

# Ways to Support Emotion Regulation



## Model Emotion Acceptance and Awareness

Neurodivergent people may see negative emotions as ‘bad’ because of past experiences with negative consequences, which can lead to avoidance or other unhelpful responses

- Model that “All emotions are OK”
- Reassure students that emotions are natural and normal, even uncomfortable emotions
- Model awareness and coping to neurodivergent people



## Support Routine Self-Assessment of Emotional Intensity

Neurodivergent people often have difficulty with identifying and understanding emotions

- Focus on routine noticing of emotional intensity
- Tailor self-assessments with visuals for increasing levels of intensity
- Avoid emotion labeling or memorizing words to describe an emotion
- Use common language across professionals to assist with self-assessment of emotional intensity



## Provide Opportunities for Physical Movement

Movement is a form of self-regulation for emotions and sensory processing

- Walking, standing, and physical grounding
- Breaks from triggering situations
- Rocking or stimming



## Create an Inclusive Environment

Affirming environments that minimizes the impact of differences will support learning and wellbeing

- Consider sensory input
- Social & Communication
  - Be discrete and model that differences are welcome
  - Provide options for communication differences (e.g. cards, AAC)
  - Maintain flexible social norms (e.g. eye contact)
  - Provide supports for learning with peers

## Identify Stressors and Signs of Distress

- Identify situations and circumstances that cause distress, such as:
  - Overwhelming sensory environments
  - Changes in routine
  - Confusing social interactions
  - Unstructured spaces (e.g. cafeteria, hallway for students)
- Identify clues of upcoming meltdowns/shutdowns
  - How do they know it's coming?
  - Are there signs you can look out for?
  - Can they signal to you?



## Build Awareness of Emotional Intensity

- Focus on routine noticing of emotional intensity
  - This should be completed routinely throughout the day and not only when distressed
- Tailor self-assessments with visuals for increasing levels of intensity
- Avoid emotion labeling or memorizing words to describe an emotion
- Use common language across professionals to assist with self-assessment of emotional intensity
- Work with systems to track self-assessment data of emotional intensity



## Have a Plan in Place

- Identify a safe place where neurodivergent people can regulate
- Identify a trusted, safe person(s) that can support distress
- Include early warning signs (e.g. raised voice, physical agitation)
- Reduce demands and sensory input at the early signs of challenges
- When calm, identify and practice 1-2 strategies the neurodivergent student knows how to use
  - Consider at least one strategy that incorporates movement and one that can be seated
- Determine individualized cues or reminders to use strategies in advance (e.g. visual cue, hand signals, verbal cue)
- Identify sensory tools or items that can assist in regulation

