

Emotion Regulation Tips

Why Do Emotions Exist?

Emotions play many important roles in our lives. They remind us of the impacts of external factors, help us with our decision-making processes and interpersonal communication, show what is important for us. Emotions and emotional reactions have many functions in people's lives.

Emotions are accompanied by various cognitive, physiological and behavioural responses. Often, when our emotions emerge on the inside, we experience physical changes or sensations in our body, such as, our body temperature rises when we are angry, tears come out of our eyes when we are sad, or we smile when we are happy. Many physical responses and symptoms like these help us express our emotions. Emotions also play an important role in helping us adapt to different circumstances in our lives. Through brain signals from emotions, we can cognitively realise different situations going on around us and adapt to these different situations by adjusting our behaviours accordingly.

Functional Regulation of Emotions

Our emotions are a functional mechanism that helps us with our everyday lives, however there can be times when they emerge to the surface rather destructively. The ability to survive in social life and live our lives in a properly functional manner is closely associated with the level of our emotional regulation skills. One of the commonly used emotion regulation mechanisms is **suppression**, through which we deliberately (by will power) prevent the expression of an emotion, not the emotion itself, from fully emerging. That is why suppression is rather considered a non-functional mechanism. For that matter, frequent suppression of emotions like sadness, or anxiety causes them to emerge even stronger and might also bring symptoms of depression.

Functional regulation of emotions is closely linked to psychological well-being. In this context, the cognitive appraisal process refers to personal interpretation of a situation that ultimately influences the emotions and the intensity of the emotions the person feels vis-à-vis the situation. For example, if a person interprets that another person does something uncomfortable just to offend, hurt or endanger him or her, then his/her feelings of anger or anxiety would be triggered. When a person believes that something s/he did led to a negative outcome, the feelings of guilt are likely to emerge, likewise, sad emotions would arise if the person thought s/he has lost something. We could accordingly say that our way of appraising different situations through our available means of perceiving/understanding can significantly influence our emotions.

Emotions Regulation Strategies

Antecedent Strategies

We can develop cognitive control mechanisms before our emotions fully emerge to the surface. These are mostly thought-based, conscious strategies.

- **Cognitive Reappraisal:** Instead of immediately jumping to the first conclusion when you experienced something that is emotionally resonant with you, you can try to appraise the reasons why this situation has occurred in the first place. The ability to assessing an experience or a situation from different perspectives would help you to perceive it more objectively while mitigating intense emotions that might arise out of your personal interpretation of that situation.
- **Problem solving** is also a useful tool for emotional regulation. When you experience something that emotionally affects you, you may want to try to first understand and define the situation, and then create solution plans using your available resources, try out each plan and finally assess their results, all of which are important stages of problem-solving.

Response Focused Strategies

Sometimes emotional reactions may occur automatically and unconsciously, or they are so intense that we might have difficulty taking our time to think about what happened or making use of our problem-solving skills. In times like these, we can try to develop different approaches that can help us regulate our emotions:

- Accept all emotions that arise in different situations, see them for what they are without judging them.
- Define your emotions, express them verbally, in writing, or draw your feelings and emotions.
- Try to focus on the present and stay in the present moment instead of constantly thinking about what happened in the past or what might happen in the future.
- Try to be aware of your physical and behavioural reactions accompanied by your emotions and feelings.
- Do relaxation and breathing exercise in an oxygen-rich environment to let your body and unwind and clear your mind.
- Find an activity or a hobby that makes you feel good and mentally relaxes you.

The Importance of Social Relationships in Emotion Regulation

The relationships that make us feel safe and comfortable help us cope with everyday stress. If you feel safe with people that are close to you and they are the kind of people who can

listen to you without judging or lecturing you, being with these people or talking to them in challenging times will help you regulate your emotions more effectively.

If you realise that you are still having difficulty regulating your emotions despite your best efforts, you can always contact our psychologists at Altınbaş University Psychological Support Unit to get counselling or psychotherapy. To make an appointment, please send an email to psikolojikdestek@altinbas.edu.tr, indicating your first and last name, and your major, or just fill out the form in the link below.

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=omXv1JwHFkWL1e5uOyzkVvxjmkWO8fVNqlZN5MNvA5BURFpDMEpRNE4yWDFZQk1BMEExKQzExUUYxWi4u>

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