

Traffic Lights and Regulation for the Family

Traffic Lights, how to use them, and to respond when they are red.

Our young people learn early on that when traffic lights are **green** because it is safe to go. We need to slow down at **amber** lights, and we need to stop when they are **red**.

Using this analogy around regulation can be permission giving in families with young children. All of us need to monitor and manage our moods, emotions, and behaviours so don't see this as about hard and fast rules - make it work for you and your circumstances.

Here are some ideas we have found helpful:

- Brainstorm about what kinds of things each of you like to do in **green**. Have this as a whole family activity and make it an ongoing conversation over time. Make it part of your family language.
- What sorts of things you notice and feel in your body as you head toward **amber** and are there helpful things that help you slow down, stay in **amber**, or return to **green**?
- What do each of you notice in **red**, do you head there quickly, is it a slow build up? It may be different at different times.

Note that when a child gets to **red** it is not about calling "time out" or discipline for behaviour. We are wanting to give permission for our children to create safe spaces when they are heading toward the **red** zone. This makes it feel safer to use red zone strategies and learn to use them when needed.

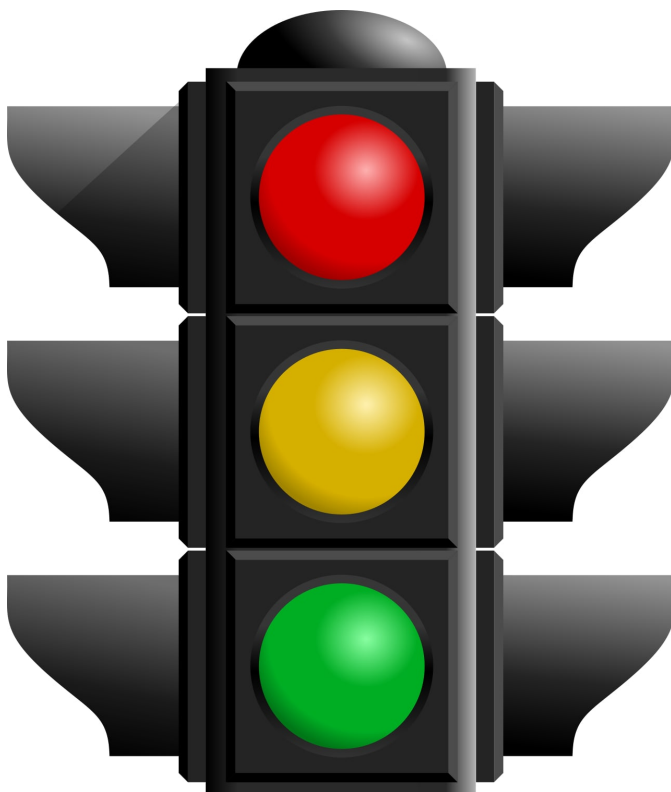
To begin with you may need to co-regulate – be with your children as they become familiar with **red**, **amber** and **green**. With time, practise, age and with emotional maturity, this can become a positive experience and we hope our children learn to use their safe places or self-regulating strategies for themselves.

Some simple ideas include:

- Indoor cubby (children often like a small cosy space to regulate in) Blankets over chairs and tables – be as creative as your space allows, hiding under a pile of pillows or a beanbag.
- Hiding under a bed with a 'doing thing' ie coloring, beating a small drum, poplets are popular right now and work a treat in that little space under the bed.

- Colouring (regulating because it is rhythmic)
- Drumming, or other rhythmic instruments.
- Jumping on a trampoline or even a small exercise tramp.
- Mini Sand or Rice Box (have a plastic container full of rice or sand that you and or your child simply runs their hands through.) I have plenty of adult clients who have and use this strategy. Sand is a natural element and is very regulating.
- Create a soothing box – this is a box your child can decorate for themselves, and you and they find things together to put in it, so when they get toward **amber**, the soothing box is ready to pull out. It may have smooth pebbles that feel good, a fuzzy toy, a poplet, a small coloring book, again whatever works for your circumstances. Mobile versions of this can be created in a pencil case or small carry bag for on to go. (Remember these are kept for regulation times and not just when boredom is kicking in)

Use the traffic light below or design your own. Remembering that if your family all begin using this language it will make it easier for your child. Begin when everybody is calm and start using it as normal language so when you need it, it is already familiar.



Red

What do I feel and do when I'm in red? What are the safe places for me to go to? What helps me get back to green?

Amber

What do I feel in amber? What helps get me back to green?

Green

What do I feel when I'm safe in green? What helps me stay here?