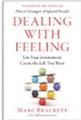


Emotion Regulation & Co-regulation

Pathway to Positive Classroom and School Climate

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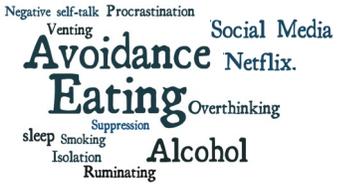
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We educators aren't regulating well



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Our students aren't either

- Impulse control, tantrums, and screaming outbursts
- Excessive crying or shutting down
- Blaming and scapegoating
- Physically assaulting others
- Refusing to share or participate
- Pouting and withdrawing
- Gossiping and meanness
- Drugs and alcohol

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Why emotion regulation, why now?

The Age of Amplification - We live in constant overdrive: 24/7 news, outrage-driven feeds, political polarization, and AI-engineered triggers.

A World of Crises - Pandemic, climate disasters, wars, injustices, economic uncertainties. The collective stress has become chronic.

Violence - Most aggressive behavior is a result of dysregulated anger, despair, or humiliation (not mental illness).

Without regulation, we spiral into outrage and fear that corrode well-being. We burn out and fracture our relationships. Emotion regulation is not just self-help; it's public safety, well-being, and social stability.

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What the research shows:

- Teachers with greater emotion regulation skills are less stressed and burnt out, have stronger social support networks, and feel more accomplished and satisfied in their jobs.
- Students with greater emotion regulation skills are more attentive, better learners, have stronger and healthier relationships, make more sound decisions, and are stronger learners.
- Put simply: We are healthier, happier, more connected, and even live longer when we can regulate emotions.

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Why didn't we learn to regulate?

- We don't value emotions as a society
- We don't recognize emotion regulation as a useful skill
- Nobody taught us the skills at home (less than 10%)
- We didn't learn the skills at school (less than 7%)
- We love the quick fix
- We'd rather treat ailments than prevent them
- There's limited institutional or governmental support

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From Permission to Feel to Dealing

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The confusion. ER is not about...

- Denying emotions
- Controlling others. Strategies are aligned with people's unique identities, strengths, values, and cultural backgrounds
- Always being comfortable or happy
- Blaming temperament or personality. Emotion regulation strategies are co-constructed throughout life
- Minimizing the importance of critical life events such as poverty, discrimination, or COVID
- Having a "correct" strategy

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What's the ultimate goal?

To move from automatic, habitual, and unhelpful ways of dealing with our emotions to conscious, deliberate, and helpful ways of dealing with them

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Regulating emotions

$$ER(G + S) = f(E + P + C)$$

Emotion Regulation (Goals + Strategies) = function (Emotion + Person + Context)

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Regulating emotions

The *thoughts* and *actions* we use to prevent, reduce, initiate, maintain, or enhance emotions (PRIME) to make sound decisions, have greater well-being, build and maintain positive relationships, and attain goals.

We need to learn **self-regulation** and **co-regulation**.

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What are the science-backed strategies?

- Shifting your beliefs about emotions
- Labeling your emotions precisely
- Quieting your mind and body
- Redirecting your thoughts
- Cultivating your emotional strength through relationships
- Optimizing your emotion regulation budget
- Becoming the best version of yourself

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Top self-regulation strategies

Teachers who use **mindful breathing, cognitive strategies, and have social support, and avoid catastrophizing and suppressing emotions** have greater job satisfaction and less burnout:

- I am confident in my ability to manage student behavior.
- My students demonstrate positive behavior.
- My students are motivated and engaged.
- My students are making academic progress.
- My colleagues are not mean or hurtful.
- I trust the leaders in my school.
- I am less exhausted.
- I feel accomplished.
- I am satisfied with my job.



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The Dealing with Feeling Wheel




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Co-regulation

- **Starts with us.** If we can't regulate ourselves, we can't co-regulate others.
- **Flows.** Emotions flow constantly between people whether we want them to or not.
- **Is intentional.** It means guiding another person's emotions with warmth, empathy, and strategies—it's different from simply reacting.
- **Is supportive.** Healthy co-regulation comforts, coaches, models, and reinforces. (It minimizes shaming and gaslighting, which leave scars).



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Co-regulation caveats

- **Minimization is damaging.** "Be a big kid" or "Get over it" dismisses the child and imprints unhelpful strategies.
- **There's a sweet spot.** Effective co-regulation balances empathy with perspective. Indulgence vs. support. It's certainly not ignoring, but it's not over-identifying either.
- **Boundaries matter.** Effective co-regulation is not about absorbing everyone else's stress. It's about empathizing while keeping enough perspective to be useful.



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Co-regulation and attachment

Attachment styles—secure, anxious, avoidant, disorganized—are shaped by early co-regulation experiences (in and out of school).

Anxious
Caregivers/educators were inconsistent, sometimes responsive, sometimes not.
The child learned: "I must cling or escalate to get attention."

Avoidant
Caregivers/educators dismissed or minimized feelings.
The child learned: "Showing emotion won't help, so I'll handle it alone."

Disorganized
Caregivers/educators were both a source of comfort and fear.
The child learned: "The person I need also scares me."

Secure
Caregivers/educators were consistent and warm.
The child learned: "My feelings matter, and others can help me manage them."



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Characteristics of healthy co-regulators



What's not in the word cloud?

National Sample (N = 10,000)



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Top co-regulation strategies

Teachers who *encourage* **mindful breathing, social support, and cognitive strategies**, and *do not encourage* **negative thinking, venting, or suppression** have a more positive classroom climate.

- I am confident in my ability to manage student behavior.
- I have students who demonstrate positive behavior.
- I have students who are less mean and hurtful.
- I am satisfied with my students' academic progress.
- I have fewer problems with absenteeism.
- I feel accomplished.



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Step 1: Set yourself up for success

- Consider the best time and place for supporting students.
- Be aware of what you bring to the situation.
 - How are you feeling? What are your nonverbals communicating? Are you tired or hungry? How well did you sleep?
- Remember to pause, breathe, de-activate, and check in with *your own* feelings first.
- Consider your *best self*. Are you approaching the situation as an educator who is: non-judgmental, a good listener, and has empathy and compassion?



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Step 2: Explore

- Approach with a welcoming facial expression and a calm voice. The mere presence of a caring adult helps a child to regulate.
- Be an emotion scientist.
 - Use gentle exploration, give undivided attention, listen for the underlying story or theme, validate all emotions.
 - Avoid telling students what they're feeling.
 - Find out how they're truly feeling. Is it anger, frustration, disappointment, anxiety, stress?



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Step 3: Strategize

- Coach using a range of strategies:
 - Mindful breathing
 - Positive self-talk and reappraisal
 - Creative problem-solving
- Remember, it's about them, not you! 😊
 - The strategy that might work best for you might not be best for the child
 - Are all or most strategies "permitted" in your classroom?
- Work on the immediate/short-term strategy.
- Consider obstacles and then plan & support.



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Step 4: Follow up

- Remember, this is a journey, and history often repeats itself.
- Check in with the student regularly. Ask how they are feeling and managing the situation they were struggling with.
- Find out about the student's successes and challenges with the strategies they have used.
- Praise for the success, accept the challenges, and work together to think through additional strategies.
- Help the student to build the habit of using helpful strategies.



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It's time to redefine success!

- Technical skills aren't enough. We are all evaluated by our emotion skills or how skillful we are at managing conflict, dealing with stress, building trust, inspiring and motivating others.
- Fortune 100 companies rank emotion regulation as a top future-of-work skill.
- Emotion regulation is the difference between reacting vs. responding, burning out vs. sustaining, breaking apart vs. holding together as a school community.
- Dysregulation costs us in health, relationships, productivity, and safety.

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