



EMOTION REGULATION IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

 **RULER** ei.yale.edu

 With support from Susan Crown Exchange

INTRODUCTION

Intense emotions are present everywhere in youth programs. Youth may feel exhilaration one minute and despair the next. They might come through your doors with attitudes that help or hinder your efforts to implement the day's programming. Whether wanted or unwanted, intense emotions make their way into every corner of your program, and youth's emotion regulation skills often influence the success of your efforts.

Imagine this scene: two teens are playing a friendly game of basketball when one fouls the other. The teen who was fouled thinks it was intentional and too rough. Both teens begin to posture and threaten each other. Or a teen storms into your program and throws her backpack against the wall, cursing and yelling as she does. Or finally, imagine a young person who isolates himself, does not interact with others, and appears to be sullen or distressed. In each of these instances, we might say that the teens need to regulate their emotions better. If they did, disruptions to programming would be reduced, benefits to youth would increase, and program culture and climate—and relationships among and between youth and staff—would improve.

The benefits of emotion regulation extend beyond gaining immediate relief from unpleasant feelings. Strong emotion regulation skills help youth improve their relationships with others, achieve long-term physical and mental well-being, and perform better in work or school. The fortunate thing is, no matter what their current skills, all youth are capable of learning to better regulate their emotions and related behavior. To do this, they need support and direct instruction in the skills involved, adults who can model those skills, and opportunities to practice and correct missteps when they happen. Rather than thinking of youth as having or not having emotion regulation skills, it is helpful to think of them as *learning* emotion regulation skills.



It is important to promote a growth mindset around emotions and help youth understand that emotions can be regulated, that there are specific strategies that can be learned, and that, whatever their current skills are, they can get better at it. Youth should know that, just as with other skills, emotion regulation requires time and practice.

Part of instilling these beliefs is for youth to understand that everyone feels angry, frustrated, hurt, or sad sometimes and that it is not bad to have those feelings. All feelings are valid and, in fact, all emotions are important because they provide us valuable information. The goal is not to avoid difficult emotions, but rather to manage them effectively. The foundation for effective self-regulation is youths' beliefs that they are able to use emotion regulation strategies when they need them. This belief is called emotion regulation "self-efficacy" and these beliefs can be modified. You can change these beliefs by directly teaching regulation strategies and by using situations in which youth make mistakes as teaching opportunities.



EMOTIONS & THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN

Although the processes involved in emotion regulation are complex, we can think of our brains as having two basic parts involved in emotion regulation. One part is responsible for the automatic responses to situations that trigger emotions. This is the part that is responsible for our survival. It sends signals to tell us to approach or avoid situations—our fight, flight, or freeze responses. We can think of this as our “emotional brain.” We can think of the other part of our brains, the part involved in regulating emotions, as our “thinking brain.” This part of our brain is used to process information more fully, keep our goals in mind, and engage in emotion and behavior regulation.

As youth move through their teen years, their brains are rapidly developing. These changes help adolescents process more complex information and learn new concepts more easily. At the same time, these brain changes can cause adolescents to feel emotions more intensely and become particularly vulnerable to stress. These changes are happening at a time when their ability to use effective emotion regulation strategies is not fully developed—their “thinking brains” continue to develop into early adulthood and can be easily overwhelmed in difficult situations. Supporting emotion regulation skills that call the thinking brain into action is especially important during adolescence.



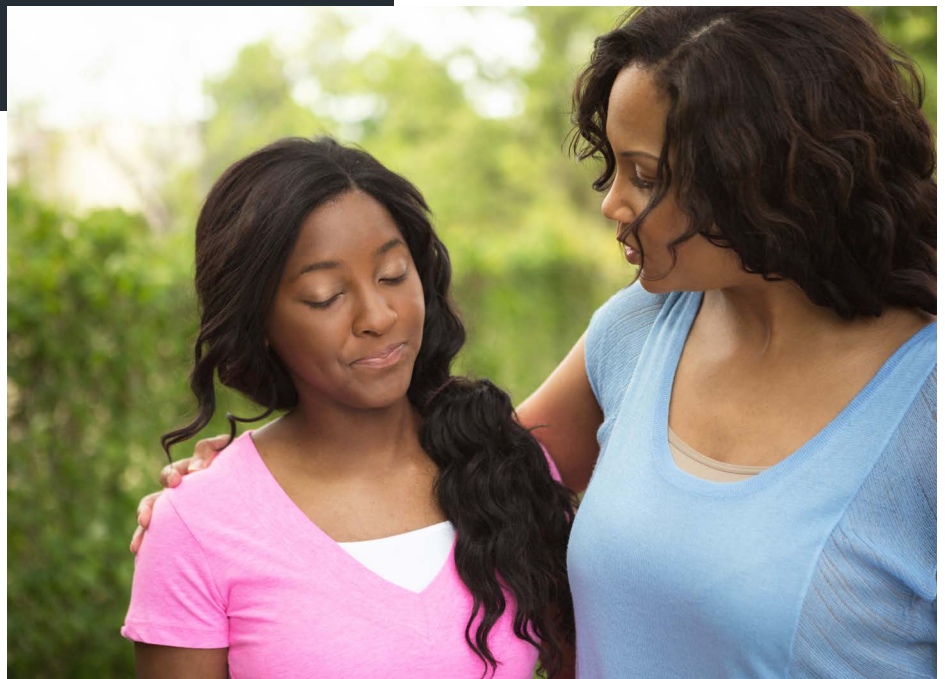
BELIEFS AND CULTURE

Emotion regulation doesn't happen in isolation—cultural, situational, and individual beliefs play important roles in how we regulate and express our emotions. First, our beliefs about whether or not it is even possible to change emotions will determine our actions. If we don't believe it's possible to change our emotions, we likely won't try. Similarly, our beliefs about whether we have the capacity to change our emotions affects our efforts to regulate them—if we don't think we have the skills, we also won't try. And finally, if we don't think we *should* change them—for example, if we think that trying to change them would be inauthentic—we would not be inclined to try even when doing so might be more adaptive. There is wide variability in these beliefs and, when working to help youth develop emotion regulation skills, it is important to be mindful that differences in these fundamental mindsets exist and need to be taken into consideration.

In the same way that beliefs about the nature of emotions impact our approach to regulating them, cultural beliefs, expectations, and norms shape our interpretation and expression of emotions. “Display rules” guide us in knowing which emotions should be expressed in a situation

and how. In some cultures, the expectation is that members of the community will express their emotions freely in loud and boisterous ways while in other cultural contexts members are generally expected to be quiet and reserved when expressing emotions. In some settings, any public displays of emotion are seen as inappropriate. As an example, beliefs about appropriate behavior at funerals can be quite different across cultures. In some, funerals are seen as somber events that require solemn and reserved behavior. In others, people are expected to openly express their grief. In still others, especially if funerals are part of religious celebrations, the expression may be one of joy. It is important to recognize that behavior does not always reflect the emotions someone is feeling and that the same behavior, in different settings, may mean very different things.

Guide youth through an exploration of emotion “display rules” in their own and others’ cultures. This can help them understand how different behaviors can mean different things to different people in different settings. For example, what is OK at home may not be appropriate in school or at work. Not only will this facilitate cultural sensitivity, it will help youth understand and alter, when necessary, their own emotion expression.





THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF EMOTION REGULATION

At the core of emotion regulation are the skills of emotional intelligence. At the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, we have developed the acronym **RULER** to represent five essential skills: **Recognize, Understand, Label, Express, and Regulate**.

RECOGNIZING EMOTIONS

Regulating our emotions requires that we are aware of them. This skill involves noticing and paying attention to 1) changes in our bodies—feeling tense or relaxed, holding our breath or breathing slowly, heart pounding or slow and steady; 2) changes in our thoughts—racing or calm, focused on assessing whether a situation is good or bad; and 3) changes in our behavior—using a loud or quiet voice, approaching or avoiding a situation. Once we become aware of these changes, we can begin to identify the emotions we are feeling and use this information to decide whether we need to regulate them.

Help youth begin to recognize shifts in their emotions by teaching about the physiology of emotions. Becoming self-aware and noticing the changes in their thoughts and body—when their heart rate and breathing changes, when their muscles are tense or relaxed, when their thoughts are calm or racing, or when their voice tone or volume changes—will prepare youth to monitor these signals when they find themselves in challenging situations.

Have youth focus on their physical sensations when they are calm so that they will recognize when they change. You can also mimic changes by having youth jump up and down while flapping their arms or some other activity that increases heart and breathing rates and then guide them through breathing and relaxation techniques to bring them back into a calm state. The more you can increase youth's awareness of their physiology, the better they will be able to tune into changes that happen in highly charged situations.

UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONS

In order to regulate our emotions effectively, we must understand how they work. This means knowing the causes of emotions and recognizing how they influence our thoughts and decisions. This helps us make better predictions about our own and others' behavior. Understanding emotions involves "reading" a situation, asking, first, what is happening, including events that led up to it, and, second, how our emotions have shifted as a result. This will help us determine our goals in the situation and identify what regulation strategies we should use to meet them.

You can help youth understand the causes and impact of emotions through direct instruction, discussion, and modeling. It can be easier to start with discussions around characters in books or movies than to try to teach the skills in relation to real and immediate situations. The distance this approach provides helps youth connect events in story lines with characters' feelings without the need to regulate their own emotions. Modeling or talking through a situation in which you are upset is also an effective strategy for teaching emotion understanding. You can say things like, "I am feeling frustrated because I'm not getting much help cleaning up." The key parts of this sentence are "I am feeling" and "because." And finally, you can help youth understand their emotions by asking them to reflect on situations that caused intense feelings. Asking a young person what happened and how it made them feel will help them connect the event with the feeling. This insight will help them choose helpful regulation strategies and guide their thinking as they decide how they will respond to the situation.

LABELING EMOTIONS

Our understanding of emotions is based, to some extent, on the language we use to talk about them. If we only have simple vocabulary to describe our feelings, we have more difficulty understanding their complexity and nuances. On the other hand, the richer our emotion vocabulary, the easier it is to understand feelings and identify effective strategies for regulating them. We say you have to “name it to tame it.” If we are feeling irritated rather than frustrated, or embarrassed rather than angry, our emotion-regulation responses will likely differ.

Help youth build a strong emotions vocabulary that allows them to label their emotions accurately. You can do this through direct instruction, discussions of emotions portrayed in books or movies, and by naming your own emotions when you experience them.

EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

This is the skill of knowing when, where, how, and with whom to express emotions. When we have these skills, we are more likely to respond to situations in ways that make things better not worse. As discussed above, it is important to remember that different cultures and situations call for different ways of expressing our emotions. For example, how we express emotions at home may differ from how we express them in public. In some settings, it may be acceptable for a person to yell when they are angry but in others it is not. In some situations, people may be expected to smile, even when they are experiencing pain. Knowing the cultural rules around emotion expression also helps us more accurately interpret others’ behavior and respond in line with expectations.

It is important for youth to be aware of how they express their emotions in different situations and contexts. You can help them gain these insights by asking them to reflect on which emotions they are generally comfortable expressing and which they find more difficult (individual differences) and how they express their emotions in different circumstances (social norms and cultural display rules). In addition to improving self-awareness, this exercise will improve youth’s capacity to read emotion expression in others, an important skill in the development of empathy.

REGULATING EMOTIONS

Emotion regulation is the master skill of emotional intelligence. Emotion regulation in the moment can involve behavior strategies—like taking deep breaths or looking away to gather our thoughts—as well as thought strategies that change the way we think about a situation, for example, instead of dwelling on a mistake, we can think of how it helps us grow. There are short-term strategies that help us regulate our emotions in the heat of the moment. There are also long-term strategies that reduce stress and leave us better prepared to manage difficult situations when they arise.

Effective emotion regulation doesn't always equal *helpful* emotion regulation. In order for a strategy to be both effective and helpful, it must provide relief from unwanted emotions, make a situation better, and help us reach our goals. Some strategies are effective in relieving an unpleasant emotion—for example, basketball players who engage in a physical fight might find relief from pent-up anger and frustration—but we would not call this strategy helpful. Similarly, substance use might allow us to escape difficult feelings, but the consequences can interfere with our goals, especially with extended use. And some strategies can be effective in the short run—for example, reducing anxiety by playing video games—but unhelpful in the long run—by preventing us from completing a task by a deadline.

We all engage in unhelpful emotion regulation from time to time. Yelling and screaming or venting and complaining might “feel good,” but they can actually intensify unwanted emotions. Similarly, going over things again and again in your mind might feel like problem-solving, but when it goes on and on, it prolongs the unwanted feeling. Avoidance and distraction can be helpful in the short run, but when used long-term to suppress emotions or ignore a problem, they allow our feelings to ferment and grow. It is helpful to be aware of these unhelpful strategies so that we recognize them when we use them and can work to replace them with more helpful ones.





CO-REGULATION

When youth are exhibiting disruptive or challenging behavior, the behavior is likely the result of ineffective emotion regulation. In these situations, youth are experiencing intense emotions and are unable to calm down or think clearly—their “thinking brains” are not accessible to them. When this happens, adults need to step in and be the young person’s “thinking brain.” The first step in the process is for adults to engage in strategies to regulate their own emotions—we can only help youth manage their emotions when we have managed our own. Initially, the adult will need to do the heavy lifting in the situation but, as the process moves forward, the young person gradually takes on more of the emotion regulation task. This shared process is called co-regulation and it can be helpful for you to think of yourselves as an emotion-regulation team.

Depending on the situation and the age and emotion-regulation skills of the youth, steps can include:

- 1. Regulate your own emotions—take a few deep breaths, reframe the situation as one in which a young person needs your assistance rather than one in which correction or punishment is the goal.*
- 2. Help the youth calm themselves. Take deep breaths together, use a quiet and calm voice, and step away from the immediate situation if possible.*
- 3. Help the young person talk through their interpretation of the situation and define the problem. Ask how the situation made them feel. Validate the emotions but not the poorly managed behavior.*
- 4. Ask them to reflect on whether their reaction was helpful in getting them what they wanted in the situation.*
- 5. If warranted, ask the youth to look at the situation from others’ perspectives.*
- 6. Brainstorm possible solutions or resolutions to the situation. Help youth think about the consequences of different options.*
- 7. Throughout the process, return to deep breathing to calm their physiology and allow the thinking brain to regain control.*
- 8. Follow up with the youth to check in on them and the situation.*



PRACTICES THAT STRENGTHEN EMOTION REGULATION IN YOUTH

1 The most important thing you can do to help youth in your program develop their emotion regulation skills is to develop your own skills. Working with youth is hard. While it is rewarding and enjoyable, it's also stressful, requires endless patience and adaptation, and can deplete your emotional resources. In order to be an effective role model, coach, mentor, champion, problem-solver, counselor, and leader, you need to be able to manage the multiple challenges you face daily and find time to replenish your own emotional reserves at the end of the day. When you can regulate your own emotional responses, you are better prepared to meet the demands of work, to be available and responsive to the youth you serve, and to teach and model the skills of emotion regulation. Among the most important strategies that you can use are those related to self-care. Making sure you eat a healthy diet, get enough sleep, exercise regularly, and engage in relaxation strategies will prepare you to be your best self in your work with youth.

We all get angry, disappointed, frustrated, and annoyed. It is important that youth see you manage your emotions effectively. Model effective emotion regulation by talking through difficult situations, naming your feelings, and explaining how you are going to regulate them. For example, if youth are not listening, take a deep breath or count to ten, get their attention, take another deep breath to model the behavior, and calmly tell them that you are feeling frustrated because you have important information to share and they are not paying attention. You can narrate the situation further by pointing out the deep breaths, telling them that you are working hard to keep your voice calm, and are trying to understand why they are not listening. By naming your feeling, you have given youth insight into your perspective and helped them realize the impact of their behavior on you. By taking deep breaths, you are demonstrating a helpful emotion regulation strategy. And by telling them that you are trying to understand their behavior, you are showing that you believe there may be more than one way to see the situation—for example, it's possible that they were so excited they didn't hear you. Repeated demonstrations provide a model that youth can use on their own or that you can use to guide them through an emotion regulation process.

2 As with all things involving youth, it is important to create safe and caring spaces in which they feel valued and appreciated as individuals. Forming strong relationships with youth will create an environment in which they will be more receptive to support and coaching, will want to manage their emotions and behavior in order to maintain their relationship with you and their peers, and will feel more comfortable making, admitting to, and ultimately correcting mistakes. It is important to ask yourself, “What kind of relationships are we fostering?” Do all members of the community—students, staff, parents—know one another as individuals? Do youth view staff members as helpers and guides or as rule enforcers? Do youth consider their peers to be collaborators in learning, or as competitors in the quest for attention and recognition?

Part of creating safe and caring spaces is building community through teamwork. As youth get to know each other, create social bonds, and develop an appreciation for diversity, they are more likely to regulate emotions and behave in ways that preserve relationships. You can facilitate a sense of community through icebreakers and relationship builders that focus on sharing individual interests, experiences, and cultural beliefs and practices. This can be done at the beginning of your time together each day or as a closing reflection before youth leave your program. Over time, youth will come to understand different perspectives and appreciate the unique qualities of each member. This, then, sets the stage for understanding when difficult situations arise.

Provide opportunities for daily check-ins to identify what youth are feeling and what they need to help them feel the way they want to feel. This will give you a read of your group and will help you to identify youth who may need a little extra support.

3 Teach specific emotion regulation skills. Direct instruction and participation in activities that build specific emotion regulation skills offers youth the chance to learn multiple emotion regulation strategies.

Different youth will prefer different strategies and different situations will call for different approaches. The more skills youth learn, the more likely they will be to find ones that work for them.

Help youth identify their triggers (situations that repeatedly upset them) and their personal warning signs (the physical sensations or typical thoughts that accompany the situation). This awareness can be developed through reflection activities, journaling, or when processing a difficult situation. When you discuss a difficult situation, talk through the warning signs youth may have felt, the thoughts they were having, and the specific emotion(s) they were experiencing. Help them reflect on their goals in the situation and their success in regulating their emotions. Brainstorm emotion regulation strategies they might use next time and, if they are willing, create a signal you can use to let youth know when they might encounter a similar situation.

Dry runs can be particularly helpful in developing effective self-regulation strategies. When you identify youth's triggers, you can plan an emotion regulation strategy and practice it ahead of time. Role playing can help with this and you can assist youth in developing strategies that they can use at the first sign of agitation. You can also provide opportunities to use these strategies in situations that are only mildly triggering. For instance, if you have a group member who has significant difficulty ending art activities, you can ask them to use the strategy when you are ending snack or another activity they are slightly less invested in. This allows youth to experience success and reinforces the usefulness of the strategies.



EMOTION REGULATION SKILLS

DEEP BREATHING

Deep breathing is one of the best immediate go-to action strategies to use when experiencing difficult emotions—it's available anytime, anywhere. When we are feeling intense emotions, our breathing tends to be fast and shallow. This causes an increased heart rate, muscle tension, and other physical sensations that prepare us for fight or flight—just the thing if you need to run away from a bear but not so effective if you are trying to avoid doing or saying something that will get you into trouble. When we take control of our breath in tense situations, it changes how our brains are working—by increasing oxygen flow so that we can think more clearly—and relaxes our bodies. Practicing this emotion regulation strategy prepares us to use it whenever we are upset and, over time, decreases the negative impact of stress in our lives.

TRY THESE BREATHING ACTIVITIES WITH THE YOUTH IN YOUR PROGRAM

Belly Breathing

1. Explain that you are going to practice a breathing exercise that will help youth calm their minds and bodies.
2. Ask youth to sit up straight and explain that it's easier to breathe when they have good posture.
3. Introduce the breathing strategy - breathing in through your nose for a count of six then out through your nose for a count of six. Explain that nose breathing is different from mouth breathing and that it helps to calm us down more quickly than when we use our mouths. (You can use the example of a dog panting to demonstrate the difference between nose and mouth breathing.)
4. Demonstrate breathing in through your nose for a total of 6 counts. Then breathe out slowly for 6 counts.
5. Ask youth to join you while paying attention to their bellies rising and falling. They can close their eyes if they are comfortable.
6. Repeat the breathing cycle three more times.
7. Ask youth how the breathing made them feel. Reinforce the fact that breathing deeply will help them calm their minds and bodies, especially when they are excited or upset.

Tich Nhat Hahn Breathing Exercise

Explain to youth that a simple breathing exercise that is based on the work of the mindfulness expert Tich Nhat Hahn is an effective way to shift their mindset when experiencing an unpleasant emotion.

1. Start by breathing in through your nose to the count of 3 and out through your mouth to the count of 3.
2. With each inhale and exhale, say the following words to yourself: in..... out....., deep.....slow....., calmease....., smile....release.
3. Ask youth to breathe with you while you say the words of the chant out loud.
4. Ask youth to share what they noticed what they noticed after repeating the chant and breathing 3 times.
5. Explain that, in only a minute they can shift their emotions when they are feeling frustrated, irritable, impatient, or the many other emotions that can hijack us every day.

TAKE SPACE

Taking space means putting physical or mental distance between yourself and the challenging situation before you make any other decisions. It is difficult to regulate your emotions when you are still in the situation. After taking a few deep breaths, stepping back will allow you the time and focus needed to call other regulation strategies into play. When possible, physically stepping away from the situation provides the best opportunity to do this. When that's not possible, even looking down or into the distance for a brief moment can help create the space we need to regulate our emotions. Another strategy for taking space when we can't leave a situation is to draw an imaginary box around the scene. As with putting physical space between us and the situation, this strategy allows the mental space we need to calm ourselves.

Create a calm-down area with a bean bag chair, fidget toys, calming jars, and any other materials youth in your program identify as being helpful to them. Youth can use the area and return to the larger group when they are ready. It is important not to use this area as punishment or to call students out by telling them that they need to spend some time there. This should be a place youth elect to visit when they need to. It won't work for everyone but it might be just the thing for some youth.

POSITIVE SELF-TALK

When we find ourselves in challenging situations—or even when we are just anticipating one—it is easy to fall into the habit of focusing on our capacity to respond effectively. For example, we may notice that we are thinking negative thoughts like, “Here we go again,” or “I don’t know if I can handle this.” Positive self-talk can help you turn these thoughts around and is a powerful strategy for shifting our view of a situation. These statements could become “I’ve got this!” and “I’ve handled similar situations before. I can handle this now.” These thoughts short-circuit a negative spiral and can lead us to more effective choices and actions.

TRY THESE ACTIVITIES IN YOUR PROGRAM

Self-Reflection

Explain the concept of self-talk—things we say to ourselves about what’s happening in our lives. Ask youth to think about a situation that is hard for them or someone they know and either draw a picture about the situation or describe it in words. Next ask them to think about negative things they or the person in the scenario might say to themselves in the situation. Finally, ask them to think of three more positive things they or the person in the scenario could say to themselves instead.

What Would You Say to a Friend

Showing ourselves compassion can be difficult and it is often easier to think about helping a friend. On paper or index cards, ask youth to write negative self-talk that they often use with themselves – ask that they not include their names on the cards. Collect cards, shuffle them, and pass them back out to your group. Working in small groups or with a partner, ask each person to read their card aloud. Their partner or members of their group will then think of things they would say to a friend who said that to or about themselves. Ask them to “translate” these statements into self-statements and practice saying them to themselves.



POSITIVE REAPPRAISAL OR REFRAINING

Cognitive reappraisal or reframing involves thinking about a challenging situation in a way that changes its meaning and emotional impact. This strategy involves telling yourself a more positive “story” about a situation. This can involve looking on the bright side, reframing a situation from being an insurmountable obstacle to an opportunity to learn, looking at things from another person’s perspective, or weighing it in terms of the “big picture.” For example, if a cashier at the grocery store is rude to you, instead of saying, “What a jerk!” you could look at it from a different angle and say, “Wow, he must be having a bad day!” Even if you cannot ignore the comment completely, this reframing might prevent you from doing something that might make things worse. Or maybe a friend is late for the tenth time—instead of saying “she doesn’t respect my time,” you might say, “maybe she has a lot on her plate lately.” This way of looking at the situation will help you talk with your friend more calmly than if you simply reacted in frustration. Positive reappraisal can also involve putting a positive spin on things or finding a silver lining. For example, when that friend doesn’t show up for a movie, we can remind ourselves that we have been trying to save money and skipping the movie allows us to stay on our savings plan. The important thing to remember when using this strategy is that the “story” we tell ourselves doesn’t need to be true—in the case of the rude cashier, we may never know—the point is to use it to regulate our emotions in the moment. This will allow time to calm down and approach the situation in a more helpful way.

TRY THIS ACTIVITY IN YOUR PROGRAM

Create scenarios of challenging situations, including a negative interpretation that someone might make. Assign these scenarios to pairs or small groups. Ask youth to read the scenarios and think of an alternative interpretation (e.g., maybe she’s late because her mom was late getting home), identify a bright side or positive outcome (e.g., I can spend this time catching up on social media), or put it in perspective (e.g., at least she’s OK).

SITUATION SELECTION

Situation selection involves choosing to avoid a situation we think may cause intense emotions. We can't always choose to avoid challenging situations but, when we can, this can be an effective strategy. It is important to recognize that this strategy may not be an effective long-term strategy—like when we need to work out a disagreement with a friend or colleague—but it can be useful when we do not feel able to manage a situation in the moment.

MODIFYING THE SITUATION

Modifying a situation means changing something about it to make regulating emotions easier. For example, when you are at a family dinner with a relative you often argue with, you can choose to sit far away from them. Or when you are invited to an event where you won't know anyone, you can invite a friend to join you.

DISTRACTION

Distraction can be an effective emotion regulation in the short run because it shifts us from using our emotion brains to using our thinking brains. When it turns into procrastination or avoidance of our problems, however, it can affect our ability to reach our goals and can actually create more emotional distress. Playing video games to relax when feeling anxious about an upcoming exam can calm us down temporarily. But, when it causes us to be unprepared for an exam, it increases our anxiety. The takeaway is that this is a strategy that is best used in short timeframes while we develop more helpful ones.

SELF-CARE

Getting enough sleep, eating a healthy diet, and getting regular exercise improves our moods by restoring the resources we need to regulate our emotions. These habits can even change the way our brains work. The better we take care of ourselves, the less likely we are to be triggered and, because we are not emotionally depleted, we are better able to regulate our emotions when we are triggered.





SOCIAL SUPPORT

Spending time with friends supports our ability to regulate our emotions by reducing stress, reinforcing a positive self-concept, helping us gain insights into situations in our lives, and encouraging self-advocacy. We can also find support through working with others to take action for a cause or social issue. If we find that we need more focused attention to address difficult situations in our lives, we can take advantage of support groups or professional counseling. These strategies help us feel connected and supported which, in turn, replenishes our mental resources and allows us to regulate our emotions better.

CONCLUSION

It can be easy to become discouraged when youth don't effectively use the skills you have been teaching them. Youth are going to make mistakes, however, and your efforts to support their growth, meet them where they are in their skill development, and provide opportunities to repair relationships will pay off with time and practice. Consistency and starting at a level that is appropriate for youth in your program are key.