Emotional Regulation WORKBOOK

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

Emotional regulation is not the absence of emotion. It means noticing what is happening, understanding what you may need and creating more options for your next response. Workplace expectations, sensory demands, communication barriers, fatigue, discrimination and unclear tasks can all affect regulation. This guide is for employees, self-employed people, managers, supporters and coaches.

1 | What emotional regulation can look like at work

Regulation might mean asking for written instructions, requesting a pause before replying, taking a movement break, using a communication card, stepping away from noise or deciding that an issue needs a reasonable adjustment rather than more effort. It is not an obligation to appear calm while an environment remains harmful.

2 | Recognise your early signs

Possible signs include tightening muscles, racing thoughts, irritability, silence, tears, trouble finding words, shutdown, restlessness, sensory discomfort and difficulty deciding what to do next. These experiences differ across individuals and can change over a working day.

My early signs of overwhelm:

3 | Look beyond the individual

Before asking "How can I calm down?", consider "What is making this difficult?" Pressure can come from interruptions, ambiguous instructions, inaccessible meetings, conflict, tight deadlines, insufficient breaks, pain, anxiety, sensory overload or too many simultaneous tasks.

Workplace conditions that increase pressure:

A practical regulation toolkit

4 | Notice - name - need - next

Notice: What signals are present? Name: What feeling fits, even approximately? Need: Information, rest, quiet, support, certainty, movement, fairness or a boundary? Next: Select one manageable response. You can skip naming emotions if body sensations or practical needs are easier to identify.

> Example: "My jaw is tight and I cannot follow the meeting. I may be overloaded. I need the instructions in writing. I can ask for notes and five minutes to process."

5 | Choose from a menu, not a command

Grounding: Notice the support of your chair or feet; look at a familiar object. Sensory support: Reduce noise, glare, clothing discomfort or interruptions. Movement: Stand, stretch or walk if safe and accessible. Communication: Use typed responses, a prepared script or a trusted supporter. Pacing: Reduce concurrent demands and schedule recovery time. Breathing exercises do not suit everyone; never force breath-holding.

6 | A response script

> "I need a few minutes to process this before I respond. Could you send the key points in writing? I can come back to you by [agreed time]."
>
> "I am becoming overloaded by interruptions. Can we agree a focused work period and a clear way to flag genuinely urgent requests?"
>
> "This is a workplace barrier rather than a lack of effort. I would like to discuss an adjustment that allows me to meet the role requirements."

A phrase I could use at work:

7 | When regulation is not enough

If the workload remains unmanageable, a manager is hostile, the environment is inaccessible or a health issue is affecting work, personal strategies are not a substitute for changing conditions. Document barriers, request a meeting, consider occupational health, union representation where relevant and reasonable adjustments.

Workplace reflection and action plan

8 | My pressure map

Situation or task:

What I noticed in my body, thinking or communication:

What the environment or task demanded:

What support or change might help:

My accessible regulation plan

9 | Before, during and after

Before: What can I plan or change in advance?

During: What are my early signs and immediate support options?

After: What helps me recover without judgement?

10 | Reasonable adjustments I may wish to discuss

Examples include written instructions, predictable schedules, quieter space, lighting changes, scheduled breaks, reduced avoidable interruptions, flexible working, meeting agendas, clear priority systems, assistive technology, an agreed communication method or a support worker where appropriate. Not every adjustment will suit every role or person.

My top three adjustment requests:

Conversations and follow-through

11 | Preparing to speak with a manager or colleague

Focus on a specific barrier, its work impact and a proposed change. You are not required to disclose every personal detail to explain a workplace support need. Ask what is possible, who will follow up and when the arrangement will be reviewed.

> "When tasks change without notice, I struggle to reprioritise. Could we use a written priority list and a brief check-in when plans change?"

The change I want to request:

Who will I speak to, and what will I ask?

Agreed action and review date:

12 | Reflection without blame

A difficult moment does not cancel the efforts you have made. Ask: What did the situation tell me? Which supports helped? What do I want the workplace to change? What would a more accessible day look like?

One thing I want to carry forward:

Quick-reference workplace plan

My signs

I may notice:

My first responses

I can choose:

What others can do

Please support me by:

What not to assume

Silence is not necessarily agreement; tears are not a failure; needing breaks does not mean someone is unmotivated; and a regulated appearance does not necessarily mean a working environment is accessible.

Support and safety

This is an educational coaching resource, not a diagnosis or replacement for treatment. If distress is persistent or substantially affecting health, speak with an appropriate healthcare professional. If there is immediate danger in the UK, call 999. The UK Equality Act 2010 may require employers to make reasonable adjustments for disabled workers and applicants, depending on circumstances.

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