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Emotional Regulation in K–5

The early-elementary friction domain nobody prepared parents for.

Life Lifted · Scott Adams

Why K–2 is a special case.

Kindergarten and first grade are the two grades where Emotional Regulation is the modal friction domain in the Life Lifted dataset. This is developmentally on-schedule — the prefrontal circuitry that supports down-regulation is still assembling — but it collides with a school context that assumes the regulation is already in place.

What K–5 dysregulation looks like at home.

The most common pattern is not a tantrum. It is a ‘melt-and-freeze’ — the child appears calm, then a small trigger (wrong cup, unexpected transition, a homework worksheet) produces a disproportionate reaction that the child themselves cannot narrate afterward.

The co-regulation move.

Co-regulation is the adult using their own regulated nervous system to loan calm to the child. It is not about words. It is body language, breathing tempo, and physical proximity. A parent who kneels to eye-level, softens their voice, and slows their breathing is doing more EF work than any verbal intervention could.

The Life Lifted scaffold for K–5.

Reduce (Move 03) is the highest-leverage move at this age. Remove the demand that triggered the dysregulation before addressing the behavior. Not permanently — just long enough to re-regulate. Then re-introduce the demand as a smaller step.

When it's not just EF.

Persistent dysregulation across settings — home, school, extended family — is a signal to consult a licensed provider. The method is not a substitute for clinical care. Provider Questions at lifelifted.net/provider-questions.html walks you through the first appointment.

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