

Zones of Regulation

Definition

The Zones of Regulation is a cognitive behaviour approach for helping students self-regulate their behaviours, emotions, and sensory needs. By using concepts and visuals to help students learn to recognise their feelings and level of arousal, it allows them to employ strategies for optimal learning.

The Goals of the Zones of Regulation

- identify their feelings and levels of alertness
- develop effective regulation tools
- learn when and how to use the tools
- problem solve positive solutions
- understand how their behaviours influence thoughts and feelings
- ultimately – develop independent regulation

The Zones uses 4 colours to help students self-identify how they are feeling in the moment and helps them to recognise the emotional feelings and current alertness that they are experiencing at that time.

The Four Zones of Regulation

- **Blue Zone**: low level of arousal; not ready to learn; feels sad, sick, tired, bored, moving slowly.
- **Green Zone**: calm state of alertness; optimal level to learn; feels happy, calm, feeling okay, focused.
- **Yellow Zone**: heightened state of alertness; elevated emotions; has some control; feels frustrated, worried, silly/wiggly, excited, loss of some control.
- **Red Zone**: heightened state of alertness and intense emotions; not an optimal level for learning; out of control; feels mad/angry, terrified, yelling/hitting, elated, out of control.

What Zone are you in?

- **Blue Zone** – your body is running slow, like when you're tired, sick, sad or bored.
- **Green Zone** – like a green light, you feel "good to go". Your body may feel happy, calm and focused.
- **Yellow Zone** – when you start to lose control, like when you feel frustrated, anxious, worried, silly or surprised. Use caution when you are in this zone.
- **Red Zone** – when you experience extreme emotions. When you are in this zone, you are out of control, you have trouble making good decisions, and you need to STOP!

The Zones can be compared to a traffic signs.

- When given a green light you are good to go.
- A yellow light means caution or a warning. Slow down, take some action.
- A red light means stop. You need to stop and regain control.
- A blue light is like pulling over to a rest area when your tired to recharge or refuel.

It is important to remember that everyone experiences all of the Zones at one time or another and that the Red and Yellow Zones are not the 'bad' or 'naughty' zones.

Tools for Regulation

For the Blue Zone – increase arousal:

- think happy thoughts
- talk about your feelings
- rub hands together
- run on the spot
- shoulder rub
- ask for a hug
- swinging or spinning
- stretching or jumping jacks
- strong scents
- vibration
- drink water
- bright lights
- listening to loud music

For the Green Zone – maintaining:

- keep your eyes on the teacher
- remember your 'golden reminders'
- think happy thoughts
- be a good friend
- help others
- work hard
- smile

For the Yellow – decrease arousal:

- talk to my parents/friends
- take 3 deep breaths
- do a wall push up
- use a fidget
- go for a walk
- take a break
- read
- deep pressure
- slow movement
- soft lighting
- listen to music

For the Red Zones – decrease arousal:

- take three deep breaths
- how big is my problem – the size of your reaction should match the size of the problem. How big do others see the problem? How big should your reaction be?
- jump on a trampoline
- relax your muscles
- talk to an adult
- sensory break
- push the wall
- count to 20
- walk away
- deep pressure
- slow movement
- soft lighting
- listen to music

The Zones provides the tools needed by the student to regulate what Zone they are in and be able to move into different zones.

Modelling the Zones as Adults

An important aspect of this approach is for all staff to know, understand and model the Zone language. This then creates a safe environment for the pupil to practice their self-regulation skills.

It also helps the pupil to learn the skills more quickly and be able to apply them in many situations.

There are many ways you can support the pupils, here are some examples:

- Make comments out loud, so that pupils can understand that it is natural that we all experience the different Zones and use strategies to regulate ourselves. “This is really frustrating me and making me go into the Yellow Zone. I need to use a tool to calm myself down. I will take some deep breaths.”
- Help the pupil gain awareness of their Zones by pointing out your observation. “I can see you are finding this tricky and it’s putting you into the Yellow Zone.”
- Validate what Zone the pupil is in and help them come up with tools to self-regulate.
- Help the pupil become comfortable using the language to communicate their feelings and needs by encouraging the pupil to share what Zone they are in with you.
- Show interest in learning about the pupils triggers and their Zone tools.
- Make sure to positively reinforce pupils for recognising their Zones and managing their behaviours while in it, rather than only pointing out when students are demonstrating unexpected behaviours whilst in a Zone.