

Managing Emotional Mayhem

The Five Steps for Self-Regulation

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Introduction

Meet Your New BFF: “Hello, Self-Regulation!”

I can't tell you how many times I've promised myself I'd calm down before speaking when angry, only to find myself yelling at those I love most. I also find myself wanting to lose weight, feeling disappointed with the numbers on the scale and ordering a pizza to feed my unhappiness. I hear the voice of my mother streaming out of my mouth, critically barking commands and questions... even though I know how hurtful this approach felt to me as a child. Sound familiar? I wrote *Managing Emotional Mayhem* for parents and educators because I am ready to do things differently. Since you picked up this book, you're ready, too!

The Unregulated Life

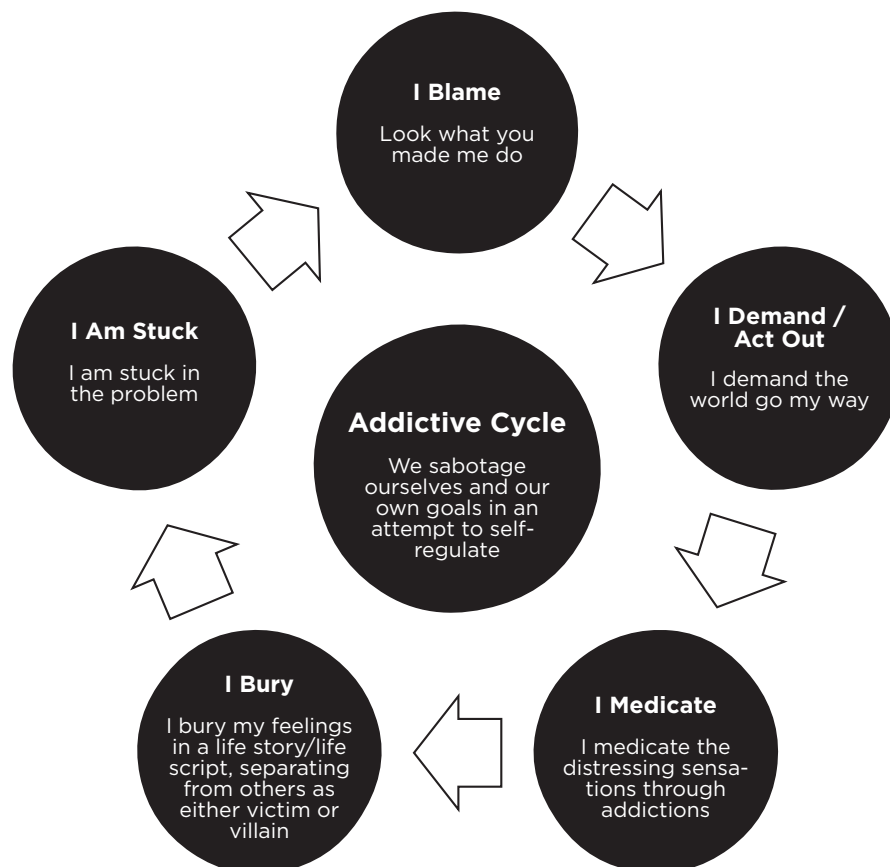
As you can imagine, if we are unable to manage our emotional states in wise ways, we probably aren't very good at helping children manage theirs. “Shut up! I don't want to hear another word out of your mouth.” “Go to your room if you can't stop that ridiculous whining. You should know better than this!” “Grow up; nobody said life is fair!” We, as adults, often find ourselves acting out our emo-



tions on children, modeling the exact behaviors we find disturbing. Fueling this fire are thoughts—of who did what, who was wronged and who is guilty—that run wild in our minds like balls in a pinball machine scoring victim and villain points. When our emotional buildup becomes too great to tolerate: Boom! We erupt by verbally or physically attacking others to get temporary relief.

Ultimately, we feel regret for what we've said and done. We pile on the guilt and shame until it obscures our true self from our awareness. We begin to believe we are bad. We justify our actions by creating or reciting life scripts in efforts to protect our worthiness. We base our scripts on how other people made us act a certain way, "I never would have said anything if he hadn't ____." Our scripts support our actions because we believe we were pushed beyond a breaking point, "The child just kept going on and on; what else could I have done!" We create life stories to support all sorts of punishments, "Sometimes you just have to show them who is boss. You know it's for their own good."

The Cycle of Self-Sabotage



We find ourselves drinking a little too much, eating a little too much, exercising a little too much or working a little too much in efforts to break this cycle of unregulated thoughts and feelings. These unconscious habits become our way of regulating our emotional states. These quirky behaviors and life addictions begin to eat away at our connections with others, ultimately impairing our relationships and goals. We sabotage our own lives in an attempt to regulate our emotions. What a vicious cycle!

The Answer to the Unregulated Life

We are fortunate to live in a time when research and neuroscience provide concrete evidence to support an idea many have long felt to be true: Our relationship with our emotions shapes our brains, our potential for success and the health of all our relationships. We need to make friends with all our emotional states, not just the ones we're comfortable with. We must become buddies with the emotions that derail us.

Every conflict starts with emotional upset. To solve any problem, we must manage the emotional upset first, and then move graciously into a conflict resolution process that produces win-win solutions. Most of us can't make it through the emotional upset to resolve much of anything! We stay stuck in the problem and wedded to our upset, searching outside ourselves for anything to make us feel better. We give our emotional selves away with comments like, "Look what you made me do," "Look how you made your sister feel." We make others responsible for our internal emotional states. "You're driving me nuts." "You're disrupting the learning for all the other students in this classroom." We cling to the idea that others must change for us to feel happy or peaceful, meaning we must control others instead of connect with them. I think we all know how well that has worked for us in the past! As we look at children, we feel compelled to examine and improve our own emotional wellbeing so we can help them develop the healthy emotional compass necessary for lifelong success.

Self-regulation is the foundational component to emotional wellbeing and lifelong success. Self-regulation is the conscious and unconscious ability to regulate our thoughts, feelings and actions in service of a goal. It has been



called “self-control” or “impulse control,” and these terms are still often used interchangeably. Regulating our thoughts, feelings and actions is different than attempting to control them. We cannot control our emotions any more than we can control the weather. However, we can manage our emotions just as we have learned to bring an umbrella along when it’s raining or a heavy coat when it’s cold. When we learn to regulate our emotions, we can benefit from the wisdom and moral compass they provide. Without healthy emotional development, we listen to the guidance of the loudest voice in the room instead of the quiet voice within us. For young children, the loudest voice is that of their parents. As they grow up, the voices change to peers, commercialism and ultimately their life partners. The self so vibrant at three years old disappears into self-doubt long before age thirty-three.

Emotions perform many survival functions within the body. The most powerful one is that of integration. Integration is the process of linking differentiated parts together to function as a whole. Our lungs and heart have specialized and differentiated functions, yet we would die if they were not linked together (integrated). Workers in an office have specialized jobs, yet the company fails if they do not communicate well with each other. People of varied ethnicities, who are uniquely differentiated by culture and tradition, enrich communities. Yet, if a community of mixed ethnicities cannot integrate, that community can become weakened by racism and intolerance. The children within a school are unique, but willingness suffers, school climate sours and children are less likely to reach their potential unless they are linked together by a sense of belonging. Integration is essential to the health of our bodies, communities and schools, and ultimately the survival of our planet.

Using the metaphor of a business, integration is a management responsibility. The Director, Principal, Coordinator or CEO has the responsibility to ensure each different department upholds its unique responsibilities and works well with the other departments. Our emotions serve management responsibilities in our brain. They integrate our nervous system in such a way we become a fine-tuned, motivated organism that can be mindful of our thoughts, feelings and actions, see from other people’s perspective, solve problems, set and achieve goals, and connect with others. Emotions are the bridge we must cross to get from any problem to its solution. My emotions allow me to become the best Becky I can be and simultaneously contribute to the world in a healthy

way. Without access to my emotions, I could easily distort my image of myself to such a degree that I could not contribute to society. In the most extreme situations, I would feel entitled to feed off of or in some way damage the society that sustains me.

How aware are we of our emotions? My best guess is that many of us have the emotional development of a toddler. Do you find this statement shocking or validating? A toddler knows basically two states of being: pleasant and unpleasant. Life is good when I am fed, dry and loved. Life is bad when I am hungry, wet or alone. Ask adults how they are feeling. You generally get two answers: fine and upset. Life is good when it is going my way and upsetting when it is not. Isn't it time we upgraded our emotional awareness?

In this book, you will learn the five steps for self-regulation. These five steps are I Am, I Calm, I Feel, I Choose and I Solve. These steps allow our emotions to perform their integrative duties, and to become the bridge between problem and solution. We must learn to navigate this bridge if we are going to have healthy relationships with our children, life partners and each other. Until we learn a better way and become conscious of habitual reactions, our out-of-control emotions, thoughts and behaviors will become part of another generation that continues to say, "Do what I say, not what I do." At some point, we must decide the buck stops here: I will break the cycle. I will do things differently than was done to me. I will engage in a cycle of success instead of sabotage.

This book is designed to gently step you through a process that will help you shift from sabotage to success. Once we, as adults, have strengthened our skill set, we can begin the process of coaching our children. Check out the goals and the coaching methods you will learn. It's a powerful program, just as we are powerful people.



The Self-Regulation Success Cycle



Goals

The overall goal of this book is to achieve better self-regulation for ourselves and our children. See if these specific goals match your most heartfelt desires for personal growth and for the children in your care. Place a check in each box that aligns with your values.

Goals for Adults

In this book, we will learn to (mark the goals *you* want to achieve):



Develop our own self-regulatory skills, providing the opportunity to put a pause between stimulus and response. This pause halts our knee-jerk reactions.

- ☐ Develop greater awareness of our selves and children, including identifying emotional triggers and accurately naming the feelings involved. This awareness allows emotions to naturally complete their integrative function.
- ☐ Respond to children's acting out and emotional upset in an attuned way at the moment the event is occurring. This adult response will foster children's development of self-regulation skills.
- ☐ Coach children to independently use the five-step self-regulation process. As we coach children, we increase their ability to utilize the skills while simultaneously strengthening the same skills within ourselves.





Managing Emotional Mayhem is part of a more comprehensive practice called Conscious Discipline. Conscious Discipline is a complete self-regulation program that integrates social-emotional learning and discipline. It is based on current brain research, and scientifically and practically empowers adults and children to transform conflicts into opportunities to learn critical life skills. If you aren't familiar with Conscious Discipline and wish to learn more, a visit to ConsciousDiscipline.com would be a helpful starting point.

Goals for Our Children

From our learning, we will then be able to help children (mark those you want for your children):

- ☐ To recognize they have been triggered and begin the self-regulation process.
- ☐ To begin calming themselves, creating the opportunity to self-regulate.



-  To name their feeling states and to be able to recognize the feeling states of others. This skill is the foundation for the development of empathy and compassion.
-  To select and conduct calming and/or engaging strategies in order to shift from an upset state to an optimal learning state.
-  To learn how to address the upsetting event with greater life skills and solve their problem.
-  To develop social awareness, responsible decision-making and communication skills aimed at fostering healthy relationships and goal achievement. As children repeat the five-step process again and again, their moral compass directs them in healthy ways to communicate, make decisions and problem-solve.

Coaching Methods

Coaching during teachable moments. In the world of young children, emotional upset is triggered every day. Limits are set, rules are enforced and the world does not always go their way. Instead of dismissing children's upset, sending children to time out, giving rewards or removing privileges, we can respond to these moments in a way that transforms conflict into cooperation. In Conscious Discipline we call these "teachable moments" instead of "discipline disruptions." Teachable moments require us to coach children to change their internal emotional states first. Then we teach a new behavioral skill. When we focus on internal states first and behaviors second, we create an opportunity to use conflict as a tool for learning social and life skills. Adults are empowered to seize these discipline disruptions as teachable moments in order to provide children with new social-emotional and self-regulatory skills.

I never knew how powerful my response to my kids' upset could possibly be. I truly thought my job was to get them to behave properly. If I got them in bed on time, out the door on time, to say please and thank you, and finish their homework, I'd have this parenting gig down. One day my oldest started running his mouth (as usual) and instead of giving him a stern look and reminding him how rude he was being, I said, "You seem angry. You were hoping you could spend more time with your friends this afternoon." His whole being changed! I changed, he changed and since then our relationship has changed. I love my new BFF – self-regulation. If I had not calmed down and seen past his mouth (one he learned mostly from me, I admit), I would have never been able to help him.

Wishing you well,
Toni, mother of 3 boys

Coaching in the Safe Place. The Safe Place is one of the core social-emotional learning structures in the Conscious Discipline philosophy. It is an area in the home or classroom where children can practice using self-regulatory skills. If you are not familiar with the Safe Place, I invite you to explore Shubert's Classroom at ConsciousDiscipline.com to see images and video of this essential structure. We will also learn much about the Safe Place in Chapter 5.

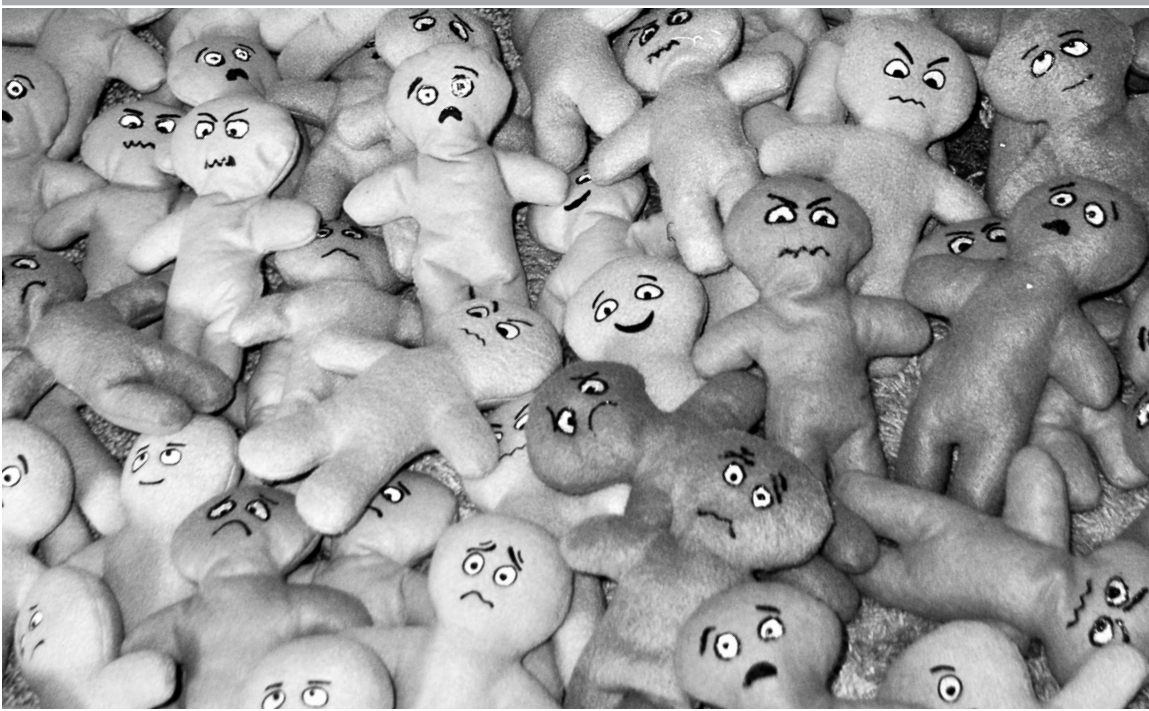
Going to the Safe Place to practice self-regulatory techniques when emotions are triggered is crucial for success. This is because the brain is state-dependent. The brain can only rewire itself for behavioral changes through repetitive actions conducted while experiencing a given state. A child can sing about anger, role-play anger management skills and identify angry faces, yet may be unable to regulate her own angry feelings and actions. This is because she can only learn to regulate her anger when an angry brain-body state is activated. In the Safe Place, children experience intense emotions and handle them in such a way that their brains actually become wired with new behaviors based on self-regulation strategies.



Unifying Parents and Educators

Parents and educators have spent generations speaking different languages when it comes to discipline. Educators have demanded parents make their children behave at school, while parents have repeatedly said, “We don’t have this problem at home.” At our best, we’ve gained a bit of insight from each other in 15-minute parent-teacher meetings and the occasional school event. At our worst, we’ve pointed fingers of fault at each other’s perceived deficiencies. It is long overdue for us all to get on the same page. I believe that integrating home and school is an essential step in societal growth. Self-regulation and impulse control do not emerge spontaneously. They are skills, learned not only through families and cultures, but also through schools and teachers (Nagin & Tremblay, 1999). I wrote this book in hopes of literally bringing parents and educators together on the same page. Page by page, we can improve our own self-regulation skill set and learn ways to help children develop healthy skills for themselves. May we take the fingers we point at each other and instead link them together in a commitment to become the best adults we can!

My intent is to unite homes and schools in a common goal of social-emotional success; however, I recognize that each group has unique concerns and logistics. For this reason, I have developed two specialized self-regulation toolkits, one for parents and one for educators. These toolkits are an extension of this book, and are based on the Feeling Buddies. The Feeling Buddies are eight simple gingerbread dolls with precise emotions expressed on their faces: angry, sad, scared, happy, frustrated, disappointed, anxious and calm. The adult teaches children how to help their Buddies self-regulate. In doing this, both adult and child practice and teach the same process to themselves. The Buddies are occasionally mentioned in this book, and are a valuable part of the self-regulation process. My hope is that this book will inspire you to continue your journey with self-regulation. The *Feeling Buddies Self-Regulation Toolkit for Educators* and the *Feeling Buddies Self-Regulation Toolkit for Parents* provide the means to that end.



Whether you are an educator or parent or both, one thing I know for sure is that feelings can sometimes be overwhelming for us all.

Book Overview

There are no accidents. You have purchased this book at precisely the right time and will get from it exactly what you need. Whether you choose to delve deeper by adding a *Self-Regulation Toolkit* to your journey is a personal decision. This book alone will set a solid course, and may be all you need to right your ship.

This book contains five chapters. Chapter 1 provides foundational information about self-regulation. Many of you may not be overly familiar with this term. You probably have guessed it is related to impulse control, self-control and emotional control, but is there more to it? In Chapter 1, I will reveal and explore the many facets of self-regulation. Chapter 2 will ask you to clean out your proverbial closet by reflecting on your relationship with your emotions and how you were disciplined as a child. Chapter 3 begins to fill your closet with a new understanding of the messages of feelings. Chapter 4 guides you through the five-step self-regulation process so you can begin to practice and model what you ultimately



expect from children. Chapter 5 provides you with the information and dialogues to coach children through the five-step self-regulation process.

I started this introduction by sharing ways my own thoughts, feelings and actions often sabotage what I most desire. In the pages since, we've dipped our toes in a pool of new knowledge and self-reflection. Take a moment to ask yourself, "Do my thoughts, feelings and actions support my most valued goals or sabotage them? Am I on the success cycle or the sabotage cycle?" I have already committed myself to do things differently. Are you ready to join me? If so, our journey starts now. Enjoy the ride!

Commitment: I commit to managing my inner mayhem. I am willing to do things differently, accept what is and move forward toward solutions. I will no longer blame others for my upset or demand life go my way. I understand this practice will strengthen all my relationships, including my relationship with myself. It reveals to me my basic worth, which is hidden beneath guilt that I am ready to release.

Signed: Becky A. Bailey Date: Starting right now!

I willingly commit to join Becky on this essential journey.

Signed: _____ Date: _____