

What is Regulation?

(Early Years)



Regulation refers to an individual's ability to manage their feelings, thoughts, and actions to achieve personal goals. When individuals are regulated, they can manage difficult situations in safe ways, participate in activities, interact with others, and work towards achieving their goals.

For children, developing regulation skills is crucial for tasks that involve turn-taking, impulse control, navigating complex social interactions, and using safe behaviours in a range of contexts. Supporting children to develop regulation skills in early childhood education settings is essential for fostering lifelong health and well-being.

When developing an understanding of regulation, it is important to explore three areas: *emotional, cognitive and behaviour*.

Emotional Regulation (*feelings*)

Refers to the ability to manage and adjust one's feelings in a way that matches the demands of a situation.

For example: A child might be excited and joyful during music and movement. After this activity, they are able to shift into a calm and content emotional state for engaging in a more relaxed activity. This ability to shift to different emotions, based on the context and needs of the situation, is a key aspect of emotional regulation.

When the emotional state required for an activity aligns with an individual's current state, they are considered emotionally regulated. It is important to remember that all children's emotions are valid and should be listened to, supported, and respected.

Cognitive Regulation (*thoughts*)

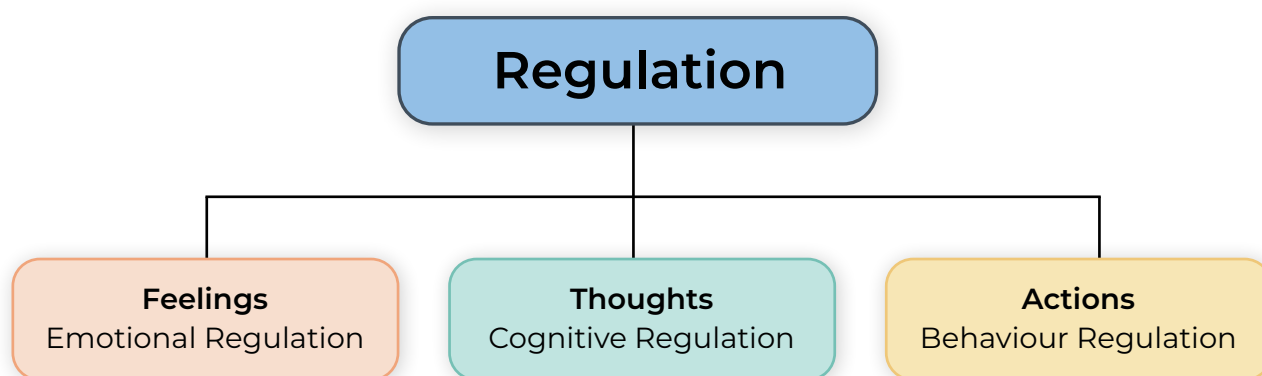
Awareness of one's thoughts, attitudes and beliefs. It assists individuals to focus on helpful and realistic thinking and adjust thoughts to match the needs of the situation.

For example: A child might be thinking about their birthday party later that day, but can refocus on the play activity in front of them at kindy and have fun with friends.

Behavioural Regulation (*actions*)

Behaviour regulation refers to the ability to be aware of and manage actions to ensure meaningful and safe behaviours are used with others and in a range of contexts.

For example: This could include waiting for a friend or teacher to finish talking without interrupting and making thoughtful decisions about how to act in different situations. This involves applying judgment to a situation and behaving in a way that achieves personal needs and goals.



As educators who are frequently supporting and guiding children's regulation, it is also important to understand dysregulation and the goal of supporting self-expression...

What is Dysregulation?

Dysregulation refers to the inability to make helpful and safe choices in the moment; and can look different for everyone. For some, this might involve unsafe or concerning actions such as kicking, hitting, or throwing objects. For others, it could present as having lots of energy, or conversely, as becoming quiet or withdrawn - both of which may impact the individual's ability to achieve their personal goals. Remember, dysregulation is not a choice, however educators can choose to show acceptance and support to a child who is dysregulated.

What is Self-Expression?

Self-expression is the process of recognising cues from the body and expressing them in ways that are safe and helpful. All emotions are valid and should be felt and expressed, but it is essential children are supported to express these emotions safely. When an individual has excess energy, whether from anger, excitement, or another emotion, they may need to release this energy to return to a helpful state, and children might need help learning this. This could look like expressing anger through physical actions like stomping feet, clenching fists, or kicking a ball, or expressing excitement by running or playing outside. The key is to express emotions in a way that is safe for both the individual and others. The goal is not to suppress emotions but to find safe ways to express them.

What can help?

Developing skills for regulation is a lifelong process. Naturally children are still learning how to regulate and express their emotions in safe ways. Educators can support children by connecting with them, being co-regulators and helping them to practice strategies that are helpful for them.

References

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