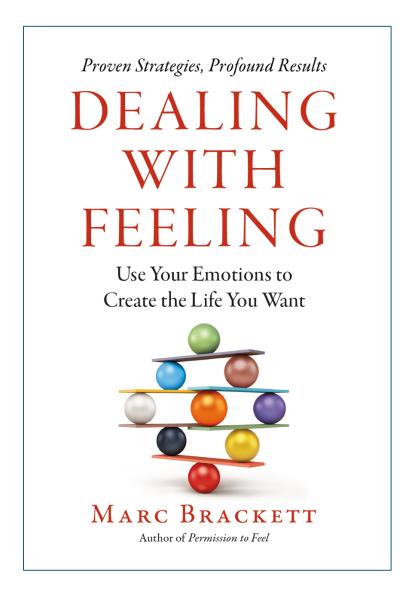
# Discussion Guide

for



Visit <u>www.marcbrackett.com</u> for more resources. To learn more about the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, visit <u>www.ycei.org</u>. For information about our school-based approach to teaching emotional intelligence, <u>RULER</u>, visit <u>www.rulerapproach.org</u>

# **Introduction: A Life-Changing Skill That Must Be Learned**

- 1. Frankl's quote suggests freedom lies in our response—where in your life has this been true?
- 2. When you hold the "lens" Marc describes to your own life, what patterns do you notice in how you react to feelings?
- 3. Which past emotional reactions would you most want a "do-over" for—and what would you do differently?
- 4. Why do you think society often believes emotions are "fixed" parts of personality?
- 5. How do you react to the claim that success is proportional to how well you deal with feelings?
- 6. Have you ever felt ashamed of a time you messed up? How do you balance self-compassion with accountability?
- 7. Why do you think emotion regulation feels harder in family contexts than in professional ones?

## Part One: Where Are We Now?

## **Chapter 1: Imagine a World**

- 1. Which "imagined world" scenario felt most utopian, and which felt most achievable?
- 2. What stood out to you most in the imagined workplace, family, or school examples?
- 3. In which parts of your life do you most long for the kind of emotionally intelligent world Marc describes?
- 4. What "dangerous conversation" have you avoided—and what holds you back?
- 5. What do you think would change if public policies were evaluated for emotional impact?
- 6. If you had to picture your community practicing better emotion regulation, what would you see differently?
- 7. Marc ends with "So—how do we get there?" How would *you* answer that?

## Chapter 2: Seven Reasons We Can't Deal with Our Feelings

- 1. Which of the seven reasons resonated most personally with you?
- 2. Which of the seven reasons feels easiest to change in your own life? Hardest?
- 3. What messages did you get as a child about emotions—spoken or unspoken? If your early lessons about feelings were a movie title, what would yours be and why?
- 4. Which "quick fix" traps do you fall into most often, and what's their cost?
- 5. How did your experience of school line up with Marc's description of SEL?
- 6. Why do you think society invests more in treatment than prevention when it comes to emotional health?
- 7. How do gender, race, or culture influence which emotions are "acceptable" to express where you live or work?

## **Part Two: Definitions**

## **Chapter 3: What Is Emotion Regulation?**

- 1. Marc argues that emotion regulation is learned, not innate—what convinces you of that?
- 2. How do you distinguish between "feeling an emotion" and "regulating an emotion"?
- 3. When do you think it's wise *not* to regulate but simply to feel?
- 4. How does Marc's framing challenge misconceptions that regulation means suppression?
- 5. What metaphors (like "toolbox" or "muscle") best capture how you view regulation?
- 6. Which emotions feel hardest for you to regulate? Why?
- 7. How might you apply Marc's emotion regulation formula to helping you better regulate your emotions? ER (G+S) = f(E+P+C)?

## **Chapter 4: Emotion Regulation in Action**

- 1. What's your personal go-to unhelpful strategy when you're stressed or experiencing another strong emotion?
- 2. What's your personal go-to helpful strategy when you're upset? Why is it effective?
- 3. How do you balance "accepting" vs. "shifting" emotions?
- 4. Why might small, daily regulation strategies matter as much as big ones?
- 5. How can you tell when a regulation strategy is a "quick fix" vs. a lasting solution?
- 6. What does failure to regulate look like in your relationships?
- 7. Which emotion regulation practice do you want to test this week?

## **Chapter 5: What Is Co-Regulation?**

- 1. What is co-regulation? How is co-regulation different from empathy or support?
- 2. Who in your life has been your most effective co-regulator? Why?
- 3. What happens in relationships when co-regulation is absent?
- 4. Do you think people should only respond to *requests* for co-regulation or offer it uninvited?
- 5. What makes you resistant to letting others help regulate your feelings?
- 6. How does co-regulation shift power dynamics in families, schools, or workplaces?
- 7. How might society look if we normalized co-regulation?

# **Chapter 6: Co-Regulation in Action**

- 1. Which of Marc's examples of co-regulation felt most powerful?
- 2. Can you recall a moment when co-regulation transformed a difficult situation? What role did tone, timing, and presence play?
- 3. Have you ever "failed" to co-regulate? What did you learn?
- 4. How can teachers or leaders co-regulate without overdoing it for others?
- 5. How can technology help—or hurt—our ability to co-regulate?
- 6. Which co-regulation strategies feel most natural to you? Least natural?
- 7. Who is one person you might get better at co-regulating with? Why?

# Part Three: Building Blocks

## **Chapter 7: Rethinking Your Beliefs About Emotions**

- 1. What beliefs about emotions were you raised with? Which still stick?
- 2. How do your beliefs about emotions show up in your parenting, teaching, or leading?
- 3. What's one belief you'd like to unlearn? One you'd like to reinforce?
- 4. Why might seeing emotions as "weakness" be harmful?
- 5. How might a fixed or growth mindset about regulation influence whether we regulate well or poorly?
- 6. Were you surprised by the research presented on emotion malleability? Why or why not?
- 7. How could you challenge others' unhelpful beliefs without shaming them?

#### **Chapter 8: Labeling Your Emotions Precisely**

- 1. How precise are you with your own feeling words—beyond "stressed" or "fine?"
- 2. How did Marc's examples of mislabeling emotions land with you?
- 3. Which emotion words do you overuse? Underuse?
- 4. How might a richer vocabulary enhance your relationships?
- 5. What were your thoughts on the research presented on the power of affective labeling?
- 6. What has been your experience with the Mood Meter (or the HowWeFeel App)? What do you learn from it?
- 7. How can schools and workplaces normalize a richer emotional vocabulary?

# **Part Four: Strategies**

## **Chapter 9: Quieting Your Mind and Body**

- 1. Which calming techniques resonate most with you?
- 2. How do you notice stress in your body?
- 3. What's the difference between short-term soothing and long-term regulation?
- 4. Which breathing exercises are hardest for you to practice consistently?
- 5. Why do you think some people resist breathing exercises?
- 6. Which of the mindfulness practices that Marc shared did you like the most and the least? How did you feel after trying them?
- 7. What "reset ritual" could you add to your daily life? What will get in the way of you doing this regularly?

# **Chapter 10: Redirecting Your Thoughts**

- 1. What thought patterns trigger your strongest emotions?
- 2. How do you balance optimism with realism when reframing?

- 3. How does redirecting thoughts differ from denial or toxic positivity?
- 4. Why might cognitive reappraisal or reframing feel harder in moments of grief or trauma?
- 5. Which distancing strategies feel the most realistic to you?
- 6. When have you seen visualization help a child, student, or colleague? Which visualization strategies do you use?
- 7. What are the dangers of over-relying on thought redirection?

#### **Chapter 11: Cultivating Your Emotional Strength through Relationships**

- 1. Who in your life best strengthens your regulation ability?
- 2. How would you describe "emotionally intelligent relationships" you have experienced?
- 3. Which "feelings mentor" attribute (non-judgmental, good-listener, empathic/compassionate) is the hardest for you to apply in your relationships? What can you do to grow in this area?
- 4. How do you choose who to share your rawest emotions with? What's the link between vulnerability, trust, and regulation in relationships?
- 5. How do you support others without depleting your own emotional reserves?
- 6. How might workplaces foster stronger emotion-regulating relationships?
- 7. Which relationship in your life could benefit from more intentional regulation?

#### **Chapter 12: Optimizing Your Emotion Regulation Budget**

- 1. How do you currently "spend" your emotional energy?
- 2. Which areas of life drain your emotional budget most quickly?
- 3. Which budget area (sleep, nutrition, physical activity) do you feel is working best for you and why?
- 4. How did your upbringing influence your emotion regulation budget strength or challenge areas?
- 5. How do your current relationships add to—or deplete—your emotional budget?
- 6. What budgeting shift would most change your daily well-being? Why do you believe that's the case?
- 7. How might you design a more balanced emotional economy for yourself?

## Part Five: Practice Makes Permanent

# **Chapter 13: How Children Learn to Regulate Emotions**

- 1. If you could go back, what emotional lesson would you teach your younger self?
- 2. What lessons about emotions did you learn—or not learn—as a child?
- 3. What role does modeling play vs. explicit instruction?
- 4. How might cultural or generational norms shape how kids learn emotions?
- 5. What's one practical way you could teach a child about regulation?

- 6. How did the method Marc used to teach kids how to regulate emotions sit with you? What makes it easy or difficult to facilitate these kinds of conversations with kids?
- 7. How do you think technology complicates how kids learn to regulate?

#### **Chapter 14: Becoming the Best Version of Yourself**

- 1. How do you define your "best self"? What is your core best-self attribute?
- 2. Which strategies from the book do you want to practice more intentionally?
- 3. What role does self-compassion play in becoming your best self?
- 4. What obstacles get in the way of you practicing regulation consistently?
- 5. How do you balance striving for improvement with accepting imperfection?
- 6. What legacy do you want to leave in how you deal with emotions?
- 7. What's your one biggest takeaway from *Dealing with Feeling*?

# **Epilogue: A Vision Realized**

- 1. How would you describe this book's core message in one sentence?
- 2. Which part of Marc's final vision resonated most deeply with you? Do you believe we can realistically move toward that world? Why or why not?
- 3. What small actions can you commit to that bring us closer to it?
- 4. How do you imagine future generations benefiting if we succeed?
- 5. What role do leaders play?
- 6. What responsibility do *you* feel after reading this book?
- 7. What changes give you hope that we're already on the right path?