



R is for Regulation

AARMA Principle #3 – Calm brain = productive brain

The third AARMA Superpower is **Regulation** — helping our children recognise and manage their emotional responses so their **Wise Handler Brain** can stay in charge. **Calm brains learn best.**

Regulation

A calm brain is a productive brain. When emotions run high, the Guard Dog Brain barks, taking over the controls. Regulation teaches kids to soothe that Guard Dog, regain balance, and make wiser choices — a life skill that underpins learning, relationships, and resilience.

The Guard Dog brain and the Wise Handler literally cannot operate at the same time. It's like a see-saw in the brain. It's one or the other, and the Guard Dog always gets the first look as it's the protection mechanism and it has to bark 'just in case' there is a threat or danger.

The science

When a child (or adult) feels angry, frustrated, or scared, the **Guard Dog Brain** (amygdala) takes charge. It's wired to protect, not to think — flooding the body with stress chemicals and temporarily switching off the **Wise Handler Brain** (prefrontal cortex), which manages reasoning, empathy, and problem-solving.

That's why we can't "teach sense" to a child or teen mid-tantrum — their thinking brain is offline. They're not refusing to listen; they're *unable* to. Only once the Guard Dog settles can the Wise Handler return to work. That's why Regulation isn't about discipline first — it's about calm first.

Every time a child learns to pause, breathe, or take space before reacting, they're strengthening the brain pathways that help them manage emotions in the future.



Our job as big humans



Our job is to *lend our calm* until our little humans can find their own. That's called **co-regulation** — when a caring adult's steady presence helps a child's nervous system settle. Regulation is not about getting children to suppress their emotions — it's about helping them to learn to handle them wisely. We want our children to notice, accept and feel *all* their feelings, but also to know how to steer and regulate them safely.

By teaching calm strategies, we're not "fixing" behaviour; we're helping children build the internal tools to manage stress and stay in control — now and into adulthood. It's slow work, but every small moment of calm under pressure is a huge win for the developing brain. Regulation starts with us — because our calm is contagious.

Classroom (or home) activity

Primary (little humans): Create 'Colour my Calm'. Ask children to draw or colour what calm looks, feels, or sounds like. Or simply allow some quite colouring time. They can use their creations as a visual reminder when things get heated or upset.

Secondary (teens/mid-sized humans): Invite students to build a 'Reset Playlist'. Choose songs that shift mood or focus. Discuss how music affects emotion and energy.

Tips for educators, parents and carers

- Practice your own self-regulation when you are upset: take slow breaths, lower your voice, soften your tone. If you lose your cool, apologise. Show what calming down looks like.
- Begin lessons or routines with a 2-minute calm-down ritual — breathing, stretching, or quiet focus.
- When emotions run high, pause the conversation rather than push through. "I can see you are really upset. Let's take a moment together."
- Name what you notice: "Your Guard Dog is barking — let's calm it before we talk."
- Keep your tone low, slow and even — your calm tells their brain it's safe.
- Celebrate recovery moments: "You calmed down quickly — that's your Wise Handler getting stronger!"

Book a chat with us



**Helping our Little Humans
grow into BETTER Big
Humans!**

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the **Better Me**
project