



Doctorate Program
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026801



Emotional Regulation

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Objectives

- **At the end of this discussion, every candidate will be able to:**
- Discuss key concepts of Emotional regulation and emotional control, and Dysregulation
- Explain the Importance of Emotional Regulation in Daily Life
- Explain the Benefits of emotional regulation
- Discuss the Common causes of regulation difficulties
- Differentiate between Types of Emotional Regulation (Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Regulation)

Objectives, cont.

- Explain Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation
- Analyze Theories of emotional regulation
- Discuss Therapeutic approaches for emotional regulation disorder
- Examine the Emotional regulation for different age groups
- Discuss Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

Outlines

- Emotional regulation and emotional control meanings, and Dysregulation)
- Importance of Emotional Regulation in Daily Life
- Benefits of emotional regulation
- Common causes of regulation difficulties
- Types of Emotional Regulation (Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Regulation)

Outlines

- Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation
- Theories of emotional regulation
- Therapeutic approaches for emotional regulation disorder
- Emotional regulation for different age groups
- Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation
- How to Teach Emotional Regulation

Introduction

- Emotion regulation is one of the most important psychological constructs in contemporary psychology because it directly influences how individuals think, behave, interact socially, make decisions, and cope with stress.
- Emotion regulation refers to the processes through which individuals influence:
 - Which emotions they experience
 - When they experience them
 - How intensely they experience them
 - How they express those emotions

Introduction

- Emotion regulation is not simply suppressing emotions or avoiding them. Instead, it involves adaptive management of emotional experiences in ways that promote psychological functioning, goal achievement, and social adaptation.
- Modern emotion regulation research emerged strongly during the 1990s with the work of James Gross and colleagues, although the roots of the concept extend back to:
 - Freud's defense mechanisms
 - Lazarus and Folkman's coping theory
 - Developmental psychology studies
 - Behavioral and cognitive theories.

Introduction

- Emotion regulation became central in psychology because emotional dysregulation appears across nearly every major psychiatric disorder including:
- Depression
- Anxiety disorders
- PTSD
- Borderline personality disorder
- Eating disorders
- Substance use disorders
- Psychosis
- Emotion regulation is therefore considered a transdiagnostic process.

What Is Emotion?

Emotions are complex psychological states involving:

- Subjective feelings
- Physiological arousal
- Cognitive interpretations
- Behavioral responses

Emotions are adaptive because they:

- Prepare the body for action
- Signal important environmental information
- Facilitate communication
- Guide decision-making
- Promote survival

What Is Emotion?

Examples:

- Fear promotes protection from danger
- Anger mobilizes defense
- Sadness promotes social support seeking
- Joy reinforces rewarding experiences

Emotional Control

Emotional control: refers to attempts to inhibit, restrain, or suppress emotional expression.

This concept is narrower than emotion regulation because emotional regulation may involve:

- Increasing emotions
- Decreasing emotions
- Accepting emotions
- Redirecting emotions
- Transforming emotions

Emotional control often focuses mainly on suppression

Emotional Dysregulation

Emotional dysregulation refers to:

- Difficulty understanding emotions
- Difficulty tolerating emotions
- Difficulty modulating emotional intensity
- Difficulty returning to baseline emotional functioning

Emotional Dysregulation

Individuals with emotional dysregulation often demonstrate:

- Emotional instability
- Rapid mood shifts
- Aggression
- Impulsivity
- Emotional numbness
- Dissociation
- Extreme reactivity to minor stressors

Emotional Dysregulation

Emotional dysregulation is strongly linked to:

- Trauma
- Childhood adversity
- Chronic stress
- Neurobiological vulnerability
- Invalidating environments

Emotional Regulation

Emotion regulation is the ability to manage and respond to emotional experiences in a healthy, adaptive way. It involves recognizing what you are feeling and choosing constructive responses instead of reacting impulsively, which prevents you from being overwhelmed by intense emotions.

Emotional Regulation

Mastering this skill is an ongoing process. Understanding how to manage your emotions effectively involves several key strategies:

The 4 R's of Emotion Regulation

A simple framework to manage your responses in the heat of the moment:

Recognize: Identify and name the emotion you are feeling (e.g., "I feel frustrated right now") without judgment.

Relax: Regulate your physiological state with deep, slow breaths or a brief walk to prevent acting out of panic.

Reframe: Change how you think about the situation. Look for alternative perspectives rather than jumping to negative conclusions.

Respond: Choose a deliberate, values-aligned course of action instead of a knee-jerk reaction.

Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation refers to the processes individuals use to manage and respond to their emotional experiences in appropriate and adaptive ways. It encompasses strategies to amplify, maintain, or decrease one's emotional responses.(Olivia.,2023)

Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation is the ability to exert control over one's own emotional state. It may involve behaviors such as rethinking a challenging situation to reduce [anger](#) or [anxiety](#), hiding visible signs of sadness or [fear](#), or focusing on reasons to feel happy or calm.

Emotional Regulation

Emotions are integral to the human experience, shaping our reactions, decisions, and overall wellbeing.

Emotional regulation refers to the ability to influence which emotions we feel, when we feel them, and how we express or experience them.

For many of my clients, even recognizing an emotion is difficult, never mind trying to have any sense of influence over them. This is particularly true if they've experienced trauma or chronic persistent stress where they've had to numb to survive.

Importance of Emotion Regulation in Daily Life

Emotion regulation affects every aspect of human functioning.

1-Academic Functioning

Emotion regulation influences:

- Attention
- Concentration
- Memory
- Learning efficiency
- Problem solving
- Executive functioning

Importance of Emotion Regulation in Daily Life

Students who regulate emotions effectively demonstrate:

- Better academic performance
- Improved classroom behavior
- Better peer interactions
- Higher motivation

Importance of Emotion Regulation in Daily Life

2-Social Relationships

Emotion regulation is essential for:

- Empathy
- Conflict resolution
- Communication
- Intimacy
- Attachment security

Poor emotional regulation contributes to:

- Relationship instability
- Aggression
- Withdrawal
- Misunderstanding
- Social rejection

Importance of Emotion Regulation in Daily Life

3-Occupational Functioning

Emotion regulation predicts:

- Leadership skills
- Teamwork
- Workplace resilience
- Burnout prevention
- Decision-making quality

Importance of Emotion Regulation in Daily Life

4-Mental and Physical Health

Adaptive emotion regulation is associated with:

- Reduced anxiety
- Lower depression risk
- Better cardiovascular health
- Reduced inflammation
- Better immune functioning
- Improved wellbeing

Maladaptive emotion regulation predicts:

- Psychopathology
- Chronic stress
- Emotional exhaustion
- Physical illness

Intrinsic vs Extrinsic Emotion Regulation

Intrinsic Emotion Regulation

Intrinsic regulation refers to regulating one's own emotions.

Examples:

- Deep breathing to reduce anxiety
- Reappraising a stressful event
- Practicing mindfulness
- Distracting oneself from distress

Intrinsic vs Extrinsic Emotion Regulation

Extrinsic Emotion Regulation

Extrinsic regulation refers to influencing another person's emotional state.

Examples:

- Comforting a crying child
- Encouraging a fearful friend
- Calming an angry patient
- Motivating a discouraged student

Extrinsic emotion regulation is central in:

- Parenting
- Teaching
- Nursing
- Psychotherapy
- Leadership

Benefits of Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation plays a critical role in psychological, social, academic, and physical functioning. Effective emotional regulation allows individuals to manage emotional experiences adaptively rather than becoming overwhelmed by them.

1. Improved Mental Health

One of the most important benefits of emotional regulation is better psychological wellbeing.

Individuals with strong emotional regulation skills experience:

- Lower levels of anxiety
- Reduced depressive symptoms
- Lower emotional distress
- Greater emotional stability
- Better resilience during stressful situations

Adaptive regulation strategies such as cognitive reappraisal and mindfulness are associated with fewer symptoms of psychopathology, while maladaptive strategies such as rumination and suppression are strongly linked to anxiety and depression.

Benefits of Emotional Regulation

2. Better Stress Management

Emotion regulation helps individuals respond effectively to stress rather than reacting impulsively.

Benefits include:

- Reduced physiological stress responses
- Faster emotional recovery after stressful events
- Better coping under pressure
- Increased tolerance of frustration

People who regulate emotions effectively are more likely to remain calm and solution-focused during difficult situations.

Benefits of Emotional Regulation

3. Enhanced Cognitive Functioning

Emotions directly influence cognition and executive functioning.

Effective emotional regulation improves:

- Attention
- Concentration
- Memory
- Decision-making
- Problem-solving
- Cognitive flexibility

When emotions are dysregulated, the brain becomes overloaded, reducing the ability to think clearly and rationally.

Benefits of Emotional Regulation

4. Improved Academic Performance

Students with strong emotional regulation skills often demonstrate:

- Better classroom behavior
- Greater persistence
- Higher motivation
- Better learning outcomes
- Improved task completion

Emotionally regulated students are better able to manage:

- Test anxiety
- Academic pressure
- Frustration during learning

Benefits of Emotional Regulation

5. Better Social Relationships

Emotion regulation is essential for healthy interpersonal functioning.

Benefits include:

- Better communication
- Increased empathy
- Reduced aggression
- Improved conflict resolution
- Stronger friendships and relationships
- Greater emotional understanding of others

Individuals who regulate emotions well are more likely to maintain stable and satisfying relationships.

Benefits of Emotional Regulation

6. Increased Emotional Awareness

Emotion regulation improves:

- Recognition of emotions
- Emotional labeling
- Understanding emotional triggers
- Awareness of bodily emotional signals

This emotional insight helps individuals respond intentionally instead of reacting automatically.

Benefits of Emotional Regulation

7. Greater Self-Control and Reduced Impulsivity

Effective regulation strengthens:

- Inhibitory control
- Delayed gratification
- Behavioral control
- Emotional patience

This reduces:

- Impulsive behaviors
- Aggressive reactions
- Self-destructive behaviors
- Emotional outbursts

Benefits of Emotional Regulation

8. Better Physical Health

Research links adaptive emotional regulation to:

- Reduced inflammation
- Better cardiovascular functioning
- Lower cortisol levels
- Improved immune functioning
- Better sleep quality

Chronic emotional dysregulation increases risk for:

- Hypertension
- Heart disease
- Fatigue
- Chronic stress disorders

Benefits of Emotional Regulation

9. Increased Resilience

Emotion regulation helps individuals recover from adversity more effectively.

Emotionally regulated individuals:

- Adapt better to change
- Recover faster after failure
- Maintain hope during hardship
- Tolerate uncertainty more effectively

This contributes significantly to psychological resilience.

Benefits of Emotional Regulation

10. Improved Workplace Functioning

In occupational settings, emotional regulation contributes to:

- Leadership effectiveness
- Professional communication
- Team collaboration
- Workplace adaptability
- Reduced burnout

Employees with strong regulation skills manage criticism, deadlines, and workplace stress more successfully.

Benefits of Emotional Regulation

11. Better Emotional Flexibility

Healthy emotional regulation does not mean suppressing emotions.

Instead, it allows individuals to:

- Experience emotions appropriately
- Shift emotional states flexibly
- Match emotional responses to situations
- Use different regulation strategies depending on context

This emotional flexibility is strongly associated with psychological wellbeing.

Benefits of Emotional Regulation

12. Prevention of Psychopathology

Strong emotional regulation skills protect against:

- Anxiety disorders
- Depression
- PTSD
- Substance abuse
- Personality disorders
- Eating disorders

Because emotional dysregulation is a transdiagnostic factor, improving emotional regulation can reduce vulnerability to multiple psychological disorders simultaneously.

Common Causes of Emotion Regulation Difficulties

Emotion regulation difficulties arise from complex interactions among biological, psychological, developmental, social, and environmental factors. These difficulties may impair an individual's ability to understand, tolerate, manage, or appropriately express emotions.

1. Childhood Trauma and Adverse Experiences

One of the strongest predictors of emotional dysregulation is early trauma.

Examples include:

- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect
- Parental loss
- Domestic violence
- Chronic criticism
- Unstable caregiving

Common Causes of Emotion Regulation Difficulties

Trauma disrupts:

- Emotional development
- Attachment security
- Stress-response systems
- Self-soothing abilities

Children exposed to trauma often develop:

- Hypervigilance
- Emotional instability
- Dissociation
- Difficulty trusting others
- Intense emotional reactivity

Research shows prolonged stress alters brain structures involved in emotional control, including the amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex.

Common Causes of Emotion Regulation Difficulties

2. Chronic Stress

Continuous exposure to stress overwhelms emotional coping systems.

Sources may include:

- Financial stress
- Academic pressure
- Workplace stress
- Family conflict
- Caregiver burden
- Chronic illness

Common Causes of Emotion Regulation Difficulties

Long-term stress may lead to:

- Emotional exhaustion
- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Reduced emotional tolerance
- Burnout

Chronic stress also impairs executive functioning, reducing the ability to regulate emotional responses effectively.

Common Causes of Emotion Regulation Difficulties

3. Insecure Attachment

Early attachment relationships strongly influence emotional development.

Children who experience:

- Inconsistent caregiving
- Emotional invalidation
- Lack of responsiveness
- Rejection

may struggle to develop healthy emotional regulation skills.

Insecure attachment patterns may result in:

- Fear of abandonment
- Emotional dependency
- Emotional avoidance
- Difficulty calming oneself

Secure attachment, in contrast, supports co-regulation and emotional resilience.

Common Causes of Emotion Regulation Difficulties

4. Neurobiological Factors

Emotion regulation depends on healthy brain functioning.

Difficulties may result from dysfunction in:

- Amygdala
- Prefrontal cortex
- Hippocampus
- Stress hormone systems

Examples:

- Hyperactive amygdala → emotional overreactivity
- Weak prefrontal control → impulsivity
- Reduced hippocampal functioning → poor emotional integration

Neurodevelopmental differences may also impair regulation.

Common Causes of Emotion Regulation Difficulties

5. Temperament and Genetics

Some individuals are biologically more emotionally reactive.

Temperamental factors include:

- High sensitivity
- Emotional intensity
- Behavioral inhibition
- Low frustration tolerance

Genetic vulnerability may increase risk for:

- Anxiety
- Mood instability
- Impulsivity
- Emotional sensitivity

However, temperament interacts with environment rather than determining outcomes alone.

Common Causes of Emotion Regulation Difficulties

6. Poor Emotional Awareness

Some individuals struggle to:

- Identify emotions
- Label feelings
- Understand emotional triggers
- Recognize bodily emotional signals

This may result in:

- Confusion
- Emotional overwhelm
- Poor coping choices
- Emotional avoidance

Without emotional awareness, effective regulation becomes difficult.

Common Causes of Emotion Regulation Difficulties

7. Cognitive Distortions

Negative thinking patterns interfere with adaptive emotional processing.

Examples include:

- Catastrophizing
- Overgeneralization
- Black-and-white thinking
- Personalization
- Negative self-talk

Distorted thinking amplifies emotional distress and maintains dysregulation.

Common Causes of Emotion Regulation Difficulties

8. Maladaptive Learned Coping Strategies

Individuals may learn ineffective emotional coping patterns such as:

- Avoidance
- Suppression
- Aggression
- Emotional withdrawal
- Substance use
- Self-harm

Although these strategies may provide temporary relief, they worsen emotional regulation long-term.

Common Causes of Emotion Regulation Difficulties

9. Emotional Invalidation

Invalidating environments dismiss or criticize emotional experiences.

Examples:

“Stop crying.”

“You’re too sensitive.”

“Your feelings don’t matter.”

Repeated invalidation teaches individuals:

Their emotions are unacceptable

Emotions are dangerous

Emotional expression leads to rejection

This often contributes to shame, suppression, and emotional confusion.

Common Causes of Emotion Regulation Difficulties

10. Mental Health Disorders

Many psychological disorders involve emotion regulation impairments.

Examples:

- Depression → rumination and emotional withdrawal
- Anxiety disorders → avoidance and hyperarousal
- Borderline personality disorder → emotional instability
- PTSD → hyperreactivity and emotional numbing
- Eating disorders → suppression and shame

Emotion dysregulation is considered a transdiagnostic process because it appears across multiple disorders.

Common Causes of Emotion Regulation Difficulties

11. Sleep Deprivation and Physical Exhaustion

Poor sleep reduces:

- Cognitive control
- Emotional tolerance
- Impulse control
- Stress resilience

Sleep deprivation impairs prefrontal cortex functioning, making emotional reactions stronger and regulation more difficult.

Common Causes of Emotion Regulation Difficulties

12. Social and Environmental Factors

Environmental influences may worsen emotional dysregulation.

Examples include:

- Social isolation
- Bullying
- Discrimination
- Poverty
- Unsafe environments
- Unstable relationships

Supportive environments improve regulation, while chaotic environments impair it.

Common Causes of Emotion Regulation Difficulties

13. Cultural and Socialization Factors

Cultural norms shape:

- Emotional expression
- Emotional suppression
- Acceptable emotions
- Coping behaviors

Some individuals may never learn healthy emotional expression due to restrictive emotional socialization.

Common Causes of Emotion Regulation Difficulties

14. Lack of Emotion Regulation Skills Training

Many people are never explicitly taught:

- How to identify emotions
- How to calm themselves
- How to tolerate distress
- How to communicate emotions effectively

Emotion regulation is a learned skill that requires:

- Modeling
- Practice
- Reinforcement
- Safe relationships

Common Causes of Emotion Regulation Difficulties

15. Dissociation and Emotional Avoidance

Some individuals cope by disconnecting from emotional experiences.

Examples:

Emotional numbing

“Zoning out”

Feeling detached

Depersonalization

Derealization

Although dissociation protects against overwhelming distress temporarily, it prevents healthy emotional processing.

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

Emotion regulation is influenced by multiple interacting factors including biological, psychological, developmental, social, cultural, and environmental variables. These factors determine how individuals experience emotions, interpret emotional events, and manage emotional responses.

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

1. Biological and Genetic Factors

Biological systems play a major role in emotional regulation.

Genetic Predisposition

Some individuals are naturally more:

Emotionally sensitive

Reactive

Impulsive

Stress-responsive

Temperament differences may increase vulnerability to emotional dysregulation.

Brain Functioning

Emotion regulation depends heavily on several brain regions:

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

Amygdala

Processes fear and emotional salience

Hyperactivity increases emotional reactivity

Prefrontal Cortex

Responsible for executive control

Modulates impulsive emotional responses

Supports cognitive reappraisal

Hippocampus

Integrates emotional memory

Helps contextualize emotional experiences

Neurobiological impairments may reduce emotional control and increase impulsivity.

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

2. Temperament

Temperament refers to biologically based emotional tendencies present early in life.

Children differ in:

- Emotional intensity
- Adaptability
- Frustration tolerance
- Sensitivity to stress
- Highly reactive children may:
 - Become emotionally overwhelmed more easily
 - Require more external regulation support
 - Show stronger stress responses

Temperament interacts with environmental experiences throughout development.

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

3. Attachment and Early Relationships

Attachment relationships strongly influence emotional development.

Secure Attachment

Promotes:

- Emotional safety
- Co-regulation
- Self-soothing
- Emotional confidence

Insecure Attachment

May contribute to:

- Fear of abandonment
- Emotional avoidance
- Emotional dependency
- Poor emotional tolerance

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

Caregivers help children learn emotional regulation through:

- Modeling
- Emotional validation
- Consistent soothing
- Emotional coaching

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

4. Parenting Style

Parenting practices significantly shape emotional regulation.

Supportive Parenting

Encourages:

Emotional expression

Emotional understanding

Problem solving

Healthy coping

Invalidating Parenting May involve:

- Criticism
- Emotional dismissal
- Punishment of emotions
- Neglect

Invalidating environments increase risk for emotional dysregulation.

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

5. Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences

Trauma disrupts emotional development.

Examples include:

- Abuse
- Neglect
- Violence
- Loss
- Chronic stress

Traumatized individuals often experience:

- Hyperarousal
- Emotional instability
- Dissociation
- Emotional numbness

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

6. Cognitive Factors

Thought patterns strongly affect emotional regulation.

Cognitive Appraisals

How individuals interpret situations influences emotional reactions.

Examples:

“This is dangerous.”

“I can’t handle this.”

“I’m a failure.”

Cognitive Distortions

Distorted thinking increases emotional distress.

Examples:

- Catastrophizing
- Overgeneralization
- Black-and-white thinking
- Self-blame
- Adaptive cognition improves emotional flexibility.

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

7. Emotional Awareness

The ability to identify and understand emotions affects regulation capacity.

Emotionally aware individuals can:

- Recognize emotional triggers
- Label emotions accurately
- Detect bodily emotional cues
- Select appropriate coping strategies

Poor emotional awareness often leads to:

- Emotional confusion
- Impulsive reactions
- Avoidance
- Emotional overwhelm

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

8. Stress Levels

Stress significantly influences emotional functioning.

Acute Stress

May temporarily impair:

- Attention
- Cognitive control
- Emotional tolerance

Chronic Stress

May produce:

- Emotional exhaustion
- Irritability
- Burnout
- Hyperreactivity

Prolonged stress negatively affects brain systems involved in regulation.

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

9. Social Environment

Social context strongly affects emotional regulation.

Supportive environments promote:

- Emotional safety
- Validation
- Healthy coping
- Emotional expression

Negative environments increase:

- Emotional suppression
- Anxiety
- Aggression
- Emotional instability

Social isolation also impairs emotional regulation capacity.

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

10. Cultural Factors

Culture shapes:

Emotional meaning

Emotional expression

Emotional suppression

Social emotional expectations

Individualistic Cultures

Encourage:

Emotional expression

Autonomy

Pride

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

Collectivistic Cultures

Encourage:

Emotional restraint

Harmony

Group sensitivity

Cultural display rules determine which emotions are socially acceptable.

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

11. Developmental Stage

Emotion regulation changes across the lifespan.

Childhood

Requires co-regulation and external support.

Adolescence

Marked by:

Increased emotional intensity

Impulsivity

Brain restructuring

Adulthood

Typically associated with:

Greater cognitive flexibility

Better coping skills

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

Older Adulthood

May involve:

Increased acceptance

Reduced emotional reactivity

Positivity bias

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

12. Sleep and Physical Health

Physical wellbeing strongly affects emotional functioning.

Poor sleep impairs:

Prefrontal cortex functioning

Emotional control

Attention

Stress tolerance

Physical illness and fatigue also reduce emotional resilience.

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

13. Mental Health Disorders

Psychological disorders often impair emotional regulation.

Examples:

Depression → rumination

Anxiety → avoidance

BPD → emotional instability

PTSD → hyperarousal

Eating disorders → emotional suppression

Emotion dysregulation is central across many psychiatric conditions.

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

14. Learned Coping Strategies

Individuals learn emotional coping patterns through experience.

Adaptive learned strategies:

Problem solving

Reappraisal

Mindfulness

Maladaptive learned strategies:

Avoidance

Suppression

Aggression

Substance use

Repeated use strengthens emotional habits over time.

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

15. Emotional Beliefs

Beliefs about emotions influence emotional regulation.

Examples:

“Emotions are dangerous.”

“I should never feel sad.”

“I cannot control my emotions.”

Beliefs affect:

Emotional tolerance

Regulation attempts

Psychological wellbeing

Believing emotions are uncontrollable predicts poorer emotional functioning.

Factors Affecting Emotional Regulation

16. Motivation and Goals

People regulate emotions according to personal goals.

Examples:

- Reducing anxiety
- Maintaining social approval
- Avoiding conflict
- Enhancing happiness

Emotion regulation therefore depends partly on:

- Personal values
- Motivation
- Contextual demands

Theories of Emotional Regulation

Emotion regulation theories attempt to explain:

- How emotions are generated
- How emotions are modified
- Why people regulate emotions differently
- Which strategies are adaptive or maladaptive

Modern theories combine perspectives from:

- Cognitive psychology
- Developmental psychology
- Neuroscience
- Clinical psychology
- Social psychology

Theories of Emotional Regulation

1. Gross Process Model of Emotion Regulation

Developer

James Gross

Overview

The Gross Process Model is the most influential contemporary theory of emotion regulation.

It proposes that emotions develop through a sequence of processes:

- Situation
- Attention
- Appraisal
- Response

Emotion regulation strategies intervene at different points in this sequence.

Theories of Emotional Regulation

Emotion Generation Cycle

Situation

The individual encounters an emotionally relevant situation.

Example:

- Exam
- Argument
- Public speaking

Attention

The person selectively attends to aspects of the situation.

Example:

Focusing on criticism instead of praise

Theories of Emotional Regulation

Emotion Generation Cycle

Appraisal

The person interprets the situation.

Example:

“I’m going to fail.”

Response

Emotional, physiological, and behavioral responses occur.

Example:

- Anxiety
- Sweating
- Avoidance

Theories of Emotional Regulation

Five Families of Emotion Regulation Strategies

1. Situation Selection

Choosing situations likely to produce desired emotions.

Example:

Avoiding toxic environments

2. Situation Modification

Changing aspects of a situation.

Example:

Solving a conflict

3. Attentional Deployment

Shifting attention.

Example:

Distraction

Rumination

Theories of Emotional Regulation

Five Families of Emotion Regulation Strategies

4. Cognitive Change

Changing interpretation of events.

Example:

Cognitive reappraisal

5. Response Modulation

Changing emotional responses after emotions occur.

Example:

Suppression

Deep breathing

Theories of Emotional Regulation

Importance of the Gross Model

The model explains:

Why some strategies are healthier

Why timing matters

How emotions evolve dynamically

It also forms the basis for:

CBT

DBT

Emotion regulation therapy

Many modern interventions

Theories of Emotional Regulation

2. James-Lange Theory of Emotion

Developers

William James & Carl Lange

Main Idea

Physiological changes occur first, and emotions result from interpreting those bodily changes.

Sequence

Stimulus → Physiological arousal → Emotion

Example:

- Heart races
- Sweating occurs
- Person interprets this as fear

Theories of Emotional Regulation

Importance

This theory emphasized:

- Body-emotion connection
- Physiological responses

It influenced later theories of:

Interoception

Somatic awareness

Embodied emotion

Criticism

Different emotions may share similar physiological responses.

Cognitive interpretation was underestimated.

Theories of Emotional Regulation

3. Cannon-Bard Theory

Developers

Walter Cannon & Philip Bard

Main Idea

Emotional experience and physiological arousal occur simultaneously.

Sequence

Stimulus → Emotion + Physiological response simultaneously

Example:

Seeing danger causes:

Fear

Increased heart rate
at the same time.

Importance

This theory challenged the idea that bodily changes alone create emotions.

Theories of Emotional Regulation

4. Schachter-Singer Two-Factor Theory

Main Idea

Emotion results from:

Physiological arousal

Cognitive interpretation

Formula

Emotion = Arousal + Cognitive Label

Example

Rapid heartbeat:

During danger → fear

After winning a prize → excitement

Theories of Emotional Regulation

Importance

This theory emphasized:

- Context
- Cognitive appraisal
- Interpretation of bodily states

It strongly influenced cognitive models of emotion regulation.

Theories of Emotional Regulation

5. Appraisal Theory of Emotion

Main Idea

Emotions arise from how situations are interpreted rather than from events themselves.

People continuously evaluate:

- Threat
- Meaning
- Control
- Coping ability

Theories of Emotional Regulation

Primary and Secondary Appraisal

Primary Appraisal

“Is this dangerous or important?”

Secondary Appraisal

“Can I cope with this?”

Importance

Appraisal theory explains:

Individual differences in emotional reactions

Role of cognition in emotional regulation

Why the same situation affects people differently

Theories of Emotional Regulation

6. Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping

Main Idea

Stress depends on interaction between:

- Person
- Environment
- Appraisal processes

Emotion regulation depends on:

Perceived threat

Perceived coping resources

Theories of Emotional Regulation

Types of Coping

Problem-Focused Coping

Changing the stressor.

Example:

Studying harder for an exam

Emotion-Focused Coping

Managing emotional distress.

Example:

Relaxation

Seeking emotional support

Theories of Emotional Regulation

Importance

This theory strongly influenced:

- Stress psychology
- Coping research
- Clinical interventions

Theories of Emotional Regulation

7. Emotional Intelligence Theory

Developers

Salovey & Mayer

Popularized by Daniel Goleman

Main Idea

Emotion regulation is part of emotional intelligence.

Components

1. Emotional Awareness

Recognizing emotions.

2. Emotional Understanding

Understanding causes of emotions.

3. Emotional Regulation

Managing emotional responses.

4. Social Emotional Skills

Managing relationships effectively.

Theories of Emotional Regulation

Importance

The theory linked emotional regulation to:

- Leadership
- Academic success
- Workplace functioning
- Social competence

Theories of Emotional Regulation

8. Developmental Theory of Emotion Regulation

Main Idea

Emotion regulation develops gradually across childhood and adolescence.

Children initially rely on:

- Caregivers
- Co-regulation
- External soothing

Later they develop:

- Self-soothing
- Cognitive control
- Emotional awareness

Theories of Emotional Regulation

Kopp's Developmental Stages

Reflexive Regulation

Birth to infancy

Sensorimotor Regulation

Voluntary behavior emerges

Control

Awareness of social expectations

Self-Regulation

Flexible emotional management develops

Theories of Emotional Regulation

9. Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (SST)

Developer

Laura Carstensen

Main Idea

As people age, they prioritize emotionally meaningful goals and experiences.

Older adults:

Focus more on emotional wellbeing

Avoid unnecessary conflict

Prefer emotionally rewarding relationships

Positivity Effect

Older adults attend more to:

Positive stimuli

Positive memories
than negative information.

Theories of Emotional Regulation

Importance

This theory explains:

Aging and emotional wellbeing

Emotional priorities across lifespan

Emotional selectivity

Therapeutic Approaches for Emotional Regulation Disorders

Therapeutic approaches for emotional regulation disorders aim to help individuals:

- Understand emotions
- Tolerate emotional distress
- Reduce maladaptive coping
- Increase emotional flexibility
- Develop healthier emotional responses

Therapeutic Approaches for Emotional Regulation Disorders

Modern psychotherapy considers emotional dysregulation a core mechanism underlying many psychiatric disorders including:

- Depression
- Anxiety disorders
- PTSD
- Borderline personality disorder (BPD)
- Eating disorders
- Substance abuse disorders

Therapeutic Approaches for Emotional Regulation Disorders

- 1. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- 2. Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)
- 3. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)
- 4. Emotion Regulation Therapy (ERT)
- 5. Mindfulness-Based Interventions
- 6. Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT)
- 7. Trauma-Focused Therapies
- 8. Psychodynamic Therapy
- 9. Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)
- 10. Skills Training Programs
- 11. Pharmacological Interventions

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Emotion regulation develops across the lifespan and changes according to:

- Brain maturation
- Cognitive development
- Social experiences
- Attachment relationships
- Environmental demands
- Aging processes

Different age groups regulate emotions in different ways because emotional regulation abilities evolve gradually from dependence on caregivers to independent emotional management.

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

1. Emotional Regulation in Infancy (Birth–2 Years)

Characteristics

Infants are born with very limited self-regulation abilities.

At this stage:

- Emotions are intense and immediate
- Emotional reactions are mostly physiological
- Regulation depends heavily on caregivers

Infants initially rely on:

- Co-regulation
- Soothing from adults
- External calming

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Common Emotional Responses

- Crying
- Fear
- Distress
- Irritability
- Excitement

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Main Regulation Mechanisms

Co-Regulation

Caregivers regulate the infant's emotions through:

- Touch
- Eye contact
- Voice tone
- Holding
- Feeding
- Rocking

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Self-Soothing Behaviors

Gradually infants begin:

- Thumb sucking
- Looking away
- Holding objects
- Seeking comfort

Importance of Attachment

Secure attachment helps infants develop:

Emotional safety

Stress tolerance

Trust

Early regulation abilities

Inconsistent caregiving increases risk for future emotional dysregulation.

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

2. Emotional Regulation in Early Childhood (2–6 Years)

Characteristics

Children begin developing:

- Emotional language
- Self-awareness
- Behavioral control
- Understanding of social rules

However, emotional regulation remains immature.

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Common Emotional Challenges

- Tantrums
- Frustration
- Fear
- Separation anxiety
- Impulsivity

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Emotional Regulation Skills Emerging

Emotional Labeling

Children begin identifying:

- Happy
- Sad
- Angry
- Scared

Delayed Gratification

Children gradually learn:

Waiting

Turn-taking

Impulse control

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Attention Redirection

Children use:

- Play
- Distraction
- Comfort objects

Role of Parents and Teachers

Adults support emotional regulation by:

- Modeling calm behavior
- Teaching emotional vocabulary
- Validating emotions
- Providing structure
- Teaching coping skills

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Helpful Strategies

Calm Spaces

Quiet areas help children self-regulate.

Visual Supports

Examples:

Emotion charts

5-point scales

Zones of regulation

Breathing Exercises

Simple breathing techniques improve calming.

Risks During This Stage

Poor emotional regulation may lead to:

Aggression

Social difficulties

Behavioral problems

Emotional instability

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Helpful Strategies

Calm Spaces

Quiet areas help children self-regulate.

Visual Supports

Examples:

Emotion charts

5-point scales

Zones of regulation

Breathing Exercises

Simple breathing techniques improve calming.

Risks During This Stage

Poor emotional regulation may lead to:

Aggression

Social difficulties

Behavioral problems

Emotional instability

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

3. Emotional Regulation in Middle Childhood (6–12 Years)

Characteristics

School-age children develop:

- Better executive functioning
- Greater emotional awareness
- Improved social understanding
- They become more capable of:
- Independent regulation
- Problem-solving
- Perspective-taking

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Emotional Challenges

- Academic stress
- Peer conflict
- Social comparison
- Self-esteem issues

Regulation Skills at This Stage

Cognitive Strategies

Children begin using:

Self-talk

Problem solving

Perspective taking

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Social Regulation

Peers become important sources of:

Support

Validation

Emotional learning

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Effective Interventions

Emotional Check-Ins

Regular emotional reflection improves awareness.

Problem-Solving Training

Children learn:

Identify problems

Generate solutions

Evaluate consequences

Organizational Support

Teaching:

Planning

Time management

Task completion

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

4. Emotional Regulation in Adolescence (12–18 Years)

Characteristics

Adolescence is a period of:

- Emotional intensity
- Identity exploration
- Brain restructuring
- Increased impulsivity

The emotional system develops faster than executive control systems.

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Neurobiological Changes

- Increased limbic system sensitivity
- Incomplete prefrontal cortex maturation
- Heightened reward sensitivity
- This contributes to:
 - Risk-taking
 - Mood swings
 - Emotional reactivity

Common Emotional Challenges

- Peer pressure
- Identity confusion
- Romantic relationships
- Academic pressure
- Social anxiety

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Emotional Regulation Patterns

Adolescents often use:

Suppression

Rumination

Avoidance

Emotional expression through peers

Healthy development involves increasing:

Cognitive reappraisal

Emotional insight

Problem solving

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Important Supports

Emotional Validation

Adolescents need:

Respect

Emotional understanding

Safe communication

Mindfulness and CBT Skills

Helpful for:

Impulsivity

Anxiety

Emotional awareness

Peer and Family Support

Strong relationships buffer emotional stress.

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Risks

Poor regulation during adolescence increases risk for:

Depression

Anxiety

Substance use

Self-harm

Eating disorders

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

5. Emotional Regulation in Young Adulthood (18–40 Years)

Characteristics

Young adults generally develop:

Greater emotional independence

Improved cognitive regulation

Better long-term planning

Emotional Challenges

Career stress

Financial responsibility

Romantic relationships

Parenting

Identity consolidation

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Common Regulation Strategies

Healthy adults increasingly use:

Cognitive reappraisal

Problem solving

Goal-directed coping

Emotional reflection

Workplace Emotional Regulation

Important for:

Leadership

Professionalism

Teamwork

Stress management

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Risks

Emotional dysregulation may appear as:

- Burnout
- Chronic anxiety
- Emotional suppression
- Relationship instability

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

6. Emotional Regulation in Middle Adulthood (40–65 Years)

Characteristics

Middle adulthood often involves:

Greater emotional maturity

Increased perspective taking

Better emotional balance

Individuals often become more selective about:

Relationships

Stressors

Emotional investments

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Common Emotional Challenges

Caregiver stress

Career demands

Aging concerns

Family responsibilities

Health changes

Regulation Strengths

Many adults improve in:

Emotional flexibility

Acceptance

Patience

Emotional insight

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Common Strategies

Reappraisal

Acceptance

Selective emotional investment

Meaning-focused coping

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

7. Emotional Regulation in Older Adulthood (65+ Years)

Characteristics

Older adults often report:

Greater emotional stability

Lower negative affect

Increased emotional acceptance

This is sometimes called:

The positivity effect

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Socioemotional Selectivity Theory

Older adults prioritize:

Emotionally meaningful relationships

Positive experiences

Emotional wellbeing

Emotional Regulation Strengths in Aging

Older adults may:

Avoid unnecessary conflict

Focus on meaningful experiences

Use acceptance more effectively

React less intensely to stress

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Common Challenges

Loss

Grief

Illness

Loneliness

Cognitive decline

Regulation Strategies Commonly Used

Acceptance

Emotional selectivity

Positive attention

Meaning-focused coping

Emotional Regulation for Different Age Groups

Potential Difficulties

Cognitive decline may impair:

Reappraisal

Executive functioning

Cognitive flexibility

Some older adults may also experience:

Emotional withdrawal

Isolation

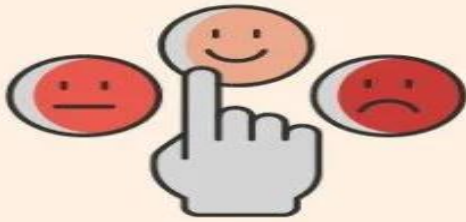
Depression

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

Effective emotional regulation strategies help individuals manage emotions in healthy, flexible, and adaptive ways. These strategies reduce emotional distress, improve psychological wellbeing, and support social and occupational functioning.

Emotion regulation does not mean suppressing emotions or avoiding them completely. Instead, it involves understanding emotions, responding appropriately, and adjusting emotional experiences according to situational demands.

EMOTION REGULATION STRATEGIES



Name the emotion



Validate the emotion



Identify triggers



Meditation or mindfulness



Talking through emotions



Journalling



Notice when you need a break



Good sleep hygiene



Consider therapy

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

1. Cognitive Reappraisal

Definition

Cognitive reappraisal involves changing the interpretation of a situation to alter its emotional impact.

Examples

Instead of:

“I failed, so I’m worthless.”

Reappraisal becomes:

“This mistake can help me improve.”

Benefits

Reduces anxiety and depression

Improves resilience

Enhances emotional flexibility

Reduces emotional intensity

Research consistently shows that reappraisal is among the most adaptive emotion regulation strategies.

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

2. Mindfulness

Definition

Mindfulness is the practice of:

Present-moment awareness

Nonjudgmental observation

Emotional acceptance

Key Components

Awareness of thoughts

Awareness of bodily sensations

Awareness of emotions

Acceptance without avoidance

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

Benefits

Reduces emotional reactivity

Improves emotional awareness

Reduces rumination

Increases emotional control

Mindfulness Techniques

Deep Breathing

Slowing breathing to calm physiological arousal.

Body Scan

Focusing attention on bodily sensations.

Grounding Exercises

Connecting to the present environment.

Mindful Observation

Observing emotions without reacting impulsively

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

3. Emotional Awareness and Labeling

Definition

Recognizing and naming emotions accurately.

Examples

Instead of:

“I feel bad.”

More specific labeling:

“I feel disappointed.”

“I feel anxious.”

“I feel embarrassed.”

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

Benefits

Emotional labeling:

Reduces emotional confusion

Activates cognitive processing

Improves regulation strategy selection

Reduces impulsive reactions

4. Deep Breathing and Relaxation Techniques

Purpose

Reduce physiological arousal associated with emotional distress.

Examples

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Slow abdominal breathing.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Alternating muscle tension and relaxation.

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

Guided Relaxation

Using calming mental imagery.

Benefits

Lowers heart rate

Reduces anxiety

Activates parasympathetic nervous system

Improves emotional calmness

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

5. Problem-Solving

Definition

Actively addressing the source of emotional distress.

Steps

Identify the problem

Generate possible solutions

Evaluate consequences

Choose a strategy

Implement the solution

Review effectiveness

Benefits

Reduces helplessness

Increases control

Reduces stress

Promotes adaptive coping

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

6. Acceptance

Definition

Allowing emotions to exist without fighting, avoiding, or judging them.

Important Clarification

Acceptance does NOT mean:

- Giving up
- Approving distress
- Being passive
- Acceptance means:
- Acknowledging emotional experiences
- Allowing emotions to pass naturally

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

Benefits

Reduces emotional avoidance

Decreases emotional suffering

Increases psychological flexibility

Reduces secondary emotions like shame

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

7. Distress Tolerance Skills

Definition

Skills used to survive emotional crises safely without impulsive or harmful behavior.

Examples

Grounding

Connecting to sensory experiences.

Self-Soothing

Using calming sensory activities:

Music

Warm baths

Soft textures

Temporary Distraction

Redirecting attention briefly during overwhelming distress.

Benefits

Prevents impulsive behavior

Reduces emotional escalation

Increases emotional endurance

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

8. Positive Refocusing

Definition

Redirecting attention toward positive or neutral experiences.

Examples

Gratitude exercises

Positive memories

Enjoyable activities

Pleasant imagery

Benefits

Reduces emotional intensity

Enhances mood

Builds resilience

Increases positive affect

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

9. Social Support

Definition

Seeking emotional assistance from trusted individuals.

Types of Support

Emotional support

Practical support

Validation

Advice

Benefits

Reduces emotional isolation

Promotes co-regulation

Enhances resilience

Improves stress coping

Healthy relationships are powerful emotional regulation resources.

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

9. Social Support

Definition

Seeking emotional assistance from trusted individuals.

Types of Support

Emotional support

Practical support

Validation

Advice

Benefits

Reduces emotional isolation

Promotes co-regulation

Enhances resilience

Improves stress coping

Healthy relationships are powerful emotional regulation resources.

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

10. Opposite Action

Definition

Acting opposite to destructive emotional urges.

Examples

Depression urges isolation

Opposite action:

Social engagement

Anxiety urges avoidance

Opposite action:

Gradual exposure

Anger urges aggression

Opposite action:

Calm communication

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

Benefits

Interrupts maladaptive emotional cycles

Reduces emotional reinforcement

Builds behavioral flexibility

This is a core DBT strategy.

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

11. Emotional Expression

Definition

Expressing emotions safely and appropriately.

Healthy Emotional Expression

Talking

Journaling

Art

Music

Therapy

Assertive communication

Benefits

Prevents emotional suppression

Enhances emotional processing

Improves relationships

Reduces emotional tension

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

12. Physical Activity

Definition

Using movement and exercise to regulate emotions.

Benefits

Exercise:

- Reduces stress hormones
- Improves mood
- Releases endorphins
- Reduces anxiety
- Improves sleep

Examples

- Walking
- Yoga
- Running
- Stretching
- Dancing

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

13. Healthy Lifestyle Habits

Physical health strongly affects emotional regulation.

Important Factors

Sleep

Poor sleep impairs emotional control.

Nutrition

Blood sugar instability increases irritability.

Hydration

Dehydration affects cognitive functioning.

Exercise

Improves emotional resilience.

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

14. Cognitive Flexibility

Definition

Ability to adapt thinking according to context.

Flexible Thinking Includes

Multiple perspectives

Tolerating ambiguity

Adjusting expectations

Reducing rigid thinking

Benefits

Better stress adaptation

Reduced catastrophizing

Improved coping

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

15. Self-Compassion

Definition

Treating oneself with kindness during emotional distress.

Components

Self-kindness

Common humanity

Mindful awareness

Benefits

Reduces shame

Reduces self-criticism

Improves emotional resilience

Increases emotional safety

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

16. Journaling and Emotional Reflection

Definition

Writing about emotional experiences.

Benefits

Organizes thoughts

Clarifies emotions

Identifies triggers

Promotes self-awareness

Improves emotional processing

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

17. Emotion Regulation Flexibility

Definition

Using different strategies depending on:

Situation

Emotional intensity

Context

Goals

Example

Mild stress

Reappraisal may help.

Extreme distress

Distraction or grounding may work better initially.

Importance

Psychological health depends not on one strategy alone, but on flexible use of multiple strategies.

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

18. Interoceptive Awareness

Awareness of bodily emotional signals.

Examples

Tight muscles

Rapid heartbeat

Sweating

Trembling

Benefits

Recognizing early bodily signs allows earlier emotional regulation before escalation.

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

19. Environmental Regulation

Definition

Changing surroundings to support emotional wellbeing.

Examples

Quiet spaces

Reduced stimulation

Organized environments

Nature exposure

Safe social settings

Benefits

Environmental adjustment reduces emotional overload.

Strategies for Effective Emotional Regulation

20. Psychoeducation

Definition

Learning about emotions and emotional processes.

Benefits

Understanding:

Emotional triggers

Brain responses

Stress reactions

helps individuals feel more in control and less overwhelmed.

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