

Tool of the Week Guide



The *Tool of the Week* provides a routine to introduce, practice, and reflect on regulation tools over time. This practice is designed to be quick (about 3–5 mins/day) and can be layered-in with your instruction as you move forward with Zones Concepts to expose learners to a variety of new regulation tools. Ultimately, the *Tool of the Week* supports a learner's agency, giving them the knowledge and experience to customize their Zones Toolbox with their preferred and effective regulation strategies.

WHEN TO START USING TOOL OF THE WEEK?

Starting with Concept 8, teach a new *Tool of the Week* every week as you continue forward in The Zones of Regulation Curriculum. Consider pausing direct instruction of Zones Concepts after Concept 8 to give learners more exposure and experience with new tools before progressing to the more metacognitive concepts (C9 and C10). If learners have prior knowledge of The Zones of Regulation, can reliably identify their Zones, and have familiarity with using the Zones to categorize tools, exploration can begin sooner.

TYPES OF TOOLS

Tools of the Week are divided into the following types, or categories, of tools:

- **Sensory and Movement Tools:** Help us to engage and regulate through our senses.
- **Mindfulness Tools:** Help us bring awareness to our mind and body in the present moment.
- **Connection Tools:** Help us build and access healthy relationships with others to support regulation.
- **Thinking and Planning Tools:*** Help us use higher level thinking and problem-solving to regulate.

*Note that the cognitive nature of these tools makes them less accessible for some learners. When working with learners in the early stages of their regulation development, consider starting with the other categories first.

Don't limit your tool exploration to only the ones in *Tool of the Week*, they are just the tip of the iceberg! Try a wide range of regulation tools with your learners, using your knowledge of their development, preferences, and needs as your guide. Also remember, a tool doesn't need to be a therapeutic object or procedure. A tool might be the glass of water you have next to you, the activity you enjoy in your free time, or something unique that you do that helps you regulate.



HOW TO TEACH A TOOL OF THE WEEK

Start at the beginning of the week so learners have plenty of opportunities to practice and evaluate how the tool works for them by the week's end.

- Pick a consistent time when you can devote 5 minutes to the process described below, such as, morning meeting, a transition after lunch, or the start of a session or family meeting.
- Refer to Concepts 7 and 8 for vocabulary and strategies for categorizing regulation tools into Zones and reflecting on how they impact regulation.

SAMPLE TOOL OF THE WEEK 5-DAY INSTRUCTION PLAN

Here is a sample weekly routine to introduce and reinforce new regulation tools.

~5-min practice sessions. Allow extra time at end of week to fill out reflections/toolboxes.

Monday	Tuesday – Thursday	Friday
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Select and introduce the new <i>Tool of the Week</i>.• Leader models and invites learners to practice together and reflect on what they notice.• Post <i>Tool of the Week</i> visual (and tool if applicable) in accessible location.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Daily: Review, model, practice, and reflect on the tool while gradually transitioning from Leader-led modeling to Learner-led instruction to peers.• Prompt learners to practice trying out the tool during the week.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learner-led or partner practice.• Complete Zones Tools Reflection and discuss different perspectives.• Add tool to community and/or personal Zones Toolboxes (if effective).

ONGOING ZONES CLIMATE PRACTICES

Share the *Tool of the Week* handout with supportive team members. Model using the tool real-time to support your own regulation. Co-regulate with learners real-time to support them in using the tool to reinforce their use of the tool independently.



TOOL OF THE WEEK HANDOUT

Share each *Tool of the Week* handout with other team members, such as families/caregivers, teachers, therapists, and other care providers, just as you do with the Zones Bridge in each concept. This promotes further reinforcement and encourages learners to practice the new tools across settings and environments.

TOOL TIPS

- **Modeling matters:** Demonstrating and reflecting on using tools as an adult is incredibly impactful for learners. You can use phrases such as: *"I'm going to pause and use a tool before we start our activity"* or *"I'm feeling really sleepy, I'm going use one of my Blue Zone tools and drink some water,"* or *"I was really frustrated about _____ yesterday and needed to take some deep breaths to be able to manage my Yellow Zone."*
- **Regulation tools are for well-being, not compliance:** Tools are not a behavior management or compliance technique, although being in control of one's behavior is often a byproduct of using a tool effectively.
- **Empower learners to explore and determine which tools work for them:** Tools are not "one size fits all." They will differ from person to person, and from Zone to Zone. Part of gaining independence in regulation is trying out new tools over time, and reflecting on which ones help toward goals, jobs/tasks, and well-being.
- **Tools are a choice, not a mandate:** Always provide the option to use a tool without forcing it. This will encourage learners to develop agency in regulation.
- **Tools vs. toys:** Many new tools or techniques have a "novelty effect" that will diminish over time. Thoroughly model how to effectively use a particular tool, allow opportunities to explore the tool, and help learners notice when it is interfering with their ability to meet their goals.
- **Acknowledge when learners make an attempt to "try" a tool:** Even if it doesn't work well in the moment, it is likely a step in the right direction to building regulation skills.
- **Teach tools over time:** We encourage you to continue introducing and practicing new tools while also revisiting previously taught tools to keep them in the front of mind.
- **Consider creating a positive reinforcement system:** For example, use a tally charts or [Tool Tickets](#), to celebrate learners' attempts at using the tool in real-time.

Tool of the Week

Ocean Breaths

Check-in
Pause to notice how you feel before using the tool. Pay special attention to your body signals.

Practice
Imagine waves washing up on a beach as you take deep breaths.
Follow these steps:
1. Breathe in and imagine your breath pulling a wave to shore.
2. Breathe out and imagine your breath pushing the water back out to sea.
3. Continue the deep breathing, noticing how the sound and feel of your breath are like ocean waves.
WHY TO TRY:
Deep breathing brings oxygen throughout your body, relaxing your muscles and steadying your heartbeat. Focusing on your breath is a healthy mindfulness practice that helps you connect to the present moment.
Try to find a moment each day of the week to practice the tool.

Reflect
Notice how the tool affects your feelings and body signals. Which Zone(s) could it help you regulate?

THE ZONES OF REGULATION

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LOOKING FOR MORE REGULATION TOOLS?

The Zones *Tools to Try Cards for Kids* (ages 5–10) and *Tools to Try for Teens and Tweens* (ages 10+) (Kuypers & Sautter, 2020) include over 50 tool cards. These two separate decks are an easy, user-friendly way to introduce regulation strategies and empower learners to choose tools that work best for them. Each strategy card displays the regulation tool on one side and a how-to-do-it description on the reverse, along with a metacognitive self-reflection.

Available in PRINT as heavy duty 2-sided cards at socialthinking.com/Products/zones-of-regulation-tools-to-try-cards-for-all-ages-bundle or in a DIGITAL format as an e-book on Apple Books and Google Play.

