



## REMEMBER

- Emotional regulation isn't about suppressing emotions - it's about recognizing and managing them so they don't control us. When this skill is absent, life is exhausting for the young person and the people around them.
- The logical part of the adolescent brain is still in process of development until the mid-20's. Poor impulse control, misreading faces/ non-verbal cues, and making snap decisions are to be expected. Although we need to hold teens responsible for their responses, we also need to understand that this area of the brain is still in process of forming.
- Teens need adults to model how to rely on more than emotions for interpreting situations and making decisions. Helping them explore what they are thinking not just what they are feeling can help them to engage with their logical brain.
- Emotions are given to us by God and are part of being human. As we learn how to recognize our emotions, we can remember that our Maker has also given us what we need to "not be mastered by anything" (1 Cor. 6:12) - even the way we feel.



## RECOGNIZE

- Teens who struggle with managing their emotions often struggle with managing stress as well. Learning to manage emotions helps them handle frustrations, solve problems, push through challenges, delay gratification and seek help when needed.
- In the developing teenage brain, emotions are more easily accessed than logic creating a roller coaster experience. One day may hold moodiness, impulsivity, and irrationality as well as mature, rational thought. Teens often need support to navigate through this chaotic time in healthy ways.
- Young people who are experiencing high stress and mental health challenges, those who have suffered childhood trauma, ADHD or FASD, and those that regularly use drugs and alcohol tend to struggle to an even greater extent with unbalanced and reactive emotions.
- Emotional regulation is a skill that allows us to acknowledge and feel our emotions without giving them the power to interpret and control the situation. When this is present, emotions are expressed in proportion to the situation and don't cause damage to relationships or goals.
- Emotional regulation is necessary for positive mental health and can be learned. As a teen practices identifying, accepting and managing their emotions within the context of supportive relationships, greater balance and stability follow.



## RESPOND

- **Introduce teens to their brain.** Knowing why their emotions hijack their logic can help an adolescent feel less overwhelmed by their own reactions.
- **Meet them where they are.** Starting with reason doesn't help. Start by meeting the youth in their emotion through empathy and understanding. Help them identify and name the feeling, rather than asking them to justify or explain it.
- **Slow things down.** Invite the teen to put the big feelings to the side for just a minute to give their body a break. Breathe deeply, slowly and repeatedly with them and teach them how to do this on their own.
- **Recognize the source.** Big emotions may be a reaction to stress or to feeling threatened/ fearful because of a misinterpretation of a situation. After a teen feels heard, you can introduce a question: "What are your thoughts saying about the situation/yourself/others?" This will help them hear from more than their emotions and begin to tap into their "logical brain".
- **Rewind and reframe.** Invite them to look at the situation again to see if there might be another possible perspective or interpretation of the thing they are reacting to. Help them look for things that support and don't support their feelings.
- **Make space.** If they are willing, ask the teen to commit to not making any decisions until 10 minutes after their big emotion has begun to calm. This will help them to respond rather than just react and may just save their relationships and self-esteem!



## RESOURCES

- **Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life for Teens** - This book offers a great set of skills to help young people deal with fears, doubts and intense emotions. Available in teen workbook form as well.
- **developingminds.net.au/blog/2017/7/6/useful-questions-to-ask-sadworriedmad-youth-and-teens** - A great set of questions you can ask to help young people explore what they are feeling and how that's affecting them.
- **meandmyemotions.org** - This website created for teens helps young people become aware of their emotions and what they can do to manage them well. It's filled with simple content and powerful tools.