



How To Regulate Your Emotions

A GUIDE TO 5 KEY EMOTIONAL
REGULATION STRATEGIES

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What is emotional regulation?

Emotional regulation is the conscious processing of emotions. When we regulate our emotions, we influence how and when we experience and express them.



Why is it important?

Being able to regulate emotions healthily can transform our wellbeing and communication, by allowing us to understand and harness what we feel.

We can use emotion regulation both intrinsically (using strategies to regulate our own emotions) or extrinsically (using strategies for/with others to help them regulate their emotions).

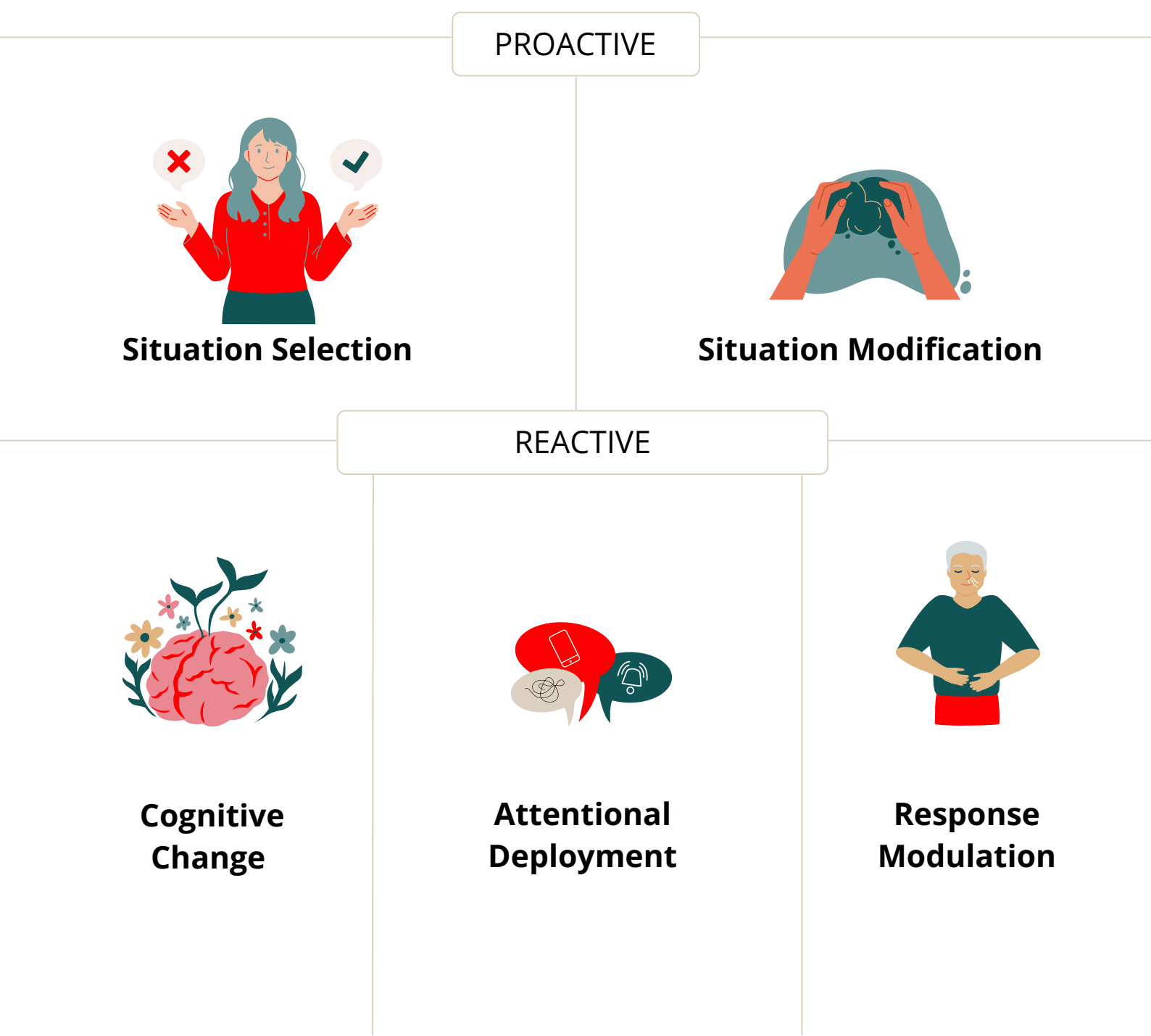
This resource will guide you through the 5 proactive and reactive emotional regulation strategies, giving you practical actions to implement them.

Want to get a handle on how you're feeling and harness the emotional power within? Then read on!



The Five Families

There are 5 'families' or types of emotion regulation. The first two focus on what we can do before the emotion appears; they are **proactive**. The following three are **reactive** strategies that we can use to best manage our behavioural and physiological responses once the emotion is present.





Situation Selection

Situation selection is about making proactive choices so you are as well prepared as possible to regulate your emotions on a daily basis. We can make decisions based on the events or situations that we are likely to encounter. This refers to approaching or avoiding certain things to help us regulate our emotions.



PUT IT INTO ACTION

- ☞ Proactively allocate time to activities that you know help you. For example, chatting with a friend, going for a swim or run, or another hobby. It is anything that you know helps you when you are finding it hard to manage how you feel.
 - ☞ Review your planned time and activities and minimise (or remove) those that you know you will find hard.
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Situation Modification

This strategy is about how we can change a situation in a way which enhances (or reduces) its emotional impact. This strategy is about using proactive choices to make situations you find hard easier and to make situations that you find easy or energising even more so.



PUT IT INTO ACTION

☞ If you know that in situation X you often feel Y, what can you do to help you in that moment?

It may be that you can alter the situation itself. Alternatively, you may be able to alter what happens before or after that situation to better prepare or move on from it.

☞ What do I know helps me when I find things (emotionally) hard?

☞ How can I bring more of that into this situation?



Attention Deployment

This is where we can change the focus of our attention when placed in a particular situation. It can involve distracting ourselves or focusing on something else to help regulate the emotion.

Sometimes this distraction is within awareness. For example, we may change the topic of conversation as we find topic X tricky. Sometimes it can be out of awareness where we may procrastinate or do other tasks to avoid facing the activity that elicits strong emotions. Alternatively, it may be that the distraction is just more fun, so we choose that.



Distraction As A Vice

From a more damaging perspective, attentional deployment can be completed by stimulants (e.g. coffee or alcohol) as a way to not think about or not pay attention to the things that are making regulation difficult.

PUT IT INTO ACTION

- ☞ What are the things that I ruminate on or think about a lot?
 - ☞ When do I find myself remembering the same experiences?
 - ☞ What are the stories that I tell myself?
 - ☞ Where do I concentrate my thoughts or my feelings?
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Cognitive Change or Reframe

This strategy is about changing our thought process or perspective towards a situation to change the direction of our emotions. Changing the way we think can allow us to make more effective choices.

There is a strong link between what we feel and how we think. We may feel a particular emotion about someone else's driving habits and how we feel may change if we were to learn that a critically ill friend or relative is in the car and being taken to hospital.

The change in thinking 'If I had known X' then impacts how we may feel about a situation. This cognitive change or re-appraisal can be done through greater awareness as in the example above, and it can be done through deliberate thought as well.

PUT IT INTO ACTION

- ☞ What else may be happening here that you could be unaware of or about?
- ☞ What could you be making this situation mean to you?
 - ☞ What could it mean to others?
- ☞ How else could you feel about this situation?

With increased awareness and/or perception comes greater possible meanings or interpretations, and from there comes more choice about how we can think and feel.



Response Modulation

Once we recognise the emotion(s) starting to show, we can then look to manage our behaviour through response modulation. Whilst we may still feel and experience the emotion, we can attempt to navigate the actions or words we choose in response to the situation.

Often, this strategy centres around the suppression or minimisation of the emotion. This can be a helpful, short-term strategy to deal with the situation or challenge at hand. When used repeatedly and over long(er) periods of time it is a destructive way to regulate emotion, because it only deals with the emotional output, rather than understanding the cause behind it.



PUT IT INTO ACTION

- ☞ Breathing exercises or mindfulness activities.
- ☞ Forcing a smile or a positive or helpful tone in your voice
- ☞ Remember that it will be over soon and you can move on to the next interaction.