



How Well Does Your Teen Regulate Emotions? **by Richard Guare, Ph.D., Peg Dawson, Ed.D, and Colin Guare**

Emotional control is the ability to manage emotions to help our-selves regulate and guide our behavior, perform tasks, and reach our goals. When we possess this skill we can deal with life's challenges as well as its pleasures and keep cool in emotionally intense situations, from family conflicts to confrontations with a testy boss or an aggressive driver. Besides managing our temper, emotional control helps us avoid being overwhelmed by unpleasant feelings, such as irritation, dejection, and nervousness.

The flip side of managing unpleasant emotions is being able to generate positive feelings as a way to overcome obstacles and keep going through difficult times. This is an important skill for our teens if they are going to negotiate the trials and tribulations of adolescence and learn to interact with a variety of different people. Having a quick temper can harm friendships and get teens in trouble at school.

For each item in the chart, first, decide whether the statement to the left or right of BUT describes your teen better. Then rate the degree to which that statement applies to your teen. The number of items for which you chose the right-hand statement is an indicator of how much improvement your teen may need in the skill overall. Your ratings indicate possible targets for skill-building: Where you chose "pretty much" or "very much" for a left-hand statement, your teen is demonstrating good use of the skill in that particular domain. "Pretty much" or "very much" for right-hand statements indicates areas that may need the most work.

Increasing Emotional Control

Be clear and specific about your rules and keep the "have-tos" to a relatively small number. Keep rules in the following categories (1) the in-formation category: where they are, whom they are with, and whose parents are in charge; (2) the permission category: time that they need to be home and acceptable use of electronics/social media; (3) the prohibition category: people, places, and off-limits activities. Be clear about which rules, if any, are in any way negotiable, review them regularly so it is clear that your expectations have not changed, and enforce them so your teen knows you mean them.

ADHD



Foundation

JUST A LITTLE	PRETTY MUCH	VERY MUCH				JUST A LITTLE	PRETTY MUCH	VERY MUCH
			Some kids stay positive even when homework is difficult or time-consuming.	BUT	Other kids get annoyed when homework is hard or confusing or takes a long time to finish.			
			Some kids can stay cool no matter what the irritation.	BUT	Other kids have a short fuse and get easily frustrated by even little things.			
			Some kids take unexpected events in stride.	BUT	Other kids get stressed out if something does not go right.			
			Some kids just let things "roll off their backs."	BUT	Other kids get hurt or aggravated easily if someone criticizes them.			
			Some kids control their temper easily.	BUT	Other kids scream or "lose it" when they get angry.			



Be sure your teen knows about appointments, family gatherings, and other events not scheduled by the teen for fun, so there are no surprises

Hell hath no fury like the teen who claims not to have known about a previously scheduled important event that now conflicts with plans he's made on his own. Because self-determination is so important to them, teens often make plans without telling parents, so putting your agenda on the table well in advance and issuing reminders increases the likelihood that teens will take into consideration and not explode when the time arrives and they've made more appealing plans.

Use communication strategies that invite discussion rather than confrontation.

Use active listening. Active listening involves paying attention to what your teen is saying, using gestures that you understand by briefly paraphrasing the gist of what the teen is saying. Listening is key. Try to avoid the urge to immediately offer an opinion, judgment, or solution to what you see as a problem. When the situation calls for it, honestly express how you feel, whether it is positive or negative, without being hurtful or insulting.

Negotiate whenever you can; save the non-negotiables for situations that are important. At a time when there is no pending issue or conflict and you both are calm and have time to talk, let your teen know that issues will come up and you will do your best to hear and respect her point of view and negotiate or compromise whenever possible. There are also times when, as a parent, you will not be able to compromise or negotiate.

Avoid the knee-jerk "no" to any request that your teen makes. "No" needs to remain in your vocabulary, but use it judiciously and be prepared to present your reasons.

If you can consistently use these types of communication strategies, you will at least decrease the likelihood that your teen will have an explosive emotional reaction when there is a disagreement.

From Smart but Scattered Teens: The "Executive Skills" Program for Helping Teens Reach Their Potential, by Richard Guare, Ph.D., Peg Dawson, Ed.D, and Colin Guare. Copyright 2012. Reprinted with permission of Guilford Press.