In their early years, children are just beginning to learn about feelings and how to manage them in their relationships with others. From time to time most young children may display behaviours such as aggression, emotional outbursts and inattention. These are usually due to them feeling overwhelmed for some reason. Many adults overestimate the ability of young children to manage their emotions on their own.

Parents and carers can help children manage their emotions by:

1. **Being calm**
   - By demonstrating calmness and staying in control of your own feelings and behaviours you are providing a positive blueprint for children to learn from.
   - Understanding and managing your own emotions will help you to be relaxed and calm for the children in your care.
   - Learning to recognise when a child ‘pushes your buttons’ and developing ways to manage these situations will minimise stress and enable positive experiences for everyone.
   - Have conversations with others to share experiences and strategies. This also helps to reduce feelings of isolation (e.g., ‘you are not on your own’).

Useful questions to ask yourself:

- How do you know when you are feeling overwhelmed or stressed?
- What pushes your buttons? (that is, what aspects of children’s behaviour do you react to?)
- What do you do to help keep yourself calm and manage your own emotions? Does it work?
- What else could you try?

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1From http://journal.naey.org/btj/200607/Gillespie709BTJ.pdf
2. Helping children be calm

Observe closely
- Become a skilled observer to increase your understanding of children’s behaviour. Use knowledge of how each child takes in information, seeks emotional connection and communicates to help them manage their emotions.

Respond
- Acknowledge, encourage and respond to children’s communications.
- Use positive touch where appropriate such as holding, patting or touching gently on the arm or shoulder.
- Show appropriate levels of emotion in your interactions with children.

Provide structure and predictability
- Have age-appropriate routines and limits.

Arrange developmentally appropriate environments
- Avoid competitive experiences for young children (e.g., by having enough of the same toy available for several children or playing more cooperative games).
- Include relaxation breaks in the day (e.g., stretching, aerobic exercise, quiet time).

Show empathy and care
- Try to see things from the child’s perspective and understand their motives. This helps you to ward off any potential problems and respond quickly and appropriately when challenges do arise.

Useful questions to ask yourself:
- How do you know when a child is feeling overwhelmed or stressed?
- What do you do to help them become calmer? Does it work?
- What else could you try?
- What do they do to become calmer themselves?

Learning to manage emotions helps children feel confident and capable.

3. Helping children learn to manage their emotions on their own

When children know that they can make themselves and others feel better they feel confident, capable and more in control. Parents and carers can help children learn to manage their feelings, resolve conflicts, and respond to the emotions expressed by others by teaching them ways to reduce stress and maintain a calm state. These include teaching children to:
- minimise stress and optimise ‘feel good’ hormones through breathing techniques, exercise, positive social experiences, diet and rest
- watch and learn from how others manage their strong emotions
- problem solve ways of managing situations that prompt strong emotions for them (e.g., having a calm thought, moving away)
- express their emotions in productive ways such as drawing, acting with toys or with playdough.