

How can K-12 students learn to regulate their emotions?

Emotion regulation requires noticing and naming emotions as they arise (e.g. joy, excitement, frustration, anger), understanding the impact these emotions have in our body, thoughts, behaviour and expressions, knowing what causes us to feel the way we do, and having strategies to navigate our way through them. Research demonstrates that emotion regulation is a skill that can be taught and developed across the lifespan.

HERE ARE FIVE KEY TIPS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS' EMOTION REGULATION

Talk about emotions to build a foundation for emotion regulation	It's important to help learners notice and name their emotions. For example, you can help students identify book characters' emotions and then link those to their own experience using guiding questions like: how is the character feeling? Why do you think they feel this way? What might they do to change how they feel? What would you do?
Explicitly teach emotion regulation strategies	It's helpful to teach a wide range of emotion regulation strategies, including mindful breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, positive self-talk and positive reappraisal (i.e. reframing a negative perspective about something and changing it into a positive one). Start by teaching strategies that are accessible in the moment (like mindful breathing) and that students already know. Explain what the strategy is and why/how/when it might be used.
Practice using the strategies	Practice the strategies when students are "cool" and not "hot." When anyone is emotionally activated, it's difficult to think rationally. In a classroom, this might include integrating a daily mindful practice during circle time or class meetings. This practice helps students feel familiar with the strategy and builds neural pathways, making the strategies more accessible when needed.
Create space and support for emotion regulation	Integrate support for emotional regulation into day-to-day life (e.g. if a conflict arises, you can help learners draw on strategies they have been learning). Students can also be provided with spaces where they can go to "cool off" if needed. It's important for children and youth to have autonomy to choose and use strategies that they are comfortable with that meet their particular needs.
Model effective emotion regulation strategies	It's important to be mindful of how our behaviours provide implicit instruction and influence student's skill development. It can be helpful for adults to narrate some of the regulation processes so that children can see/hear how they handle emotions. In a challenging situation, it's also critical that adults use strategies themselves to stay calm so that they are available to help others respond to the situation effectively.

Parents and teachers play a critical role in supporting and teaching students the skills and strategies needed for emotion regulation. Research has shown that when students are able to successfully regulate their own emotions, they tend to experience improved health and wellbeing, greater emotional resilience (i.e. the ability to recover from stressful situations), more positive interactions with peers, and more success at home and school.

For online resources and references please visit:
www.edcan.ca/facts-on-education

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The Facts on Education Series is produced with a generous sponsorship from the Canadian School Boards Association and the Desjardins Foundation.

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