

What is Emotional Regulation?

We sometimes feel like we are supposed to be in perfect control of our emotions, but there are many cognitive, physiological, and psychological factors that affect our ability to successfully manage our own feelings. Emotion regulation refers to the ability to control one's emotions and the behaviours that stem from them (Rouse, 2024). The opposite of successful emotion regulation is emotion dysregulation.

There is much diversity in emotion regulation abilities among those with ADHD, research indicates that people with ADHD have been found to experience higher levels of emotion dysregulation compared to those without ADHD (Christiansen et al., 2019).

Emotion Regulation and the Brain

ADHD is associated with differences in the structure and function of various regions of the brain. One of these regions is the prefrontal cortex (Christiansen et al., 2019). These differences are responsible for the challenges that people with ADHD experience with executive functions, such as those related to memory and organisation (Wilkins, 2024).

However, the prefrontal cortex, along with other brain regions such as the amygdala, are also important for the regulation of emotions (Christiansen et al., 2019).

Therefore, psychologists suspect that differences in how the brains of people with ADHD work are responsible for increased difficulties with emotion regulation.



Consequences of Emotional Dysregulation



PERSONAL



INTERPERSONAL



OCCUPATIONAL

Emotion dysregulation can have negative repercussions for both the person experiencing dysregulation and those they interact with (Giorgi, 2024) .

Behavioural expressions of dysregulation can involve outbursts of anger, problematic substance use, and self-harming behaviours (Giorgi, 2024) . On the other hand, dysregulation can also lead to extreme conflict avoidance and perfectionism (Giorgi, 2024).

Along with the obvious health risks of behaviours such as substance abuse, interpersonal and professional relationships can suffer when dysregulation occurs. Relationships may break down if emotion dysregulation is causing conflicts to occur and is preventing intimacy by interrupting healthy communication (Giorgi, 2024) . Therefore, it is beneficial to look at implementing practical strategies to best regulate one's emotional responses. In a workplace context, emotion regulation is particularly important, as mood swings and impulsive behaviour can interfere with career advancement and cause conflict with co-workers (The ADHD Centre, 2023) . It is, therefore, beneficial to look at implementing practical strategies to best regulate one's emotional response.

Practical Strategies

Various strategies can be used to better regulate one's emotional responses.

Therapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Various types of therapy are helpful for regulating emotions, including dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT).• DBT is a type of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and is one of the most effective treatments for emotion dysregulation.• DBT teaches strategies to increase your level of tolerance for unpleasant feelings and aims to help you understand your emotions, reduce your vulnerability to these emotions, and ultimately decrease emotional suffering.
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Practical Strategies

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Mindfulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mindfulness meditation can be an effective emotion regulation tool for people with ADHD.• Mindfulness assists emotion regulation by allowing us to notice emotions before reacting to them.• An acronym for mindfulness practice is R.A.I.N. This involves recognising, accepting, and investigating emotions, as well as non-identification.• Non-identification is a separation between oneself and one's feelings. Instead of 'I'm sad', we may say 'I am me and I happen to be feeling sadness.'
Self-Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Labelling our emotions as they come can make it easier to react to them in a more appropriate way.• Take stock of your lifestyle. Reflecting on the quality of your diet, sleep, and exercise habits will allow you to make small improvements in these habits over time, which has a positive impact on emotion regulation.
Co-Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the case of children, emotion co-regulation can help them to develop self-regulation skills.• Co-regulation involves helping children to recognise and understand their emotions.
Medication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Medication, including anti-depressants and anti-psychotics can be used when treating emotion dysregulation.• It is important to talk to a medical professional about medication, as some anti-depressants are not recommended to be taken alongside ADHD medication.



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