



Regulation Strategies – Summary

Regulation is the way people manage their thinking, emotions, attention, and physical reactions. Understanding regulation is critical to creating a trauma-informed school environment.

Why is regulation important?

Students with a history of Adverse Childhood Experiences often have a lot of difficulty with regulation. Many of the challenging behaviors you may see in a classroom are linked to problems with regulation.

What do you need to know about regulation to effectively support students with ACEs?

Regulation is a complex process. Effective regulation involves a person's ability to manage their –

- Thinking
- Emotional responses
- Attention
- Physical reactions

“Top-down control” describes the way people can deliberately use their thinking skills to help them regulate. “Bottom-up control” describes the way people's ability to regulate is controlled more by immediate emotional and physical reactions than by their thinking.

Students with ACEs tend to display more “bottom-up control” than their peers. As a result, they can be emotionally reactive, act before they think, and fail to consider the consequences of their actions.

How do regulation skills develop and how can ACEs disrupt that process?

Our regulation skills typically evolve along a common pathway that has four developmental phases –

- Absolute dependency
- Co-regulation
- Caregiver-directed self-regulation
- Self-regulation

There are two important conditions that facilitate growth in regulations skills from total dependency to self-regulation: 1. supportive caregiving and 2. stable, safe, and predictable environments. ACEs often involve disruptions in these conditions. For children with ACEs –

- Regulation skills may not develop normally
- The brain and nervous system may be overly reactive and oriented toward “fight or flight” responses
- They may be hyper-vigilant to and over-focused on threat and safety



- They may be prone to misperceive people's intentions and events in their environment as threatening

How can you help students with ACEs develop more adaptive regulation strategies?

Use these 3 steps –

- 1.** Determine how a student is currently attempting to regulate. Are they using more thinking oriented strategies or are they relying on strategies that are more physical or sensory in nature? Do they try to regulate through activities they do alone or do they involve others?
- 2.** Help students use regulation strategies that are similar to the way they currently regulate, but are likely to be more successful in a school setting.
- 3.** Use this information to identify new regulatory strategies a student can learn to increase their flexibility in dealing with stress.

What skills can you teach students that will improve their ability to self-regulate?

Focus on two critical areas –

- 1.** Help students build and reinforce self-monitoring skills by:
 - a.** Teaching students to observe or track their behaviors and emotional reactions during the school day
 - b.** Teaching the student words to identify and describe their emotions, level of attention, and physical reactions.
- 2.** Help students build skill sets that help them modify the way they currently attempt to regulate by:
 - a.** Identifying a range of options they can use to regulate
 - b.** Using word or picture lists to aid them in remembering and identifying these options
 - c.** Providing students with opportunities to practice different ways to regulate
 - d.** Helping student identify and evaluate the effectiveness of behaviors that are successful

Many students who have had ACEs rely on your modeling and direction to help them regulate, so make sure your expectations do not exceed the student's level of regulation ability.