



GREAT LEIGHS PARENT GUIDE

Understanding the Zones of Regulation®

A shared language for recognising feelings, understanding our bodies and choosing helpful regulation tools

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What are the Zones of Regulation?

The Zones of Regulation is a framework that helps children notice and name their feelings, energy and level of alertness. It gives children and adults a shared language for talking about what is happening in the brain and body, and for choosing tools that may help. The long-term aim is not to control feelings, but to develop emotional awareness, co-regulation and increasingly independent self-regulation.

The most important message

All four Zones are natural and expected. There is no “good” Zone or “bad” Zone, and Green is not the only acceptable place to be. A Zone describes an internal state; it does not excuse unsafe or unkind behaviour.

Why we use this approach at Great Leighs

- It builds a richer vocabulary for emotions, energy and body signals.
- It helps children communicate what they need before feelings become overwhelming.
- It supports adults to respond with curiosity, connection and calm co-regulation.
- It helps children build a personal “toolbox” of strategies and reflect on which tools work in different situations.
- It complements our Building Learning Powers approach by strengthening resilience, reflection and readiness to learn.

Three ideas to remember

Name it: Children learn to recognise their Zone, feelings and body clues.

Understand it: They consider what may have changed their energy or emotions and what the situation requires.

Regulate it: With adult support, they choose, try and review a suitable tool. This is a skill that develops with practice.

THE FOUR ZONES

What might each Zone feel like?

The examples below are a starting point: every child experiences and shows feelings differently.

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BLUE ZONE

Low energy or slowed down

You might notice: tiredness, sadness, boredom, feeling unwell, moving or speaking slowly

Tools might include: rest, a drink or snack, gentle movement, fresh air, quiet connection, asking for help

GREEN ZONE

Calm, settled and ready

You might notice: feeling content, focused, comfortable, connected or steady

Tools might include: continuing the activity, a small movement break, positive self-talk, maintaining a helpful routine

YELLOW ZONE

Heightened energy or alertness

You might notice: worry, frustration, excitement, silliness, fidgeting, racing thoughts or butterflies

Tools might include: slow breathing, movement, sensory support, reducing demands, talking to a trusted adult, breaking a task into steps

RED ZONE

Very intense energy or emotion

You might notice: rage, panic, elation, terror, feeling out of control or overwhelmed

Tools might include: adult co-regulation, safety and space, fewer words, rhythmic breathing or movement, time to recover before talking

A child may be in more than one Zone at once—for example, tired (Blue) and worried (Yellow). Children may also look calm on the outside while experiencing strong feelings internally. We avoid assuming a Zone from behaviour alone.

Feelings are accepted; behaviour still has boundaries

We accept and validate the feeling while keeping everyone safe. A useful message is: “It is okay to feel angry. It is not okay to hurt someone. I will help you get safe and calm; then we can repair what happened.” Reflection, responsibility and repair are most effective after the child has regained enough regulation to think and talk.

Different tools for different people

A strategy is not automatically calming for everyone. Movement may settle one child and increase another child's energy. Adults help children notice the effect of a tool, rather than insisting that one response works for all.

SUPPORTING REGULATION AT HOME

Connection before correction

Children borrow calm from trusted adults before they can reliably regulate themselves.

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A simple five-step response

- 1. Regulate yourself** — Pause, soften your voice and reduce the number of words you use.
- 2. Connect and notice** — “I can see this is hard. I’m here.” Describe what you observe without judgement.
- 3. Be curious** — When your child can respond, ask: “What Zone are you noticing?” or “What is your body telling you?”
- 4. Offer a small choice** — “Would movement or quiet help?” “Would you like me close by or a little space?” Avoid offering too many options.
- 5. Reflect later** — Once calm has returned, briefly discuss what helped, what needs repairing and what might be tried next time.

Useful language

- “All feelings are welcome. I will help you stay safe.”
- “Which Zone are you noticing? There is no wrong answer.”
- “Where do you feel that in your body?”
- “What does your body need right now?”
- “Would you like help choosing a tool?”
- “That tool did not help this time. What could we try next?”
- “I am in the Yellow Zone too, so I am going to slow my breathing before we talk.”

Build a home toolbox together

Choose a small number of realistic tools and practise them when everyone is calm. A toolbox might include:

- slow breathing, counting or a short mindfulness activity
- stretching, walking, wall pushes, dancing or outdoor play
- a quiet space, comfort object, music, drawing or reading
- water, a snack, sleep, fresh air or a change of sensory input
- talking, asking for help, using a feelings scale or writing thoughts down

Try, notice, review

Ask: “How did your body feel before?” “What changed?” and “Would this tool help in the same situation next time?”
The goal is flexible choice, not a fixed list of rewards or consequences.

QUESTIONS PARENTS OFTEN ASK

Keeping home and school language consistent

A calm, non-judgemental approach helps children feel understood while learning responsibility.

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Should I ask my child to “get back to Green”?

Not necessarily. Green may support some learning tasks, but every Zone is valid and different situations need different levels of energy. Focus on what the child needs and what the situation requires.

Can a child choose their Zone?

Feelings and body states are not simply chosen. Children can gradually learn to notice them and make choices about tools and behaviour, with developmentally appropriate adult support.

What if my child will not name a Zone?

Do not force a label during distress. Offer calm presence and return to the conversation later. You might model your own Zone or offer simple words such as “low energy” or “very alert”.

Does the Red Zone mean a child is naughty?

No. Red describes intense emotion or energy, not character or intent. Unsafe behaviour still needs a clear boundary, followed by support, reflection and repair.

Why does my child cope at school and become overwhelmed at home?

Some children use considerable effort to manage the school day and release feelings when they reach a safe place. Reduce demands, offer connection and allow recovery before asking detailed questions.

Is this a diagnosis or therapy?

No. It is an educational framework and shared language. It does not diagnose a condition or replace advice from qualified health professionals.

Working together

Please speak to your child’s class teacher if you would like to compare the language or tools that help at home and school. If emotional distress is persistent, severe, affects daily life or raises a safety concern, contact an appropriate health professional. For an immediate safeguarding concern, follow the school’s published safeguarding procedures.

Find out more

Official information: [zonesofregulation.com](https://www.zonesofregulation.com)

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