



Workshop Description: This workshop includes practice for discussing and understanding emotion regulation with youth program staff. Successful implementation of this workshop will ultimately help staff to better understand their own emotion regulation strategies. In addition, staff will learn how to apply these strategies with youth through modeling.

Preparation Time: The preparation time for this workshop is approximately 15 to 20 minutes. This preparation time should include reading background information on the Emotion Regulation and Positive Youth Development website and in this workshop guide, collecting materials, and gathering any additional information you may need.

Instruction Time: It will take approximately 60 to 65 minutes to complete all activities within this guide. If you do not have time for the full workshop, only use the most relevant activities to make the workshop fit within your timeframe. Be sure to keep the reflection portion of the activities and workshop as this is where staff should consider how the activities and knowledge apply to their work.

Materials:

- Paper for each participant
- Writing utensils for each participant
- Two large blank white sheets of paper or a whiteboard

Preparation Instructions: You should read the content related to this topic on the Emotion Regulation and Positive Youth Development website, specifically the content related to Emotion Regulation and Youth Program Staff. In addition, you should review the background information in this workshop guide, gather all necessary materials, and prepare for the activities.

In this series of workshops, youth program staff will learn skills that build on one another in a specific sequence. We recommend you complete this set of workshops the workshops in the following order:

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| 1. <i>Understanding Emotion Regulation,</i> | 6. <i>Understanding and Practicing Inquiry,</i> |
| 2. <i>Development of Executive Functioning,</i> | 7. <i>Understanding and Practicing Acceptance,</i> |
| 3. <i>Understanding Peer Relationships,</i> | 8. <i>Understanding and Practicing Problem-Solving, and</i> |
| 4. <i>Understanding Emotion Regulation – Staff,</i> | 9. <i>Understanding and Practicing Cognitive Reappraisal.</i> |
| 5. <i>Understanding and Practicing Active Listening,</i> | |

Knowledge: Understanding Executive Functioning in Youth

Youth learn about emotion regulation by observing other people’s emotion regulation (within interactions with their family and others like their friends, peers, and other adults)³⁶ and through emotion coaching (*fostering awareness and reflection (i.e., acceptance), reinterpreting the meaning of emotions (i.e., cognitive reappraisal), and encouraging problem-solving*³⁵).

Although parents and families often provide the first examples and lessons for youth regarding emotion regulation, adolescence is a time when youth begin to exercise more independence and interact in environments beyond their home (like school, extracurricular activities, youth programs, etc.). In these new environments, youth are exposed to and learn from other adults (like youth program staff) and their peers. The youth program provides a laboratory for youth to learn and practice skills like emotion



regulation, and youth program staff can play a unique role in youth's lives. Adult-youth relationships offer opportunities for supporting positive social norms around emotion regulation, and program staff have regular opportunities to influence how youth see themselves engaging with the world through the examples the adults provide.

Youth program staff have an opportunity to help youth learn to manage negative emotions when they occur. When staff provide support and guidance to youth to help them manage and understand their emotions, they are providing emotion coaching.⁶¹ In order to be successful in this emotion coaching, staff need to practice active listening and inquiry, which we will be learning about in the future workshops.

Emotion coaching involves helping youth to identify their own emotions and develop solutions and strategies for how youth can manage what they feel so they can achieve their goals. A positive youth development program offers participants a safe place to practice healthy emotion regulation strategies. As youth grow more confident in their regulation abilities, youth program staff can offer challenges to further help the youth learn and grow. For example, youth who are afraid to speak in front of their peers might be challenged to give a demonstration or presentation on a favorite topic. When youth understand how to manage their strong emotions, they will be less likely to quit the program or disengage with the other youth in the program.³⁵

Objectives:

- Learn strategies for raising awareness of emotions
- Understand how youth program staff apply emotion regulation strategies to work and life
- Learn how youth program staff model emotion regulation skills for youth during regular interactions

Introduction (5 minutes):

- Describe emotion regulation and how it supports positive youth development and program success.
 - What to say: "Today we are going to learn a couple of strategies for being more aware of our emotions. Having awareness of our own emotions will help us to understand how we manage or regulate our emotions and in turn will help us better understand how we model emotion regulation to youth within the program. Youth learn from our examples, both good and bad. Promoting healthy emotion regulation in ourselves will transfer by example to the youth in the program."
- Transition into Prior Knowledge activity:
 - What to say: "To start, we are going to talk about what you know about strategies for emotion awareness and where the gaps in our knowledge are."



Prior Knowledge (5-7 minutes):

- Ask the participants to share how they would go about regulating or managing their own emotions. Record these responses on a large sheet of paper or white board so participants can see.
- Ask the participants if they have any questions about emotion regulation they would like answered or if there is anything they want to learn through this workshop. Again, record responses.

Activities:

Activity: *Body Awareness* (20 minutes)

- Describe the *Body Awareness* activity:
 - What to say: “We are going to do an activity that will show you one simple way to increase body awareness. The goal of this exercise is to connect you to your body in a way that will allow you recognize the physical changes that come with strong emotions (rapid heartbeat, tight muscles, etc.) so that you can better guide youth through the process of understanding and managing their own emotions.”
- Lead the *Body Awareness* activity:
 - Ask participants to relax and close their eyes.
 - Instruct participants to breathe in and tense each muscle group for 4 to 10 seconds as you call them out, relaxing completely on exhale. The muscle groups are hands, wrists and forearms, biceps and upper arms, shoulders, forehead, eyes/bridge of nose, cheeks and jaw, lips, chest, back, stomach, hips and buttocks, thighs and hamstrings, lower legs, and feet.
 - Instruct the participants to take a few moments to relax as much as possible and breathe through the whole body.
 - Ask the participants to open their eyes. Say to participants that when we are mad, irritated, afraid, or worried, our brain thinks we are in a dangerous situation and our body changes to address this potential danger. Some of these changes include the following:
 - Rapid heartbeat or breathing
 - Redness in face
 - Clenched teeth
 - Clenched fists
 - Raised voice
 - Tight muscles
 - Upset stomach
 - Headache
 - Feeling fidgety
 - Ask the participants how they feel after the *Body Awareness* activity.
 - Ask participants if they feel connected to their bodies and if they have this same feeling during an average day.
 - Once you have discussed and reflected on the participant’s body awareness, discuss how youth program staff can implement the same or similar exercises (i.e., breathe in



- 10 seconds, breathe out 10 seconds) with youth to develop a mind-body connection that supports the development of healthy emotion regulation strategies.
- Discuss this technique as an emotion coaching strategy: body awareness is both a way to identify emotions and a strategy for adjusting emotional responses. Being aware of emotions helps a person to shift focus from reactions to the negative emotion to the body and breathing. This may also work as an example of problem-solving in that it is a ready-made and simple solution (breathing in for 10 counts and out for 10 counts is not hard to remember) that youth can be taught to apply to a variety of situations and emotions.
 - Transition into the next activity by asking participants to consider the differences between regulating physical responses to emotion and mental responses to emotions.

Activity: Visualization (25 minutes)

- Describe the *Visualization* activity:
 - What to say: “Now that you are familiar with the importance of body awareness and managing physical changes, let’s try managing our thoughts.”
- Lead the *Visualization* activity:
 - Ask participants to close their eyes once more and guide them through the visualization exercise found on the Instructional Aid: *Visualization Script*
 - After reading the script, ask the participants to open their eyes. Pass out paper and writing utensils so that every participant has their own paper and writing utensil.
 - Instruct the participants to think about a place that gives them a sense of comfort and to draw it.
 - When everyone is finished, have group members share their drawings.
 - Then, ask participants to describe how they controlled their thoughts during the visualization activity. Discuss as a group how to use this process with youth and connect it to the development of healthy emotion regulation strategies.

A simple example is asking youth to “Give Me Five.” The youth program staff holds up their hand as a sign that youth are acting inappropriately for the given situation and waits for them to be silent so the participants can redirect. The Give Me Five example has all of the elements of an emotion coaching strategy. The staff and youth identify emotions (through the common understanding of what it means when the adult says “Give me five”), refocus (the youth must focus on being silent and awaiting further instruction), and redirect (offering solutions or alternatives to youth).
 - Transition into the end of the session by reminding participants that the two exercises performed in this workshop are healthy or adaptive strategies and that using them in the youth program with youth is one way of teaching youth these same strategies.

Reflection and Recap (5 minutes):

- Return to the participants’ responses gathered at the start of the workshop (see Prior Knowledge activity). Ask the participants what they learned during the course of the workshop and record the information on the same paper or a new blank page if there is no room. Draw attention to topics that were on the list generated earlier, new topics, and questions that were answered.



- Ask follow-up questions, such as “What part of the activity made you realize that?” and “How could you use these strategies with youth?”

Resources:

Instructional Aid: *Visualization Script*

Sources:

The *Body Awareness* activity was adapted from Carlin, K. (2018). Two activities to teach basics of emotional regulation to kids. *Bounceback Parenting*. Retrieved from: <https://bouncebackparenting.com/two-activities-teach-basics-emotional-regulation-kids/>

The Instructional Aid: *Visualization Script* was adapted from Exercises for emotional regulation. (2015). *Crisis and Trauma Resource Institute*. Retrieved from: <https://ca.ctrinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Exercises-for-Emotion-Regulation-1.pdf>



Emotion Regulation Instructional Aid Visualization Script

Instructions: Inform the youth program staff that they are going to do a short visualization activity. Ask them to imagine what you are about to describe. Many people find it easier to block out other images and thoughts if they close their eyes. Read the following script. Slowly and carefully. Pause briefly between sentences.

“Imagine a caterpillar. You can watch it crawling about on the tree where it lives. Attaching itself to a branch of the tree, the caterpillar starts to form its cocoon. Gradually it surrounds itself with golden, silken threads until it is totally hidden. Observe the cocoon for a few moments. Now be inside the cocoon...surrounded by the softness of silk...you rest in the warmth of the golden darkness...you are only dimly aware, so you do not know exactly what is happening to you, but you sense that in this apparent stillness a hidden, transforming intelligence is at work. At last, the cocoon breaks open, and a ray of light penetrates through a crack...as the light touches you, you feel a sudden surge of vitality and realize that you can shed the cocoon. As you feel the cocoon falling away, you discover that with it you have shed the defenses and supports of your safety and your past...you are now freer than you ever dreamed you could be; you are a beautiful, multicolored butterfly. You soon realize that your boundaries have extended infinitely...you can fly...you find yourself dwelling in a very new realm of colors, of sounds, of open space. You experience yourself flying...being supported by the air, being gently borne up by the breeze, gliding down, flying up again. Below, you see an immense meadow full of flowers of every kind and color...you settle on one...then on another...then on another still, so gently that the petals are not even disturbed. You experience each flower as a different being with its own color and perfume...its own particular life and quality. Take your time in experiencing the many aspects of your expansion, your freedom and your lightness.”