



Considerations for Responsive and Responsible Use of Feel Your Best Self: Brief 1

A Brief by Jessica B. Koslouski, Emily A. Iovino, & Sandra M. Chafouleas

Emotion regulation strategies can be one effective solution for decreasing negative emotion and increasing positive emotion. Thus, widespread use of Feel Your Best Self (FYBS) strategies is encouraged to build important emotion-coping skills. There can be situations, however, in which putting strategies in place could be unhelpful or unproductive. We have created two briefs to highlight opportunities to facilitate responsive and responsible use of FYBS. In this *first brief*, we focus our example on considerations for emotional response to a range of stressors, including injustices. In the *second brief*, we focus our example on considerations when delivering more intensive supports.

Consider this: *You are fuming with frustration. You text a friend or approach a partner for support. They immediately say, "It's not so bad" and suggest you look at the situation more positively.* How would you feel? You might feel invalidated, dismissed, or even more frustrated than when you first reached out. There are times in which we may first need to experience and process an emotion. We might need time to vent or sit with the emotion before we can successfully use a regulation strategy. Other times, we may choose not to use an emotion regulation strategy. For example, if our sense of emotional or physical safety has been violated, we might fight back or seek justice. Advocating for improved conditions may offer a more appropriately matched solution, alone or in combination with use of emotion regulation strategies.

"Mindfulness is not the solution; it's a tool. Simply because we are using these tools does not mean we can shirk our responsibility to work alongside our students to understand and fight systemic injustice."

-Christina Torres, author of "[Mindfulness Won't Save Us. Fixing the System Will](#)" published by ASCD

Teaching children emotion regulation strategies is not a replacement for broader work to improve the conditions in their lives. At times, children may be upset because of teasing, bullying, or discrimination. In these instances, adults have a responsibility to address the issue more broadly. Prompting emotion regulation strategies may help some children to feel better in the moment, but adults must be thoughtful about additional action that may be needed to support and advocate for children.

These examples can bring forth lots of questions about solutions to address dysregulation, including prompting use of emotion regulation strategies. For example, how do we decide when to prompt use of a strategy or when could it be better to wait or avoid prompting altogether? Dysregulation is tough; it can be displayed as sadness, anger, silliness, frustration, and more. To strengthen your skills in supporting children's emotions and responding to dysregulation, we offer three guiding questions to ask yourself. Depending on the situation, each of the questions below may have more or less relevance. Following an overview of each

question, we offer scenarios to illustrate how you might apply them in different ways given varying levels of emotional intensity. We encourage you to draw parallels to interactions you have had and consider how you might respond similarly or differently in a related situation.

1. Should I first comfort the child? Do I need to let the child work through some of this emotional response before suggesting a strategy?

Explore this: As shared in the opening frustration example, sometimes we need time to experience and process an emotion before we try to put an emotion regulation strategy in place. Once we have the chance to vent or feel the emotion, we can become more ready to use a strategy like *Turn the Dial*. Consider the same for children. In this situation, is comfort or validation an important first step? Does the child need time to work through some of their emotional response before you suggest a strategy?

2. What strategy will I suggest? Think about what you know about the child, situation or stressor, and context.

Consider this: The children you work with are in a crowded assembly. The presenter is holding various reptiles, and one of the children shrieks and starts flailing their legs when the presenter pulls out a large snake. You move towards the child and crouch down next to them. They are sweating and panicked. Given the setting (i.e., an assembly where being quiet and observing personal space is valued) and student need (self-soothing), the FYBS *Connect With Others* strategies are not going to be appropriate. Instead, self-soothing strategies such as *Belly Breathing* or *Ground it Down* are more likely to be effective. The goal here is to facilitate a small change that helps the child work through their feelings and put a plan in place to carry on. However, even if the child is able to calm, your work may not be done.

3. What follow-up do I need to do? Is there advocacy to be done? Should I notify others about the situation?

Remember this: Emotion regulation strategies can be used in both small and big moments. For example, you might prompt *Belly Breathing* or *Ground It Down* to settle children after returning from recess, or to help a student coping with a loss or overwhelmed with fear about violence they have witnessed. In the latter example, additional follow-up supports are likely needed. We have an obligation to support the child in both the short-term (e.g., validating emotions, prompting a strategy) and long-term (e.g., connecting to mental health supports). We also need to evaluate our role in advocating and taking action to enable safer, more supportive conditions for children in which they can thrive. Identify steps you can take within your school or community to advocate for safe, equitable, and joyful environments for children.

Below we offer examples of how the three guiding questions can be applied. We illustrate the potential levels of comfort and validation that might be needed before prompting use of a strategy based on the types of emotions experienced in addition to the various levels and types of follow-up or advocacy that could be warranted. We acknowledge that the provided examples take place in a school setting but suggest that the same questions and principles can be applied across family and community settings.

Scenario	Children return from recess full of energy and need to settle to attend to academic instruction	During independent reading time, you see a student staring into space with tears welling in their eyes	A student approaches you crying, saying that a peer was teasing them at snack time for living with grandparents
Step 1: Comfort and Validation	Simple validation might be enough here: "I can see that we have a lot of energy from being outside at recess."	You might approach the student, lower yourself to their eye level, and ask if they are okay. If the student becomes more emotional or expressed interest in talking, consider bringing them to a quiet area of the classroom to ask what is bothering them.	Dedicate time to comforting and validating the student's emotional experience: Bring yourself to the child's level (crouch down or sit). Validate how upsetting the experience must have been. Depending on how upset the student is, you might offer tissues or ask questions to gather more information.
Step 2: Strategy Selection & Prompting	"Let's do 5 Belly Breaths." Prompt students through the strategy.	If the student is not able to calm or refocus on their own, consider prompting a self-soothing strategy. For example, "do you want to try Ground It Down?" If the student agrees, prompt them through the strategy.	As the student begins to naturally calm, you might prompt a strategy to help them continue with their day: "Do you want to do 5 Belly Breaths together?" If the student agrees, prompt them through the strategy.
Step 3: Follow-up or Advocacy	Follow-up could be as simple as, "Great job. How are you feeling now? Are we feeling ready to get to work?"	<p>Keep an eye on the student for the remainder of the day, and especially during independent work times.</p> <p>If the pattern persists, or the student shared concerning information (e.g., ruminating thoughts, persistent sadness, or exposure to unsafe environments), reach out to the students' caregivers and your mental health colleagues (school psychologist, counselor etc.)</p> <p>If the pattern persists, consider pairing the student with another student for independent work times (e.g., reading or working together). Idle thinking time can be a trigger for drifting or ruminating thoughts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow up with peer • Check in with targeted student again later • Consider whether to reach out to targeted students' family members • Consider how diverse family structures are represented in your classroom books and activities; integrate read-alouds showing and celebrating the strengths of diverse family structures (grandparents, foster families, single parent, same sex parents etc.) • Consider whether any of your classroom activities or materials may lead to further alienation (e.g., Father's Day gifts, communication addressed to mom and dad)