

Co-regulation, Self-regulation Policy

Autumn 2025 Review: Autumn 2026

Version Control	Date	Actions
1	June 2020	Policy Created Approved at FGB on 30.06.2020
2	September 2022 Nov 2022	Reviewed by Kate Lanning. A section on flexible thinking and safeguarding on page 4 Ratified by Governors at Full Governing Board 29/11/2022. Ratified policy shared with all staff.
3	Nov 2024	Reviewed by Kate Lanning, added age of when children are usually developmentally able to self-regulate on page 1 and added ELSA (a new support) page 4 Ratified by Governors at Full Governing Board 26/11/2024. Ratified policy shared with all staff.
4	Nov 2025	Reviewed by Kate Lanning – changed to be reviewed annually, changed the self-regulation/co-regulation plan, to co-regulation plan Ratified by Governors at Full Governing Board 25/11/2025. Ratified policy shared with all staff.

See Page 5 for Appendixes

Our aim at Tunstall Nursery School is to help children become active, independent learners alongside and in collaboration with others. Self-confidence and self-motivation are the basis of this approach. This policy outlines the strategies we use and the reasons behind them. Understanding children’s cognitive development is key to supporting children’s emotional development. Our staff support children to self-regulate their emotions, by co-regulating; through connection, empathy, clear routines, play, setting limits and mindfulness. All children should feel safe, seen and secure enabling them to self-regulate.

Our school life is based on mutual respect. Everyone is entitled to respect and should be respectful. Respect should be demonstrated in all we do.

Brain development

The human brain takes 25 to 28 years to reach maturity. We recognise that a young child’s brain is still in its infancy, as children are not usually able to self-regulate until they are 7 years old. This is particularly true of the pre-frontal cortex, the rational/thinking area of the brain. The amygdala is the area of the brain which senses danger and can send the body into a state of fight, flight or freeze. When this happens, a person becomes deregulated and cannot see rationally. This is called ‘flipping your lid’ (Appendix 1). Children need to return to a state of calm before they can reason, apologise or make a repair.

Our aim is to support the child’s ‘pre-frontal cortex’ through co-regulation, allowing the child to self-regulate. We do this by:

1. First empathising, which helps the child feel understood.

2. Supporting the child to calm down (Appendix 3).
3. Telling the child 'the story' - talking through what happened, once they are calm.
4. Supporting the child to make a repair (this includes the adult saying sorry for the child, with them near by).
5. Allowing the child to suggest how they might do things differently next time, give options if they are unable to do this.

A child's stage of development needs to be taken into consideration when setting expectations (Appendix 2).

Connection

At Tunstall, we understand that 'connection' is key to helping children self-regulate. The connection they have with their keyworker and adults in the setting is essential to building a child's self-esteem and helping a child self-regulate. A genuine trust and sense of fairness needs to be established so that a child's individual development and needs can be addressed. Staff gain the trust of children by being fair and consistent. Bilingual staff and parental support ensure that the diverse cultures of our children's homes are reflected in our school and expectations.

Empathy

"Empathy is seeing with the eyes of another, listening with the ears of another and feeling with the heart of another."
 – Alfred Adler

Empathy is important, it helps a person feel understood. Whilst we may not always agree with a child's actions or understand their reasons, we aim to always empathise. Naming emotions and empathising with a child helps them to self-regulate by:

- Recognising and naming their feelings.
- Expressing their feelings appropriately.
- Learning to recognise other people's needs and emotions.

Behaviour is a child's way of communicating something is wrong. They are finding something difficult, rather than being manipulative or controlling.

Routines

Routines help children to feel safe and secure and help them understand what will happen next and what is expected of them. Some children may need extra support to follow routines, for example, an adult may hold a child's hand during transition times, show visual prompts to aid understanding or talk through what will happen next.

Play

Play is essential for children. Playful activities provide young children with opportunities to practice self-regulation. Play helps children co-operate with their peers and adults. During play they begin to understand other people's needs and emotions and learn to adapt their play. When children play and have fun, they have improved connection with others. When they laugh, they release oxytocin and other feel-good chemicals, which helps to release tension.

Deregulation

An emotion is a message, which is sent to your brain from your body. It is important that we listen to that message to support ourselves. If we ignore the emotion, it can lead to future mental health problems. For example, telling a child 'No crying' will suggest crying is a bad thing to do rather than a release.

Staff will ensure that any behaviour that may harm a child, member of staff or the environment is stopped immediately, in a firm, but caring way.

Staff will:

- Deal with the matter immediately.
- Stop the behaviour* - children usually respond to a calm assertive adult voice and close physical presence at their level. A clear message is given by staff, i.e. "Waiting".

- Staff would name the child's feelings "You are feeling angry because you want to go on the computer now."
- Staff would support the child to wait for their turn and help children with key phrases, turn taking and social language. "Can I play?" "Your turn next".
- Once the child is calm, tell the story of what happened, i.e. "You wanted to go on the bike, you got angry. You tried to take the bike. We played with the ball whilst we waited for your turn."
- Give children a way of taking responsibility. "I am waiting. When you are ready, you can pick up the toy..."
- Ask the child what they could do next time or offer a solution if needed.

*When a child is not hurt and no property damaged, staff may use distraction or ignore certain behaviour.

If another child is hurt then staff will:

- First comfort the child who is hurt.
- Say sorry to the child who is hurt "I am sorry you were hurt. x felt really cross, they are learning to take turns". This helps other children to understand the child's behaviour.
- Support the child, who hurt the other child, to calm down.
- Try to establish with all the participants what was happening - this involves active listening and supporting the children in expressing the situation.
- Give a clear statement as to why it is unacceptable, "Hitting hurts".
- Help in reconciliation for example, by going with the child to see if the friend is alright. The child may say sorry but if the child is not ready to say sorry and mean it, the adult should model saying sorry for the child. Giving eye contact should not be insisted upon, an apology and sense of being sorry is a difficult concept for a child under 5 and in some cultures eye contact is a sign of disrespect.
- Once the child is calm, tell the story of what happened, i.e. "You wanted to go on the bike, you got angry. You hit your friend. We got your friend ice to make them feel better."
- Ask the child what they could do next time or offer a solution if need be.

We support all children to use a problem-solving approach to resolve conflicts between children. (See appendix 4)

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a technique to help us to stay calm, recognise and understand different emotions. At Tunstall we teach mindfulness by:

- Naming children's feelings and empathising.
- Talking about children's different emotions, when they are frustrated, excited, happy, sad, or angry.
- Mindful deep breathing, creative activities such as clay.
- Talking with children about where they feel emotion in their bodies e.g. they have a sore tummy when they are nervous.

Limit setting – All emotions are acceptable, but not all behaviours

When a child is having difficulty self-regulating and needs support to calm down adults will help them by 'co-regulation'. This is first and foremost done through empathising and setting a limit, for example, "You are sad, your turn next". If the behaviour is repeated over a period of time, then the child is removed from the activity/situation. Adults would say "It's finished" or "You need to go inside".

If the child is still feeling deregulated, then they need time with an adult who will help them calm down, this may include sitting in the calm down area and taking deep breaths or using a toy or a prop to help the child calm (Appendix 3). When the child has calmed down the adult will tell the story of what happened, accepting the child's feelings whilst explaining that the behaviour was unacceptable, i.e., "Hitting hurts".

If a child is upset the adult will let the child know they are there for them. For example, "I can see you are really upset, I am going to be just here."

Connection-Seeking Behaviour

When a behaviour is repeated, this is understood to be the child connection-seeking. If the child is seeking connection, a child will be given connection, through time with an adult. Adults will observe and try to understand the trigger or the child's need for attention. If the behaviour is ongoing, then the triggers and supportive strategies will be discussed with all staff and shared with parents to ensure consistent approach. A 'Co-regulation Plan' will be put in place, which will set out the strategies to support the child's self-regulation through co-regulation to minimise incidents.

In addition, staff should:

- Ensure the child is not discussed in front of other children and parents, fuelling the perception that this is a 'naughty' child.
- Ensure one person takes the lead in supporting the child's regulation skills to provide a consistent approach and make sure that the bigger picture is understood.
- Ask for help or ask another member of staff to take over if necessary.
- **Notice what the child does well. Children respond to praise. Praise is an important tool and is most effective when used specifically.**

If the child is still having difficulty, then they may be referred, with parental agreement, either for ELSA support in nursery or to other agencies for an input of professional help and advice - such as Health Visitors, Croydon Early Learning Primary Prevention Team, Community Paediatrician or Educational Psychology service.

Flexible Thinking

At Tunstall we recognise that sometimes children may struggle to find solutions due to rigid thinking. Flexible thinking and problem solving are essential skills for children to resolve conflicts and to manage their emotions. Children need to learn these thinking skills to support their self-regulation. To support children to become flexible thinkers' adults will model their own thinking out loud, offer choices and make suggestions when problem solving.

Safeguarding

In order for children to self-regulate they must feel safe, therefore safeguarding is at the heart of what we do. All staff undergo annual safeguarding training and annual prevent training. If they have any concerns about a child's behaviour in relation to radicalisation or safeguarding, they will report concerns to the Designated Safeguarding Lead. During daily evaluations staff discuss any safeguarding concerns or children who may need additional support. We constantly review procedures for supporting children's self-regulation.

If a child brings something inappropriate to nursery staff may confiscate the item and put it in a safe place until their parents/carers come to collect them. Staff would talk through what they are doing to the child, for example, "I just need to put your bag up here, till your mum comes to get you." When the item is in the child's pocket, we would ask children to take it out by modelling and taking something out of our pocket and putting it in our 'Opps box.' If they refused staff might need to help them empty their pocket. The same strategy would be used if a child puts something from nursery into their bag or pocket.

At Tunstall, we aim to foster an environment where when mistakes are made, the person is not blamed or punished, but instead learns how to fix them.

We will be reviewing this policy to ensure that all stated actions are examined to see how far we can use such actions to promote racial equality, counteract racism and foster good race relations.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Flipping your lid

The area of the brain called the amygdala would ensure survival by sending a message to run (flight), fight, freeze (play dead) or fawn (do everything that is asked of them). The amygdala would shut down parts of the body not needed, in order to react more quickly. In modern day life everyday problems can appear as a threat. For a young child this could be not having a turn when they want it or having to tidy up in the middle of their play. Our pre-frontal cortex is the part of the brain helps us to be rational. When we become deregulated our pre-frontal cortex 'separates' from the rest of our brain. Dr Daniel Siegel calls this 'Flipping your lid'. We need to return to a state of calm, before we can be rational. The more we understand our feelings and practice mindfulness the more we are able to self-regulate.

See this link for Dr Dan Siegel explaining his hand model of the brain.

https://www.drdansiegel.com/resources/everyday_mindsight_tools/

Here is a video that can be used with children, age appropriately.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bKuoH8CkFc&feature=youtu.be>

Appendix 2: Ages and stages

2-3 year olds

At this age, children can often become frustrated because:

- Their physical abilities are often not as developed as they would like.
- They do not yet have the language skills to express their wants and needs.
- Their amygdala is taking the lead and they have little control of their pre-frontal cortex.
- They are egocentric and find it hard to see someone else's point of view.
- They have big feelings and emotions.

They benefit from:

- Adults using actions as well as words, e.g. kindly helping a child stop rather than just telling them.
- Adult empathy and help.
- An environment where they feel safe and secure and can freely play.

3-4 year olds

As a child gets nearer to 4 their tantrums should reduce. Children want more independence but still need to be nurtured. They have new fears as they become more aware of the world. They have little impulse control and emotions can still overwhelm a child.

They benefit from:

- Being given as much independence as possible.
- Allowing them to take risks (not hazards).
- Giving them choices so they feel in control.

Appendix 3: Supporting a child to become calm

- Empathise and stay close.
- Take deep breaths with the child (even if the child does not join in).
- Use bubbles to help the child to take breaths.
- Finish an activity.
- Take the child to play somewhere else, or distract, if appropriate.
- Tell the story.

Appendix 4: Solving problems and resolving conflicts.

1. Approach quickly and calmly.

2. Acknowledge feelings, by making simple statements.
3. Gather information.
4. Restate the problem-use children's language.
5. Ask for solutions and choose one together.
6. Give follow-up support. Check later that the solution has worked.