

Strategies to Support Executive Function in Autistic Students: Emotion Regulation



In the U.S., approximately 2% of youth have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Mental health challenges, including those related to executive functioning, are more common among autistic youth. This infographic focuses on strategies to support **emotion regulation**, which is a component of executive function, to promote friendships, independence, and wellbeing.

When supporting autistic students with executive function challenges, it is important to *teach new skills* while also creating an environment that *supports neurodiverse learning styles*.¹

Emotion Regulation is the ability to manage big emotions. Specific strategies that can be used to teach emotion regulation include:



Psychoeducation:

Students build foundational emotion knowledge by learning to identify emotions and the situations that cause them to experience a variety of emotions.



Relaxation Strategies:

Students learn different techniques to calm their bodies (e.g., deep breathing, going for a walk, listening to music).



Cognitive Strategies:

Students learn to use phrases, such as "I can handle this," or "I've done this before and I can do it again," to manage worrisome thoughts.

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Applying Strategies:

Teachers and providers can help students practice their emotion regulation strategies in real-world situations, starting with those that are more manageable and gradually working up to those that might be a little harder.²

Helping students to apply emotion regulation strategies empowers students and teaches them that they can be in control, have more fun, and participate in a greater number of activities.

It is important to teach autistic students emotion regulation skills in a manner that is inclusive and neurodiversity affirming.



Support a variety of self-soothing behaviors and activities (e.g., deep breathing, scripting, listening to music, body tensing) that help students feel regulated.



Provide access to sensory supports (e.g., headphones) and use spaces that help students stay regulated in the first place (e.g., rooms with dim lights).



Help students to practice emotion regulation strategies when students feel calm, instead of only using them when they are anxious, upset, or dysregulated.

View the Southeast MHTTC webinar "*Evidence-based approaches to support the executive functioning of autistic students*" here: bit.ly/3pLI6Iw

View the Southeast MHTTC report "*Using Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to Support the Mental Health of Autistic Students: An Overview*" here: bit.ly/44zuGgR

View the Southeast MHTTC infographic series "*Strategies to Support Executive Function in Autistic Students*" here: bit.ly/43FUUNr

References

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