

EMOTIONAL REGULATION

There appears to be a great deal of confusion or misunderstanding about what it means to be “emotionally regulated.” Many of you have expressed the idea that if you’re “regulated”, you won’t react, cry, raise your voice, shake with grief, or react at threats. The belief is that you will be stoic, utterly calm, and shrug it off. That’s not regulation. That’s suppression.

Emotional regulation means your emotions move through you, not that you avoid having them. It means you might have intense feelings without being completely overwhelmed. It means you might cry, rage, ache, and exhibit any number of bodily sensations and, at the same time, you know how to come back from those temporary peak emotional states. Suppression is not healing. There is empowerment in learning how to maintain conscious awareness during difficult or painful feelings. Emotional regulation isn't the absence of feeling. It's the safety to actually feel those feelings.

I've read articles and viewed podcasts wherein people talk about “doing the work” like it means becoming unshakeable. As if healing turns you into someone who never wavers, never weeps, never feels too much. But real emotional regulation isn't about turning the volume down on your inner world. It's about learning to hold what's there without needing to escape it, immediately fix it, let it define your identity, or rule your life. It's about safety not silence.

When you're more emotionally regulated, it doesn't mean you don't ever get overwhelmed. It means you know what to do when you're feeling overwhelmed. You know how to recognize the triggers or signals a little sooner, how to slow down your breath and ground yourself in your body when those old stories and narratives start triggering a reactive survival response.

Whether you need to escape to a quiet safe room of the house, sit parked and crying in your car, call to vent to a friend, or lie in bed and stare at the ceiling for a while because everything feels too much, eventually, you will come back into your body, reconnect with yourself, and begin to move through this temporary experience of a peak emotional state. That's what emotional regulation looks like.

Healing doesn't make you immune to pain. It actually makes you more conscious, aware, honest, and more skillful in how you carry the pain. It means you stop dissociating and minimizing when hard difficult or painful things happen. It's not about being unaffected. It's about becoming available to the truth in the moment and to what your body and your emotions are trying to tell you.

Even after a great deal of healing, you will still feel grief, rage, the sting of rejection, and the ache of longing. But instead of shutting down or running away, you'll learn to let those feelings move through your system without defining you. You'll learn to experience feelings without drowning.

There are times in life that will knock the wind out of you. Not because you're weak or "dysregulated" or because you're doing anything wrong. But because you're a human being having a very real experience. And sometimes, that experience is painful, messy, or just overwhelming. If you feel hurt, sad, angry, frustrated, betrayed, or just lost and confused from time to time, it doesn't mean you're broken. It means you're present.

Grief, anger, confusion and all the other uncomfortable difficult emotions aren't evidence that you're failing. They're evidence that you care. That something really matters to you. You don't help yourself when you expect an impossible standard of calmness or stoic composure in moments that should naturally challenge you, moments of heartbreak, transition, or uncertainty. You aren't meant to sail through every difficulty with a peaceful smile. You're meant to feel it and connect with the truth of your experience.

Emotional regulation isn't a switch you flip. It's a muscle you build. You learn to pause, breathe, and reflect on what's happening inside you without immediately needing to fix, blame, escape, get numb, or run away. And over time, something shifts. You realize that emotions aren't threats, they are signals, teachers, and invitations to explore your values, boundaries, needs, and wants. You'll always have hard days, but you won't abandon yourself during them. Instead, you'll know how to stay present with self-compassion and self-love.

