



Hello! My name is Sam, I created Helping Hands Creations to provide free resources for the ADHD/Autistic communities or anyone they may be useful to. I am creating these free resources because I believe in providing my community the tools they need to succeed and without it being blocked behind paywalls. I highly encourage you to share my work to anyone in need, my only request is to please avoid giving my resources to businesses who would use it for monetary reasons. If you are interested in a private or group lesson, please contact me through my patreon.



Today's focus is understanding emotional regulation. The topic surrounding emotional regulation can be very confusing and often misunderstood. Let's see about breaking it down on what emotional regulation is, how it can help you, and a personal strategy I advocate for.

Overview

Emotional regulation is being able to self manage emotions by engaging in self care behaviors and communicating needs. Today, we will explore:

What is
Emotional
Regulation?

How do
people self
regulate?

What changes
can help me?

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Emotional regulation is being able to self manage emotions by engaging in self care behaviors and communicating needs.

You first need to understand what emotional regulation is
Then discover different strategies that can help navigate different situations
And finally, the whole point of this presentation is to help communicate your needs to yourself and others



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AGENDA

What is it?	How to do it?	What will help?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is emotional regulation?• Visual description• Why do autistic/ADHD people struggle with emotional regulation?• Common Myths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the goal?• Discovering your baseline• Identifying emotions• Learning more about High and Low emotions and tasks• Reframing and Expectations• Regulating = Balancing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create routines• Make Regulating Plans• Allow feedback• Recovery Communication• Note to Support• Journaling and Mindfulness• Activities 

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Today's agenda



Let's explore what people mean by “emotional regulation”

What is Emotional Regulation?

- Emotional Regulation is being able to self monitor and react appropriately when **dysregulated**.
- In other words, when **dysregulated**, you may struggle to:
 - **Identify** your emotions
 - **Unaware** of your behaviors' intensity
 - **Proactive** in taking steps to return to your calm state

Some common signs of being **dysregulated**:

- Exaggerated or intense reactions
- Yelling or inappropriate language
- Crying and feelings of "doom"
- Assume the worst outcome
- Struggle to calm down but it IS NOT a meltdown or anxiety attack

Disclaimer: Not every ASD/ADHD person may feel these symptoms

Being dysregulated means you are struggling to return to your calm state after something brought about intense emotions

Emotional regulation is your ability to control and self manage your own emotions

Babies have no emotional regulation: when they cry, it can mean ANYTHING is wrong

But as we get older, we are expected to learn more and more independence with our own emotions

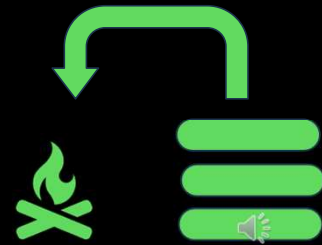
Visualizing Emotional Regulation

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- The simplest way to explain emotional regulation is to think of a campfire.
 - If a campfire gets too hot, cover the fire to let it die down
 - If it is about to go out, add fuel.



We can do this with our emotions by
Self managing them with actions



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Think of yourself as a campfire, outside forces like: wind, rain, other people will change how strong or weak the fire is

Emotional regulation is being able to react to these situations and recover with or without support

Visualizing Emotional Regulation Cont.

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- Many autistic/ADHD people think **emotional regulation** is like a thermostat
 - "Deal with it" So it's an instant change? Right??
 - Think "Be calm" and it's done?
- People do **NOT** instantly change emotions
- They **perform tasks** (mental or physical) to change how they feel
- People usually **identify**, **plan**, and then **manage** their emotions.
- But it is a **skill** that can be learned over time.



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To the typical person with strong emotional regulation, they understand the social expectation of controlling their emotions to prevent others from feeling any side effects of the situation and to avoid social repercussions and conflicts

Think of someone being fired and getting a call while at Walmart

It's perfectly normal to be very upset! But most people would want that person to calmly exit the store and then get upset and maybe cry and then do something to get their mind off of the situation

If they cried or screamed in the store, it may scare people who don't know the situation

It might even cause security to have to escort them out

Being able to emotionally regulate yourself will improve your overall health and social situations

Benefits of Emotional Regulation

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- Independence
- Privacy
- Lessen the risk of meltdowns
- Improved personal relationships
- Improved social awareness
- Arguments will be less intense and more about compromise and problem solving
- Less stress and stress related health issues



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Being able to emotionally regulate yourself opens so many doors!

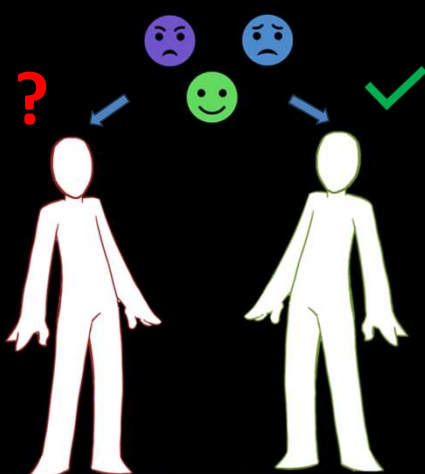
You can become more independent, have more privacy when something happens that upsets you

You will find less conflicts day to day and notice how others navigate their emotions

Arguments will become more productive and cause less resentment

And you may even feel less sick from the emotional stress

Why do we struggle?



- We experience the world differently from the average person
- Maybe we....
 - Struggle to **identify** different emotions
 - Feel **strong physical responses** that influence our behavior
 - Were never **directly taught** self management skills
- Whatever the case, us struggling does not mean we can't learn



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Autism and ADHD mean we experience information/emotions/situations differently from the average person

Even within our communities we are very different from one another!

So that means it IS a journey to discover our own feelings and what works for us

Each of us comes from our own unique situations, but just because we may struggle with emotional regulation doesn't mean we can't improve with practice

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Common Myths

Just get over it!

- What people mean by this is to **move on** from the **emotion/topic/situation**
- This means taking the **STEPS** to **CHANGE** how you feel.
- They mean to take **responsibility or manage**
- They don't mean to "switch it off"

It's not a big deal.

- ADHD/ASD people **experience the world differently** from the average person
- This doesn't make anyone better or worse inherently, just different.
- To you, it may **FEEL HUGE!** That's okay. You can feel that big feeling and **take steps to move forward.** 🔊

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One of the most common “culture clash” I have is with neurotypical people

It's not on purpose, we just experience emotions differently and have different perspectives on what is important

We also don't use language in the same way

What is a big deal to us, may not be to them and vice versa

We also take a lot of things they say at face value when they actually have hidden meanings behind them

“deal with it” they don't mean to simply stop being mad, they are saying this isn't the time or place or way to do it

They are expecting you to deal with your emotions on your own time and in whatever way you need to help with the situation

They are most likely uncomfortable or even angry at how it's affecting them

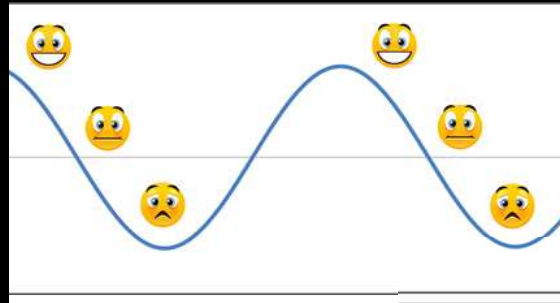
So many of these common phrases can cause a lot of confusion, but that's why we are here today to learn more about emotional regulation



Let's explore how to emotionally regulate

What is our goal?

- Our goal is to return to our **baseline** or how you feel in your **neutral** state
- Everyone has a different **Baseline**
- Many different things in life will bring your emotions up or down, but **the goal is to ALWAYS return to your baseline.**



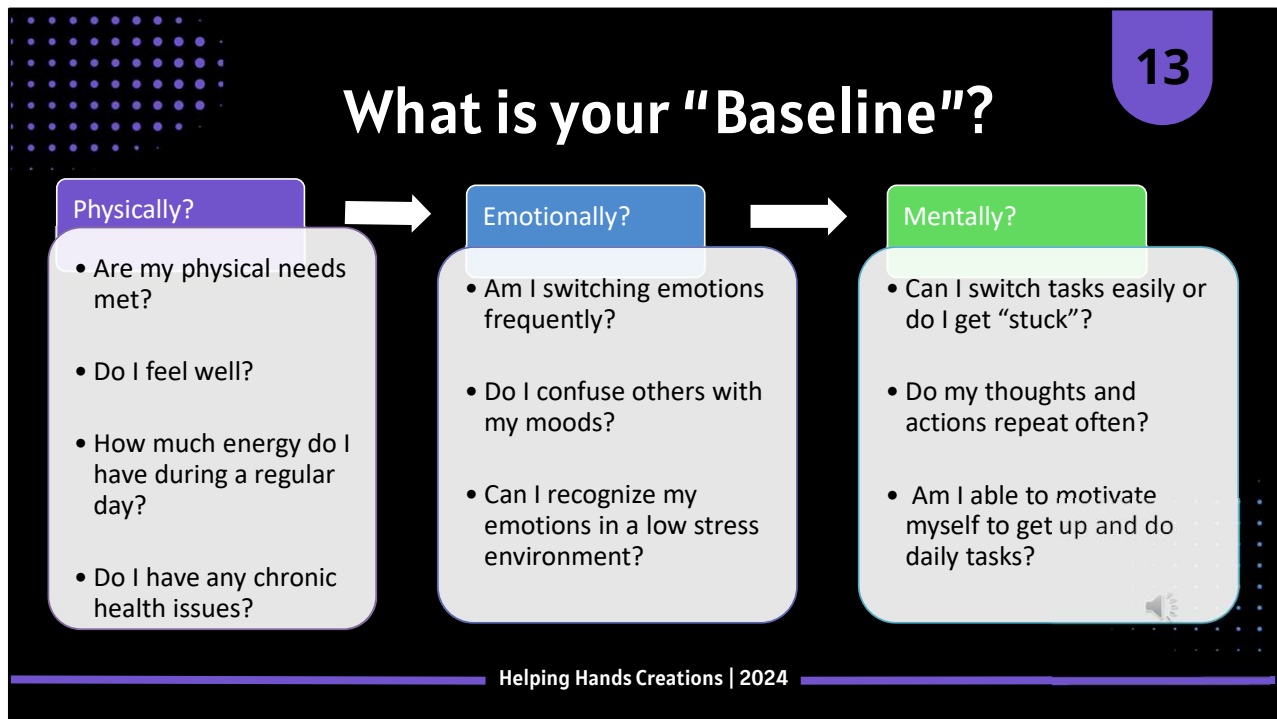
Our goal will ALWAYS to return to a calm state

This does NOT mean you stop being mad, it just means you are able to control the emotion enough that you can either walk away or continue what you were doing before

Imagine if you were SUPER EXCITED ALL THE TIME!!

That sounds exhausting! Haha

It's not about being a super happy, go lucky person, it's about learning to keep your emotions from being TOO intense to where they affect your daily life



So your baseline is going to feel different from other people's baseline

I'm normally a fairly energetic person, so my leg is constantly bouncing

But if my partner was bouncing his leg, I would immediately know he is dysregulated and could use a break

Being able to self monitor will also help you prevent the situation from escalating into a meltdown so it's important to learn how you feel usually day to day

If you know someone who struggles with emotional regulation, helping them with your observations (with their permission) may also help them

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Every Baseline is Unique


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I suffer from chronic pain and my pain increases when I'm stressed.

I cry very easily watching TV, so crying isn't a good sign I'm upset.

I'm generally have a lot of energy on an average day.

I forget to eat often and that can make me grumpy on an average day.



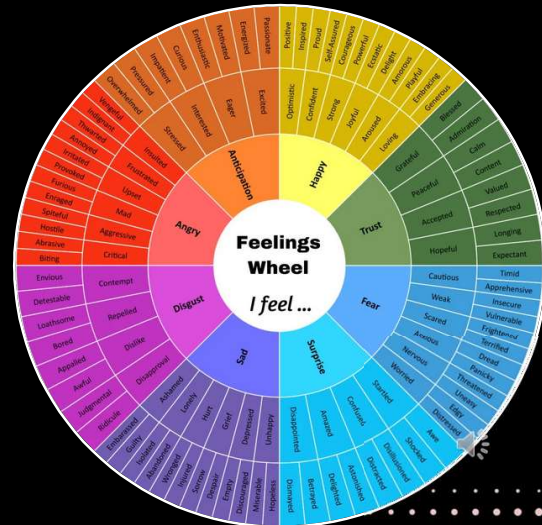
Did you hurt yourself or are you feeling your chronic pain more today because you are upset?

You very suddenly don't want to get out of bed, are you sick or did something happen?

A friend learns to ignore your Disney tears during movies because you know how to return to baseline as soon as the movie is done

your emotions' intensity when you are hungry, no skipping lunch!

- There are **MANY** different **emotions** brought on by **infinite** situations
- Feelings are **unique** to everyone
- You will have to study how to identify **YOUR** different states.
- **Mindfulness** and **journaling** are great for **reflection**



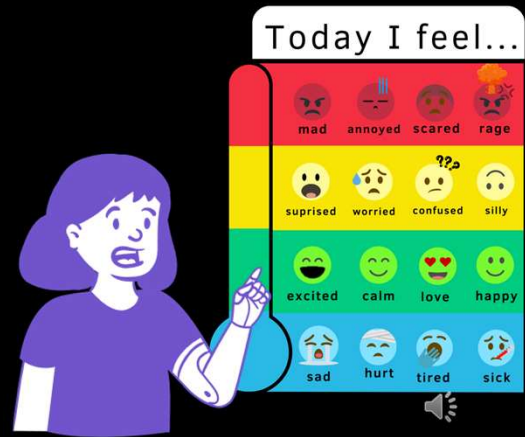
It's important to realize your signs of distress will be different from people around you

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Differences Between High/Low Energy Emotions

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- **"High energy"** emotions:
 - Anger, rage, worried, surprised are usually associated with **a lot of movement**
- **"Low energy"** emotions:
 - Sad, tired, sick, or hurt are usually associated with **low movement**
- Practice **"mindfulness"** by asking
 - "What physical traits do I have when I feel ____?"
 - "What caused this feeling to happen?"



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Different emotions invoke different physical responses

Feeling "blue" may calm you down physically to the point you don't want to get out of bed or eat/drink

That's JUST as unhealthy as being angry and yelling or being worried and taking off on a midnight run

Being mindful of what you are feeling will help you do healthy behaviors

So when you are feeling intense emotions, remember to ask yourself questions

Identify Energizer and Relaxer Tasks

● Energizers

Actions, tasks, hobbies that **creates** energy to influence your mood

● Relaxers

Actions, tasks, hobbies that **releases** energy to influence your mood



So different activities will have different effects on your body

If you go running, it will get your blood moving, give you good feeling hormones that will give you an energizing boost

Whereas if you soak in a hot tub or listen to soft music, your body may relax

When you are struggling with emotional regulation, that doesn't mean to ONLY do the one activity you like

If I am MAD, maybe ranting about it will make me feel MORE mad so doing a relaxing activity is better

If I am sad, reading sad stories on my phone in bed won't help me in the long run

It's okay to be sad or mad, but it being too INTENSE or for too LONG is not good for you

Common Self Care Activities

● Energizers

- Exercise
- Socializing
- Leaving the house
- Doing a “stressful” activity like playing a competitive game
- Meeting new people

● Relaxers

- Bathing
- Napping
- Drawing
- Watching nature
- Reading
- Enjoying music or art



Here are common self care activities people do to either give themselves an energizing boost or to relax

Remember, what works for YOU may not work for someone else

Socializing for me is a huge boost! But for my partner, is more likely to exhaust him into being dysregulated

Disclaimer: these tasks are going to be unique to you! Maybe drawing is a high energy task because of self doubt or maybe you enjoy high energy music

It will take time and experimenting with different tasks to discover what are YOUR energizers or relaxers

Reframing and Expectations

One strategy to use instead of tasks is to **Reframe**

Instead of taking a break, you take a second to **gauge the intensity of your emotion VS the actual situation**

Many times, you may discover the **situation does NOT justify the intensity of the response** you are doing

"If I start yelling, I need to ask myself if it's justified"



The intensity of emotions can be overwhelming

The fire in your chest can be so distracting that it may cause you to do unwanted behaviors such as yelling

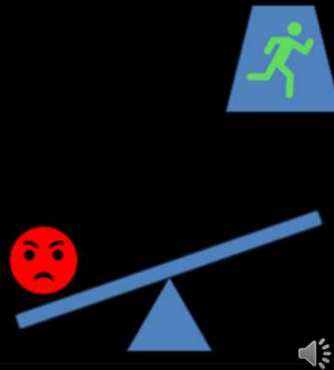
If the idea of taking a break is unappealing, you may want to consider using reframing and having expectations to self monitor yourself

To do this strategy, it means to consider your actions AS you are doing them and while you are dysregulated

I personally prefer using breaks to return to baseline, but with practice, mentally checking in with yourself can be an excellent strategy

Regulating = Balancing

- You will constantly be experiencing ups and downs in your emotions
- It is up to YOU to discover what tasks you can do to emotionally regulate yourself
- Creating routines, habits, and expectations for yourself can help you in returning to your baseline



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Over time, you will discover what works and what doesn't

And sometimes, you know what you need but you can't do it right away

You know yourself best, the end goal is to do what you need to do to safely return to your baseline and to increase your independence

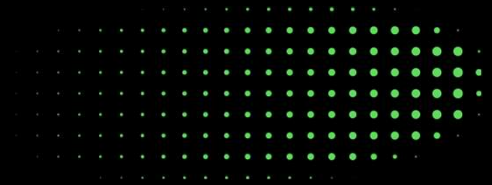
But you can always ask for help and support if you need it, it will take time and patience to discover your needs



Let's discuss planning and practice

Create Routines

- Study **when** you struggled to return to your **baseline**
- **Be open** to asking family and friends their opinions
- **Practice** with reoccurring triggers
- Learn more about:
 - How different emotions feel for you
 - What tasks help you
- **THEN create routines and plans** to combat common situations you encounter



Day to day, you will have a similar schedule, so finding patterns of when you struggle with emotional regulation will come with time

Having your family and friends help you realize when you may be dysregulated can be very helpful, but it's also important to communicate to them **WHEN** you want their help

Having reliable fall back plans of what to do when you are upset will help you be more successful

Some Regulating Plans

1 Social Anxiety

1. After company, I feel dysregulated
2. I will do a relaxing activity and read to return to baseline.

3 Lingerin Hur

1. I still feel hurt over a resolved issue
2. I will do an energizing activity and cook a big meal to give myself a boost.

2 Overwhelmin Anger

1. Sometimes I yell during arguments.
2. I will reframe and make sure any yelling I do is justified for the situation at hand.

4 Sick or Recoverin

1. I still feel sad and struggling to get up while I'm recovering
2. I will set alarms to make sure I take my meds and eat/drink.

Here are several scenarios of times different people struggling with their emotional regulation

Notice they use either a physical or mental activity to help them return to baseline

Now sometimes, you will just BE upset

These are strategies for when you want to lower the intensity of the emotion or start to recover and move forward from the situation

Allow Feedback

Gaining Perspective

- It is hard to tell when you are “overreacting” if you are distressed
- Having trust in your support system is important so you have an outside source to help you monitor your behavior
- What you are feeling is REAL, but that doesn't excuse negative behaviors or actions

Allow Support

- Many people **will not** understand why you struggle to identify emotions
- But allowing others to support you, **you gain trust in their support**, and they gain trust that you **are allowing them to help**

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It's very important to allow feedback when you are struggling with emotional regulation

For the simple reason, it can be hard to notice from US that we may be overreacting to the situation or are “stuck” with the emotions

But trust has to be earned and it's a two-way street

The biggest mistake other people will make is mistaking our emotions as not our real feelings

Just because I need to calm down before we continue the argument does NOT mean I am not “really” mad

Being dysregulated means the intensity is making the situation more difficult, but the root cause is still there

If the cause of the rift is with the support system, it's important to acknowledge the feelings being presented

Note to Family/Friends

- Discuss communicating breaks BEFORE conflicts
- The other person IS feeling BIG feelings and is struggling with them
- Navigating arguments with you will require patience on both sides

Disengage and Give Feedback

- "Let's continue to talk after a break."
- "I feel hurt how this conversation is going, can we continue later?"

Don't dismiss Feelings

- "You are dysregulated and need to calm down now."
- "Why are you overreacting? Go to your room and deal with it."

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Many people see autistic/adhd people's intense responses as a sign we are "unreasonable" but it is not the feelings that are unreasonable, it is our behaviors that can be problematic

Lowering the intensity of our emotions just helps us gain control over our responses. Having an argument while being dysregulated helps no one but telling someone "you are just dysregulated" will make them feel dismissed.

Disengage, give feedback, and return to the conversation when both sides can communicate productively. A danger of using therapy like language when engaging with loved ones is...you aren't a therapist, you are part of the situation

No one should feel attacked, the autistic/adhd person should NOT feel less than for struggling with their emotional regulation. It is our behaviors that should be judged rather than our struggle with emotional regulation.

It is part of our independence to ask for help in the ways WE agree too, that is why it's important to discuss strategies before emotions are high

Recovery Communication

Gentle with Yourself

- Guilt or shame are common when you struggle with emotional regulation
- It's okay because you are here taking steps to take care of yourself



Gentle with Others

- Remember, they don't have to understand to accept you and support you.
- Even if you don't mean to hurt others, we are still responsible for our behaviors and words.
- Talking to them and discussing what happened is the start of the recovery for them too

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If you struggle with emotional regulation, you have to acknowledge the possible problematic behaviors that happen as a result:

Yelling
Cursing
Breaking things
Crying uncontrollably
Storming off
Etc.

People WILL worry, be scared, or even angry

By learning to emotionally regulate, you are helping reducing the chance of repeating these problematic behaviors

The point is NOT to stop feeling emotions, it's to control the intensity, have strategies to help you accomplish the goal of returning to your baseline, and gain independence

Mindfulness and Journaling

- **Mindfulness**

Focusing on what you are feeling and doing in the moment.

Both methods are tools for :
Identifying and keeping track of your emotions and how it affects you in your daily life.

- **Journaling**

Keeping track of your moods, triggers, health, and emotions

The more you learn about yourself, the easier time you will have transferring skills to unique situations.

Mindfulness is a whole topic on it's own, but the importance of it and journaling is HUGE

Learning how your emotions feel, when they happen, and how to return to baseline will all depend on how much "work" you put into learning about your needs

It will always be easier to deal with familiar situations, but the more you record past events and monitor your own behaviors, the less often you will find yourself relying on outside sources to discover what's wrong

Activity One: Describe Your Emotion

- I have always struggled describing my emotions but visualizing them has helped me with identifying them and their intensity levels
- Describe how an emotion makes you feel either:
 - emotionally, physically, or mentally
 - You may draw, write, or even pick songs to represent the emotion you are describing



It was very helpful to me personally to visualize what my emotions felt like. Whatever method you choose: art, writing, music, drawing, etc, the point is to try and discover the different “intensities” of emotions for you

Mine is:

Activity Two: Return to Baseline

- Bad days are going to happen, BUT we can plan out things to DO
- Plan an activity you would like to do when sad or angry
- Name an example trigger that may have occurred with a solution



- Got into an argument with a friend
- Go walk the dog around the block

- Got into an argument online
- Block the messages and take a bath

Practice by picking an emotion/trigger/possible activity to help you return to baseline

This is just brainstorming, you will discover it's best to explore many options to find out what works best for you

Follow Through

It will take practice, time, and lots of communication

But learning more about how YOU feel different emotions, how to identify them, and finding out what helps? It WILL make a difference.

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It is hard to remember to take care of yourself when you are overwhelmed with stress, sensory input, and feelings.

But the goal is to be happy, you can only get to that point if you practice self care and take a step towards independence.



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