



Educator Emotion Regulation Plan

What is Emotion Regulation?

There is no question that being an educator is emotional work. Educators have hundreds of experiences each day that lead to an emotional response, some positive and some negative, and with varying levels of intensity. **Emotion regulation skills help educators manage strong emotions they have in response to those experiences so that they can process the event and respond in helpful ways.** Emotion regulation is a critical part of maintaining resilience and professional performance in the face of job-related and other life stressors.

Feeling stressed and unable to regulate emotions in response to everything an educator must juggle, both personally and professionally, including the daily witnessing of other's suffering, is a completely normal response. And with some thoughtful attention to emotional responses, educators can learn to manage those stressors and thrive.

Emotion Regulation and Educator Success

Emotion regulation skills are important because an emotionally regulated educator can more effectively build relationships with students, manage their classrooms, create psychologically safe environments, and model self-regulation skills for students. (Sutton, Mudray-Camino, & Knight 2009)



Additionally, educators need to be emotionally regulated themselves to help students regulate their emotions, a process known as co-regulation. Emotion regulation skills also help educators cope with negative life events and stressors and increase overall psychological health and well-being. (Gross and John 2003; Aldao et al., 2010; Luhmann et al., 2012) Educator emotion regulation skills are a crucial part of building positive and inclusive classroom cultures and preventing burnout.

How To Use the Emotion Regulation Reflection and Worksheet

The [Emotion Regulation Reflection](#) and [Action Plan Worksheet](#) are meant to provide a space for self-reflection and planning for managing strong emotions before difficult situations arise. This aligns with Wisconsin's Social and Emotional Learning Competency "**understanding and managing emotions,**" which includes "*the ability to predict situations that will cause strong emotions, and plan and prepare to manage those emotions,*" an essential skill for adults. (DPI 2018)

It is recommended that you use this plan when you are calm and best able to reflect on its various components. Consider revisiting this plan periodically as you gain insight into what strategies are most helpful to you.

Note, this plan focuses on things that a person can control; skills and mindsets they can develop in themselves. It's important to acknowledge, however, that social and environmental factors, often things outside of a person's control, impact their well-being too. Especially when considering the impact of racism or other forms of discrimination on people's well-being, it is essential to work towards building healthier, more equitable environments while also developing individual wellness skills and mindsets. This will ensure that everyone has the potential to live a healthy life.

Emotion Regulation Reflection

Imagine a typical school day: maybe you had to rush to get to work on time, or you had an unplanned fire drill during first period, or maybe one of your students is having a particularly difficult time meeting behavioral expectations. Maybe you handled these challenges with ease, or maybe some of them really left you feeling stressed and you responded in a less-than ideal way.

So how did you get to that point? Let's try to better understand our behavior in scenarios like these by examining the relationships between situations, our interpretation of those situations, and our emotional, physical, and behavioral responses.



1. Activating Events

Emotions are generated as a response to situations, both internal (e.g., thinking about the death of a loved one), and external (e.g., a difficult interaction with a student). When experiences produce strong negative emotions such as fear, anger, and sadness, the intensity and duration of these emotions may be overwhelming and lead to unhelpful behaviors. These events are known as activating events and are unique to each person.

Take a few minutes to reflect on the events that activate you and record them below.

Activating Events: *When these things happen, I am more likely to feel unsafe and upset. E.g., not being listened to, feeling pressured, being excluded, lack of control over a situation, certain times of the day, feeling lonely, not getting enough sleep, schedule disruptions, etc.*

2. Thoughts

So why are activating events unique to each person? Oftentimes, the event itself is not what causes a certain emotional reaction, but the thoughts that you have about that situation.

Reactions to a situation are influenced by a person's past experiences, which shape beliefs about themselves, others, and the world. In stressful situations, people may get caught in patterns of inaccurate thoughts, also known as cognitive distortions, which reinforce negative thinking and emotions.

The following are eight common patterns of distorted thinking. (Aguilar 2018)

Black and White Thinking: Thinking in extremes, with no shades of grey or recognition of the complexity of people or situations. Thoughts include words like "never," "always" and "either/or," e.g., "If all of my students don't score well on standardized tests, I will be a failure as a teacher."

Personalization: The belief that actions of others are a reaction to one's own negative characteristics; the tendency to take everything personally and believe that bad things are a direct result of one's actions or negative characteristics, e.g., "My colleague didn't smile at me in the hallway because I didn't support her idea at the staff meeting last week."

Jumping to Conclusions: Making negative assumptions without knowing all of the facts. Assuming to understand the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of others without ever checking in with them, e.g., "That student didn't put his hood down when he came in today. He's just trying to get into a power struggle with me."

Overgeneralization: Using one piece of evidence to draw broad conclusions about people and situations, e.g., "The school administrator stopped into my classroom unannounced today, they probably don't trust me."

Catastrophizing: Assuming the worst-case scenario will happen and thinking that situations are terrible and intolerable, e.g., "This new strategy is supposed to help with classroom management, but it will never work. My classroom will be in chaos and my students won't learn anything."

Unrealistic Expectations: Thinking that all people and situations need to measure up to rigid rules for how things "should" be, e.g., "As a first-year teacher, I should be able to manage my classroom as well as my colleagues who have been teaching for a while."

Disqualifying the Positive: Focusing on the negative aspects of people, situations, and experiences, while ignoring or explaining away any positive aspects, e.g., "My student thanked me for listening to him about a tough situation at home, but I know he only came to me because his favorite teacher was out sick today."

Emotional Reasoning: Believing that feelings are facts, e.g., "I'll feel guilty if I don't say yes to being on another committee. I'll be letting my colleagues and students down."

Do any of those thoughts sound familiar to you? We've all had some of these thoughts at some point or another in our lives. Fortunately, once we know how to recognize these distortions, we can take steps to interrupt them before they affect how we feel and behave.

Using the list above, place a check mark next to the three most common cognitive distortions you have related to your work, and reflect on the situations that lead to those. Then, using the activating events from question one, recall the thoughts you might have had about each situation and record them below.

Thoughts: *Inaccurate or unhelpful thoughts get stuck in my head, especially when I am stressed.*

3. Responses: Emotional, Physical, and Behavioral Responses

Emotional



So far you have identified activating events and examined some inaccurate thoughts that can produce and reinforce strong emotional responses. Using the situations that you identified above, record some of the emotions you have experienced in response to those situations.

Emotional Response: *These are the emotions I'm likely to have when I encounter activating events.*

Physical



In situations that people perceive as stressful or threatening, the amygdala, the watchdog of the brain, signals the body to shift its resources to keeping us safe. These shifts, while meant to protect us from danger, can make it more difficult to remain emotionally regulated. This can lead to increased heart rate, sweating, muscle tension, difficulty thinking, dry mouth, reactivity, red face, digestive concerns, etc. Take a moment to consider your body's response to the stressful situations you identified above and record it below.

Physical Response: *When I notice these things happening in my body, it may be a cue that I am stressed and having a difficult time regulating my emotions.*

Behavioral



Along with the physical response, we will also feel an urge to act. While we may not always act on this impulse, it is important to begin to notice the behaviors that we might exhibit during stressful situations. Take a few minutes to think about the ways you have behaved in response to the stressful situations that you identified above and record them below.

Behaviors: *These are behaviors that I show when I am stressed and having a difficult time regulating my emotions. E.g., snapping at others, being inflexible, withdrawing, arguing with others, swearing, using alcohol or drugs, self-harming, avoiding a person or task, becoming obsessed with someone or something, becoming verbally abusive, difficulty concentrating, overanalyzing, eating junk food.*

Emotion Regulation Action Plan Worksheet

Strengthening emotion regulation skills is about learning to respond in a different way during the pause between something that happens and the way you respond to it. You can use the following action steps to strengthen these skills and build your resilience as an educator.

4. Tame Your Negative Thoughts

One effective strategy for self-regulation is to reinterpret a situation in order to change its impact on your emotions. While you may not have control over all the challenges you encounter in a day, your opportunity for emotion regulation lies in how you interpret those challenges. Learning to identify distorted thinking and to interrupt it is like lifting weights to strength a muscle; it takes conscious effort and repetition.

Use the spaces below to turn the distorted thoughts that you identified above into more accurate thoughts.

Distorted Thought	New Thought
Example: "Brian didn't put his hood down when he came in today. He's just trying to get into a power struggle with me."	Example: "I don't know why Brian didn't put his hood down when he came into class today. Maybe I should check in with him."

5. Identify Regulation Strategies

As you work to sharpen your skill at identifying and interrupting distorted thinking, it is also important to plan ways to regulate emotions that “speak” to the parts of your brain that calm the body’s stress response.

Using the list below or your own ideas, checkmark the strategies that are helpful to you and any that you would like to try out. Consider how your strategies might differ depending on if you’re in a classroom full of students, in a preparation period, and even when you are outside of work.

Listen to music	Talk to a friend	Recite positive affirmations
Take a walk	Call a loved one	Pet your dog or cat
Cook or bake	Hold an ice cube	Draw or do art
Read a book	Write in a journal	Bounce a ball
Deep breathing	Practice mindfulness	
Watch something funny on TV	Take a drink of water	
	Spend time in nature	

6. Focus on Your Well-Being

Living a balanced lifestyle and increasing overall well-being makes you more able to regulate your emotions during difficult situations.

The Wellness Compass, a framework for understanding the essential components of well-being from the Compassion Resilience Toolkit for Schools (Rogers & DPI 2021), includes: **heart, mind, strength, and spirit**.



HEART: This area of wellness focuses on emotions and relationships - including the way we connect with ourselves and others. It emphasizes practicing self-compassion and recognizing when to reach out for help and support.

MIND: This area focuses on how we manage our time, workspace, and belongings. This area is exemplified through work and organization, like setting boundaries and taking breaks during the workday, engaging in meaningful work, being fully present in the moment, budgeting, and prioritizing how you spend time.

STRENGTH: This area focuses on stress resilience and care for the body. This area is exemplified through activities that build stress-resilience like practicing gratitude and learning new things, and caring for the body through regular sleep, exercise, healthy eating, etc.

SPIRIT: This area focuses on connecting to our sense of purpose with intentionality, exposing ourselves to resilience in those we serve, and recreating ourselves through rest and play. This area is exemplified through being able to articulate our core values and our sense of purpose, choosing

to focus our attention on things that nurture our optimism and hope, and making time for relaxation and doing things that make us happy.

Using the [Wellness Compass Practice Assessment](#), reflect on your current wellness practices.

Choose one compass area that you would like to focus on to increase your resilience and record it below. Then, brainstorm two strategies that you would like to focus on to help you in this area.

Wellness Compass Area Focus

Strategies for Increasing Resilience in this Area

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