



Understanding Co-regulation



What is Co-regulation?

Co-regulation is the interactive process by which caregivers, teachers, and other providers of those with autism (1) provide warm supportive interaction, (2) promote self-regulation through coaching, modeling, and gentle feedback, and (3) structure calm and supportive environments. Over time, repeated co-regulation helps children and adults with autism develop self-regulation. Self-regulation grows out of co-regulation.

Before Behavior Occurs

Behavior is often the final signal of a nervous system that is overwhelmed. Before a meltdown or shutdown, a child or adult with autism may already be carrying stress from:

- Sensory overload, triggers, or anticipation
- Hunger, pain, discomfort, or lack of sleep
- Transitions or changes
- Communication challenges
- Unpredictable environments
- Too many demands
- Loss of access to comfort items or methods
- Going through puberty

Co-regulation helps reduce this load before it becomes a crisis.

Co-Regulation Can Include

- A calm voice and body language
- Reassurance and emotional support
- Helping a person feel safe after distress
- Lowering lights, sounds, stimuli
- Guiding breathing or calming strategies
- Providing structure and predictability
- Allowing safe stimming
- Maintaining patience and understanding



Co-Regulation is Everyone's Job

Co-regulation is a system, not a solo job. Parents are not meant to carry regulation alone. Autistic children and adults develop within systems that include families, relatives, neighbors schools, healthcare providers, first responders, and community environments. When environments are overwhelming, unpredictable, or unaccommodating, the burden of regulation falls heavily on caregivers. This, along with judgment, assumptions, and lack of support, can make co-regulation more difficult for families.

