



RESILIENT LIFE SKILL 2: EMOTION REGULATION

WHY TEACH THIS LIFE SKILL?

Everyone - children and adults - experiences a variety of both negative and positive emotions every day. Emotions are completely normal and part of what it means to be human. However, the ability to regulate fluctuating emotions is an essential life skill that everyone needs in order to thrive in school, work, relationships, and life. Emotion regulation is also critical for managing stressful experiences such as loss and adversity.

WHAT IS EMOTION REGULATION?

Emotion regulation is the ability to manage emotions and behavior in a way that aligns with what is needed in any given situation. For example, when a child is at school and feels angry, the environment expects that the child will not throw a fit. A child might *feel* the desire to react in this manner, but it is emotion regulation that manages the feeling so that it aligns with personal goals and environmental demands.

Whether consciously or not, people engage in emotion regulation to manage difficult emotions all the time. Sometimes, we are fortunate and are prone toward healthy coping strategies, but we can easily fall into unhealthy responses as well.

Helping your child develop healthy emotion regulation strategies starts with parents learning about how emotion regulation works. With patience and practice, we can teach our children how to choose healthy responses to strong emotions.

WHEN SHOULD I TEACH THIS?

You can start to teach emotion regulation at a very young age. Tantrums and emotional outbursts generally start between one to two years of age. However, many children and teenagers will struggle with situations that trigger stress, anger, sadness, grief, and worry. Children need to acquire the skills to manage and regulate their emotions through these different experiences.

STEPS FOR TEACHING EMOTION REGULATION

- **Start by Tracking the Situations**
Start by tracking specific situations that consistently trigger strong emotional responses from your child, such as anger or fear. Start by simply taking note, and tracking to identify similarities in the responses.



- **To Avoid or Not?**

Children and teenagers can regulate their emotions by avoiding situations that might bring up strong emotions. In most instances, however, avoidance is not the best approach. Children and teenagers learn to regulate emotions by practicing self-regulation strategies through exposure to the situations that trigger reactions. Additionally, there will be many situations in their lives that bring strong emotional responses that cannot be avoided.

- **Scaffold Learning**

Now that you have started to notice specific situations that consistently trigger strong emotional responses, develop a plan for coaching your child or teenager toward specific skills that will help them to regulate their responses.

- Step 1: Anticipate and Communicate Upcoming Situations
 - Share with your child that the situation is coming soon, and give them time to transition smoothly.
- Step 2: Change the Situation
 - Turn the situation into a game, try singing a song, or move the activity to a different physical location.
- Step 3: Slow Down
 - If your child still has a strong emotional response, start by slowing yourself down. Do not overreact, but rather just pause before you respond. Then, ask your child to slow down with you.
- Step 4: Identify Emotions
 - Ask your child to identify the emotion(s) they are feeling.
 - For young children, use visual charts (like those included in the activities below) to aid in this process. For each emotion, work with your child to develop a list of coping options, and then practice one or more of the choices.
 - Ask teenagers, to identify what they are feeling, and start to make connections between that emotion and the triggering event.
- Step 5: Communicate Emotions
 - Once your child or teenager has identified the emotion they are feeling, teach them to communicate in a healthy, constructive way. Model a healthy expression of that emotion.
- Step 6: Employ Healthy Coping Strategies
 - Once a child or teenager learns to communicate their emotions, start practicing the use of healthy coping strategies with them. Some ideas can include:
 - Deep breathing
 - Taking a break from an activity
 - Using a grounding technique
 - Engage in positive self-talk



- Trace a pattern
 - Counting
 - Exercise or get outside
 - Listen to music
 - Anything that helps the child to calm strong emotions
- **Patience and Practice, Practice, Practice**

Acknowledge this is the first step to handling strong emotions in a more healthy, constructive way. Be patient with your child and keep the perspective that this is an important life skill that needs to be developed. With time, your child will learn to self-regulate and will be more resilient.





ACTIVITY, GRADES K-5:

THE COLOR OF MY EMOTIONS

PREP FOR ACTIVITY

Print out the shapes below, or draw your own shapes on a piece of paper at home.

SUGGESTED BOOKS TO BUILD EMOTIONS LANGUAGE

A great way to start building a young child's emotion language, even at an early age, is to read books on emotions. These are a few favorites:

- [*My Many Colored Days – Dr. Seuss*](#)
- [*The Way I Feel – Janan Cain*](#)
- [*Grumpy Monkey – Suzanne Lang*](#)
- [*Today I Feel Silly: And Other Moods That Make My Day – Jamie Lee Curtis*](#)
- [*In My Heart – Jo Witek*](#)

Tip: If you are not able to get a book, you can often find a video on YouTube of someone reading it aloud!

EMOTIONS CHART

Print out the chart below and when your child begins to have a strong emotional reaction, ask them to identify the emotion they are feeling on the chart. Are they worried? Sad? Irritated? Mad?





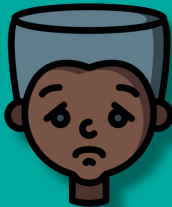
MAD / MEAN



ANGRY / IRRITATED



SAD / FRUSTRATED



WORRIED / ANXIOUS



HAPPY / CALM



EMOTION REGULATION PLANS

Print one of each of the emotion regulation plan sheets for your child, and find time to sit down with them to develop a plan for what they can do if they feel angry, sad, frustrated, etc. What are specific coping strategies they can employ that will help them to calm themselves?

WHEN I FEEL...



MAD / MEAN

I CAN...

WHEN I FEEL...



ANGRY / IRRITATED

I CAN...



WHEN I FEEL...



SAD/ FRUSTRATED

I CAN...

WHEN I FEEL...



WORRIED/ ANXIOUS

I CAN...

WHEN I FEEL...



HAPPY/ CALM

I CAN...



Routes to Resilience Parenting Modules

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ACTIVITY, GRADES 6-12:

MANAGING MY TRIGGERS

LEARNING TO MANAGE TRIGGERS

A 'trigger' is anything that causes a strong and unwanted emotional or behavioral response. Almost anything can be a trigger—people, places, situations, or things. Sometimes avoiding triggers can be helpful, but there are many situations that cannot be avoided. People learn to manage triggers most effectively by working through their emotions. With courage, you can learn to cope with that person, place, situation, or thing in healthy ways. Use the worksheet below as a guide.

Describe the Situation

Describe the situation that evokes a strong emotional response for you. Be detailed with where, when, who, and how the situation arises.

Can You Prepare?

Anticipating triggers before they happen is a powerful way to manage our own responses. If you know a teacher at school tends to make you angry, remind yourself before you go into their classroom that you want to stay calm. How can you anticipate and prepare?



Can You Change It?

Is there something about the trigger that you can change? For example, if you have a friend who always says negative things about what you wear, can you tell them to stop? Some situations we can change, others we cannot.

How Can You Cope?

If you cannot change the situation, what are strategies you can employ to cope with the trigger?

