

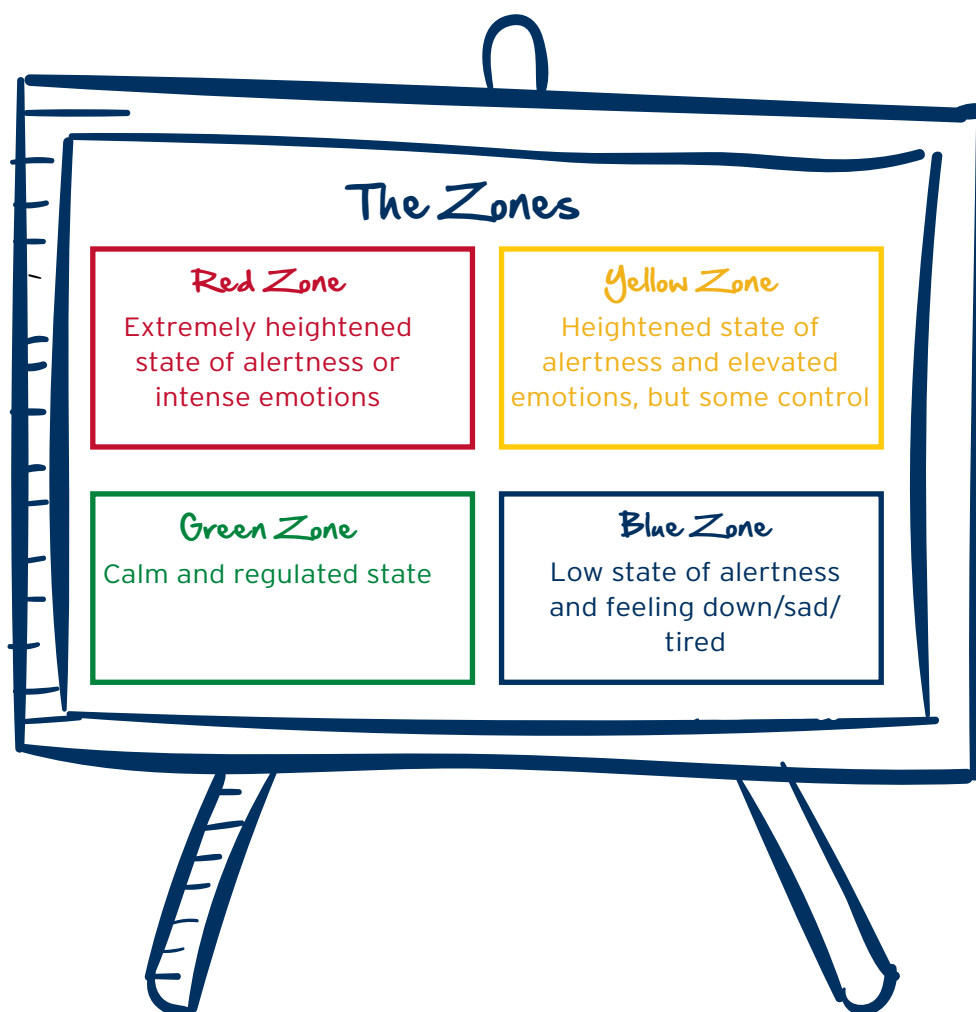


# Research-informed guidelines for using The Zones of Regulation at Aspect

## Background

In 2023, ARCAP, in collaboration with Aspect Education, conducted a research study aimed at better understanding the way in which [The Zones of Regulation](#) (The Zones) was being implemented across Aspect schools and to gather teacher perspectives as to the value of this program in developing emotion regulation and social skills among Aspect students. We found that:

- ★ The majority of teachers reported that The Zones was an acceptable and feasible program with the caveat that considerable modifications need to be made in order for Aspect students to engage with the content and that some students, particularly those with an intellectual disability or students who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), may not be suitable candidates, even with modifications.
- ★ For those students who were able to engage with The Zones, teachers had observed improvements in social skills and emotion regulation which they attributed to their participation. It is important to note that this is based on teacher perception only and no objective measures were obtained in the course of this study.
- ★ Teachers required support and resources in order to effectively implement The Zones including opportunities for supervision and collaboration and ready access to resources such as training, visual supports and modified lesson plans (the full research report is available [here](#)).



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## Which students might be best suited for The Zones?

After trialling the full Zones program, 10 teachers endorsed The Zones with modifications for their students and two teachers felt it was not suitable, even when modified for their students. All teachers made it clear that no one program will suit all the students in an Aspect classroom, school, or cohort. However, our findings did suggest that some children may be more likely to engage and/or benefit than others:

- ★ Younger students or those trying The Zones for the first time will benefit from the first six lessons in The Zones as foundational lessons. These can be taught in repetition with extra time spent learning emotional vocabulary.
- ★ Students who are in middle primary are likely to benefit most from The Zones, especially when they have had initial exposure to it in the early primary years. This age group required minimal modifications and responded well to the lessons.
- ★ Students in the upper primary or secondary years may be less engaged with The Zones content. This could be because they were already very familiar The Zones from exposure during earlier years of schooling, or it could be due to the language and vocabulary being aimed at a somewhat younger audience. In this case, it may be beneficial to focus on later lessons in The Zones program or those lessons with more sophisticated content. Teachers can also change the language to suit the age and developmental level of the students as needed.
- ★ Students with an intellectual disability may not benefit from The Zones due to the number of modifications that are needed for this cohort, especially as the program continues to more complex concepts after the first six lessons. In our study, teachers reported that the students may appear to be learning the content but were often providing scripted responses to The Zones.

## Which lessons are highly endorsed?

A number of lessons were described by teachers as being highly beneficial for students. Many teachers repeated these lessons or felt students were most highly engaged during these lessons. Several lessons were described by teachers as requiring significant modifications.

Highly endorsed lessons	Lessons requiring significant modifications
Lesson 1: Creating wall posters of The Zones	Lesson 2: Zones Bingo
Lesson 2.5: Expected and unexpected behaviour	Lesson 4: Scenario cards
Lesson 5: Understanding different perspectives	Lesson 10: Exploring sensory support tools
Lesson 8: My Zones across the day	Lesson 11: Exploring tools for calming
Lesson 9: Caution! Triggers ahead	
Lesson 12: Exploring tools - thinking strategies	
Lesson 13: The toolbox	

# How do lessons need to be modified?



**Pace and groupings:** Lessons were long and frequently needed to be broken up, repeated across multiple weeks, or changed to individual or small group lessons.

- ★ Consider the timing of the lessons. Make lessons shorter or break them into multiple lessons.
- ★ Change group activities to 1:1 activities, as needed.
- ★ During group sorting activities (e.g., discussions around which emotion goes in which Zone), some students tended to defer to other students or felt differently about where each emotion goes. Students found this frustrating. Engagement may improve if these activities are completed individually.



**Worksheets and writing activities:** Worksheets and written activities were visually overwhelming and required writing skills that were beyond many students' abilities.

- ★ For students who do not have adequate writing skills, worksheets should be fully modified (Figure 1).
- ★ Some standard scenarios may not be relevant or meaningful for Aspect students. In this case, have students come up with their own. Alternatively, write new scenarios for the class that are relevant and easy to understand. These can be prepared before the lesson and should be made available as resources across Education.
- ★ Some reading activities are too complicated and students cannot understand the vocabulary without explicit teaching. Closely review the readability of the books, resources and worksheets and simplify as needed.

The ZONES of Regulation™

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

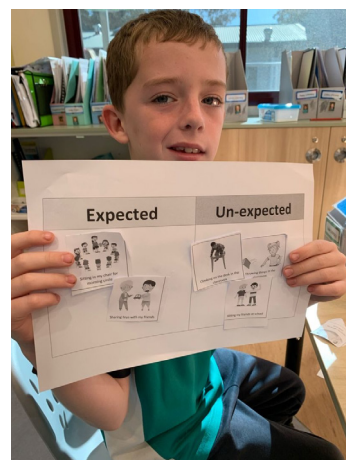
How are you feeling? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

What zone?	What can I do?
Red	<b>Helpful thoughts</b> Remember you can do: • Cool breathing • Calm's relaxation game • Feel good activity Think helpful thoughts
Yellow	
Green	
Blue	
Anything else?	



Figure 1: Modified worksheets



**Active engagement:** Teachers changed reading, writing, or verbal activities to tactile, drama or movement activities to increase student engagement.

- ★ Include movement or physical activity as often as possible.
- ★ Incorporate drama, acting, and role play. Students were really engaged when teachers and staff would role play certain zones or triggers to teach concepts (Figure 2).
- ★ Involve students through hands-on activities. For example, one teacher added light switches to The Zones chart so students could flip the switch when they were in a certain zone (Figure 3).
- ★ Screen the games and remove any games that are "winning" or "losing" games.



Figure 2: A teacher doing “unexpected” behaviours - incorporating drama/acting



Figure 3: Adding a tactile hands-on activity - flipping the switch



**Relevancy:** Needed to update the materials so that they were relevant to the students and highlighted student strengths and interests.

- ★ Allow for extra time for lessons that are specific concerns for students in your class such as the lessons on worrying which is a common issue for our students (Figure 3).
- ★ The suggestions for video clips and books are not typically relevant or appropriate for our students. Find videos and books that are relevant, and share with your professional learning community.
- ★ Some students will not relate to the language in The Zones because of experiences in the past or particular aversion to the colour language. When this happens, try replacing The Zones language with something that is relevant for the student or incorporates their interest. For example, one student was not comfortable with The Zones so the language was changed to concepts related to weather to describe emotional states and regulation.



**Visual supports and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC):** Teachers created a diverse selection of visual supports to supplement the material.

- ★ The visuals and pictures in the reproducibles within The Zones may not work for students because they don’t easily relate to the images. Instead, take photos of the students themselves in each zone (Figure 4).
- ★ Teachers with students who use AAC need substantial time to prepare language on the individual devices.
- ★ One activity (Lesson 2: Zones Bingo) has pictures of facial features with no written words, which students had trouble interpreting. Students also wanted to challenge the “accepted” responses with their own interpretations. This was overwhelming. Consider adapting this lesson by including an activity before Bingo where students identify which facial feature represents which emotion. This can be done individually or as a group, depending on the cohort.

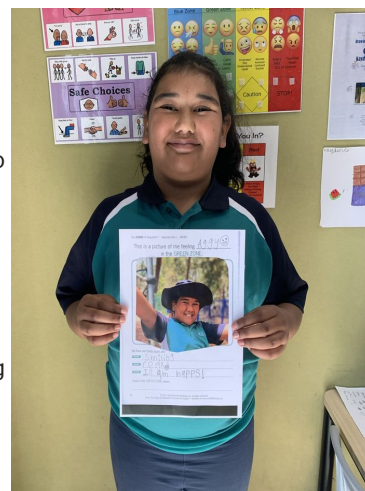


Figure 4: A student showing what they look like in the green zone.

## Top 5 Tips for teachers implementing The Zones

1. Do not underestimate the importance of modifications - can't use The Zones as is.
2. Minimise writing tasks - make sure to modify to make these activities more engaging through role play, visual activities, drama etc.
3. Consider how to intentionally include family input. For example, sending The Zones charts home or including it in IP meetings. Parents could receive a letter about the program and what was being taught each term.
4. Move through The Zones slowly. Ideally across a school year rather than two terms.
5. Use The full Zones program, with modifications and suggested recommendations rather than using ad hoc components.



*Read more about the guidelines or teacher perspectives in the full report*





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understanding, engaging & celebrating the  
strengths, interests & aspirations  
of people on the autism spectrum

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