

## Behaviourally-Based Regulation Strategy Menu

Here's a **menu of behaviourally-based emotion regulation strategies**, organized like a wellness menu. Each section offers different types of tools that people can use depending on their needs and emotional states. These tools are grounded in evidence-based practices from CBT, DBT, ACT, and behavioural psychology.

**Instructions:** Choose the strategy that works best for you depending on the circumstances or your needs

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### Daily Foundations (Preventative Strategies)

*Build emotional resilience by investing in consistent healthy habits.*

- **Regular Physical Activity** – Walk, jog, dance, stretch, or do yoga. Even 20 minutes a day can reduce stress and improve mood.
  - **Sleep Hygiene Routine** – Set a consistent bedtime, limit screens, and create a wind-down ritual.
  - **Balanced Nutrition** – Eat regularly, include protein and complex carbs, and stay hydrated.
  - **Scheduled Breaks & Rest** – Use the Pomodoro technique or schedule intentional "mental breathers."
  - **Sunlight & Nature Exposure** – Aim for at least 10-30 minutes of natural light and green space daily.
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### Quick Regulation Tools (In-the-Moment Strategies)

*For when emotions feel overwhelming and you need immediate relief.*

- **Cold Water Splash or Ice Hold** – Activates the dive reflex and can rapidly calm the nervous system.
- **5-4-3-2-1 Grounding** – Identify 5 things you see, 4 you can touch, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, 1 you taste.
- **Paced Breathing** – Inhale for 4, exhale for 6–8 seconds to trigger the parasympathetic nervous system.
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation** – Tense and release muscle groups to reduce physical and emotional tension.
- **Change of Scenery** – Physically move locations, even briefly, to help break emotional momentum.

## Express & Process (Expressive Behavioural Strategies)

*Use action to release or understand what you're feeling.*

- **Journaling** – Write freely for 10–15 minutes about thoughts or feelings (no editing or judgment).
  - **Creative Outlets** – Paint, draw, sing, sculpt, or dance to externalize emotion.
  - **Voice Memos to Self** – Talk through your thoughts/emotions out loud to gain perspective.
  - **Crying Freely** – Allowing tears can be a powerful emotional release, not a weakness.
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## Opposite Action (Change Through Doing the Opposite)

*From Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) – act opposite to unhelpful emotional urges.*

- **Sadness → Get Active** – Go for a brisk walk, reach out to a friend, or tackle a small task.
  - **Anger → Practice Kindness** – Write a gratitude list or do something nice for someone.
  - **Fear → Approach Gradually** – Break fears into steps and approach them in small doses.
  - **Shame → Share with a Safe Person** – Vulnerability with someone trustworthy disarms shame.
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## Values-Based Living (Long-Term Behavioural Alignment)

*Increase emotional wellbeing by acting in ways aligned with your core values.*

- **Identify Core Values** – Define what truly matters to you (e.g., connection, creativity, growth).
  - **Daily Micro-Actions** – Do one small task a day that reflects a value (e.g., texting a loved one if connection is a value).
  - **Behavioural Activation** – Schedule enjoyable or meaningful activities, even if motivation is low.
  - **Volunteer or Help Others** – Acts of service improve mood and reinforce values of compassion or community.
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## Social Strategies (Connection-Based Regulation)

*Regulate emotions through safe social behaviours.*

- **Reach Out to a Friend** – Text, call, or meet up to feel less alone.
  - **Co-Regulation** – Sit or breathe with someone calm to borrow their nervous system stability.
  - **Ask for What You Need** – Practice assertive communication to express emotions or set boundaries.
  - **Join a Group or Class** – Consistent group activity can provide community and distraction.
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## Reduce Environmental Triggers

*Modify your space or routine to reduce unnecessary stressors.*

- **Digital Boundaries** – Limit exposure to news, doom-scrolling, or comparison-inducing social media.
  - **Declutter a Small Space** – Organizing a drawer or desktop can help regulate emotions.
  - **Create a “Calm Corner”** – A space with calming items (soft lights, textures, scents).
  - **Avoid Known Triggers** – Temporarily limit contact with people or places that exacerbate distress.
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## Bonus: Weekly “Emotion Check-In” Practice

Take 10–15 minutes once a week to reflect on:

- What emotions showed up this week?
- What helped regulate them?
- What do I want to try next week?