

3 ways to help tamariki regulate emotions



Big feelings are part of being human.

They show up for all of us - adults and tamariki alike. Learning to manage them takes time, practice, and support.

When we guide our children with calm curiosity and connection (especially on those days when the toast lands butter-side down), we help them build lifelong skills for managing stress, communicating, and feeling safe in their world.

1

Don't be afraid of emotions



Emotions are natural and signal what's going on for us or our tamariki. When we treat emotions as normal and valid, we show our children that feelings aren't scary or shameful - they're just part of being human.

When your child is upset, try to stay calm and grounded. Offer empathy instead of quick fixes. You might say, "That was really hard for you, eh?" or "I get why you're upset - that didn't feel fair."

Support looks different for every tamaiti. Some might need quiet time to reset, others to let energy out, or simply your calm presence nearby. However they need it, the goal is connection - not correction. **Connection is your superpower.**

3

Have a plan for big emotions



When tamariki are calm, talk about what helps them when they feel upset, angry, or overwhelmed. This builds awareness and gives them tools to reach for when things get tricky.

You might ask, "What helps you when you feel something big?" or "You did a great job calming down yesterday - what helped?" Then make this your calm plan together. It might include taking deep breaths, drawing, listening to music, or heading outside to bounce on the trampoline.

Practise these ideas when everyone's relaxed so they're easier to remember later. Then, when the big feelings arrive, acknowledge how they're feeling and gently remind them of your calm plan: "Hey, remember what helps when things feel big?"

A calm plan works best when it's been practised with smiles, not tears.

2

Kōrero about emotions as normal

The more we talk about feelings in everyday life, the more confident tamariki become in recognising and expressing them.

Reading books about emotions can really help - they're a gentle way to explore what feelings look and feel like. Notice emotions in stories, shows, or daily life and comment on them with curiosity: "That character looks nervous - what do you think might help?"

It also helps to model your own emotions honestly: "I'm feeling frustrated. I just need some space to take a breath."

When emotions become everyday kōrero, like talking about the weather, tamariki learn that feelings come and go, and that's perfectly normal.

Talk about feelings like you'd talk about the weather - they pass, they change, and they're part of life.

What the research says

Research shows that when parents respond to emotions with empathy and warmth - while still keeping boundaries and expectations clear (and with kindness) - tamariki learn to manage stress better, build stronger relationships, and feel more confident over time.

This approach is sometimes called emotion coaching or authoritative parenting and is linked to greater wellbeing and resilience for children (Raising Children Network, 2024; Gottman et al., 1997).

Brought to you by

real parents

Supporting whānau to connect,
understand, and thrive.

www.realparents.org.nz