

Emotional Regulation Workbook

Practical tools to understand emotions, calm the nervous system and respond with greater choice.

Emotional regulation is not about stopping feelings, forcing yourself to be calm or always responding perfectly. It is the ability to notice what is happening inside you, understand what your nervous system may need, and create enough space to choose what happens next.

What emotional regulation can look like

Notice: recognising body sensations, thoughts, urges and emotions before they become overwhelming.

Name: finding language for what is happening without judging yourself for it.

Understand: asking what may have triggered the response and what need sits underneath it.

Regulate: using strategies that fit the level of activation rather than trying to think your way out of a body-based response.

Choose: responding with greater intention once there is enough capacity to do so.

The nervous system matters

When we sense threat, pressure, conflict, sensory overload, rejection or uncertainty, the autonomic nervous system can shift into protection. Fight may feel like anger or agitation; flight like panic or urgency; freeze like feeling stuck or unable to think; and shutdown can bring exhaustion, numbness or withdrawal. These responses are not moral failures. They are protective patterns, although they can become difficult when they are triggered frequently or intensely.

Your regulation map

What I notice	My early signs	What tends to help
Body	_____	_____
Thoughts	_____	_____
Emotions	_____	_____
Behaviour / urges	_____	_____
Sensory needs	_____	_____

Try this: pause - notice - choose

Pause: Can I delay the reaction for ten seconds? **Notice:** What is happening in my body, thoughts and emotions?

Choose: What would support me now: movement, quiet, connection, space, sensory reduction, food/drink, grounding, reassurance or a practical next step?

Recognising emotions before they overflow

Emotions often arrive with physical information before we have words for them. Learning your own signals can make regulation more accessible.

Emotion check-in

Emotion	Possible body clues	What might it be telling me?
Anxiety	Tight chest, restless legs, racing thoughts	I may need safety, information, preparation or grounding.
Anger	Heat, clenched jaw, pressure, urge to act	A boundary, injustice, frustration or unmet need may be present.
Sadness	Heaviness, tears, low energy	I may need comfort, rest, connection or space to grieve.
Overwhelm	Noise feels louder, thinking becomes harder	Demand may currently be greater than capacity.
Shame	Wanting to hide, collapse or replay events	I may need perspective, acceptance and safe connection.
Excitement	Fast speech, energy, butterflies	Positive activation can also need pacing and grounding.

Build a personalised regulation menu

When I am mildly activated: stretch, change position, drink water, step outside, reduce notifications, use music, write down the next task.

When I am highly activated: reduce demands, move away from conflict, use repetitive or rhythmic movement, ground through touch and sight, seek a safe person, lower sensory input.

When I am shut down: use warmth, gentle movement, familiar sensory input, simple food/drink if possible, low-demand connection and one very small next step.

Regulation does not have to look still. For some people, especially neurodivergent people, movement, pacing, rocking, fidgeting, pressure, headphones, reduced eye contact or temporary withdrawal may be effective forms of regulation.

My regulation menu

When I feel...	I can try...
Restless / activated	_____
Overwhelmed	_____
Angry / frustrated	_____
Anxious	_____
Flat / shut down	_____
Sensory overloaded	_____

From trigger to choice

Use this page after an event, or later when you have enough capacity. The aim is curiosity rather than self-criticism.

1. What happened?	
2. What did I notice in my body?	
3. What emotion(s) showed up?	
4. What thoughts or meanings appeared?	
5. What did I feel like doing?	
6. What did I need?	
7. What helped / might help next time?	

Repair after dysregulation

Regulation skills do not prevent every difficult response. Repair matters too. You might say: "I was overwhelmed and I reacted quickly. I want to come back to this when I can communicate more clearly." Repair can include acknowledging impact, explaining without excusing, restating a boundary, asking what the other person needs, and deciding what would make a similar situation safer next time.

Building regulation over time

Emotional regulation is influenced by much more than a single coping technique. Sleep, nutrition, pain, hormones, sensory load, workload, relationships, uncertainty, trauma history, neurodivergence and physical health can all affect available capacity. A strategy that works one day may not work on another.

Your weekly capacity check

Area	Low / OK / High demand	What would support me?
Sleep / rest		
Sensory load		
Work / responsibilities		
Relationships		
Physical needs		
Uncertainty / change		
Time alone / connection		

A message from Maggie

You do not need to become less emotional to become more regulated. Emotions carry information, and some nervous systems experience that information very intensely. The goal is to understand your own patterns well enough that you can recognise when capacity is changing and support yourself earlier. Start with what is realistic. One pause, one boundary, one sensory adjustment or one moment of noticing can be meaningful. Regulation is something we practise, not something we pass or fail.

Books & trusted resources

Deb Dana: *Anchored* - a practical introduction to working with nervous-system states through a Polyvagal-informed lens.

Russ Harris: *The Happiness Trap* - accessible Acceptance and Commitment Therapy ideas for making space for difficult internal experiences while acting on values.

Matthew McKay, Jeffrey Wood & Jeffrey Brantley: *The Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Workbook* - structured skills covering mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotion regulation and relationships.

NHS: Every Mind Matters provides practical information on stress, anxiety and wellbeing. For persistent emotional distress, speak with your GP or an appropriate mental-health professional.

This workbook is educational and supportive rather than a substitute for individual medical or psychological assessment. If you are in immediate danger or unable to keep yourself safe, seek urgent help.