A Positive Youth Development Topic Paper

Understanding and Responding to Emotions

Adolescence is a time of constant change and growth in all facets of functioning. As youth transition from childhood to adulthood (approximately ages 10 to 20 years old), they have to learn how to navigate complex emotions that accompany biological changes (e.g., puberty), new relationships (e.g., romantic relationships), and expanded networks and environments (e.g., employment).[1] As they develop, many youth begin to spend more of their time in extracurricular activities such as youth programs, and nonparental adults (i.e., youth program staff) in these programs will likely encounter youth who are managing difficult and complex emotions. To help ensure all youth have enjoyable and meaningful experiences while in a youth program, youth program staff must learn to help youth regulate and express their emotions in constructive ways that support positive youth development.

Positive youth development refers to a strengths-based approach to understanding and nurturing healthy functioning among youth.[2, 3] Through this approach, youth programs offer activities that provide opportunities for youth to learn new skills and make meaningful connections with their peers and staff.[4] Also, within the positive youth development approach, youth program staff who are able to successfully diffuse, manage, and redirect youth's expression of negative or destructive emotions can assist youth as they learn new skills (e.g., emotion regulation skills) to help them thrive. Moreover, successful management of youth's emotions can help to create a youth program that is safe and enjoyable for all. In order to provide context as to how youth program staff can best understand and respond to youth's emotions, this review will focus on three main areas: definition and theories of emotion regulation; developmental, biological, social, cultural, and environmental factors to consider to better understand youth's emotion regulation; and strategies for youth program staff on constructive ways to respond to youth's emotions.

What Is Emotion Regulation?

A review of emotion regulation begins with an understanding of the nature and scope of emotions. Emotions are a "complex pattern of bodily and mental changes that include physiological arousal, feelings, cognitive processes, visible expressions (including face and posture), and specific behavioral reactions made in response to a situation perceived as personally significant."[5] Emotions are comprised of biological, behavioral, and cognitive processes that occur within individuals as a response to both internal and external stimuli. Individuals are able to use these processes to modulate their experience, expression, and regulation of emotions.[6] Individuals' abilities to regulate their emotions expands as they develop and mature. Two important and related concepts to emotions are emotional development and emotion regulation. Emotional development is defined as the "emergence of specific affects, the growth of emotion regulation, and the increasing integration of emotion with social and cognitive development,"[7] while emotion regulation refers to the processes (e.g., behaviors, skills, strategies, etc.) by which individuals increase, maintain, and decrease both positive and negative emotions.[8] In general, the process of emotion regulation reflects individuals' efforts to influence which emotions they experience, when these emotions are experienced, and how these emotions are expressed.[9]

As youth's emotional development matures in adolescence, they experience increased interpersonal and social demands; specifically, they encounter more complex situations that require them to expand their emotion regulation skills.[10] Objectives and goals of emotion regulation relate to the management of "emotionally charged states" such as modulating impulses, mood, stress, and affect.[11] The management and regulation of emotions are based on several factors such as neurobiological and cognitive functioning, individual temperament and personality, and environmental influences.[8, 12] For example, environmental influences include the socially and contextually appropriate ways[13] children and youth are taught to regulate and manage their emotions. In particular, children and youth tend to be reinforced for regulating their emotions that are consistent with the social norms and expectations of their environment.[14] For many years researchers have focused on conceptualizing emotion regulation from limited perspectives; more recently, researchers have begun to integrate multiple theoretical perspectives into one model.[9] To better understand current perspectives of emotion regulation, the next section briefly reviews two integrative models.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Emotion Regulation

Throughout child and adolescent development, emotions become more connected with increasingly complex internal (e.g., cognitive) and external (e.g., sociocultural) systems. Given the complexity of emotions, there is no consensus across theoretical orientations as to their development, experience, expression, or regulation. Researchers have defined emotions as antecedents, outcomes, and simultaneous occurrences of various biological, physiological, cognitive, behavioral, and social processes.[15, 16] Reviewing all the theoretical perspectives of emotions that underlie emotion regulation is beyond the scope of this paper; however, the subsequent section briefly describes two models of emotion regulation: one that focuses on regulation based on internal processes, the *process model of emotion regulation*, and one that focuses on regulation based on external influences, the *ecological systems perspective of emotion regulation*.

The Process Model of Emotion Regulation

The process model of emotion regulation integrates theories based on internal processes (e.g., neurobiological, cognitive, behavioral, etc.) that individuals employ as they manage and regulate their emotions. Primarily, this model is based on theories of stress and coping (e.g., cognitive mediational model)[16] that focus on how internal processes such as cognitive appraisals, response tendencies, and behavioral and physiological reactions interact to produce various emotions.[17, 18] Furthermore, it is believed that emotions are a result of individuals' understanding of the implications of what is occurring in their environment and how what is occurring influences their well-being.[18] To explain how individuals regulate their emotions based on these internal processes, the process model of emotion regulation proposes five stages in the regulation process at which individuals can modulate their emotions: *situation selection*, *situation modification*, *attentional deployment*, *cognitive change*, and *response modulation*.[9, 17] These stages can occur simultaneously, sequentially, and/or can be repeated multiple times within one situation or circumstance.

The first phase, *situation selection*, refers to when individuals approach or avoid certain people, places, or objects to increase or decrease the likelihood they will be in a situation where they experience

certain emotions.[9] During infancy and childhood, parents and other caregivers are primarily responsible for selecting situations for children that have "manageable emotional demands" and don't overwhelm children's ability to self-regulate their emotions.[17] However, as children enter adolescence, they exercise more autonomy over selecting different environments (e.g., extracurricular activities) that may impact not only them but also family, peers, and others (e.g., choosing their favorite restaurant for family dinner or being selective with whom they invite to their birthday parties). Notably, effectively selecting situations that will increase the likelihood of positive emotions (or decrease the likelihood of negative emotions) includes self-knowledge regarding the stimuli that may elicit undesired emotions, and youth are more likely to be able to access this knowledge in adolescence.

The second phase, *situation modification*, describes individuals' efforts to modify their situation(s) in attempts to alter stimuli or triggers that elicit emotional responses. This modification can range from asking for help to ease frustration (self-regulation) to decreasing the volume during a television show that has content that might be upsetting. Although situation selection is conceptualized as distinct from situation modification, modification of a situation may be deployed with the goal to create (and therefore select) a new situation. Of note, situation modification is believed to be related to alterations made to the external environment in order to modulate emotions while changes to the "internal environment" is believed to happen at a different stage.[17] The third stage, *attentional deployment*, differs from the previous two stages in that there is not a focus on individuals' environment. Instead, attentional deployment refers to how individuals influence their emotions by how and where they direct their attention. For example, two common strategies to direct attention are distraction and concentration.

The fourth stage is *cognitive change*, which refers to how individuals regulate their emotions by changing how they appraise or think about a situation to alter the situation's emotional impact and significance. Examples of cognitive changes individuals engage in to regulate their emotions include comparing their current situation to a previous situation in order to feel less upset or redefining their expectations of a situation in order to manage their disappointment.[17] The fifth and final stage, *response modulation*, refers to when individuals have already begun to experience an emotion and they engage in efforts to influence their physiological, experiential, or behavioral responses. These efforts are conceptualized as being direct and intentional such that individuals are conscious and aware of their emotions in the particular situation. Response modulation might include pretending to like a gift (i.e., changing the outward expression of an experienced emotion) so as not to hurt the giver's feelings or engaging in activities or habits (e.g., use of illicit substances or excessive food intake) to influence both internal emotional processes and outward expressions of emotion.[9] Strategies conceptualized within this model have been associated with decreases in negative affect such as sadness and anxiety and improvement in physical conditions such as pain.[19] In sum, the process model of emotion regulation aims to describe how internal processes (e.g., cognitive appraisals and physiological reactions) impact the experience of emotions. In contrast, the relational view of emotion regulation focuses on how external processes, such as interpersonal interactions and relationships, impact individuals' emotion regulation.

The Relational View of Emotion Regulation

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The relational view of emotion regulation refers to how the interactions and relationships among individuals and their environments contribute to individuals' management of emotions.[20] This view can be best understood through an ecological systems perspective of human development, which proposes that growth and development are a result of ongoing interactions with the environment.[21, 22] Within the ecological systems perspective, there are four systems (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem) within which individuals interact with their environment. The microsystem refers to the relationships between the individuals and their family, peers, mentors, and other important people while the mesosystem describes the interactions among the various components and settings within an individual's life. The exosystem describes the settings and structures that have a significant role in individuals' lives, such as neighborhood, workplace (especially as adolescents enter the workforce), and government agencies, and the macrosystem refers to the overarching structures, rules, and regulations that form society and culture. Individuals' ongoing interactions and relationships within these systems affect different processes (e.g., cognitive development) and outcomes (e.g., psychological and occupational functioning) that comprise their development, including emotional development. From a relational view, emotions are derived from multiple components (e.g., sensory, biological, cognitive, social, and cultural, etc.) that continuously influence each other and are embedded in mutual contexts within the multiple ecological systems.[23] As such, individuals and environment are intertwined in the development of emotion; that is, emotions are a result of the relation between the person experiencing an emotion and the object (e.g., animate or inanimate object, tangible or intangible) of that emotion.[24]

Although a relational view proposes that emotion regulation is based on a series of interactions and relationships that impact how individuals manage, respond to, and express emotions, emotion regulation is initially based on social cues between infants and their environments. These interactions become the basis of the attachment between infant and caregiver and lay the foundation for how individuals learn to regulate their emotions.[25] Interactions between infants and caregivers teach infants emotion regulation strategies; calm, soothing, sensitive, and patient caregivers teach adaptive strategies while anxious, aggressive, or neglectful caregivers teach maladaptive strategies.[14, 25] For example, securely attached children more quickly recovered to positive affect after a stressful situation was removed (i.e., children were able to regulate their stressful response to return to positive affect) than children who were not securely attached.[26] The ability to quickly regulate from negative to positive affect demonstrates adaptability and flexibility to the changes in the environment. Furthermore, having strong family and peer connections was associated with youth's greater abilities to manage their anger and control peer conflicts,[27] which suggests that positive interactions with family and peers may be able to help youth regulate negative emotions. As indicated by the process model and relational view model of emotion regulation, management of emotions is related to various internal and external processes. Throughout childhood and into adolescence, the internal and external processes that impact emotion regulation change based on factors such as biology, peers, family, culture, and society.

Factors That Influence Adolescent Emotional Development and Regulation

Although emotional development begins at birth, youth's emotions become more varied and complex as development accelerates in adolescence and into early adulthood.[23] Consequently, youth

must learn new skills and strategies to regulate new emotional experiences or emotional experiences occurring in new environments. This section reviews commonly cited factors[28] for youth program staff and managers to consider that impact on youth's development and regulation of emotions.

Neurological and cognitive

Emotional development in adolescence is unique due to rapid neurobiological changes. As children enter adolescence, they experience neurological and biological changes that improve their abilities to regulate their own emotions. During adolescence, for example, the basal ganglia undergoes maturation that impacts habit formation and reward-related behavior,[29] maturation of the pre-frontal cortex leads to improved executive functioning,[30] and higher GABA levels lead to increased ability to inhibit actions.[31] Furthermore, youth experience changes in neural activity in the brain, such as dopamine, glutamate, and GABA signaling,[32] with prefrontal activity becoming more focal.[33] The maturation of brain processes means youth must adapt quickly to their own increased surges of emotions and complicated affective responses.

In addition to neurobiological changes, maturation in cognitive abilities during adolescence also plays a significant role in youth's emotional development.[30] In particular, youth begin to develop meta-cognitive abilities: they are able to think about what they are thinking and feeling. For example, youth can recognize they are angry and choose to remove themselves from the anger-inducing situation rather than remain and continue to become more upset. These meta-cognitive abilities lead to skills that youth can use to effectively manage their emotions, which occurs through observation of others, coaching from trusted adults, and repeated experiences of similar situations and emotional consequences.[34] Another example is executive functioning, which is the effortful control of thoughts, behaviors, and emotions and can be an important indicator of emotion regulation abilities. Development of executive functioning abilities that can be applied to highly emotional decisions means that youth will undergo a significant shift in their emotion regulation capabilities,[30] which can have impacts on other aspects of their lives (e.g., academic functioning, social development, etc.). Neurological and cognitive factors are two categories of internal influences on emotion regulation. However, equally as important for the development of emotion regulation skills and abilities are social, individual/personality, and environmental factors.

Age, gender, and personality

Throughout childhood, age is a factor in the regulation of emotions.[35] However, as youth mature their emotion regulation and expression is impacted by increasingly complex social development unique to adolescence. Specifically, compared to early and middle childhood, youth are tasked with regulating more complex emotional states (e.g., romantic feelings) while simultaneously experiencing an expanding social network, increased need for autonomy, and changes in their relationships with caregivers. Furthermore, during adolescence, regulating emotions increasingly becomes a function of social-contextual factors, youth's own motivations, and type of emotion.[1] Although there have been mixed findings regarding the relationship between age and emotion regulation,[36] emotion regulation capabilities tend to increase from early to middle childhood,[37] middle childhood to adolescence,[38] and young adulthood to middle age.[39]

Gender differences in emotion expression emerge throughout development (very few gender differences in infancy with differences steadily increasing through adolescence) and different social contexts (being with peers vs. parents).[40] Since there is a relationship between gender and biological processes related to different sexes (e.g., hormones), experiences and expression of emotions are also associated with biological processes that relate to sex and gender differences;[41] however, changes in gender identity that occur during adolescence may also influence how youth's emotions are regulated. Furthermore, how gender differences in emotion expression and regulation manifest among gender and sexual minority youth (e.g., gay, bisexual, transgender, or non-binary) is unclear.[42] More research is needed on emotion regulation and gender with sexual minority youth to better understand how their experiences of emotion expression and regulation might vary from heterosexual and cisgender youth.

In studies of emotion expression and regulation within cisgender samples, girls have been found to express more positive and negative emotions while boys have been found to express more negative emotions.[40] Consequently, girls may need more support in regulating internalizing emotions while boys may need more support regulating externalizing emotions. Also, girls have been found to utilize emotion and cognitive processing words when describing personal experiences more than boys, a strategy that has been linked to better emotion regulation. Moreover, boys appear to have better emotional well-being when they use strategies to help them process their thoughts and feelings as a way to regulate their emotions than boys who do not use processing strategies.[43] In addition, gender differences have been found regarding which emotion regulation difficulties account for anxiety symptoms; anxiety in girls was associated with difficulties with emotion regulation strategies whereas anxiety in boys was related to difficulty accepting one's own emotions.[44] These findings are notable since increased use of emotion and cognitive processing words when describing emotional events is associated with greater well-being.[45]

Similar to gender, personality affects individuals' emotion regulation based on a combination of internal traits (e.g., introverted and extroverted)[46] and environmental influences (e.g., cultural expectations of personality characteristics such as courage and shyness)[47] that interact to impact youth's outcomes.[48] In addition, emotion regulation in early childhood predicts similar regulation skills in early adolescence, suggesting personality qualities may play a role in how individuals manage their emotions over time.[49] Youth with assertive, confident, and creative personality traits used cognitive reappraisal (a type of emotion regulation strategy) more than youth who did not endorse those traits,[50] while youth who exhibited the personality trait of adaptability (e.g., to novel situations) endorsed healthier emotion regulation strategies than youth who did not exhibit adaptability.[51] Moreover, the relationship between personality and emotion regulation appears bidirectional as youth who exhibited healthy emotion regulation strategies were more likely to endorse risk-taking (as measured by a controlled task in a research lab by giving participants choices based on different odds) than those who exhibited unhealthy strategies.[52] The influence of age, gender, and personality on youth's emotion regulation becomes more complex when examined within the context of youth's interpersonal and social relationships.

Parents, peers, and other relationships

Parents and other caregivers teach emotion regulation skills within the broader context of emotion socialization. Emotion socialization refers to behaviors that shape "the ways in which emotions in others are experienced or expressed."[51] Youth learn about emotion regulation through three primary

mechanisms: direct observation, emotion-related parenting behaviors, and the emotional climate within the family.[35] Through these mechanisms, parents teach either adaptive or maladaptive strategies that inform youth's emotion regulation skills, and these skills are associated with positive[52] or negative[53] outcomes. Moreover, when there is a healthy attachment in the parent-child relationship, youth are not only likely to feel supported and safe to express themselves but also open and receptive to parents' efforts to teach socially acceptable ways to regulate their emotions.[35]

While families have a significant role in children's and youth's emotion regulation, peers can also significantly influence each other's emotion regulation.[1] In particular, healthy peer relationships have been found to have a positive impact on youth's emotion regulation, empathy, and overall adjustment.[54, 55] In addition, when youth are in neighborhoods where there is higher violence and/or danger, having friends with better emotion regulation skills and tendency toward prosocial behavior significantly improved the adolescents' behavior.[56] Furthermore, these youth were less likely to engage in delinquent or aggressive behavior than youth who had friends with poorer emotion regulation skills and less tendency toward prosocial behavior.

Nonparental adults (e.g., mentors, teachers, etc.) can also have an impactful role on youth's emotion regulation.[57] Within their capacity in either school, youth programs, or other settings, nonparental adults have opportunities to teach emotion regulation strategies and model adaptive ways to manage emotions.[58] Although caring nonparent adult-youth relationships are the cornerstone of successful youth programs and set the foundation for positive youth outcomes,[59] there is limited research as to how adult-youth relationships in this context influence youth's emotion regulation skills.[34] Recent research suggests youth who reported caring and trustworthy adults at school were significantly less likely to have a past suicide attempt than youth who did not,[60] suggesting an association between the presence of supportive adult relationships and better ability to use positive emotion regulation skills. Furthermore, youth who perceived their sports youth program to be caring and supportive reported greater abilities to regulate both positive and negative emotions.[61] As youth grow and have more relationships outside of their families they have more interactions with diverse cultures and broader facets of society. Therefore, understanding how culture and society impact emotion regulation is vital.

Culture and society

The broader culture and society in which individuals live impact several aspects of emotion regulation, such as cultural expectations about the expression and suppression of emotions[62, 63] and societal display rules, which are rules regarding the appropriate expression of emotion in terms of magnitude, category, length, and tone.[64] This lack of understanding may exacerbate difficulties in social interactions; for example, youth who are victims of bullying have difficulty understanding the cultural norms that inform acceptable regulation of emotions.[65] There are also cross-cultural differences that impact how emotion regulation is taught and which emotions are emphasized. Western European cultures tend to prioritize expression of emotion that focuses on the self and one's own needs while East Asian cultures tend to value emotional expressions that focus on group interests and social harmony.[66] Moreover, based on differing cultural beliefs and expectations about emotion regulation, certain emotion regulation strategies (e.g., suppression) may lead to poor outcomes in one group and not in another.[67, 68, 69] Therefore, it is important to be aware of cross-cultural differences and societal

rules in how emotions are expressed and regulated when working with youth and their families. As previously discussed, emotion regulation is directly and indirectly influenced by a myriad of factors. In addition, emotion regulation is directly and indirectly linked with various outcomes among youth and children (e.g., psychological, interpersonal, and academic functioning).

Emotion Regulation and Youth Outcomes

Although emotions, emotion socialization, and emotion competence is often examined in the context of normative development, emotion regulation and its impact on outcomes is most often studied within the context of psychopathology, such as clinical diagnoses of depression, anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and severe psychopathology.[70] Furthermore, most research focuses on emotion regulation and its impact on outcomes for infants and children and less research is available about the relationship between emotion regulation and outcomes in adolescence.[71] Despite the limited research, data suggest that positive emotion regulation skills such as cognitive appraisal and acceptance are negatively associated with psychological symptoms while negative emotion regulation skills such as suppression and avoidance are positively linked to psychological symptoms among youth.[72] Specifically, low use of reappraisal was related to youth depression.[73] In addition, youth with better executive control tend to employ positive emotion regulation skills and decision-making, which are associated with low levels of externalizing behaviors.[74] Positive emotion regulation is also associated with academic competence among children[75] and youth.[76] Community violence was less predictive of anxious symptoms among youth who used positive emotion regulation and coping to manage their feelings.[77] Moreover, youth who employed a higher range of emotion regulation strategies were found to have fewer internalizing symptoms (e.g., depression and anxiety) than youth who had a limited range (only one or two) of strategies.[78] Overall, these findings indicate that emotion regulation strategies can help to mitigate negative outcomes and increase the likelihood of positive outcomes. Therefore, as youth program staff work to deliver high-quality activities and programming, it may be useful to consider a range of emotion regulation strategies to use with youth to maximize positive outcomes.

Strategies to Improve Emotion Regulation

There are numerous strategies youth employ to manage their emotions, which are linked to factors such as personality, family relationships, and societal expectations. Emotion regulation strategies are either adaptive (e.g., cognitive reappraisal, problem-solving, and acceptance) or maladaptive (e.g., avoidance, suppression, and rumination). More frequent use of adaptive and less frequent use of maladaptive strategies are associated with positive development and functioning among youth.[72] Both adaptive and maladaptive strategies are consistent with the five stages of the *process model of emotion regulation*: *situation selection*, *situation modification*, *attentional deployment*, *cognitive change*, and *response modulation*.[9, 17] Although this review will focus on youth's regulation of negative emotions, there is an area of research that focuses on regulation strategies to maintain the experience of positive emotions.[79]

Adaptive strategies

Adaptive strategies require high-level executive functioning that increases during adolescence.[72] Since adaptive strategies increase the likelihood of positive outcomes,[80] they are an important set of skills for youth to develop.

Cognitive reappraisal. Cognitive reappraisal is an example of the cognitive change stage of the process model of emotion regulation, and it refers to changing thoughts and beliefs about an object or situation that triggered a negative emotional response.[81] This strategy requires individuals to give a different, often more positive, meaning to an object or situation in order to lessen their negative response. Moreover, at high stress levels, individuals who engaged in cognitive reappraisals endorsed fewer depressive symptoms than those who did not.[82] Youth program staff can help youth improve upon their cognitive reappraisal skills by providing youth with additional information or alternative explanations that can help youth ascribe different meanings to their interpretations. For example, teaching youth to brainstorm potential alternatives to why a fight occurred between group participants, can help them with perspective-taking and may mitigate strong emotional reactions.

Problem-solving. Problem-solving refers to the ability to generate new or alternative solutions to issues or situations that elicit a negative emotional response.[72] Problem-solving can be an example of the situation modification stage of the process model of emotion regulation as it encourages youth to modify their current circumstances by focusing their efforts on cognitive and behavioral tasks that are involved in problem-solving (e.g., thinking of and executing new solutions) in order to redirect them from focusing on their emotional experiences. Furthermore, positive problem-solving skills have been associated with life satisfaction[83] and fewer depressive and anxious symptoms.[84] Youth program staff can facilitate problem-solving skills by developing activities that require youth to generate alternative ideas or solutions to dilemmas that arise within the youth program as well as everyday issues outside of the program.

Acceptance. Acceptance refers to allowing emotions to occur without trying to suppress, deny, or negate them[72] and is an example of the cognitive change and response modulation stages of the process model of emotion regulation. The idea of acceptance is common in therapeutic interventions such as mindfulness and acceptance and commitment therapy, which encourage a nonjudgmental awareness and acceptance of experiences as one way to lessen stress responses.[85] Therapeutic approaches that teach acceptance of emotions have been found to be positively related to adaptive outcomes and negatively related to maladaptive outcomes.[86] Youth program staff can reinforce acceptance of emotions by developing curricula that teach normative emotional reactions (e.g., anger, sadness, happiness, etc.) and how to label and describe these emotions with words, art, dance, music, etc.

Maladaptive strategies

Maladaptive strategies increase the likelihood of negative outcomes and tend to most often impact social interactions and relationships as well as internalizing symptoms.[80]

Avoidance. Avoidance describes ignoring internal feelings and external stimuli or situations that are believed to trigger unwanted emotions and is an example of the attentional deployment stage of the process model of emotion regulation. Although avoidance tends to reduce negative emotions in the

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short-term (e.g., avoiding bullies at school so as not to experience fear), it can exacerbate long-term negative outcomes such as anxiety symptoms.[72] Furthermore, avoidance is often related to other maladaptive strategies; for example, avoidance and rumination were positively correlated in a sample of older youth, and avoidance was associated with depression when rumination was high.[87] Youth program staff can help youth reduce their tendency to avoid negative emotions (e.g., sadness, anger, etc.) by openly discussing difficult emotions and possible ways to confront and resolve their emotions. In particular, youth program staff can make sure to address challenging topics that elicit complex emotional responses, such as discrimination, community violence, or bullying.

Suppression. Suppression refers to both stifling emotional expressions of felt emotions and subduing some or all emotional experiences[72] and is an example of the response modulation stage of the process model of emotion regulation. The use of suppression can have various goals, although the objective is to dampen emotional experiences and expressions.[46] Although a lot of research suggests suppression is associated with maladjustment,[88, 89] there is evidence that the impact of suppression on outcomes may be cultural in that some cultural groups experience negative outcomes while others do not.[90] To discourage suppression, youth program staff can provide youth with education on what suppression is and how to recognize when they are engaging in this strategy. Staff can model healthy ways to express emotions, and, equally as important, foster an environment where youth are able to express both positive and negative emotions.

Rumination. Rumination is when individuals repetitively and often intensely focus on an emotional experience or reaction, with special attention to the causes and consequences of the emotions.[91] This emotion regulation strategy can pertain to multiple stages of the process model of emotion regulation model, such as situation selection, attentional deployment, and response modulation. Rumination is associated with many negative outcomes among youth, such as depression,[92] anxiety,[93] and alcohol use.[94] Youth program staff can help youth recognize when they are hyper-focused on an emotion (e.g., anger) or the events related to that emotion (e.g., a fight they had with a sibling) and teach strategies such as distraction and acceptance to help them regulate their emotions.

Implications for Youth Programs

Across diverse situations and settings, individuals are constantly regulating their emotions whether they are in a positive setting that elicits happiness or a stressful social interaction that elicits anxiety and anger.[46] Although youth tend to report experiencing more positive than negative emotions in youth programs,[34, 95] it is essential that youth program staff have skills and competencies to help youth regulate negative emotions if they arise. Without effective strategies to manage negative emotions, programming and activities may be disrupted, and youth's feelings of safety may be compromised. To best help youth learn and apply effective emotion regulation strategies, youth program staff will likely have to engage in emotion coaching. Emotion coaching is when adults provide support and guidance for how youth understand and manage emotions.[58] As emotion coaches, adults view negative emotions as opportunities for learning and growing and not as problematic. In the literature, three types of emotion coaching approaches have been identified: fostering awareness and reflection, suggesting strategies, and encouraging problem-solving.[34] Specifically, similar to coaches in other settings (e.g., sports), during emotion coaching staff must engage youth in identifying their own

emotions and generate solutions as to how they can manage what they are feeling to achieve their goals within the youth program. Furthermore, emotion coaching also involves encouraging youth to take "emotional risks" such as a task that elicits fear or anxiety to foster learning and growth.[34] Moreover, emotion coaching is also about being an example for youth, so when youth program staff demonstrate positive emotions in difficult or stressful situations, they are putting into practice adaptive emotion regulation skills for youth to emulate. Overall, youth program staff are tasked with engaging in emotion coaching to help youth work through challenging emotional situations so that youth are less likely to quit the current activity, distance themselves from other group participants, and/or discontinue attending the youth program altogether.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Emotion regulation is a complex process that is influenced by neurobiological, cognitive, personality, cultural, and environmental factors.[68, 35, 33] Furthermore, emotion regulation can impact outcomes such as mental health, relationships, and academic functioning.[96, 60] Specifically, models of emotion regulation emphasize internal[9] and external[20] variables that contribute to emotional development and what individuals learn related to managing their emotions. There are numerous strategies that have been identified as helping individuals regulate their emotions, such as cognitive reappraisal and acceptance,[19] and youth program staff are well-positioned to assist youth as they build their emotion regulation skills. For youth programs to effectively assist youth as they navigate complex emotional experiences, staff can use emotion coaching. Emotion coaching offers a framework for staff to view negative emotions as opportunities for youth to learn about themselves and grow their self-regulation skills. In addition, emotion coaching encourages youth to take risks to experience new emotions or new experiences that may elicit difficult emotions in order to further emotional skill building and development.[95]

Although there is a myriad of research on emotion regulation and adolescence, there is limited research on emotion regulation in the context of youth programs and emotion socialization and emotion coaching by nonparental adults (e.g., youth program staff). To address this limitation, future research that evaluates professional development training on emotion regulation and emotion coaching is needed. Many youth program staff have identified gaps in their knowledge about addressing difficult topics and corresponding emotional responses within youth programs;[97] therefore, additional training and evaluation of the training may be warranted. For a better understanding of youth program staff's influence on youth's emotion regulation, more qualitative and quantitative data on youth's perspective on emotion coaching within youth programs are needed. Moreover, data from youth's perspectives can help to inform content used in staff's professional development training. Another area for future research is the effectiveness of emotion regulation strategies within different youth program settings, age groups, racial or cultural groups, and youth's concerns or issues. Findings can help shape how youth program staff develop activities and manage the environment within the youth program. Additional research in these areas can provide youth program staff with more knowledge to improve their capabilities of helping individual youth and improving the overall experiences of all youth.

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