

Supporting Someone Experiencing Emotional Regression

Practical Guidance for Family, Friends, and Care Teams

Understanding What's Happening

When a person reverts to a younger emotional age, they're not "being childish" — their brain has shifted into a survival state connected to an old wound. They are reliving, not performing. The goal isn't to correct them but to help their nervous system feel safe again.

Do's — What Helps

-  Stay calm and grounded. Your calm tone and body language communicate safety faster than words. Breathe slowly and speak gently.
-  Validate feelings, not logic. Say things like: "I can tell this feels really big for you right now." or "You're safe — I'm here with you."
-  Offer simple, concrete choices. Regression often makes decision-making hard. Provide two calm options: "Would you like to sit here or step outside for a minute?"
-  Protect dignity. Avoid public confrontation or correction. Give privacy and emotional space.
-  Model self-regulation. If you stay grounded, their nervous system may mirror yours (co-regulation).
-  Use sensory grounding. Encourage deep breathing, feeling the chair beneath them, or holding a comforting object.
-  After the moment passes, invite gentle conversation about what felt triggering — never while they're overwhelmed.

Don'ts — What Hurts

-  Don't tell them to "grow up," "calm down," or "get over it."
-  Don't flood them with reasoning or problem-solving.
-  Don't touch without permission — regression can heighten sensitivity.
-  Don't make it about you ("You're making me upset"). Stay anchored in compassion.

Faith-Based Perspective

When someone regresses, it's a reminder that a younger part of them still needs love. Responding with gentleness allows you to reflect God's heart: "A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out." — Isaiah 42:3.

Your calm presence becomes the environment where healing begins.

Remember

They are not the age of their behavior — they are the age of their wound. Meet them with the patience you would offer a frightened child, and you may help them grow into peace.

Dr. Cindy H. Carr, D.Min., MACL