce stress, build resilience, and support both mental and physical health. It also sends your body a powerful message: **you're safe**. With regular practice, it becomes easier to stay grounded and respond with calm, even in challenging moments.

How To Do It

Pause. When you notice you're feeling upset, stressed, or reactive, take a moment to pause.

Place your hand on your heart. Use your palm and apply light pressure. You can close your eyes if it helps you focus.

Take 3–5 deep breaths. Inhale slowly through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Let your shoulders relax.

Say something kind to yourself. Try one of these, or come up with your own:

- "This is a tough moment, and I'm doing my best."
- "It's okay to feel this way—this will pass."
- "I am showing up for my child, even when it's hard."



Tool 2: S.T.O.P. Practice

Parents/Guardians-only

A quick way to pause and respond calmly, especially during tense moments



Feeling triggered, overwhelmed, or close to losing your cool?

The S.T.O.P. Practice is a simple, evidence-based mindfulness strategy that helps you hit pause, manage strong emotions, and choose how you want to respond.

Even a brief moment of mindfulness can interrupt a stress spiral. Research shows that practices like S.T.O.P. activate your body's calming system, reduce emotional reactivity, and build long-term emotional resilience. This gives you space to parent with more intention, connection, and care—even when emotions run high.

With regular practice, S.T.O.P. builds emotional awareness, reduces reactivity, and strengthens your ability to model healthy regulation for your child.

How To Do It

S – Stop. Pause for a moment. Taking a break can help interrupt a stress response.

T – Take a breath. Inhale slowly through your nose, exhale through your mouth. Repeat a few times. Deep breathing helps calm your body and reset your focus.

O – Observe. Notice what's happening—internally and externally. What are you feeling? What's going on with your child? What do you need right now?

P – Proceed. Choose your next step with intention. Maybe that means speaking calmly, setting a boundary, or simply waiting a beat before responding. You might find it helpful to say to yourself: "I can take a moment before I react," or "This is hard, but I can handle it," or "Staying calm helps me and my child."

Nobody responds perfectly all the time. But practicing this simple pause is a step toward healthier reactions and stronger family connections—and the research backs that up.



Tool 3: Helping Yourself Through Big Feelings

Parents/Guardians-only

A simple way to stay grounded and self-compassionate in challenging parenting moments



Parenting is hard—and even the most loving caregivers feel overwhelmed sometimes.

When emotions run high, it's easy to lose your cool or get stuck in guilt or frustration. This four-step tool offers a simple way to slow down, name what you're feeling, and respond with kindness toward yourself.

The goal isn't to be perfect—it's to be present and gentle with yourself. Research shows that when parents and guardians practice self-awareness and self-compassion, they are better able to support their children and strengthen family relationships.

How To Do It

1. **Notice.** Pause and ask yourself, "What am I feeling right now?" Try to name the emotion without judging it.
2. **Accept.** Remind yourself, "It's okay to feel this way." Emotions aren't good or bad—they're just signals.
3. **Be Kind.** Offer yourself some compassion. Say something like, "This is hard, but I can do this," or "I'm doing my best." Treat yourself like you would a close friend.
4. **Plan.** Think about a small next step that could help—whether it's taking a deep breath, stepping away for a moment, or speaking gently to your child.

Nobody responds perfectly all the time. But practicing this simple pause is a step toward healthier reactions and stronger family connections—and the research backs that up.



Tool 4: Mindful Hugs

Parent/Guardian + Child Together

A simple way to feel calm and connected



Parenting—and being parented—can be stressful for both you and your child.

Sometimes, feelings get really big for both of you. The Mindful Hug is a simple way for you to create a sense of safety, calm strong emotions, and deepen your connection.

When you hold your child in a hug for at least 10 seconds, your body releases oxytocin, often called the “feel-good” hormone because it helps you build trust and connection. At the same time, hugging lowers stress hormones like cortisol. This kind of mindful touch acts as a natural reset by activating your parasympathetic nervous system—the part of your body that helps you relax and feel safe instead of stressed. Research shows that this physical connection helps reduce stress and strengthens the bond between you and your child, while also supporting your ability to manage big feelings together in a healthy way.

How To Do It

- Hug your child gently.
- Hold the hug for at least 10 seconds, paying attention to your breathing.
- Notice your breath slowing and a sense of calm growing.
- If your child is able, invite them to breathe along with you.

Use this time to show love and presence, helping both of you emotionally reset. This simple hug helps you both feel calmer and closer—and shows your child how to handle big feelings in a healthy way.



Tool 5: Emotion Coaching

Parent + Child Together

A step-by-step way to help your child understand and manage big feelings



Emotion Coaching is a powerful approach that helps you recognize and validate both your own emotions and your child's.

Instead of dismissing or punishing feelings, you guide your child to notice, name, and work through their emotions with your support.

Research shows that Emotion Coaching, compared to approaches that dismiss or punish emotional expression, helps children develop stronger emotional skills, reduces behavioral problems, and deepens your relationship. It teaches both of you how to handle difficult feelings in a healthy, supportive way.

How To Do It

1. **Be Present:** Let your child know you're here for them. Say something like, "I am here. I am present."
2. **Name the Feeling:** Help your child notice and name their emotions. Use a calm voice to say, "It's okay to feel sad."
3. **Connect to the Cause:** Help your child understand what triggered their feelings. For example, "You're feeling sad because your toy broke."
4. **Suggest Comfort:** Offer ways to cope, such as, "When I feel sad, I like hugs. Would a hug help you?"
5. **Find Solutions Together:** Work with your child to decide on next steps. You might ask, "Should we try fixing it or play something else?"

This approach gives you clear, practical words and steps to support your child's emotional experience, helping them feel understood and teaching them healthy ways to manage their feelings.

