

Learning to Manage Our Emotions

Once we have learned to identify and recognise emotions within ourselves, a great next step is learning how to respond to them and manage them effectively – this is called **emotion regulation**.

Sometimes we experience emotions that overwhelm us, and these can influence our thoughts and behaviour – this is called dysregulation.

Emotion regulation is a skill we begin learning as young children and continue to develop into adulthood.

Emotion regulation typically begins through a process of co-regulation. Co-regulation is the ability to manage our emotions and behaviours through the support of another connecting individual, where the connecting individual teaches and models effective ways to soothe and regulate.

From co-regulation, a child progresses into more independent management of their emotions – known as self-regulation.

Challenges with emotion regulation can lead to challenges in various aspects of life, such as learning, relationships, psychological resilience and our wellbeing and mental health.



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There are numerous emotion regulation skills that we can learn and practise (and teach/model to the young people in our lives) to develop our ability to manage and respond effectively to the emotions we experience.

These skills help us take control of our emotions, instead of them taking control of us!

We can learn to regulate our emotions with skills that work quickly, in the moment. For example...

1) **Opposite action**

Our emotions influence our behaviour; they guide us to respond in a certain way. For example, fear might influence us to run away from something, or even to stay and 'fight'. When we experience an overwhelming emotion, sometimes the linked behaviours can be impulsive and not match our needs and wellbeing.

Being able to identify the emotions we are experiencing provides us with clues as to which action/regulation skill we can use to counter the emotion and reach a state of regulation.

For example, if we are experiencing high arousal emotions such as anger or anxiety, we could use low arousal relaxation-based methods of regulation such as paced breathing and body awareness (described below!)

Alternatively, if you are experiencing a low arousal emotion such as sadness, high arousal regulation strategies would likely be effective in returning you to a state of regulation- for example, exercising.

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Low arousal relaxation-based regulation skills

When we experience stressors, and we feel overwhelming emotions such as anxiety, grounding techniques are a great resource to use in the moment to turn our attention away from our thoughts and bring our attention back to the present moment, often having a soothing, regulating effect.

Some helpful grounding techniques to learn and practise with your young person are...

1) **5-4-3-2-1 technique.**

- Identify 5 things you can see.
- Identify 4 things you can feel.
- Identify 3 things you can hear.
- Identify 2 things you can smell.
- Identify 1 thing you can taste.



2) **Body awareness**

- Place both feet flat on the floor.
- Wiggle and clench your toes.
- Notice and describe the sensations in your feet.
- Repeat with your hands, first placing them on your lap.

3) **Paced breathing**

- Breathe in slowly through the nose for 4 seconds.
- Breathe out through your mouth for 6 seconds.
- It is important here to breathe out more slowly than you breathe in.
- Repeat.



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We can also learn to regulate our emotions with skills that integrate into our day-to-day lives and create an increased level of emotional resilience...

1) Accumulate positive experiences

Create a schedule filled with pleasant activities which elicit pleasant emotions can help to reduce our vulnerability to becoming dysregulated when we are faced with stressors day-to-day.

2) Cope ahead

This skill prepares us to manage and cope with emotions before experiencing them.

- Describe the event/situation you are going to experience. Be specific and identify all the emotions you feel you may experience.
- Decide what regulation skills you plan to use.
- Rehearse the event/situation in your mind, whilst using your chosen regulation skill. Imagine this from a first-person perspective. Use a relaxation technique such as paced breathing.

