

Understanding Emotions

What Are Emotions?

Emotions are the body's **automatic reactions** to different stimuli in one's environment, which can be real or imagined. Emotions can produce a variety of physical changes, thoughts, and feelings.



Emotions exist on a continuum and may be positive, supportive, or challenging.

Everyone experiences emotions! They are a normal part of human life.

Managing Emotions

Emotion Regulation: The ability to understand and accept one's own emotional experiences, and use strategies to effectively express and cope with emotion.

Emotion Co-Regulation: The process by which individuals support each other in managing their emotions, particularly in times of stress or difficulty. This also helps them navigate interpersonal relationships, ultimately promoting healthier relationships.

When adults support youth through emotion co-regulation, youth are provided with emotional support and validation. This helps foster more supportive learning environments where students feel comfortable expressing themselves.

In a calm state, students are most successful in learning, communicating, problem solving, and collaborating; calm teachers are likewise at their most effective.

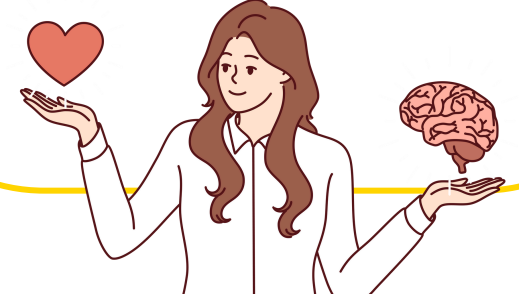
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Emotion regulation is **not** an innate skill. We all develop our ability to regulate our emotions over time.



Emotions vs. Feelings

Feelings are the **conscious, personal interpretations** or experiences of emotions.



Emotional contagion occurs when individuals subconsciously mimic the emotions of those around them, most often by mirroring tone of voice, facial expressions or body language.

When students who are anxious, angry or upset struggle to regulate their emotions, their teachers and fellow classmates may "catch" these emotions, and also begin to feel stressed or irritable.

Ensuring both teachers and students have the tools necessary to self-regulate their emotions is important to promote classroom learning and connectedness.

Emotions and Learning

Emotions may impact learning by influencing students' attention, memory, motivation, and cognitive function.

Aspect of Learning	Supportive Emotions (Interest, excitement, joy, confidence, pride, and curiosity)	Challenging Emotions (Anxiety, frustration, confusion, embarrassment, boredom, and anger)
Attention	May enhance focus and engagement with material.	May cause distraction, making it difficult for youth to concentrate.
Memory	May improve retention and recall of information.	May impact memory or cause forgetfulness.
Cognitive Functioning	May enhance problem-solving abilities and creative thinking.	May increase cognitive burden, making it harder for youth to process new information.
Motivation	May boost motivation and encourage active participation.	May cause youth to feel disengaged or uninterested in learning.
Social Interactions	May foster positive, healthy relationships and collaboration.	May lead to conflicts or disruptions in the youth's social or learning environment.
Behavioral Responses	May increase willingness to participate and take risks.	May cause youth to avoid challenging tasks and/or appear withdrawn from friends and peers.

What is Emotional Dysregulation?

Emotional Dysregulation

- **Emotional dysregulation** is the experience of very intense emotions and is frequent and long-lasting.
- Individuals often have difficulty understanding and controlling their emotions.
- A person's emotions and reactions may seem unreasonable or out of proportion.
- There may be other causes of irregular emotions (e.g., hormonal changes, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), mental health diagnoses).



To learn about ACEs and incorporating trauma-informed practices, visit: decyde.ca/tips



Learn more about stress and practicing self-care here: decyde.ca/mental-health-and-well-being

Mental Health

Certain mental health conditions can contribute to emotional dysregulation, including:

- Anxiety disorders
- Borderline personality disorder (BPD)
- Bipolar disorder
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Fetal alcohol syndrome disorder (FASD)



Learn more about neurodiversity here: decyde.ca/neurodivergent-substance-use-2

Signs of emotional dysregulation:

- Strong emotional reactions
- Interpersonal challenges
- Intense emotions that are difficult to control
- Anxiety
- Perfectionism
- Challenges coping with stress
- Impulsivity
- Mood swings
- Depression
- Unable to let go of negative emotions
- Feeling overwhelmed by emotions
- Substance use
- Disordered eating
- Suicidal ideation
- Self-harm

Strategies for Supporting Emotion Regulation Among Youth

Discuss Emotions & Model Effective Emotion Regulation



- Regularly engage youth in noticing and naming their emotions
- Actively listen and show genuine interest and empathy when a student expresses their emotions
- Where appropriate, the teacher may draw on personal experience and narrate their own emotion regulation process to model helpful strategies for youth

Incorporate Emotion-Regulation Techniques in Learning Activities



- Teach youth how to use practical emotion regulation strategies such as deep breathing, positive self-talk, mindfulness (particularly arts-based or movement-based mindfulness activities) to help them self-regulate
- Incorporate emotion regulation techniques regularly into learning activities (e.g., at the start of the day, or before transitioning to a new lesson)

Provide Space & Support for Emotion Regulation



- Help students use the strategies they have learned to help regulate their emotions
- Ask "What is going on?" instead of "What is wrong with you?"
- Promote inclusivity, understanding and empathy within the classroom and other learning environments
- Provide students with a dedicated "cool-down" area they can go if they need a quiet space
- Maintain a clear structure of daily activities and display a visual schedule in the classroom so students know what to expect

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