

Activity: Developing an Emotional Regulation Plan

We all experience times when we feel overwhelmed and allow our feelings to control our actions. But to successfully cope with stressful events, we must learn to inhibit some responses while employing other, more positive ones. The ability to identify and name emotions, assess internal strategies and external supports, and act to make our environment safer are key to regulating negative, reactive emotions.

Answer the following questions to lay out what your own emotional regulation plan would look like:

1. When stressful events occur, what emotion(s) do I show that may be of concern or that I wish I had more control over? (e.g., fear, anger, jealousy, sadness, shame, etc.)
2. What do you see as your primary triggers and warning signs of stress? (e.g., not having a say or not being listened to, feeling lonely, feeling pressured, etc.)
3. What might other people notice me doing if I begin to lose control or my emotions? (e.g., pacing, becoming very quiet, being rude, isolating, etc.)
4. What strategies can you (or do you) use to increase your ability to calm down and regulate your emotions? (e.g., time to myself, humor, listening to music, talking to others, breathing, etc.)
5. What external social supports are available to you that may help?
6. What things do NOT help you keep calm or regulate your emotions? (e.g., being alone, being around people, not being listened to, etc.)

Additional Strategies for Emotional Regulation:

One way of regulating our emotions is to manage our self-talk. By asking ourselves new questions we can come up with options when upset. Here's what a balanced conversation may sound like...

- What am I reacting to? What is it that's really pushing my buttons here?
- Am I jumping to conclusions?
- Is there another way of dealing with this?
- Is it fact or opinion?
- Is there a different point of view to see the situation through? Think bigger picture.
- What meaning am I giving this situation?

When feeling particularly overwhelmed or when dealing with intense emotions, try the STOPP technique to help you regulate your emotions and stay calm:

- Stop. Don't act immediately—pause for a moment.
- Take a deep breath. Notice your breathing as you breathe in and out.
- Observe. What am I thinking right now? What is your focus of attention? What are you reacting to? What sensations do you notice in your body?
- Pull back. Zoom out. Put in some perspective and ask yourself what is the bigger picture? Is this thought a fact or opinion? What is another way of looking at this situation and/or a more reasonable explanation? How important is this or will it be?
- Practice your skills. What is the best thing to do right now (best for me, for others, for the situation)? Do what will be effective and appropriate.

