

# Emotion Regulation Strategies for Educators

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## Strategies Video Series

- I. Attention
- II. Executive Functioning
- III. Emotion Regulation
- IV. Memory

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## Outline

- Define Emotion Regulation
- Strategies to prevent dysregulation
- Strategies to support the student in the moment
- Putting it together - Example
- Summary

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## Defining Emotion Regulation

- Emotion regulation can be defined as the ability to modulate and regulate your emotional responses
- Emotion regulation ability is interconnected to the broader domain of executive functioning
  - Inhibition/Impulse control
- Poor emotional control can be expressed in different ways.

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## Emotional Regulation

- Emotional regulation difficulties might look like overreacting or they may look like...
  - She cried for no apparent reason.
  - He was disproportionately upset when he was told to put his paper away.
  - "mismatch between context and emotional display"
  - They can go from zero to 100 very quickly with any emotion



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## Translating Research to Practice



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## Disruption to life

- Emotion regulation can be helpful in day to day life
- Disruption to this function can make it difficult to engage in academic and social activities



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## Managing the triggers?

Using the ABC approach to challenging behavior, we can manage the antecedents, or triggers, to reduce the chances of a behavior occurring.

- Develop a positive rapport
- Establish consistent routines
- Provide rules/education about appropriate ways to communicate
- Involve the person in discussing behavior issues
- Avoid or minimize known triggers
- Use distraction or redirection away from the trigger
- Discuss these triggers with the person
- Know what they are using as possible coping strategies (deep breathing, mindful activity, switching to a preferred activity, etc.)
- Suggest and encourage these strategies when a trigger occurs.

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## Strategies

- These challenges do not typically occur in isolation
- May be helpful to utilize strategies for other areas that the child may be struggling with for example executive functioning or memory



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## How do I support my student?

1. Stay calm
2. Allow for time to regroup
3. Hear them out
4. Respond positively and provide feedback/support as warranted
5. Gently redirect them to another activity or topic.

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## Positive reinforcement

- This is generally the most effective strategy. An incentive is given immediately when a desired behavior occurs. For example, Kevin usually becomes quiet when anxious then suddenly starts shouting at everyone. He is learning to tell family members when he is getting anxious and do his deep breathing exercises. Every time he remembers to do this, his actions are praised.



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## Positive reinforcement con't

- Positive reinforcement is not bribery - reinforcement comes after a task is completed, bribery is offered before. Try to make sure the reinforcer is practical, ethical and valid for the behavior being targeted. Timing is critical - ensure the positive reinforcement happens immediately after the desired behavior.
- Keep in mind that lengthy "behavioral contracts" may not be appropriate if the individual has problems with working memory or awareness.

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## Giving feedback

- After a brain injury, a person may become unaware of what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior. They may also have trouble interpreting facial expressions or non-verbal language that others are upset. We need to provide immediate clear verbal feedback on inappropriate behaviors.



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## Redirection

- Redirection can involve distracting a person when a trigger for behavior occurs, or redirecting them when a behavior is occurring. It is often used for repetitive behaviors such as constantly talking about the same topic. It is often effective when combined with positive reinforcement as well.



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## Ignoring the behavior

- In some cases, behavior occurs to get attention, so the best strategy may be to ignore it. As with many of these techniques, tactical ignoring is best linked with positive reinforcement. For example, a child is ignored during an angry outburst, but is rewarded with praise, a treat or favorite activity once the outburst is over.



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## Putting it all together - Example

- Kevin – a 13 year old young man who sustained a severe TBI about a year ago.
- Kevin gets anxious and has a hard time communicating his concerns. He will sometimes yell or rip up assignments for seemingly no reason.
- What do we know about Kevin's triggers?
- What are strategies we learned Kevin was working on to cope?
- How can you support him in a moment of stress?

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## Case example

- What do we know about Kevin's triggers?
  - Well we know he can become overwhelmed easily with large assignments
  - We can ask him to do every other problem on the page, or to write one response at a time – maybe we chunk his assignments or help with prioritizing tasks
  - Maybe Kevin also gets frustrated more easily because things take longer to do – thinking and motor planning
    - So we give him extended time or an alternative way to complete the task that accommodates his motor challenges

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## Case example

- What are strategies we learned Kevin was working on to cope?
  - We know from talking with his parents that he is working on deep breathing, activity pacing, and learning to communicate his needs
    - We also know that Kevin struggles with communicating, especially when faced with a challenging task and doesn't always think about asking for help first

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## Case Example

- How can you support him in a moment of stress?
  - First, stay calm – speak in a neutral voice
  - For Kevin, we know that he has a chart to refer to – we know that he needs a verbal cue to look at the chart or he won't be able to independently choose how he can be helped – so we gently state “Kevin, I can see that you are getting frustrated. Let's take a look at your chart to help you.”
  - This visual cue can be helpful to allow the child to name their feelings, to take a mental break from whatever they are doing, and to allow them the opportunity to use some of their coping strategies or even ask for help if that is needed.
  - Finally providing feedback/reinforcement for engaging in these can be reassuring and increase the likelihood of them using strategies again

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## Emotion regulation sheet

### Strategies for feeling CHALLENGED

- STOP. Name your feelings. Calm down.
- More time/Take a break
- “Look Back” (self-reflect)
- Ask for help
  - Choices
  - Hint
  - Say it a different way
  - Repeat it
  - Write it down
  - See a picture
  - Show me



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## Circling Back - Summary



- Gather as much information as possible about the child – Neuropsychology evaluations, speech and language evaluations, medical documents, PT and OT evaluations
- These challenges are dynamic, multi-variate, and evolving
- Brain injuries are individual and diverse
  - There are some commonalities but each one is unique
- It is important to individualize and fade accommodations as necessary
- Teachers play a key role!

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