

Emotional Suppression vs Regulation

SAME EMOTIONS · DIFFERENT APPROACHES · DIFFERENT OUTCOMES

Emotions are a natural and important part of being human. The goal is not to get rid of difficult emotions, but to understand how to relate to them in a healthy and effective way.

EMOTIONAL SUPPRESSION

Pushing emotions away, hiding them, or trying not to feel them.

Suppression involves blocking, ignoring or avoiding emotions — often to feel better in the short term, or to meet external expectations. While it may ease distress temporarily, emotions tend to persist and can resurface later, often more intensely.

VS

EMOTIONAL REGULATION

Acknowledging emotions and responding to them skilfully.

Regulation involves noticing, accepting and understanding emotions, and using helpful strategies to manage how you respond. It is not about eliminating emotions, but about working with them in a way that supports your wellbeing and values.

BOTH ARE COMMON

We all suppress emotions at times, and we all regulate emotions to varying degrees. The key is greater awareness and more choice.

COMMON FEATURES OF SUPPRESSION

Tries to avoid or block the emotion
Often feels like "I shouldn't feel this"
May involve distraction, withdrawal or keeping busy
Emotions are pushed down rather than processed
Can feel effective in the short term
Often leads to increased internal tension over time
May result in outbursts, numbness or physical symptoms
Can interfere with relationships and authentic connection
May be shaped by past experiences or messages like "be strong"

COMMON FEATURES OF REGULATION

Notices and names the emotion
Allows the emotion to be present without immediate judgement
Uses strategies to manage intensity (breathing, grounding, self-talk)
Considers what the emotion is signalling
Responds in a way that aligns with values and goals
Reduces the likelihood of impulsive or unhelpful behaviours
Builds resilience and emotional flexibility
Supports healthier relationships and communication
Increases self-understanding and self-compassion

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES OF SUPPRESSION

- Increased stress and anxiety
- Greater emotional reactivity over time
- Difficulty identifying and expressing emotions
- Feelings of numbness or disconnection
- Physical symptoms (tension, headaches, fatigue)
- Strain in relationships
- Higher risk of depression and burnout

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES OF REGULATION

- Greater emotional awareness and clarity
- Improved ability to cope with stress
- More balanced and thoughtful responses
- Stronger relationships and communication
- Increased self-compassion
- Better alignment with personal values
- Improved overall mental and physical wellbeing

TIPS FOR MOVING TOWARDS REGULATION

1

Notice

Pause and acknowledge what you are feeling.

2

Normalize

Remind yourself that all emotions are valid and temporary.

3

Make space

Allow yourself to feel the emotion without judgement.

4

Use strategies

Try slow breathing, grounding, self-talk, movement or talking to someone.

5

Choose

Respond intentionally, considering what will help in the long term.

Emotions are information, not problems to be eliminated.

SOURCES

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