

What is an Individual Co-Regulation Plan?

An **Individual Co-Regulation Plan** is a personalised approach that helps an adult support a child to manage their emotions, behaviour, attention and feelings through warm, responsive relationships. Rather than expecting a child to regulate independently, practitioners work alongside the child, providing the emotional support, guidance and strategies they need until they are able to use these skills more independently.

Co-regulation recognises that young children are still developing the parts of the brain responsible for self-regulation. When children become overwhelmed, anxious, frustrated, excited or dysregulated, they often need a trusted adult to help them feel safe, calm and understood before they can engage in learning or problem-solving.

An Individual Co-Regulation Plan identifies:

- The child's strengths, interests and positive relationships.
- Situations, environments or triggers that may lead to dysregulation.
- Early signs that indicate a child may be becoming overwhelmed.
- Specific co-regulation strategies that are effective for that individual child.
- How adults will respond consistently to support the child's emotional wellbeing.
- Ways to help the child gradually develop their own self-regulation skills over time.

The plan should be developed collaboratively with parents/carers and, where appropriate, other professionals involved with the child. It should be reviewed regularly to ensure strategies remain effective as the child's needs change.

The aim of an Individual Co-Regulation Plan is not to control behaviour but to build a child's capacity to understand and manage their emotions, feel secure in relationships, and successfully participate in everyday experiences. By providing consistent, attuned support, practitioners help children develop resilience, emotional literacy and self-regulation skills that form the foundation for future learning and wellbeing.

For early years practitioners, an Individual Co-Regulation Plan should be practical, concise and focused on what adults will do to support the child. The plan should be based on observations, discussions with parents/carers, and knowledge of the child's strengths and needs.

A good co-regulation plan should fit on one or two pages and be easy for all practitioners to read and implement consistently across the setting.

Steps to Create an Individual Co-Regulation Plan

1. Gather Information

Start by building a clear picture of the child:

- What are their strengths, interests and motivators?
- What helps them feel safe and secure?
- What do parents/carers notice at home?
- Are there any developmental, communication, sensory or additional needs that may impact regulation?

2. Identify Triggers

Consider situations that may lead to dysregulation, such as:

- Transitions
- Loud environments
- Waiting or sharing
- Unfamiliar adults
- Difficult tasks
- Separation from parents/carers
- Changes to routine

Focus on understanding the reason behind the behaviour rather than simply describing the behaviour itself.

The regulation continuum:

3. Recognise Early Signs

Identify what the child does before becoming distressed or overwhelmed.

Examples may include:

- Becoming quieter than usual
- Pacing or wandering
- Covering ears
- Clinging to adults
- Increased movement
- Changes in facial expression
- Refusing activities

Recognising early signs allows adults to intervene before the child reaches a crisis point.

4. Agree Adult Responses

This is the most important part of the plan.

Specify exactly how practitioners will respond, for example:

- Use a calm, reassuring voice.

- Get down to the child's level.
- Acknowledge feelings.
- Reduce language and give simple instructions.
- Offer a sensory resource.
- Support the child to move to a quieter area.
- Provide visual cues.
- Stay nearby until the child feels regulated.

Ensure all staff use the same agreed approaches consistently.

5. Include Prevention Strategies

Consider what can be put in place proactively, such as:

- Visual timetables
- Warning before transitions
- Predictable routines
- Access to sensory tools
- Regular movement breaks
- Opportunities for choice and control
- Key person support

6. Plan for Recovery and Learning

Once the child is calm:

- Reconnect with the child.
- Reflect on what happened using age-appropriate language.
- Help identify feelings.
- Celebrate successful regulation strategies.
- Avoid lengthy discussions when emotions are still high.

7. Review Regularly

Monitor:

- Which strategies are working?
- Have triggers changed?
- Is the child beginning to use strategies independently?

Review with parents/carers and professionals as needed.