



Emotional Self-Regulation- A Skill That Benefits Everyone

By Summer Stanley

Many of us react too quickly to stressful situations. Often, simply taking a few seconds to think things through before acting can make a huge difference in how a situation plays out. This is a skill most people can learn—it's called emotional self-regulation.

“Emotionally, self-regulation is the ability to calm yourself down when you're upset and cheer yourself up when you're down,” said Steven Stosny, Ph.D., in *Psychology Today*. “Behaviorally, self-regulation is the ability to act in your long-term best interest, consistent with your deepest values.”

People of any age can benefit from learning how to self-regulate their emotions. For kids, it's a great way to learn how to control their impulses, make good social connections, and develop self-esteem. For adults, self-regulation makes stressful conditions at work, home, or in the community much more manageable.



Tantrums and outbursts are to be expected in toddlers and young children, but as they get older, kids usually get better and better at controlling their emotions.

Experts say that the key to helping children learn self-regulation skills is to coach them through difficult situations. Sometimes called “scaffolding,” this involves encouraging positive behaviors until children can handle these challenges on their own.

A good example of scaffolding is helping your child with a frustrating math homework assignment. Instead of constantly looking over the child's shoulder, help him or her with one problem, then provide encouragement to try the rest of them alone. The child can also take brief breaks when he or she feels frustrated. Check in every so often, and offer praise when your child does well.

The idea behind scaffolding is to pare down an overwhelming task to a series of smaller, easier-to-accomplish tasks. When the first step is successfully completed, another can be added, and so on, until the entire project is done. This helps the child build self-regulation skills in manageable increments.

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For adults and children alike, strategies such as mindfulness and cognitive reappraisal are good ways to self-regulate.

- **Mindfulness:** This strategy helps with self-regulation by allowing you to delay gratification and manage emotions through practical exercises such as deep breathing.
- **Cognitive reappraisal:** This strategy involves thinking about a situation in a more positive way, rather than one that is likely to increase negative emotions. For example, if a friend did not return your calls or texts for several days, rather than thinking “my friend hates me,” you might instead think, “my friend must be really busy.”

Resources:

“How to Practice Self-Regulation,” accessed June 19, 2019, from <https://www.verywellmind.com/how-you-can-practice-self-regulation-4163536>

“How Can We Help Kids With Self-Regulation?” accessed June 19, 2019, from <https://childmind.org/article/can-help-kids-self-regulation/>

“Self-Regulation,” accessed June 19, 2019, from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/anger-in-the-age-entitlement/201110/self-regulation>

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