

Emotional Regulation vs. Emotional Suppression

Calming down is not the same as pushing feelings away.

WHAT IT MEANS

Regulation means influencing which emotions we have, when, and how we express them. Suppression means hiding the outward expression while the feeling continues inside.

KEY IDEAS

- All feelings carry information. Regulation is about how we respond, not about getting rid of feelings.
- Suppression hides the outward expression while the feeling continues underneath.
- Reappraisal means considering other meanings of a situation, which can change how we feel.
- Naming a feeling in words is a simple, practical first step.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

- Emotion regulation research distinguishes strategies used early, like reappraisal, from those used after a feeling is underway, like suppression (Gross, 1998).
- People who habitually use reappraisal tend to report more positive emotion and better well-being than habitual suppressors (Gross & John, 2003).
- Suppressing expression during conversation has been linked to reduced rapport and connection with the other person (Butler et al., 2003).
- Putting feelings into words (affect labeling) is associated with reduced activity in brain regions tied to emotional reactivity (Lieberman et al., 2007).

TRY THIS

- Name the feeling to yourself: “I’m frustrated.”
- Ask what else the situation could mean.
- Choose a response that fits your values.

REFLECT

- Which feelings do I tend to hide, and where did I learn to?
- What is one other way I could read a recent frustrating situation?
- What helps me pause long enough to choose my response?

This guide is educational and is not therapy, diagnosis or medical advice. If feelings or relationships feel unmanageable or unsafe, please reach out to a licensed professional. In a crisis in the U.S., call or text 988.

SOURCES

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