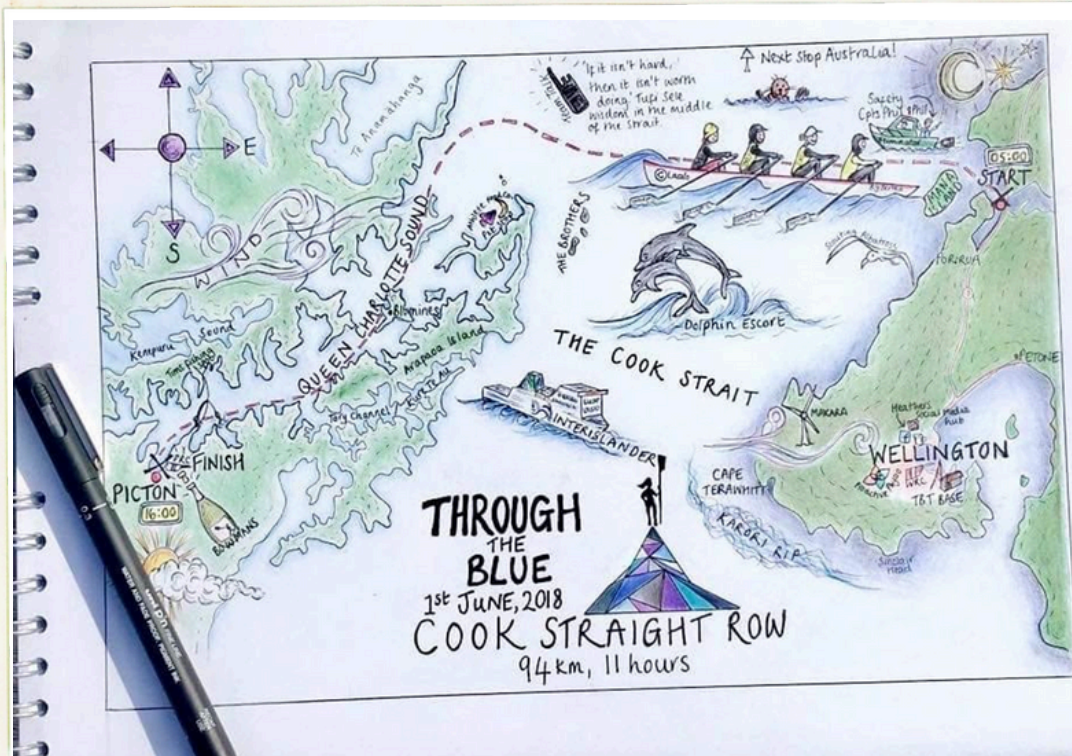


Emotion Regulation

Learn about emotions and emotion regulation

With stories from the Cook Strait and the classroom

Workbook



This workbook & the emotion regulation training was developed by Through the Blue Charitable Trust in collaboration with the Youth Wellbeing Study Team.



2024

Cover image: Original artwork by Rachel.

Illustrations of TTB Team: Original artwork by Ant Sang.

Through The Blue logo: Original artwork by Vera.

A special **THANK YOU** to Jess for your consistent involvement over so many years. Thank you also for sharing your knowledge, skills, and insight, and for your patience, dedication, and support of our idea and the cause from the day we asked for your support. We could not have put this together without you. Words can not express how much we appreciate you.

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WATCH THE TED TALK

Emotions help us create connection

We had the opportunity to share our story and many of the tools in this workbook in a TEDx Talk. This is a great place to get started.

Scan the QRcode to watch it. You can download the workbook here too.



Kia ora, Talofa Lava, Greetings,

This training and workbook was developed by members of the Youth Wellbeing Study Team, in collaboration with Through The Blue Charitable Trust.

Through the Blue are a group of people who coach, teach, or mentor young adults. On 1 June 2018, four members of the group rowed across the Cook Strait to raise money for Youth Mental Health. We were supported by the remaining team members on support boats and on land. With the money raised, Through the Blue is finding ways to advocate for and support education around youth mental health. As part of this endeavour, we teamed up with the Youth Wellbeing Study team in the School of Psychology at Victoria University of Wellington, to create this training and resources for teachers. We are thrilled to be able to share this workbook with you!

The content in this workbook is at the core of the workshops we ran with teachers. You can work through the workbook cover-to-cover or pick and choose sections that interest you. You will find space to reflect and answer questions throughout the workbook to help you capture your thinking and learning. While the workbook is aimed at teachers who work in a school context, other educators, parents and anyone interested in emotion regulation might also find it useful.

There are several learning objectives for the workbook & training:

1. Understanding what emotions are and why we have them
2. Knowledge of the concept of 'emotion regulation' and its importance for day-to-day functioning
3. Consideration of how emotion regulation fits within the wider school context
4. Knowledge of the developmental and neurological factors relevant to adolescent emotional experience

Throughout the workbook, we use the team's experience of rowing across Cook Strait as a source for examples to help explain emotions and emotion regulation. Navigating emotion regulation requires many of the same things that were required to successfully complete the row: e.g. planning ahead of time for expected challenges, being flexible in the moment in order to respond to the unexpected, knowing what works for you to stay calm and collected (which may be different to what works for others on your 'team'), learning from past experience, and establishing boundaries so that you don't get overwhelmed. "*We are all in the same boat*" in that everyone needs to develop skills in emotion regulation to function well and succeed.

As teachers, you will also be modelling emotion regulation to students, and colleagues, and can provide simple (yet effective) suggestions and guidance to your students.

We look forward to sharing the content we have developed with you and hope that you find it useful!



The Youth Wellbeing Study Team & Through the Blue Charitable Trust

Meet the Through The Blue team

Through the Blue (TTB) Charitable Trust was founded in 2018 by a group of rowers. The trust's purpose is to provide teacher education about youth mental health. Our focus is on building emotional resilience and regulation skills in teenagers. This means the emphasis is on education and early intervention (i.e. filling students' kete 15km away from the cliff, rather than being the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff). The trust was created because TTB's founding members noticed a gap in access to professional development on youth mental health within teacher education.

The first fundraiser was a row from Wellington to Picton, across Cook Strait. The four team members rowing across (Eleanor, Johannah, Rachel and Tina; bios to follow) were the first all-female crew to row that distance, and the first ever to row this distance in the North Island to South Island direction. It took 11hr to complete the 94km. Many of the mental and emotional regulation skills we relied on to complete this physical challenge are the skills teens need to develop to be emotionally resilient. In this way, the story of the row provides an ideal framework and illustration. The Cook Strait 🤖 is 'considered one of the most unpredictable and dangerous waters in the world'. It's all about perspective though, or as rower Ellie put it, "That sounds hard? I promise you; mental health struggles are harder."

TTB describe the connection between the row, their experiences, and this training resource for teachers:

We used lots of emotion regulation strategies that helped us get through. We learnt these through experience and also from the people who coached, taught, and mentored us. We have practised and honed these skills in stressful situations and we know that these skills are transferable.

Many of these skills can be modeled, talked about, and explicitly taught. As teachers, you will personally benefit from learning more about these strategies. The tools we share can then be used professionally when you work with your students. We can also use this in our own teaching and coaching. So, while we have been building this resource for teachers, this has been a journey of personal development for us as well.

We are keen to facilitate people sharing their stories, too. What we share is personal. Most of us don't usually get an insight into the minds and thoughts of other people. We are trying to make this more visible. There is power in telling your story and sharing personal experience.

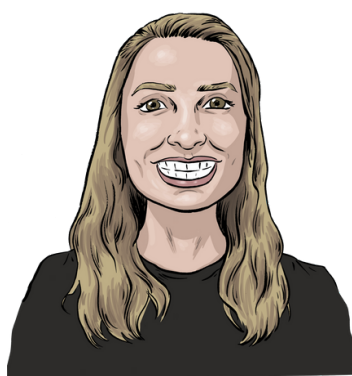
We also think that it takes a village to shape a person. Teachers are not, and should not, be solely responsible for helping students develop emotional resilience, but they can contribute to students' kete by modeling effective emotion regulation.



Meet the TTB rowers and support team

A heads up: What we share in our introductions is personal and a couple of the team members have had their own struggles with mental health issues and mental illness. While we only aim to give context to our motivations here, some readers may find some of the content in our bios upsetting.

Jo



Meeting with organisations for the Through the Blue Charitable Trust, I learnt the phrase “*ambulance at the bottom of the cliff-help*”. As grotesque and poignant as this term is, it rings true. What if we can focus efforts on early recognition and early intervention of mental illness? What if we could help give our youngsters a vocabulary to express their emotions? What if we could educate on the body’s physiological response to stress, grief and anxiety? What if we could discuss our mental health as easily as we can explain a sprained ankle?

As athletes, we have spent years of our lives being specifically trained to push our bodies. We have been mentored, learnt through trial and error, and we’ve developed strategies to cope with large volumes of training.

This Cook Strait crossing is a metaphor: we have been training, preparing and planning so we have the best chance of succeeding. We have been building up our resilience slowly so we can manage the hours of rowing we will be doing. Young people also need to train, prepare and plan to develop the resilience to succeed and manage when things get tough. As adults, we can model and teach them how to do that.

Through the Blue is a very personal endeavour. There are too many people I know, love and appreciate dearly, who struggle with their mental health. For me some days rolling out of bed, feels equivalent to rowing the Cook Strait. I found high school particularly challenging, it has taken a long time for me to realise how to maintain a healthy balance and understanding how to regulate the equilibrium.

Jo competed internationally from 2012-2014, she coached rowing and rows surf.

Ellie



In some ways, I think rowing saved my life.

After attempting to take my own life, I found myself hospitalised, in a new city and living with my parents again. I was looking for a way to meet new people, keep fit, push myself and establish goals - so I thought I'd give rowing a go. Rowing gave me the routine and discipline I needed, it was both physically and mentally testing and I was able to achieve goals I didn't think my body was capable of. The fantastic thing is, every time I reach a goal, there is always another one to work towards. That gives me something to look forward to, to work towards. It gives me a purpose.

I'm a huge believer in use what you have and do what you can. We're never going to conquer the mountainous problems of this world by staring at them and going, "that's way too big, where do I start, what could little old me possibly do to make a difference?" You can make as big of a difference as you are willing to make. I'd like to pose a question to whoever may be reading this - what in this world breaks your heart, what do you enjoy doing and how might you use that 'thing' to make a difference?

This row is a full circle for me. I started rowing to save my own life, now I'm hoping that what we have created as a result of this row will help others.

Ellie is a nurse and a design researcher.

Rachel



Mental illness is terrifying. It is a silent villain and it's painful to realise how many people in our lives are vulnerable to it at times. The scariest part for me is not knowing that someone may be struggling until they reach a crisis point. Big changes need to be made in the prevention, recognition and early intervention of mental health. Society's mentality needs to change from the theory of 'learning the hard way' or 'toughen up and get on with it' to realise that these are not sustainable and long-term methods for us to look after ourselves or each other. I truly hope that Through The Blue and the Cook Strait row end up being just a tiny part in NZ's progress towards reducing mental illness.

Rachel competed internationally, coaches rowing and works as a teacher.

Tina



To me, the row across Cook Strait serves as a metaphor for the struggles many of us face from time to time. How do you support yourself and each other through challenging times? Much like our row, maintaining mental health can be a challenge. It takes a village to support each other well. As a teacher, I am part of that support village. I spend a lot of time with rangatahi and I think we can contribute by modeling and teaching the skills that are helpful to get through tough moments. Opening up the conversation about mental health is a good start. We need to get to a point where it is ok to ask for and to offer help without any hesitation. If what we do as a charity makes a difference in one person's life, it's worth it.

Tina competed internationally from 2006-2012 and works as a teacher and a coach.

Tim



The first time that I thought about killing myself was when I was 12 years old, I was determined to jump off the roof of the school to end my life, I never attempted to but I did obsess over the idea for a long period of time. I never talked to anybody about my thoughts, I never even considered the fact that the way my brain worked was different to others. For the next 15 years depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts have been a big part of my day to day life.

In 2016 these illnesses affected my health significantly, I was sinking down a hole and nothing that I or others around me did had any effect. In September of that year I had a serious attempt at my own life, landing me in the Intensive Care Unit at Auckland Hospital while friends and family waited to hear whether I would survive the night.

I often wonder how things could have been different for me if during high school a teacher was able to identify that I struggled with depression, life may have been different over the next 15 years. If all the resources I received in 2016 were offered to me before it was too late, again, things could have been very different. Through The Blue is giving me the chance to have a real purpose in life and to give other young people the opportunity that I never quite got. I cannot wait for our vision to become a reality and make a truly positive difference to the life of New Zealanders.

Tufi



As an athlete I have found success by being resilient and persevering through tough times. Applying these skills to be able to push myself to achieve the goals I had set only worked to an extent. Building myself as an athlete on this small set of skills only allowed me to achieve so far. I left myself without any other skills to help me through. I found myself struggling with mental well being and coping with failure in destructive ways.

As a coach, I strive to provide athletes with an understanding of the range of skills that are needed to be able to build themselves up in a holistic manner. This allows them to deal with the challenges they face in the best way possible. To be able to provide the tools and understanding to achieve is one of the most rewarding things I have experienced. To understand what a person is going through and to have the tools to support them is the most valuable thing I can do as a mentor.

Tufi competed internationally from 2010-2012 and he coaches. Pre-Cook Strait Crossing, he supported the team with logistics. He was on the support boat during the row.

Jakob



Rowing has been a big part of my life, first as a rower during high school and then as a coach throughout university. While finishing my Masters in psychology, I joined Through the Blue to share what I learned about youth mental health and to help the group find and connect with an organisation which would help them realise their goals.

Throughout the years, rowing has provided me with a support network and a sense of community and purpose. The values of community and support, which were fostered by rowing, are what inspired me to pursue postgraduate study into psychology. This is why I jumped at the opportunity to use rowing, which has given me so much, to make a positive difference for youth mental wellbeing.

Heather



Through The Blue is something that really jumps out to me as a fantastic idea and something that can make a real difference.

In high school I had all the support in the world but one thing I didn't understand was this feeling inside me that something wasn't quite right. Looking back on it now I can understand that it was anxiety and depression. Over the years I have grown to understand how to deal with this in a positive manner through exercise, challenges and talking about it.

For me university was a tipping point, second year was really tough both through relationships with friends, boys and the people I lived with. I struggled a lot and, while I never took action on some of the thoughts I had, it scares me to think now what could have been. Through my cries for help, I was put on medication that really helped me and this is something that I am not ashamed to talk about now. It's scary when these things happen but I now have the tools to help me when things get tough or I can't see the light at the end of the tunnel. There are many more layers to this story and why I want to be involved in Through The Blue. I want the stigma of mental illness to be broken and for people to get talking about it.

I am proud of my friends [TTB rowers] and what we are achieving and can't wait to be beside them on the support crew boat documenting their efforts.

The row across Cook Strait was supported by:

laszloboatsnz



And an honorary mention for **Bowman's Reserve!**
Thank You for your unwavering & enthusiastic support.

The TTB experience

Throughout this booklet there will be anecdotes and examples taken from recollections by TTB members of the row across Cook Strait, which relate to the content presented. The intention is to bring this content to life, and provide a platform to discuss how emotions unfold and ways to facilitate emotion regulation.

There were 'layers' of emotion regulation throughout the process of planning the row, the row itself, and the recovery following completion of the row. These layers included:

1. The wider community (e.g. supporters, funders, people on the periphery)
2. The TTB team - both rowers and support crew
3. The individual

COMMUNITY LEVEL



Tina: "One of my friends met us early in the morning before we left. She'd got up super early to be there at 4.30am to see us off at 5am. I remember really noticing that it meant a lot to me knowing that she was so supportive of what we were doing. I valued that she literally showed up that day. Lots of people wished us good luck, but for her to be there was special and I really appreciated it. She was also the one who ended up handing me half-full cups of tea after the row, because I couldn't hold a full cup. So she was there to support when and where she could."

THE TTB TEAM



Ellie: "I remember part-way through being convinced we weren't moving... and dad [on support boat] saying "I promise you, you are...you just have to trust me"...I thought back to the times where I was so low...Everyone around me all had those exact same conversations. They just said look at me, trust me, you are going to get better, you are going to move past this... [I thought] surely he's right about this too when he's actually staring at the gps in front of his face." {REACHING OUT FOR SUPPORT AND REASSURANCE FROM YOUR TEAM}

THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL



"The finish line wasn't the finish...those were two of the hardest weeks of my life....[I put a lot of] pressure on myself...learned a lot about myself...I use being busy as a coping mechanism.. which can be a good thing and sometimes not..." {SELF-REFLECTION OF THE STRATEGIES YOU USE TO REGULATE - When are these helpful and when are these detrimental to wellbeing}

The Layers of Emotion Regulation in the School Context

Throughout this workbook we will refer to the different ways information on emotion regulation can be applied. We will invite you to reflect on the 'layers' of application, and where you'd be willing to start applying these concepts in your role at school.

In considering emotion regulation in the school setting, there are various settings or focal points where emotion regulation can take place; including:

- The wider school community (by promoting education and discussion within the school community about emotions).
- The (physical) school environment (e.g. by creating spaces where students and staff can unwind and promote wellbeing).
- Interactions with students (individually and collectively).
- Interactions with parents and whānau.
- Interactions with colleagues and other professionals.
- As individuals, managing and being more cognisant of our own emotional responses.

Some of these focal points are easier to 'see' or respond to than others.

Through this training and the workbook, we invite you to reflect on where, across these 'layers of application', you feel most able to start making observations or changes to your practice and emotion regulation in your school. People also vary on their capacity to implement change or strategies across these different domains.

As part of considering where to apply the material, it is worth considering what gets in the way of applying the material across different settings. For some, barriers could include having the time and energy to reflect on your practice, to be able to try out doing things differently. For others, it may be worries about how others may react to these changes (be it colleagues, students or family members). Other barriers can include self-judgement and concerns about getting it "right". We invite you to consider what these barriers may be for you, and ways to overcome them.

Reflective Questions:

What do you hope to gain from this training/the workbook?

What might get in the way of you applying the material from this training/workbook?

Overall Structure of the workshops

When we have delivered our workshops, we have usually split the content into two workshops. This has enabled us to introduce some content and teachers could then practise using the content for a few weeks before we added new information.

Workshop 1

What is emotion?
What is emotion regulation?
Observing emotion
Clear and Cloudy emotions
Emotional validation

Workshop 2

Factors related to emotional experience
Individual differences
Strategies of Emotion Regulation
Reappraisal
Cognitive diffusion

Why do anything? - The importance of naming the values that underlie our behaviour

What were the values driving TTB members to participate in the challenge of rowing Cook Strait?

Challenge
Contribution

"I had to do it, because of Fomo [fear of missing out], ..but also to support and take on this challenge."

Supporting Others

"I could make a really genuine & meaningful contribution to the team. That's really important to me. I'm more interested in contributing to a joint success than my own."

Contribution

"...People coming together and becoming bigger than their parts"

Challenge & Team Work

"...even with great connection, people can feel alone, noticing when people are falling over is important.. "

Connection
Pragmatism

"To do it, we needed to do it for a reason...we just needed to keep the momentum going and get on with it.. "

Preparation & Supporting Others

Challenge

"It helped me in more ways than I'll actually ever know "

Connection & Feeling Grounded

"Can we do it?! Coming back to reasons why and pushing myself out of my comfort zone "

Challenge
Adventure

"If you're going to something crazy, you may as well do it for a good cause "

Purpose to work towards

"I had found and fell in love with rowing as a coping mechanism to get me through out of the second dip [of a period of being low]. It gave me goals, routine, team and a purpose to be working towards "

Supporting Others



Why do training on Emotion Regulation?

We all have goals that we want to achieve. These are usually driven by our values*. To achieve goals, and live by our values, we need to be able to regulate ourselves and our behaviour. A big part of regulating ourselves and our behaviour involves emotion regulation**.

The school environment has multiple examples of effective (and ineffective) emotion regulation.

- What is it like when emotion is being regulated well in the classroom?
- What is it like when emotion is not being regulated well? How effectively are you able to teach?

Perhaps it would be best to take a step back and consider – **why are you a teacher?** Often there is a value underpinning our career decisions. Common values that drive the decision to work in education may relate to valuing learning, growth and stewardship.

Values lend themselves to specific goals, and achieving these goals requires emotion regulation (e.g. remaining calm when having to re-explain a concept; demonstrating interest and enthusiasm to foster encouragement and perseverance).

Hence emotion regulation enables us all to:

1. Live in the way we most want to, and similarly;
2. Behave in a way that best represents the person we want to be;
3. Inspire others to better regulate themselves.

Reflective Questions:

Why did you become a teacher?

Are these still the same reasons now?



*Harris, R. (2022) The Happiness Trap: Stop Struggling, Start surviving (2nd Edition), Little Brown Book Group: Robinson.

**Ochsner KN, Gross JJ. The cognitive control of emotion. Trends Cogn Sci. 2005 May;9(5):242-9. doi: 10.1016/j.tics.2005.03.010. PMID: 15866151.

What motivates you to go and teach students now? What values sit underneath that?



How do you hold these values in mind when work gets tough?



TTB experience

The relationship between stress and performance

RACHEL



"The biggest challenge before the row was my confidence in my own body. It was the first big thing I'd done post hip surgery and back injury. So for me it was about making sure I could do it and the biggest motivation for that was that I didn't want to be the one that let us down. There was a real pressure on myself that I didn't want to be the one that had to stop rowing in the middle of Cook Strait. [...]"

TINA

"I needed to feel as prepared as possible and so Rach and I had quite a few training sessions together and I also trained with Jo a few times. It gave me confidence that I was as ready as I could be. But my preparation went beyond that too. I thought about things we (the whole team) might need during the row. We were all sorting our own food, drink and extra clothes, but I packed an extra waterproof jacket because I thought 'who knows, we might need this' and it turned out we did. I gave it to Ellie about 1.5 hrs. into the row. So that was part of my preparation too."



TUFI



[about the stress working out the route and the appropriate weather and water conditions] "We are looking at these charts [on the Inter Islander], and I'm like 'I don't know what this means' and he [Interislander Captain] was like: 'Avoid this, watch that...' and I'm like, we'll try and avoid anything that you say, and it was sort of dawning on me that this was going to be quite the task. And people had been saying to us, 'Why haven't you done it today, look how flat the harbour is' and people just absolutely had no appreciation of how s**t it was going to be."

JO

[Tim on the support boat trying to encourage her with a familiar gesture - unsuccessfully] "... I could kind of see him trying to catch my attention. And I was sooo mad. ... But I tried to not say anything, I think I just grunted or muttered under my breath, I was so p***ed off, I didn't speak for like half an hour after that. I just kind of stewed. ... I was very very close to saying some very strong words."



Considering terminology first*

Affect is an umbrella term to cover our stress responses, emotions and moods. It is useful to distinguish between these concepts, so that we can be clear about the various 'layers' to someone's experience**.

Stress response refers to the way our body responds when unable to manage situational demands in the moment. In other words, our felt level of stress is proportional to the extent to which a situation exceeds what we can manage given our current internal and external resources. Internal resources include things like how much sleep we've had, our self-talk, and physical health. External resources may include things like financial means, housing situation, and level of social support.

NB: Acknowledging our own and others' 'resources' (capacity) can be extremely validating. You may wish to name this for a student or colleague. e.g. In the classroom you might say:



*The information on this page is based on literature from various authors; for a general overview see Gross, J. J. (Ed.). (2007). Handbook of emotion regulation. The Guilford Press. Lochner.

**K. (2016). Affect, Mood, and Emotions. In: Successful Emotions. Springer, Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-12231-7_3;

Stress Curve

There is an inverted-U relationship between stress and productivity (see below), whereby no stress is likely to dampen productivity, moderate stress is likely to encourage productivity, and high stress is likely to limit productivity (particularly if this stress is over an extended period over and above the level someone can realistically cope with). Every person will have a slightly different 'sweet spot' – where the level of stress is motivating and helpful rather than detrimental to their wellbeing.

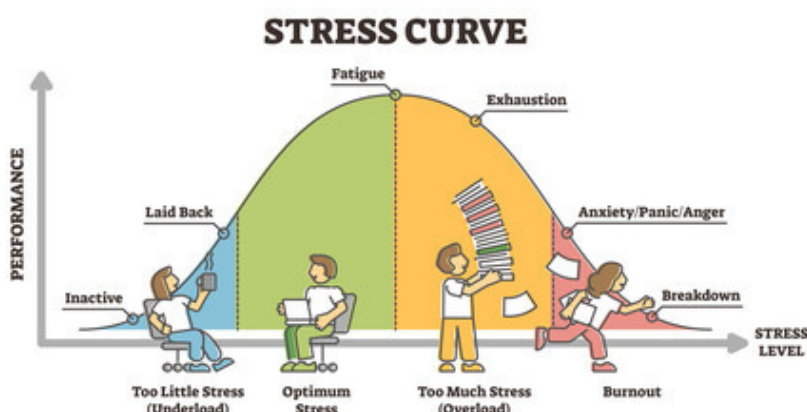


Image sourced from <https://stock.adobe.com/search?k=stress+performance+curve>

Emotions refer to more specific affective states or feelings (e.g. anger, sadness). These occur in response to particular events (either internal or external) and result in particular behavioural response tendencies. We will primarily be talking about emotions throughout this resource and training.

Emotions are fleeting and research suggests that a single emotion won't last longer than 90 seconds, unless re-triggered. Many are much shorter.

We can retrigger emotions by staying in the same situation or by simply thinking about a particular situation that has evoked the emotion over and over again.

See section on validation for more information (p.38).

TTB experience: Members' affect, emotions and stress differed over the course of the row

Team members recognised that they were all in pain, hungry, and trying to pass the time. Some members used actions or thoughts to manage this:



JO

... *hands further out*

Thought: 'ok, I can do 30 strokes like this. 1, 2, 3, 4, ...' *moves hands back to the end of the oar handle*

'let's see if I can do 40 strokes like this. 1,2,3,4,...'

be the one that had to stop rowing in the middle of Cook Strait. [...]"

TINA

Thought: ... 'just work on getting your blades in the water, every stroke. We'll get closer with every stroke' ... 'looking forward to that cheese sandwich.'



Sometimes the TTB team members experienced and managed the fluctuation in emotions together. They supported each other actively. As shown by the following recall of a conversation during the row, sometimes what one team member needed to get through was different from another's needs in the moment, but team members made accommodations to support each other.

Jo: "Ok, I need us to count some strokes" [NB: she means out loud]

Tina: "what?!"

Rach: "Jo needs us to count strokes."

Tina: (Thought to herself... 'No way am I counting all the strokes we still have to do!!'...

followed by '...mhh, that is probably not what she meant. She needs this right now.' *starts counting out loud - with the rest of the team*: "1,2,3,4,....."

Early into the row, the team lost a white light. It dropped into the ocean and illuminated the water as it sank. Here are two different experiences of that same moment:



JO

"We saw it [the light] like drifting through the water. It was actually quite a magical thing. But I was like, ... It was creepy but cool, I don't know. I've used that kind of idea in design since, that idea of lights and water kind of moving..."

TUFI

"That was daunting, that was scary, that was just like, 'ah that's how deep it is down there.' & [in response to Jo's comment] we were finally out, it's going on. I'm like, 'Ok this is going to be ok.' and then we get out past Mana Island and then that bloody torch falls off the boat, and it's right when it's still dawn, it's dark, and that thing disappears into the ocean as the waves are growing, you might have thought it was beautiful, Jo, but I thought it was f***ing terrifying. I was just like, 'What is this gonna be like?!' I can barely see the South Island. Just seeing that floating down, I'll never forget that, just bye bye, I was almost expecting like a big silhouette of a fish or a shark to go past, you know? It was that sort of moment."



More context on Emotions

It is important to us to emphasise that there are no “good” and “bad” emotions. Labelling emotions as good or bad tends to convey a judgement on our experience as “good”, “bad”, or “okay” or “not okay”. We cannot necessarily control our emotional experience – emotions happen as part of being human – and to judge them as good or bad places a judgement on ourselves to change them, when changing them may not be possible or helpful*.

Moods are more diffuse, and bias cognitions and behaviours. Moods typically last longer than emotions. Moods may be considered an overarching bias to approaching the world a certain way, or with certain expectations, which can determine how situations are interpreted, and therefore how situations are responded to**. To illustrate this, we can compare moods to the overall climate and emotions to individual weather events.

Reflective Questions:

Can you notice when a student may be experiencing an 'emotion' versus a 'mood' state? What do you notice? Why is this an important distinction?

Do you notice when stress is helpful for fostering peak performance in your students, and when stress may be unhelpful? What do you notice? How can you support students to find that 'sweet spot' where the optimal amount of stress or pressure supports learning and growth, but does not over-extend students?

*Various therapies emphasise this point, including Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (See Russ Harris's work (e.g., Harris, R. (2022) *The Happiness Trap: Stop Struggling, Start surviving* (2nd Edition), Little Brown Book Group: Robinson) and Emotion Regulation Group Therapy (ERGT; Gratz and colleagues; referred to later in this workbook; see Gratz KL, Bardeen JR, Levy R, Dixon-Gordon KL, Tull MT. Mechanisms of change in an emotion regulation group therapy for deliberate self-harm among women with borderline personality disorder. *Behav Res Ther*. 2015 Feb;65:29-35. doi: 10.1016/j.brat.2014.12.005. Epub 2014 Dec 13. PMID: 25557395; PMCID: PMC4306622.).

**Gross, J. J. (Ed.). (2007). *Handbook of emotion regulation*. The Guilford Press. Lochner

Key features of emotion*

Emotions involve changes in subjective experience, behaviour and physiology.

Emotions impact on our:

1. Thoughts
 - a. Self-talk
 - b. Our appraisal of our experience
2. Body
 - a. Physiological effects occur in the autonomic and neuroendocrine systems to provide support for anticipated emotional experience (e.g. gearing us up for 'flight or fight')
 - b. People vary to the extent to which they experience, and are aware of, these physical changes across situations.
 - c. NB: Young peoples' physiology and neuroanatomy is set up to experience emotions and the associated body responses to the same degree as an adult (i.e. same degree of emotional intensity when experiencing loss; when falling in love), however they do not have the past experience to be able to understand what this may mean for them, and how to manage and prepare for these physiological changes (or the history to know that emotional distress, even when very intense, does pass).
3. Behaviour
 - a. Facial expression
 - b. Posture
 - c. Instrumental behaviours (e.g. moving away or moving towards something).
 - d. How we interact with others

*Gross, J. J. (Ed.). (2007). Handbook of emotion regulation. The Guilford Press. Lochner

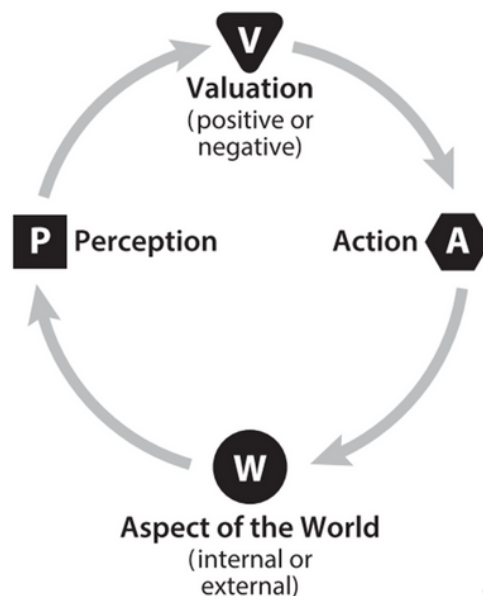
How emotions unfold

Emotions unfold over time/ unfold in a sequence - see model on next page.

Emotions are seen to unfold over a period of seconds to minutes. This is important to bear in mind when adolescents experience everyday emotions – these emotions will be fleeting, unless they are retriggered (e.g. through rumination or through judgement of an emotion (e.g. berating oneself for feeling sad, and then becoming angry)).

There are several steps to an emotion unfolding over time:

- Step 1: Emotions are triggered by a situation (external or internal) (see 'Aspect of the World').
- Step 2: Our attention is diverted in a way that attends to salient information (based on our goals, expectations, prior learning) (see 'Perception').
- Step 3: There is an appraisal of the situation, with associated changes in subjective experience, physiology and behaviour (see 'Valuation').
- Step 4: The response (see 'Action') can then inform the situation itself, and there can be further unfolding of the emotion sequence.



(Ochsner & Gross, 2004)

Example

Here is how your emotion might unfold upon meeting someone for the first time:

Aspect of the world: Meet the person for the first time.

Perception: I see them, and they seem friendly.

Valuation: I might experience this as something positive, I might be curious to learn more about them.

Action: I stay engaged in the conversation because I want to keep it going.



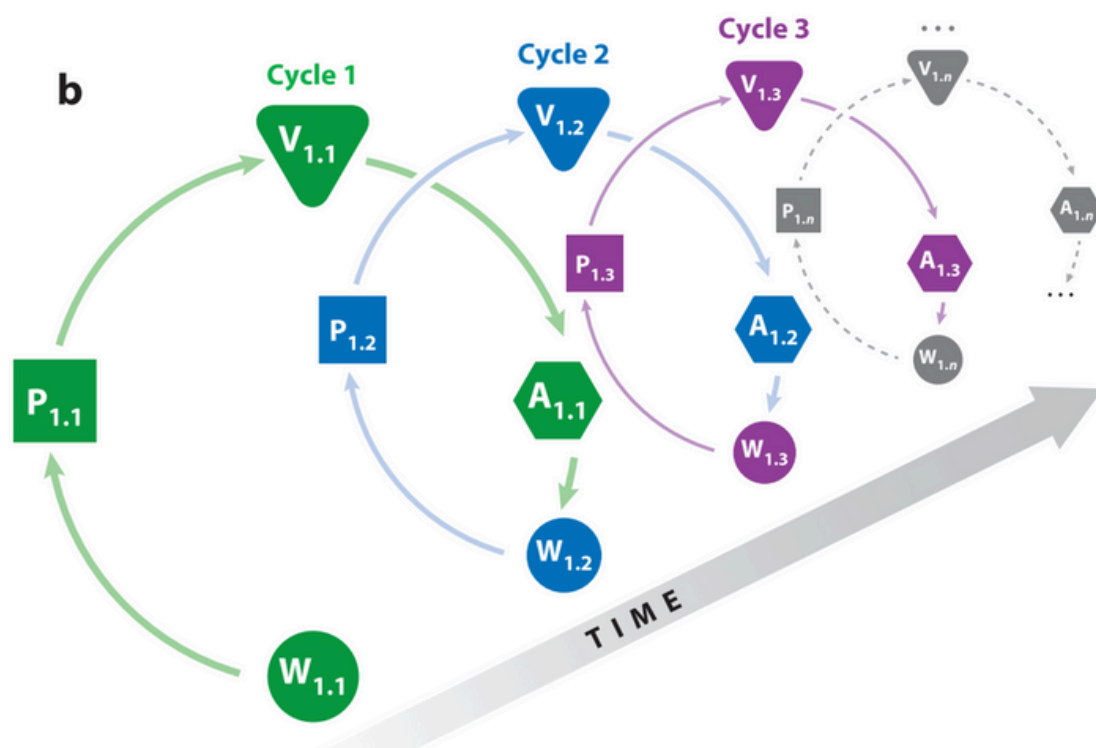
*Ochsner, K. N., & Gross, J. J. (2004). Thinking makes it so: A social cognitive neuroscience approach to emotion regulation. Handbook of self-regulation: Research, theory, and applications, 229-255.

Our response to emotions can be helpful or harmful, depending on the context
Emotions themselves are not helpful or harmful - how we respond is key.

Emotions serve multiple functions:

- They guide our attention
 - They inform what information to attend to (e.g. what to be looking at or what sounds to be listening out for), by emphasising the importance of certain information (e.g. fear keeps us on the lookout for threat).
 - They give us useful information about how to respond in a given situation (e.g. move away from situations that feel threatening).
- They give us useful information about what other people may do
 - Our emotional response to those around us can determine who we choose to spend time with (e.g. we are more likely to talk to someone if they make us feel good).
 - Emotions help us change the existing situation in a useful way (e.g. motivate us to steer a conversation to topics we enjoy).

We go through this cycle of unfolding emotions several times every time we experience an emotion. At each point within the cycle, we have an opportunity to use strategies to regulate the emotions we are experiencing.



(Ochsner & Gross, 2004)



Summary

Emotions provide us with information about our environment, other people, and ourselves. We can use this information to make constructive decisions about how we may choose to act, particularly in situations with heightened emotional intensity.

TTB experience of the cycle of emotions

Tina described how her response to seeing dolphins was initially positive, and then indifferent. She then used this information to determine that her body needed support and was becoming irritable.

TINA

**Aspect of the world:**

Dolphins swam alongside the rowing boat three times during the row

Perception:

By the third time, Tina thought 'I really don't care about the bloody dolphins.'

Valuation:

Tina thought: 'Oh, if you don't care about the dolphins, Tina, things are pretty bad. You're going to have to eat something.'

Action:

briefly stops to take a bite out of a cheese sandwich

Note that Tina's emotional experience was related to her thoughts (e.g. self-talk about her lack of care, signalling that things were not going well); physiology (e.g. noticing that her blood sugar was low); and behaviour (e.g. instrumental behaviour of reaching for the cheese sandwich).

When you are having a hard time, it is really difficult to appreciate the positive things that are happening. Including being joined by a pod of dolphins!

Similarly, in the classroom, if you are stressed and in a negative/challenging position, it will be difficult to appreciate the positives in your classroom.

The cycle of emotion can be triggered by many different things, including what others may say. For example, early in the row Ellie asked the other team members: “*Is it going to get any worse?*”

ELLIE

Aspect of the world:

Ellie asking the question, “*Is it going to get any worse?*”

Perception:

Team members agreed that they all thought - yes, it probably will get worse...

Valuation:

Better to keep these thought and emotions to myself

Action:

Members did not respond to her question - therefore did not share their thoughts about how hard it may get.



When it's difficult to respond to a question directly, it can be helpful to turn to emotional validation, which we discuss later in this training.

See **page 38** for more information on validation.

In brief, emotions help us...*

- **prepare for action**, e.g. when we need to act quickly (e.g. in danger) our emotional response is hard-wired to get us out of trouble!
- **communicate**, e.g. frowning let's others know we may be confused; smiling lets others know that we want to engage with them.
- **deepen our experience of life**, e.g. all emotions – including the ones that can be distressing; e.g. sadness deepens our experience of empathy/understanding.

*For further information see Gross, J. J. (Ed.). (2007). Handbook of emotion regulation. The Guilford Press. Lochner

Reflective discussion

- How do you see emotions unfold in the classroom?
- Think of a time when you went through this cycle of emotions unfolding while interacting with students.
- Think of a time where you witnessed emotions unfolding in a student while they were in your class.

Notes

Reflective Questions:

Do you notice students recruiting, upregulating, or down regulating certain emotions in the classroom? (see glossary for definitions) What do you notice?

There are times where students may struggle with a mismatch between their emotions and their goals (e.g. behaving in line with their values).

How can we support students in these situations? What would it be like to name common situations where this happens (e.g. peer pressure or students trying to fit in), and have a conversation with students about what will be effective in the moment?



*For further information see Gross, J. J. (Ed.). (2007). Handbook of emotion regulation. The Guilford Press. Lochner

TTB experience of 'clear' and 'cloudy' emotions

Clear emotions: proportional and make sense given the situation...



JO

"You on the safety boat reading out those messages [of support]...a real lift...there were more people with us than were rowing in the boat...made it feel a bit lighter..."



TUFI

(about Rachel): "...[this moment] when Rachel looks at me with glee almost and goes..."look at my hands!" and it's like... "Oh my God...they're...ripped...absolutely done.." and she was happy about it...she made it...she did it" [Strong emotions, including elation, felt by Rachel for getting through]

Cloudy emotions: An over- or under-response given the situation, linked to other factors...



ELLIE

"I remember part-way through being convinced we weren't moving... and dad [on support boat] saying "I promise you, you are...you just have to trust me"...I thought back to the times where I was so low...I couldn't see a life beyond that feeling.." [Emotion clouded by past history]



HEATHER

(social media support person during the row): "Just crazy... sitting in Wellington...waiting and not knowing what was going on...you (Tufi) and Tim both shared your location with me and then your phones died.... [I thought] oh sh** they're dead...I couldn't get in contact with anybody...it was just the most terrifying thing...to me you were just bobbing in the Cook Strait...it was my last day at work before leaving for London...so many chapters closing on this one day...I've never felt so relieved to hear that people stood on land in my life..." [cloudy emotions when inferring reason for no contact; NB: our brains can paint images in our minds that heighten emotion and our assumptions - "to me you were just bobbing in the Cook Strait"]

‘Clear’ and ‘Cloudy’ emotions

Emotions themselves are not harmful – it is how we choose to engage with them, interpret them, and then how we choose to respond to them that is key.

Some researchers, such as Gross (2015) have suggested that “emotions are harmful when they are the wrong intensity, duration, frequency, or type for a situation, and maladaptively bias cognition and behaviour” (p. 4 Gross 2015). However, we would argue that emotions that are the wrong intensity, or a mis-match to the situation, are providing information about our current state of wellbeing, which is useful, and may provide evidence that self-care is warranted (or that another (perhaps related) issue is ‘clouding’ our response). For example, if someone were to experience a higher degree of anger than is warranted in a situation, this may suggest that this person is lacking internal resources to cope with a situation or stressor and would benefit from support.

With this in mind, it is useful to consider the idea of “clear” and “cloudy” emotions*, and primary and secondary emotions. These are discussed below.

The term ‘clear’ and ‘cloudy’ emotions is adopted from work by Kim Gratz and Matthew Tull (2012)**.

Clear emotions are when our emotional experience is directly related to an event, and proportional to the event (i.e. the level of emotional arousal makes sense in the given context). Clear emotions are adaptive and give us information about an event at hand. Clear emotions can be intense and strong, or relatively low in intensity.

Cloudy emotions occur when our emotional response is “clouded” by other things that have gone on earlier in the day, or that are occurring for us internally (e.g. poor sleep) or externally (e.g. currently going through a relationship break up). There are many types of things that can “cloud” our emotional responses, such as poor self-care (e.g. making us more prone to irritation), caffeine (e.g. can heighten anxiety or agitation), drug use (can numb or amplify our emotional response), unprocessed emotion from past experiences, etc.

Knowing if our emotions are ‘clear’ or ‘cloudy’ can help us make more helpful decisions about how we choose to act.

*Gratz, K. L., Tull, M. T., & Levy, R. J. P. M. (2014). Randomized controlled trial and uncontrolled 9-month follow-up of an adjunctive emotion regulation group therapy for deliberate self-harm among women with borderline personality disorder. *Psychological medicine*, 44(10), 2099-2112.

**Gratz, K. L., Levy, R., & Tull, M. T. (2012). Emotion regulation as a mechanism of change in an acceptance-based emotion regulation group therapy for deliberate self-harm among women with borderline personality pathology. *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 26(4), 365–380. <https://doi.org/10.1891/0889-8391.26.4.365>

Another consideration when responding to emotion is figuring out whether we are experiencing a primary emotion or a secondary emotion*. Primary emotions are emotions that occur spontaneously in response to an event (either internal or external). Secondary emotions, on the other hand, occur when we make a judgement or negative attribution about our emotional experience(s), and this judgement or attribution creates another emotional response. For example, we may have a primary emotional response of anger at someone who steps on our toe accidentally, however then may judge our anger as negative and irrational (given that it was an accident), and then feel a secondary emotion of shame.

Secondary emotions are unhelpful, and lead to negative feelings (e.g. shame and guilt for how we feel) that are unnecessary and can impede learning from an emotional experience. The judgement of our emotional experience can also be detrimental for self-esteem and can get in the way of open and honest communication (e.g. with the example above, an appropriate response might be “Gee, that hurt and I felt a bit peeved, but I can see it was a mistake. I’d really appreciate it if you could take better care next time, please”; rather than quashing our anger due to feelings of shame, and then berating ourselves for our emotions).

Notes

*Range of literature on this topic; however we draw mostly on clinical and therapeutic resources such as Greenberg, L. (2006). Emotion-focused therapy: A synopsis. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 36, 87-93.

Reflective Questions:

What do you think commonly clouds emotions for the young people in your classrooms?
How could you help them understand this, and why might this be important?

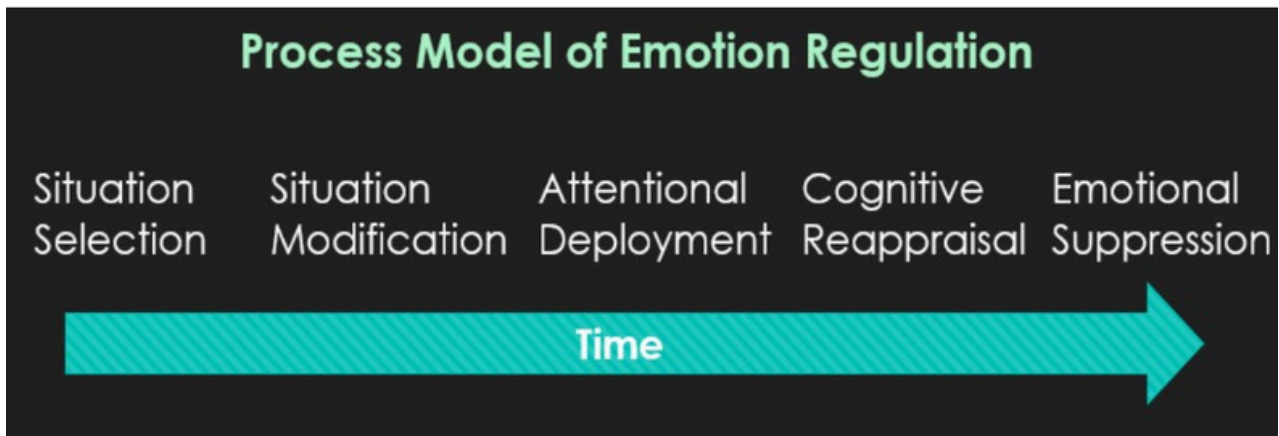
Judgement of emotion leads to distress or shame, which ultimately is unhelpful. Ideally the focus is on changing unhelpful behaviours rather than changing the emotions that come up? How can you be deliberate about establishing a class room culture where emotions are approached with openness and acceptance?

What commonly clouds **your** emotion in the classroom? Can you think of sustainable ways to reduce this 'cloudiness'?

The Importance of Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation involves managing our emotional experience to achieve a certain goal (e.g. to calm down; focus on a task; show care when feeling frustrated)*.

Emotion regulation can fall on a continuum of being intentional on one end (e.g. thinking about something positive when having an injection, as a means of distraction), and unconscious on the other (e.g. quickly turning away from upsetting imagery).



The process model of emotion regulation** is a useful way of understanding emotion as it unfolds, and the different **opportunities for emotion regulation**. The process model proposes that we experience a situation, which we then attend to, and appraise, and respond to.

At the situation level, we can engage in emotion regulation through **situation selection**, e.g. choosing what situations we are likely to expose ourselves to through the decisions we make, and **situation modification**, by modifying the types of situations we are likely to experience.

At the attention level, we can regulate emotions through managing **how we choose to spend our attention**, e.g. choosing to deliberately not attend to something that may give rise to an emotion, by turning away from it for example, e.g. turning away from the injection when having a blood test.

At the appraisal level, we can engage in emotion regulation by **changing our thoughts about the experience**, e.g. if the interpretation of an event is ambiguous, then choosing to appraise it in a more positive light, e.g. a friend does not wave at you, choosing to think they didn't see you, rather than that they deliberately did not want to engage with you.

At the response level, emotion regulation would involve **making decisions about how we choose to respond and behave**, e.g. choosing to resist an urge to respond in anger, by walking away to calm down***.

*We adopt the view of emotion regulation by Gratz and colleagues; also see Gratz, K. L., & Roemer, L. (2004).

Multidimensional assessment of emotion regulation and dysregulation: Development, factor structure, and initial validation of the difficulties in emotion regulation scale. *Journal of psychopathology and behavioral assessment*, 26, 41-54.

**Gross, J. J. (1998). Antecedent-and response-focused emotion regulation: divergent consequences for experience, expression, and physiology. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 74(1), 224.

***ibid



TTB experience of regulating emotions - both for oneself, and co-regulation (to regulate others)

Tufi, on the support boat, describes regulating emotion to support TTB rowers:



TUFI

"One thing I was able to bring in was to be cool, calm and collected most of the time...having to tell you guys [the rowers] the right things at the right time...[to be a] positive impact on the row, not a negative..translating what the Phils' [support boat drivers] were saying... [I thought to myself] you're gonna have to act if things go wrong...but there was no point in scaring you guys"

Tufi reflected on his behavior, and what information to share, to co-regulate the team. Choosing when to say things is a form of 'situation modification' in the process model above. Tufi also engaged in emotional suppression to support the team. Sometimes emotional suppression is helpful for a period, to be able to respond in line with our values. However, use of suppression has been linked to negative social* (e.g. poorer relationship quality) and health** (e.g. suppressed immunity) outcomes.

Jo describes limiting her attention to be able to cope with the task at hand - rowing:



JO

"In the moment I had to check out mentally [*has hoodie up over her head*] ..all I was doing was [putting] hands here [on the oars]...hands there..."

Hence Jo's emotion regulation involved both 'situation modification', by deliberately limiting what she could see, and 'attentional deployment'.

Rachel describes having to move out of her flat to go to an AirBnB whilst her hands were healing, to enable her to control her environment ("*I had to keep my hands clean, they were really strict about that.*"), and the physical and emotional toll of the row:



RACHEL

"The finish line wasn't the finish..[those were] two of the hardest weeks of my life...so lonely...couldn't use my hands...didn't have my family...having to sit there.. [I wrote a] 10 page recollection of the experience...pressure [I put] on myself...learned alot about myself, [I use] being busy as a coping mechanism. Can be a good thing...sometimes not.."

In Rachel's case, she engaged in 'situation selection', by choosing to select a living arrangement that would enable her recovery, 'situation modification', by deliberately setting up opportunities for reflection through her writing, and 'cognitive reappraisal' (reflecting on her choices, and what this means about herself).



*Chervonsky, E., & Hunt, C. (2017/06//). Suppression and expression of emotion in social and interpersonal outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Emotion*, 17(4), 669-683. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0000270>

**Chapman, B. P., Fiscella, K., Kawachi, I., Duberstein, P., & Muennig, P. (2013). Emotion suppression and mortality risk over a 12-year follow-up. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 75(4), 381-385. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychores.2013.07.014>

In Sum: Why do we need to regulate emotions*?

- To ensure we are acting according to our values, not reacting to an urge in the moment
- To make decisions that lead us closer to our goals
- To maintain (and develop) relationships
- To maintain our view of ourselves and how we would like to be perceived by others
- To model emotion regulation to others

Reflective Questions:

Do you notice when students are putting effort into regulating their emotions? What do you notice? Would it be useful to prompt this in some way? How could you reinforce it?

Do you use 'situation selection' or 'situation modification' in your classroom, to enable a better teaching experience for yourself and a better learning experience for you students?

*For further information see Gross, J. J. (Ed.). (2007). Handbook of emotion regulation. The Guilford Press. Lochner

TTB experience of emotion dysregulation

Team members spoke of having to push away their emotions at times (e.g. Tina and Rachel “putting a brave face on for each other” (Tufi’s reflection)). Sometimes we need to distract from emotion to get through the moment. However, if we turn to distraction again and again, this can in fact be emotional avoidance - when the emotion is avoided and not acknowledged, which prevents dealing with it effectively.

Rachel gives the example of her obvious physical pain as a potential “mask” for the emotional pain underneath:

RACHEL



“I felt a bit detached from my hands in the recovery - they were just one part of my body that needed to recover. .. I didn’t see the hands as a badge of honour (as they were perhaps seen by others/non-participants in the row)...thinking about it, my hands acted like a mask - covering the real challenge. It is easier to say ‘How are your hands?’ than asking “how are you, really?...I would have fully embraced that, too - this diversion from people asking hard questions (about my emotional wellbeing...In some ways, I think I was craving for someone to really ask, but I also preferred when people didn’t ask. Ideally people would just know what you mean and how you feel.”

As teachers, you can probably all think of examples where it’s been easier to talk about the physical distress or challenge, than the emotional distress or challenge, with either a student, colleague or school community member.

You can also probably all think of students who put a ‘mask’ on to defer comments about their emotional wellbeing.

Among the student body when someone returns after illness or injury, the focus is usually on the body, rarely do we ask how the person is really feeling and how they perhaps find this challenging in other ways.

TTB reflected that during their prior experience dealing with illness or injury as competitive athletes, the focus had usually been on the body recovery - less focus was placed on supporting this process mentally.

What is emotion dysregulation?

Emotion dysregulation can occur in multiple ways, such as*:

1. Choosing to enter situations that are known will be distressing (situational exposure).
2. Attending to information that is not particularly salient, and therefore not responding appropriately (or failing to respond at all). This can be deliberate (e.g. as a form of avoidance) or unintentional.
3. When someone does not have the resources to cope with the emotion or has a few regulation strategies to use.
4. When someone does not accept their emotional experience and attempts to push the emotion away or pretend it is not happening (which is ultimately ineffective).
5. Someone may struggle to keep their goals or values in mind, and respond in an unhelpful way in the moment.
6. Someone may become emotionally dysregulated because they have poor awareness or insight into their emotional experience, and are ill-prepared to manage their distress in a particular situation**.

As teachers, you are likely to come across examples of emotion dysregulation on a regular basis, among your students. You may also potentially observe your own dysregulation, or that of your colleagues. Remember that this is a common, human experience.

Some common examples among young people in class may be:

- Receiving an unexpected poor grade on an assignment and responding in anger
- A student feeling overwhelmed by the academic tasks set out for them
- A student feeling overwhelmed or anxious about being asked a question in class
- Teasing or bullying, or social exclusion
- Students feeling self-conscious or awkward when arriving late for class

NB: The classroom may not be the place to attend to “big” emotions. In the classroom distraction may be useful in the moment. There is a significant difference between emotional avoidance and delayed attending to emotion when context allows.

- The goal ideally is to support students to be in the ‘just right’*** zone of physiological arousal (where they are calm, but alert) to be able to attend to their work. If you catch distress early, students may be able to remain in the classroom and continue to attend. However, if their distress escalates, they may need to take active measures to calm themselves down****.

*This information is taken from multiple academic and clinical resources, including therapeutic resources by Russ Harris; Kim Gratz and colleagues, and the general resource on Emotion regulation by James Gross (ibid).

**This can also relate to underlying clinical challenges such as alexithymia (see M.G. Haviland (2016). *Alexithymia*, Editor(s): Howard S. Friedman, Encyclopedia of Mental Health (Second Edition), Academic Press, 2016, p. 47-53.

***See glossary for terms

****For further information, see resources on the Window of Tolerance (e.g., Siegel, D. J. (2012). *The developing mind: How relationships and the brain interact to shape who we are* (2nd ed.). The Guilford Press.



A note on emotional over- or under-control:

People who do regulate their emotions very well may have a tendency to either over-control their emotions, and therefore keep them pent up, and struggle to find an outlet for their distress, or under-control their emotions, which potentially leads to aggressive or socially inappropriate behaviour.

We know from ample research that trying to push away or ignore emotions does not tend to work, particularly in the long run*. Pushing away emotions tends to exacerbate the emotional distress, and inevitably the emotion(s) comes back later**. Additionally, the effort put into trying to control emotions and push them away can in itself lead to agitation and distress.

Rather than pushing emotions away, an alternative approach would be to **see emotions as tools providing us with information** about our environment, what is important to us, and what we or others need to be well. We can use this information to help guide our behaviour. We (and others; see Gratz & Tull; third wave therapies in general) would suggest a stance of acceptance towards emotions, and willingness to experience emotion rather than try to avoid it. If we are willing to experience our emotion, and address it head on, we avoid the distress that can come from emotional avoidance, emotional suppression, or engaging with secondary emotions.

Reflective Questions:

What strategies are available to support students to manage emotional distress in the classroom? Are there some subtle ways of supporting students with this?



*Te.g., for further information see Richards, J. M., & Gross, J. J. (1999). Composure at Any Cost? The Cognitive Consequences of Emotion Suppression. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 25(8), 1033–1044. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672992511010>

**Also see information on the 'White Bear' experiment (e.g., Wegner, D. M., Schneider, D. J., Carter, S. R., White, T. L. (1987). "Paradoxical effects of thought suppression". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

Reflective Questions:

Would be useful to introduce a class-wide or school-wide process? What are your thoughts on this? Consider your specific environment, resources and skill sets.

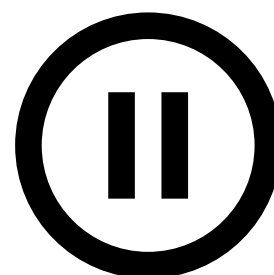
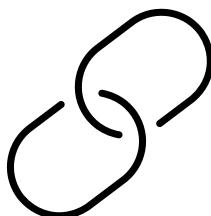
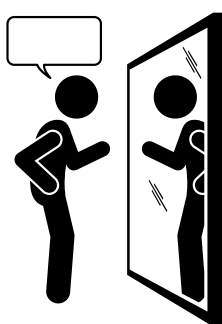
What would support you, as a teacher, to feel confident when responding to emotional distress among your students? What scenarios of emotion dysregulation are most challenging for you? Can you share ideas for managing these with your colleagues?

Validation: a strategy to encourage willingness to experience emotion and emotional acceptance

Emotional validation, in a nutshell, is when you let someone (or yourself) know that their emotions are heard and understood.

Research suggests that validating someone when they are upset quickly reduces their emotional distress. We can also learn to validate ourselves, and similarly, this can reduce our own distress in the moment.

There is an acronym from mindful parenting that can help when trying to practice emotional validation*: MLP



Mirror

Link

Pause

Mirror – Reflect back (or mirror) what you observe the other person feeling (e.g. *You seem upset/angry/sad..*)

Link - Link this emotion to the person's situation and/or to what has prompted the emotion. (e.g. *your frustration makes sense – this is hard*)

Pause – allow time for the person to hear that you've noticed their distress. Important: DO NOT offer a solution. This is not the time for solutions yet. Give the person space. If you feel the need to say something, ask a question. E.g. *"How can I help? or What do you need?"*

(To remember the MLP – think 'My Little Pony')



*Pastiroff, S. (2020). *The Mindful Parent: How to Stay Sane, Stay Calm and Stay Connected to Your Kids*. Renew your mind publishing.

Additional Reading: Emotional Validation is discussed extensively in various therapeutic resources, e.g., see: Linehan, M. M. (1997). Validation and psychotherapy. In A. C. Bohart & L. S. Greenberg (Eds.), *Empathy reconsidered: New directions in psychotherapy* (pp. 353–392). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10226-016>

This marks the end of **Workshop #1**. Use the space and questions below to reflect on a couple of key concepts we have introduced:

Reflective Questions:

What is your awareness of the 'cycle of emotions' like now, compared to before the workshop or before reading these materials?

What is your understanding of "clear and cloudy emotions"? Can you give a couple of examples of when you have experienced a clear or a cloudy emotional response?

What do you understand about 'emotional validation'? When have you felt validated? What situations can you see yourself using validation, with others or yourself?

Workshop #2

The following content is what we would discuss in the second workshop.

As we reflect on the weeks since the last workshop, consider the following questions:

Reflective Questions:

What concepts or ideas from Workshop #1 have stuck with you?

How have you taken these ideas/concepts away and applied them in your teaching practice or personal life? Give some examples.

What are some of the barriers to applying these ideas? How can these barriers be overcome?

Levels of emotional awareness

People have varying degrees of emotional awareness. Someone firstly must be aware of their emotions, before they can hope to successfully engage in emotion regulation.

Lane and Schwartz (1987) present a cognitive-developmental theory of emotion whereby five levels of emotional awareness are thought to occur hierarchically, in the following order*:

1. Awareness of body sensations (e.g. I notice my heart is beating fast)
2. Awareness of action tendencies (e.g. I notice a strong urge to escape (when anxious))
3. Awareness of single emotions (e.g. I notice I feel sad)
4. Awareness of blends of emotions
5. Awareness of a combination of blends of emotions.

Through development, children learn about their emotional experience largely through interactions with others, particularly parents and whānau**. You may notice different levels of emotional awareness in your students. Their level of awareness has an impact on their wellbeing, social relationships, and ability to engage in class.

Importantly, in times of stress, people may be less equipped to notice their emotions, express them, and have the insight to differentiate between blended emotions at any one time.

Relatedly, when someone is in a heightened state of stress, they can struggle to remain in their 'window of tolerance', and can become either under- or over-aroused. This heightened stress can lead to 'flipping the lid'*** - where the person struggles to make informed decisions, struggles to connect with their knowledge of a situation and what behaviours or responses are likely to serve them well. The 'lid' connecting their 'lizard' brain (see 'brainstem' and 'diencephalon' above) with their frontal cortex (see 'prefrontal cortex' and 'paralimbic' above; which is the part of the brain that helps us make good decisions, consider options, and plan out actions) is temporarily less connected, meaning that insight and forward planning appears to evaporate. In the classroom, when a child or young person is not in their 'window of tolerance', they will not only struggle to identify and regulate emotions, they will also struggle to engage with learning and perform tasks. Assisting students to regulate emotions in the early stages, before their lid 'flips', will help students remain engaged, and learn to manage themselves when stress levels rise****.

*Lane RD, Schwartz GE. Levels of emotional awareness: a cognitive-developmental theory and its application to psychopathology. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*. 1987 Feb;144(2):133-143. DOI: 10.1176/ajp.144.2.133. PMID: 3812780.

** For example, see Lunkenheimer E, Hamby CM, Lobo FM, Cole PM, Olson SL. The role of dynamic, dyadic parent-child processes in parental socialization of emotion. *Dev Psychol*. 2020 Mar;56(3):566-577. doi: 10.1037/dev0000808. PMID: 32077725; PMCID: PMC7041841.

***See Dan Siegel's hand model of the brain: <https://drdansiegel.com/hand-model-of-the-brain/>

****Also see online resources from Beacon House, e.g., www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ehq5-P5OSs



When the lid is 'flipped', talking through a situation may not be possible. A person first needs to return to a calm state before they can think rationally. Focusing on calming the body (e.g. through breathing, getting a cold glass of water, sensory strategies for calming) can allow the person to return to 'baseline', reconnect their frontal lobes with the rest of their brain, and then be able to talk through a situation. Similarly, allowing space for someone to 'cool down' allows this return to a calm, connected state*.

Reflective Questions:

What opportunities do you have as a teacher to model emotional awareness? How might this benefit your students, colleagues, and others in the school community?

When do you notice your students 'flip their lid'? What do you observe? How might you apply the concepts in this training when these situations arise (either to yourself, the student(s), or with others present)?

Beliefs about Emotions

Emotion regulation, and emotional awareness, can be impacted by unhelpful beliefs about emotions*.

Beliefs about emotions are socially constructed, may relate to gender roles, or beliefs from someone's family of origin, or based on past experience**.

For example, if someone believes that anger is a bad emotion to have, and experiencing anger reflects negatively on you as a person, they will be more likely to avoid expressing anger (or indeed feeling anger at all). Avoidance of an emotion limits opportunities to learn what information can be gleaned from the emotion (e.g. anger may signal that one's values or safety has been compromised), and how to regulate effectively.

For children and young people, it is important to have adults around who can express a range of emotions, including emotions that are hard to express, or challenging socially (e.g. anger, frustration, disappointment). Unhelpful beliefs about emotions can get in the way of noticing and appropriately expressing emotions when they arise.

Watching an adult appropriately navigate challenging emotions gives young people a scaffold for doing this effectively themselves. For example, with anger and frustration, this can be managed through assertive behaviours, where the self, and others, are respected, and hard conversations can occur to facilitate repair, a change in behavior, or acknowledgement of wrong-doing***.

Here are some common beliefs about emotions:

- *Showing emotions means I am weak*
- *People won't like me if I am 'emotional'*
- *Strong people don't cry*
- *<...emotions xyz> is a bad*
- *This will last forever...*
- *I will never feel better.*

*Ortner CN, Briner EL, Marjanovic Z. Believing Is Doing: Emotion Regulation Beliefs Are Associated With Emotion Regulation Behavioral Choices and Subjective Well-Being. *Eur J Psychol.* 13(1):60-74. doi: 10.5964/ejop.v13i1.1248. PMID: 28344675; PMCID: PMC5342311.

**Gonzalez, M. F., Walle, E. A., Cohen-Charash, Y., Shields, S. A. (2020). Editorial: Everyday Beliefs About Emotion: Their Role in Subjective Experience, Emotion as an Interpersonal Process, and Emotion Theory. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, DOI=10.3389/fpsyg.2020.597412

***Numerous therapies talk about the importance of modelling emotional expression and supporting young people to learn how to express difficult emotions accurately and effectively, e.g., see research on Family Connections by Alan and colleagues (Hoffman PD, Fruzzetti AE, Buteau E, Neiditch ER, Penney D, Bruce ML, Hellman F, Struening E. Family connections: a program for relatives of persons with borderline personality disorder. *Fam Process*. 2005 Jun;44(2):217-25. doi: 10.1111/j.1545-5300.2005.00055.x. PMID: 16013747).



Reflective Questions:

How do your beliefs about emotion play out in your interactions with students? With colleagues? Do these beliefs support you to acknowledge emotions, and express them in a useful way? Or do these beliefs get in the way of responding to emotions effectively?

What are some common unhelpful beliefs about emotions held by students you work with? What about in your school community? When and how could these be gently challenged in a helpful way?

More helpful ways of looking at emotions:

The word *emotion* includes the word 'motion' which means 'movement'. In many ways, emotions prompt us to *move towards* things we want more of *or away from* things we want less of.

We can also think of emotions as a notification system. Just like your phone has a notification system, we have one too. When you get a notification on your phone, this acts as a way to alert you to look at a message. The notification itself is not the message. You still need to open the notification to read or look at what it is alerting you to.

Your emotions are very similar. They are the notification. The actual message sits underneath them. The message are our needs. So, emotions alert us to a need we have. Until we address that need, the emotion is not going away. Instead we will continue to experience it, just like you would get repeat notifications on your phone. If you don't regularly address the notifications on your phone, they will stack up. After a while it is difficult for you to know which messages the most important ones are and therefore which ones you need to address first. These repeated notifications would also drain your phone battery.

The same happens to us. If we don't attend to our emotions regularly, they stack up and it becomes difficult to work out which ones the important ones are. We struggle to address the needs that sit underneath the emotions. Eventually, we feel drained and exhausted. It becomes overwhelming.

Take the time to pay attention to your emotions and see if you can work out what the need is that sits underneath them.



NEED

Emotion Regulation Strategies: TTB experience

Through the row, TTB members were required to use an array of emotion regulation strategies. Here are some examples.

Suppression:



RACHEL

Both Rachel and Tina spoke of suppressing the extent of challenging emotions, to try to “put on a brave face” for one another. The other rowers, Ellie and Jo, both had people close to them on the support boat, whereas neither Tina nor Rachel had this same level of support close by.

Most members of the team recalled using distraction at some point during the row.

Distraction:

TINA

Tina noticed that her frustration with the steering, when the support boat was in front of them during a particularly rough patch, actually distracted her from her physical pain. Focusing on a different ‘aspect of the world’ shifted Tina’s emotional response



TUFI



Tufi, from the support boat, made comments to lighten the mood, in attempts to distract the rowers from their frustration and discomfort. For example, he read out messages of support for us he had received.

JO

Jo noticed that moving her hands around whilst rowing, to try to maximise the amount of strokes in a certain position, distracted her from the enormity of the task, and helped her focus.



RACHEL



Rachel recalled spending time thinking about the KitKat she had in her pack for Tina: “(I did) spend some time thinking about the KitKat I had for Tina. It was just a tiny gesture, but I knew it would make her happy...we had to be somewhere we could actually stop so she could eat it... I was also very conscious that we weren’t following the planned route - thinking about that helped distract me”.

Reappraisal:

ELLIE

Ellie recalls being very frustrated by the false start when the team were deciding when to start the row. Although the weather looked good on multiple occasions, there were reasons the row could not progress on a given day. Ellie used reappraisal (wisdom) to reframe her frustration - by acknowledging that those making the decision regarding when to start the row were very experienced and able to make the right call on behalf of the rest of the team.



TINA



Tina used reappraisal to notice that her lack of positive emotion when seeing the dolphins for the third time was actually an indication she was hangry (see earlier example) - she used 'distance' to step back and observe her response, rather than take her emotional response at face-value (i.e. I don't like dolphins, what is wrong with me?!).

Emotional Acceptance:

There are times where emotional acceptance, and 'riding the wave' of emotion without trying to change the experience, is actually the most appropriate strategy.

RACHEL

When Rachel expressed how much her hands hurt, there was nothing her or the team could do. The constant water on her hands meant that trying to bandage them, to create a barrier to the friction, would have not been beneficial. Rachel accepted her pain, and the associated emotions of frustration, as part of the experience, and did what she could to cope. Others in the boat also used acceptance, and provided emotional validation to Rachel by acknowledging her pain and distress.



TUFI



Tufi (talking about making a plan, and accepting that it may change and adapting to this): "The ability to change and adapt and sort of let change happen and be ok with it. Sort of have a driver and some motivation and then adapt and let the plan be what it turned out to be."

Different types of emotion regulation (to name a few...)*

Suppression: This strategy is behavioural, where a person decreases the expression of emotion when emotionally aroused. Suppression has been linked (in experimental studies) to having less positive emotions and more negative emotions, and in correlational studies, to feeling less authentic, and more depressed. Suppression is also linked to worse memory for emotional interactions, avoiding close relationships and having fewer positive interactions with others

Distraction: This involves trying to experience more neutral emotion(s) by re-directing attention; through behaviours (i.e. engaging in an activity) and/or managing thoughts (e.g. trying to think of something else). Distraction can be incredibly useful in the moment, particularly when someone is not in the appropriate setting to fully experience their emotion (e.g. in a test situation engaging with one's anger may be very disruptive to performance). However, when people habitually distract from their emotions this is likely to be emotional avoidance. Avoiding emotion has several associated problems and is ultimately ineffective.

Reappraisal: This is a cognitive strategy where a person tries to think about a situation in a way that alters the emotional response. Experimental studies suggest reappraisal is linked to experiencing less negative emotions and more positive emotions, and does not increase physiological arousal (and in some cases decreases it). Correlational studies indicate that people who use reappraisal express more positive emotions and less negative emotions, and fewer depressive symptoms. Reappraisal is linked to greater emotional openness when communicating with friends, and closer relationships, in contrast to suppression.

Emotional acceptance: "Acceptance is defined as the process of non-judgementally engaging with negative emotions" (Teasdale et al., 2000). Acceptance is associated with having less negative emotions, and less disorder in mood**.

In the coping literature, better adjustment is associated with problem-focused and engagement coping, such as generation of positive and hopeful thoughts (cognitive reappraisal), careful analysis of a stressful situation, and selective attention to positive aspects of a situation. Poorer wellbeing is linked to disengagement from the stressor or the emotion; such as expressive suppression, avoidance, withdrawal, and negative cognitions about the self and the situation, and unregulated release or venting of emotion (Compas et al., 2001, in Riediger & Klipker, 2014)

In sum, avoiding and suppressing emotions is associated with poorer outcomes.



*For further information see Webb, T., L., Miles, E., & Sheeran, P., (2012). Dealing with feelings: A meta-analysis of the effectiveness of strategies derived from the process model of emotion regulation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 138(4), 775 - 808.

**multiple studies: Campbell-Sills, Barlow, Brown & Hofman, 2006; Kashdan, Barrios, Forsyth, & Steger, 2006; Roemer, Salters, Raffa, & Orsillo, 2005; Shallcross, Troy, Boland & Mauss, 2010

There are several factors that impact on what emotion regulation strategies someone is likely to use:

1. The level of emotional intensity*

- When there is high emotional intensity, people often prefer to use distraction. This may be functional, as when emotions are high, we may not be in a situation where this can be appropriately expressed (e.g. in a test environment, or during a job interview). Therefore, distraction may enable someone to cope through a situation, until there is opportunity (and appropriate supports) for the person to experience the emotion and attend to it.
- When emotional intensity is low, there is usually a preference for reappraisal. Reappraisal requires more cognitive load than distraction (ordinarily), and people may have more capacity to reappraise a situation when emotions are less intense. Additionally, something that evokes less of an emotional response may not have the same degree of importance, and the individual may not have as much investment in a particular explanation for the emotion, making reappraisal easier. When there is a strong emotional response to a situation, the individual may have a particular investment in explaining their emotions in a particular way.

2. Beliefs or cognitions**

- Beliefs about one's capacity to regulate (i.e. the resources available to them; psychologically and socially) can impact on choice of regulation strategy. If someone does not think they have the psychological resources or strength to distract themselves through high emotional distress, then distraction may not be an option they are likely to choose.
- Self-efficacy beliefs also impact on use of emotion regulation. When people believe they are capable of effectively regulating they are more likely to do so.
- Belief in the changeability of emotions: People who believe emotions are flexible and fluid are more likely to try to regulate their emotions (as they view emotions as more malleable). People who see emotions as fixed and unchanging are less likely to use regulation strategies.

*For further information see Webb, T., L., Miles, E., & Sheeran, P., (2012). Dealing with feelings: A meta-analysis of the effectiveness of strategies derived from the process model of emotion regulation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 138(4), 775 - 808.

**ibid.



3. Individual person-based factors*

- Working memory capacity may impact on someone's ability to engage in reappraisal effectively (e.g. if they are having to hold various elements of a situation in mind, to be able to come up with an effective appraisal to make sense of their experience).
- Level of emotional awareness also impacts on someone's ability to regulate their emotions, and the choices they make around this. If someone has poor insight into their emotional experiences, it may even be a challenge for them to notice that they would benefit from implementing an emotion regulation strategy. People who struggle to identify and/or describe emotions may not be able to employ some emotion regulation strategies (e.g. accessing social support; which often requires verbalising distress) as readily.



*For further information see Webb, T., L., Miles, E., & Sheeran, P., (2012). Dealing with feelings: A meta-analysis of the effectiveness of strategies derived from the process model of emotion regulation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 138(4), 775 - 808.

WaVED acronym for reappraisal*

Wisdom: There are many different ways of connecting to wiser perspectives on a situation; e.g. (a) considering words of wisdom that resonate with us; (b) considering all the facts (wise) before jumping to conclusions.

Values: Reminding ourselves of our values can often help in reappraising emotion-eliciting situations. Examples include:

- How my values suggest I should react;
- Why – the underlying purpose one has for being involved in the situation in the first place – can help to throw a different light on how it might be best to react.
- Learning & growth – reframing a situation as a potential learning experience can help to change one's view of it.

Empathy: Being empathic for others and for oneself can help.

- Almost certainly people's behaviour is understandable when one knows what they have been through and what state they are in (this applies, too, for ourselves). Trying to stand in the other person's shoes suggests how they may be seeing the situation. We are all probably doing the best we know. What we know may be lacking!
- It may help to think of everyone behaving in the way that they do because they are trying to satisfy underlying needs. Usually the needs are valid. The way that we are trying to satisfy the needs may not be skilful, fair or appropriate. The negotiation is then how to respond to valid needs in better ways.

Distance: Increased psychological distance from a situation encourages more abstract, values-linked, sensible thinking. We start to see the wood rather than just the trees. Temporal distance, spatial distance, social distance, and thinking hypothetically all encourage shifting to a higher, more abstract level.

- Imagining looking back on the current situation from some point in the future can change our perspective on it. So, too, can thinking of the situation as if it was occurring to others in another century or in another country.
- One can also create more spatial distance by going out to think on a walk, or talking to a friend (i.e. take a break from the situation).
- Social distance is created by imagining how one would think about the situation if it was happening to a friend, an acquaintance, or a stranger.
- Most of these examples of creating psycho-logical distance involve hypothetical thinking. Hypothetical thinking can extend to imagining how one would respond if the situation itself were more extreme, less extreme, had the people involved all swapping roles, and so on. All these forms of psychological distance can encourage reappraisal that links better to healthier overviews of a situation – getting a bird's eye view – rather than simply having a knee jerk reaction.

*(Sourced directly from: <http://www.goodmedicine.org.uk/stressedtozest/2009/05/reappraising-reappraisal>)



Reflective Question:

How can you encourage reappraisal among students?

TTB Experience

TTB members were encouraged to reflect on what their response may have been if they were their 'adolescent selves' when deciding to take part in the row and participating in this adventure. Would they have had the 'higher order' cognitive skills to make this decision in the same way (e.g. forward planning, abstract reasoning)?

JO

"I don't think I would have wanted to do this challenge as a 17 year old...adolescents are not as sure of their values, (have less) inhibitory control.. May have wanted to commit to things for fun and enjoyment rather than a long-term goal."



TINA



".. physically I could have likely done it. (With less) inhibitory control I would have said 'yes' straight away, as an adult I needed more time..."

The team reflected that they would likely have made different decisions as adolescents. Depending on their priorities, they would have declined because it seemed too hard, or said 'yes' straight away to please others rather than consider what they really wanted to do themselves.

Reflective Question:

What higher-order cognitive skills do you use to manage emotion in your classroom?

How could you encourage your students to be mindful of their higher-order cognitive skills (which are still developing) when making decisions about emotion and emotion regulation?

Adolescent development and emotion regulation

It is important to consider developmental changes and how these relate to emotion regulation. In adolescence, there are several factors to consider, including changes in neurobiology, changes in social environment (e.g. attachment often transfers to peers and potentially a romantic partner), and task demands (e.g. adolescence is associated with increased autonomy, the development of identity and beginning employment/exploring options for vocation).

The skills required for emotion regulation are impacted by developmental factors and what is most important to an adolescent. To regulate emotions, an adolescent first has to recognise the emotional significance of an event or experience. Developmentally, the most important or relevant information for an adolescent is likely to be their peer group. Secondly, to engage in emotion regulation, an adolescent needs to appreciate the need for regulation. This may require a history of having been through a particular experience before and learning that emotion regulation may be useful. Adolescents may not have this prior experience to draw upon. Thirdly, to regulate emotions requires an adolescent to select and implement an appropriate strategy. Selecting an appropriate strategy may be based on experience (i.e. doing what has worked in the past), and on modelling/learning from others' experience (therefore peer influence become important in determining the types of strategies a young person may engage in) (see Ahmed, Bittencourt-Hewitt & Sebastian, 2015 for a review)*.

Emotion regulation requires different skills e.g. executive functioning (e.g. for planning the appropriate regulation strategy), working memory, inhibitory control, abstract thought, decision making and perspective taking. During adolescence there are changes and developments in the pre-frontal cortex and remodeling of connections between the prefrontal and limbic systems. This may explain why adolescents have increased emotional volatility and risk taking relative to adults and younger children. Adolescence is associated with biological and physical changes, specific task demands (e.g. shifting towards independence, academic and employment pressures), and increased emotional reactivity and stress**.

Adolescence seems to be a time of increased plasticity in brain regions linked to the generation and regulation of emotion. Different brain regions appear to develop and mature at different times and at different rates. Researchers have proposed a 'developmental mismatch' between the neural systems supporting emotional reactivity and regulation – specifically **the areas of our brain that enable us to 'feel' emotions develops faster** (and matures earlier) **than the parts of our brain that help us regulate emotion. This means adolescents are more affected by the emotional context** (e.g. peer rejection) **and less able to regulate their emotions when making decisions*****.

*Ahmed, S. P., Bittencourt-Hewitt, A., & Sebastian, C. L. (2015). Neurocognitive bases of emotion regulation development in adolescence. *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience*, 15, 11-25.

**Del Piero, L. B., Saxbe, D. E., & Margolin, G. (2016). Basic emotion processing and the adolescent brain: Task demands, analytic approaches, and trajectories of changes. *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience*, 19, 174-189.

***Mills KL, Goddings AL, Clasen LS, Giedd JN, Blakemore SJ. The developmental mismatch in structural brain maturation during adolescence. *Dev Neurosci*. 2014;36(3-4):147-60. doi: 10.1159/000362328. Epub 2014 Jun 27. PMID: 24993606.



Reflective Question:

As a teacher, what role do you have in modelling emotion regulation to students? When have you done this well? What support do you need (in the environment, and for yourself) to model effective emotion regulation?

What opportunities do you have to use emotion language in the classroom?

Information about the brain may appeal to students. Are there opportunities to weave this information into your interactions with students?

TTB Experience

How have TTB members been influenced by their training context?

For example:

What observational learning have they taken away from interactions with one another?

What explicit instruction have they received from one another that's been beneficial?

How has the 'emotional climate' of the team influenced team members?

Here are some examples:

JO



Jo (talking about ways to feel supported by other members of the team): "At one point, I just pulled my beanie down and all I was trying to do was get 30 strokes in and then I could move my hands to redistribute the weight. So all I was doing was 'Hand here', 'hands there' - someone talk to me... and for me, I guess I valued that other people are there and so whether that looks like counting 10 strokes at a time, whether that looks like someone sending a message... yeah."

Jo (talking about the impact of her team member): "I drew a lot of strengths from you [Rachel] and your training. I was like... she can push herself that much. She can do it, and so I was like, I can do it too."

TUFI

Tufi (talking about his perspective from the support boat and the information he chose to share with the team):

"Having to tell you the right things at the right time... and not just sort of letting you... yeah when things are going sh*tty, what are the things that I need to tell you to make sure it was a positive impact on the row and not a negative in any way, you didn't need to know that we couldn't go straight into the South Island because it was choppy, you know...trying to not sort of let you catch on about it. Everything was going alright anyway - even if I didn't know that - it was just about communicating that. - translating what the Phils (others on the support boat who were experienced on the water) were saying and so yeah ... really sort of holding on to all the positives."



TUFI



Tufi: "Probably the scariest moment, and it was like in the back of my mind, well more like the forefront: Like 'You gonna have to act! You gonna have to act.' if something goes wrong you just sort of have to get into it and do it. But at the same time, there was no point in scaring you guys. Apart from, you know, getting those things [life rafts] ready, and making you switch off from the fight you are already fighting. ... I mean it was our job to rescue you, but we weren't there to try to. ... sort of trying to understand you enough to say, 'hey what about this? This is good to think about.'"

Influence of school environment on emotion regulation:

There are multiple contexts which impact on someone's ability to regulate their emotions. The two contexts adolescents spend the majority of their time in are home and school.

There are three mechanisms whereby family context influences emotion regulation (see Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers & Robinson, 2007)*

1. Through observational learning (i.e. parents role model certain ways of regulating emotion)
2. Through parenting practices and explicit instructions (e.g. emotion coaching)
3. Through the emotional climate in the family (e.g. how parents respond to their children's emotions and whether this encourages/discourages certain emotional responses)

There are parallels when considering the impact of the school environment on young peoples' emotion regulation.

- What do young people observe from others at your school?
- What practices or explicit instruction do they receive related to emotion regulation at your school?
- What is the emotional climate at your school?

Reflective Question/Discussion Questions for your school:

- Where do I/we sit in this context?
- What do I/we want my/our contribution to be?
- Where do my/our limits lie?
- What are my/our professional boundaries and expectations?

*Morris AS, Silk JS, Steinberg L, Myers SS, Robinson LR. The Role of the Family Context in the Development of Emotion Regulation. Soc Dev. 2007 May 1;16(2):361-388. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9507.2007.00389.x. PMID: 19756175; PMCID: PMC2743505.

Summary tips

- Emotions are innate, human and unavoidable.
- Emotion regulation is a key skill learned through development to enable management of stressors and relationships.
- It is important to regulate emotions to be able to engage in purposeful, goal-directed and value-driven behaviour.
- There are things that we can do, as significant adults in adolescents' lives, to model emotion language and emotion regulation.
- It is important to create an environment supportive of effective emotion regulation.
- If possible, consider building in emotion regulation opportunities into the school support system, and opportunities for teachers to feel supported to be effective at emotion regulation themselves.
- The areas of our brain that enable us to 'feel' emotions develops faster and earlier than the parts of our brain that help us regulate emotion. This means adolescents are more affected by the emotional context and less able to regulate their emotions.

FINAL ANALOGY



Emotions and our emotional experience is like river rafting – sometimes we have a bumpy patch that feels tumultuous and overwhelming, at other times the ride can feel serene and the flow is easy. Sometimes we can anticipate a bumpy ride ahead and can prepare for it (e.g. over exam time), and at other times the rapids or waterfalls come unexpectedly, as if out of the blue. The best we can do is prepare well for the ride, by packing our life jackets, having a good compass to guide us, bringing suitable clothes, and having knowledge of pit-stops along the way.

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Appendix 1: Emotions and physiology/biology

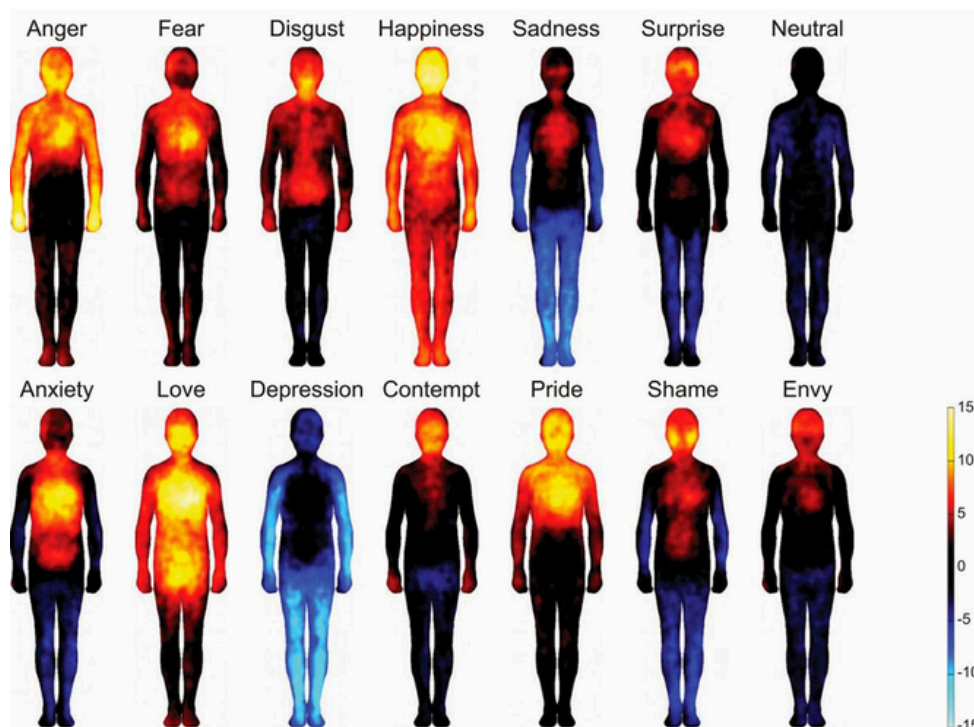
Emotions are our responses to things that happen in our external environment, or internally (e.g. body sensations, thoughts), with associated changes in our thoughts, our behaviour, and our physiology. The sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system play a role in managing the body's response to stress, including emotional stressors.

The sympathetic nervous system activates our body for “flight, fight or freeze” – this is when our heart rate increases, pumping blood to our muscles in readiness for action. Clinicians commonly talk about the flight/fight/freeze response during psychoeducation for anxiety. (e.g. see https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=7&v=rp0lpKTWrp4)

The parasympathetic nervous system, on the other hand, supports the body towards relaxation and calm, by slowing our heart rate and allowing our body to return to homeostasis. We can do things (e.g. breathing techniques) to promote activation of the parasympathetic nervous system, in efforts to calm our body down in times of stress.

For some people, it is their body responses that they more readily perceive when experiencing an emotion, and they may have less access to the cognitions or emotion words to explain their experience.

The experience of emotion in our body is universal. Research has identified where people ‘feel’ emotion in their bodies (e.g. by having them draw where they experience emotion most intensely, on body maps – see below):



Nummenmaa, Glerean, Hari & Hietanen (2014); participants drew where they felt hot/cold when imagining themselves experiencing different emotions.

Emotions can be an unlearned (innate) response to things that happen (e.g. our emotional response to being shocked; feeling disgusted by certain smells of decay), or a learned response based on our experience (e.g. seeing someone we have recently argued with and feeling angry).

Research, led by Paul Ekman, has identified six core emotions, that exist across cultures. These emotions are: anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness and surprise. Research indicates that these core emotions become recognisable in infants from an early age.



Carroll Izard: distinct emotions appear within the first months of life

Glossary

In order of reference)

Recruiting emotions:

Purposefully trying to generate an emotional experience (e.g. recalling certain memories to feel happier).

Upregulating emotions:

Purposefully trying to generate more of an emotion, keep it going longer, and increasing the intensity of the emotion (e.g. focusing on the emotion and where you feel it in your body to emphasise this experience).

Downregulating emotions:

Purposefully trying to dampen an emotional experience (e.g. through distraction, emotional avoidance).

‘Just right’ zone:

This relates to level of physiological arousal; where someone is alert and attentive (to be able to participate fully) whilst being calm and grounded enough to avoid over-stimulation. In schools, teachers (particularly at primary level) refer to the green (equates with ‘just right’), orange and red zones of arousal.

