



Emotional Regulation

Definition

Emotional regulation refers to the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express them. From an emotional development standpoint, it involves awareness of one's feelings, the ability to pause and assess those feelings, and the capacity to choose appropriate strategies to deal with them—rather than reacting impulsively or repressing them. It includes both automatic and intentional control of emotions and behaviors in a way that is socially acceptable and personally beneficial.

How does it affect teenagers

Teenagers experience emotional extremes due to rapid neurological development, particularly in the amygdala (emotional reactivity) and the still-maturing prefrontal cortex (impulse control). Without mature regulation strategies, teens may withdraw, or express emotions in harmful ways (e.g., aggression, self-harm, avoidance). Emotional regulation affects every aspect of their lives: academic performance (handling test anxiety), relationships (managing anger or jealousy), and self-esteem (coping with shame or embarrassment). Teens who can regulate their emotions are more adaptable, less likely to engage in risk-taking, and better able to handle conflict constructively.





Social regulation and social inclusion

Social inclusion requires emotional competence. Teens who cannot regulate emotions may alienate peers, disrupt classrooms, or be perceived as volatile, leading to rejection or bullying. On the other hand, emotional regulation fosters empathy, conflict resolution, and collaboration—all crucial for feeling accepted and contributing meaningfully to group settings. Adolescents with strong emotional regulation are more likely to be trusted and respected, reinforcing their sense of belonging and inclusion. Additionally, they are more likely to support peers who are struggling, creating a ripple effect of positive social behavior.



How to tackle it?

Fostering emotional regulation in teens requires consistent strategies. Begin by helping them name and understand their emotions through tools like check-ins or emotion charts. Teach calming techniques such as breathing exercises, and model emotional control in everyday situations. Role-playing and guided reflection offer safe ways to practice. These combined elements help students manage emotions and respond constructively.





Warm up questions

- What are some emotions you've felt today?
- Is it easy or hard to talk about your emotions? Why?
- What do you usually do when you're angry or anxious?
- Do you think emotions can control us?



Questions for discussion

- Why is emotional regulation important in school, family and friendships?
- How do you feel when someone yells or shuts down during a conflict?
- Can you think of a situation where better regulation would've helped?
- How can we support each other when emotions are high?

Find out more

- Siegel, D.J., 2013. Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain. New York: Penguin,
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- Edelman, S. and Redmond, L., 2011. Good Thinking for Teens: Managing Emotions and Challenging Negative Thoughts. Wollombi, NSW: Exisle Publishing.





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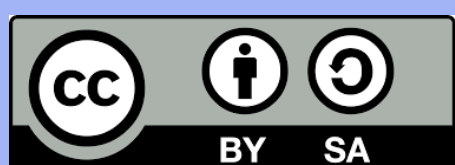
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