

## How Do I Recognize that a Child has a Problem with Emotion Regulation?

Some children may be at risk for emotion regulation-related issues, and other children may already be displaying behaviors that may stem from a lack of emotion regulation skills.

Watching for these five signs may help you identify a child who has problems with emotion regulation:

1. Shy or irritable temperaments
2. Lack of emotions in emotional situations
3. Emotional reactions or lack of emotional reactions that interfere with friendships
4. Aggressive or explosive behaviors
5. Home environments that lack support for emotion regulation or provide examples of poor emotion regulation

## What Interventions are Available for Children with Poor Emotion Regulation?

There are cognitive, affective, and behavioral interventions useful in adjusting thought processes and changing behaviors that result from poor emotion regulation.

Cognitive interventions address the thought processes behind emotion regulation and focus on developing problem solving skills.

In affective interventions, the focus is on identifying triggers and coping skills.

Behavioral interventions, such as anger management classes, address behaviors that result from poor emotion regulation.

1. Quote from Gross, J. J. (1998). The emerging field of emotion regulation: An integrative review. *Review of General Psychology*, 2(3), p. 275.
2. Quote from Dahl, R. E. (2004). Adolescent brain development: A period of vulnerabilities and opportunities. *Annals of the New York Academy of Science*, 1021, p. 19

For more reference information, please refer to "Emotion Regulation: A Guide for Teachers" located on [www.sbbh.pitt.edu](http://www.sbbh.pitt.edu)

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For more useful information regarding emotion regulation, childhood emotional and behavioral disorders, and interventions, please visit [www.sbbh.pitt.edu](http://www.sbbh.pitt.edu)



## Emotion Regulation

*Information for Parents, Teachers, and Caregivers*



## What is Emotion Regulation?

When a person encounters a situation, there are emotional cues that cause a person to feel a certain way. A person's overall emotional response is made up of a combination of three emotional response tendencies: the way a person shows emotions, the way a person feels, and the way a person's body reacts. It is between the emotional cues and the overall emotional response that emotion regulation occurs.

Emotion regulation is defined as “the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions.”<sup>1</sup>

Emotion regulation develops throughout childhood as a child learns to express and experience emotion. By middle childhood, a child has developed a large emotional vocabulary and has begun to interpret the emotional responses of others. In adolescence, emotion regulation is refined and changes depending on the type of emotion, social context, and motivation to use it.

## Why is Emotion Regulation Important?

Emotion regulation contributes to mental health, which is made up of a person's ability to be productive, be at peace with one's self, and have positive social relationships.

If a child is too preoccupied with negative thoughts to pay attention in class or too reactive to manage frustrations while taking a math test, the child's academic performance will most likely suffer.

The ability to properly cope with emotions allows a child to experience an inner sense of calm, as opposed to dwelling on whether he or she will “fit in” with his or her friends or making threats when not invited to sit with the “cool kids” at lunch.

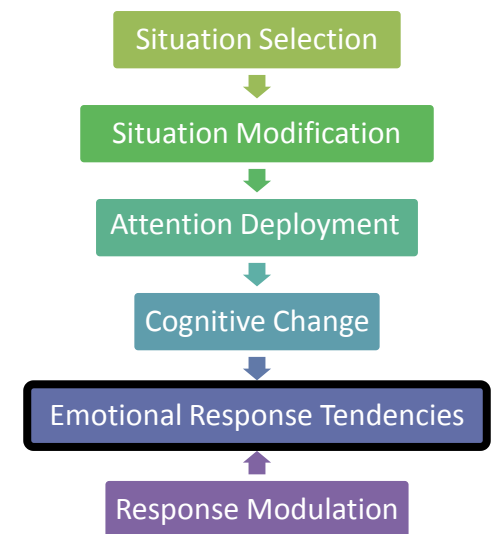
Emotion regulation also affects social relationships, as a person must be able to appropriately express, monitor and respond to emotion when interacting with others. In fact, people skilled in emotion regulation are typically rated as more well-liked by their peers.



Poor emotion regulation has negative effects on school performance and social relationships, may result in internalizing (i.e., depression, anxiety) and externalizing (i.e., conduct disorders, ADHD) disorders, and can contribute to societal problems. Adolescents are often faced with events while they are experiencing “hot cognition,” meaning that a person is “thinking under conditions of high arousal and/or strong emotion.”<sup>2</sup> Even if an adolescent can make good decisions when calm, those with poor emotion regulation who are faced with emotional arousal will most likely make negative decisions, including substance abuse, violence, and unsafe sex.

## How Does Emotion Regulation Work?

Models of emotion regulation show points for regulatory processes that control our responses to emotion. Situation selection occurs when a person engages or avoids something in order to control emotional responses. Next, situation modification occurs when a person adjusts a situation in order to avoid negative emotion. Then, there is another opportunity to engage in emotion regulation via attention deployment, meaning attention is directed away from the situation. Finally, a person can use cognitive change, which involves regulating emotion by changing the way he or she thinks about a situation. After the emotional response tendencies are triggered, a person has the option to suppress the way he or she experiences or expresses emotions through response modulation.



Emotion regulation that involves changing thought processes is called reappraisal, while emotion regulation that occurs by inhibiting emotional response tendencies or avoidance is called suppression. Using reappraisal results in more positive outcomes than using suppression, such as increases in experiences of positive emotion, higher social desirability ratings, and more positive social interactions.