Self-Regulation –
Core Emotional Intelligence Capacity – Control of Oneself by Oneself

What is Self-Regulation Theory?
Self-Regulation Theory (SRT) simply outlines the process and components of deciding what to think, feel, say, and do. It is particularly salient in the context of making a “good” choice.

Four components are involved:
1. **Standards** of desirable behavior
2. **Motivation** to meet standards
3. **Monitoring** of situations and thoughts that precede breaking standards
4. **Willpower** internal strength to control urges

These four components interact to determine self-regulatory activity at any given moment. According to SRT, behavior is determined by personal standards of good behavior, motivation to meet those standards, the degree to which one is consciously aware of circumstances and actions, and the extent of willpower to resist temptations and choose the “right” path.

The Psychology of Self-Regulation
According to Albert Bandura (1991), the expert on self-efficacy and leading researcher of SRT, self-regulation is a continuously active process in which we:
1. Monitor our own behavior, the influences on our behavior, and the consequences of our behavior
2. Judge our behavior in relation to our own personal standards and broader, more contextual standards
3. React to our own behavior (i.e., what we think and how we feel about our behavior)

According to emotional intelligence expert Daniel Goleman, there are **five components of emotional intelligence**:
1. **Self-awareness**
2. **Self-regulation**
3. **Internal motivation**
4. **Empathy**
5. **Social skills**

**Self-regulation**, or the extent of an individual’s ability to influence or control their own emotions and impulses, is a vital piece of emotional intelligence. The better able we are to understand and address our own emotions and the emotions of others, the better able we are to make sense of our environment, adjust to it, and pursue our goals.

**Self-Regulation vs. Self-Control**
“Self-control is about inhibiting strong impulses; self-regulation, reducing the frequency and intensity of strong impulses by managing stress-load and recovery. In fact, self-regulation is what makes self-control possible, or, in many cases, unnecessary.” Stuart Shanker (2016)

Viewed in this light, self-regulation as a more automatic and subconscious process—unless the individual determines to purposefully monitor and alter their self-regulation—while self-control is a set of much more active and purposeful decisions and behaviors.

8 Ways to Improve Self-Regulation
1. **Leading and Living with Integrity:** being a good role model, practicing what you preach, creating trusting environments, and living in alignment with your values
2. **Being Open to Change:** challenge yourself to deal with change in a straightforward and positive manner and work on improving your ability to adapt to different situations and stay positive through it all
3. **Identifying Your Triggers:** cultivating a sense of self-awareness will help you learn what your strengths and weaknesses are, and what can trigger you into a difficult state of mind
4. **Practicing Self-Discipline:** commit to taking initiative and staying persistent in working towards your goals, even when it’s the last thing you feel like doing
5. **Reframing Negative Thoughts:** work on your ability to take a step back from your own thoughts and feelings, analyze them, and come up with positive alternative thoughts
6. **Keeping Calm Under Pressure:** practice keeping your cool by removing yourself from the situation for the short-term—whether mentally or physically—and using relaxation techniques like deep breathing
7. **Considering the Consequences**: when you are faced with a strong temptation towards "bad" behavior, stop and think about the consequences (e.g., what happened in the past, what is likely to happen now, what this behavior could trigger in terms of longer-term consequences)

8. **Believing in Yourself**: boost your self-efficacy by working on your self-confidence; focus on the experiences in your life where you succeeded and keep your mistakes in perspective. Choose to believe in your own abilities and surround yourself with positive, supportive people (Kline, n.d.)

**List of Self-Regulation Skills**

1. Move or act in a deliberate or purposeful fashion
2. Adapt successfully to familiar settings
3. Focus and maintain attention on something
4. Ignore distractions
5. Follow requests or instructions
6. Attempt to regulate others
7. Create “rules”
8. Inhibit an inappropriate response
9. Alternately shift attention and refocus it
10. Inhibit movement or speech when appropriate
11. Regulation of emotions in appropriate social interaction
12. Regulation of attention
13. Use of strategies in the carrying out of cognitive tasks
14. Ability to communicate needs, wants, and thoughts in language
15. Ability to sustain attention
16. Ability to be curious and enthusiastic when doing new activities
17. Can inhibit impulsivity and follow directions
18. Can take turns in speech and/or behavior
19. Shows sensitivity to others’ feelings, particularly other children
20. Can keep information in his/her mind when trying to solve a problem
21. Able to inhibit impulsive responses when formulating and carrying out a response

**Understanding Ego Depletion**

This is a state in which an individual's willpower and control over their self-regulation processes have been used up, and their energy earmarked for inhibiting impulses is expended. It often results in poor decision-making and performance (Baumeister, 2014).

When a person has been faced with many temptations and especially strong temptations, they must then exert an equally large amount of energy when it comes to controlling their impulses. SRT argues that people have a limited amount of energy for this purpose and once it’s gone, two things happen:

1. Inhibitions and behavioral restraints are weaker, meaning that the individual has less motivation and willpower to refrain from the temptations
2. The temptations/desires/urges are felt much more strongly than when willpower is at a normal, non-depleted level (Baumeister, 2014)

This is a key idea in SRT; it explains why we struggle to avoid engaging in “bad behavior” when we are tempted by it over a long period of time. For example, it explains why many dieters can keep to their strict diet all day but give in after dinner when tempted by dessert. It also explains why a married, or otherwise committed person, can rebuff an advance from someone who is not their partner for days or weeks but eventually give in and engage in an affair.

Recent findings in neuroscience back this idea of self-regulatory depletion; a study from 2013 (Wagner et al.) used functional neuroimaging to show that those who had depleted their self-regulatory energy experienced less connectivity between the regions of the brain involved in self-control and those involved in rewards. In other words, their brains were less accommodating in helping them resist temptation after sustained self-regulatory activity.

**The Art of Mindfulness**

Self-regulation and mindfulness are two peas in a pod when it comes to contributing to well-being. Self-regulation requires self-awareness and monitoring of one’s own emotional state and responses to stimuli. Being conscious of your own thoughts, feelings, and behavior is the foundation of self-regulation; without it, there is no ability to reflect or choose a different path.
Teaching mindfulness is one great way to both improve the ability to self-regulate and enhance overall well-being. Mindfulness can be defined as the conscious effort to maintain a moment-to-moment awareness of what’s going on, both inside your head and around you.

Mindfulness encourages active awareness of one’s own thoughts and feelings and promotes conscious decisions about how to behave over simply going along with whatever your feelings tell you. The researchers found that those in the mindfulness group exhibited greater attention, better ability to delay gratification and more effective inhibitory control than those in the control group. Findings also suggested that those with the most inherent trouble self-regulating benefited the most from the mindfulness intervention, indicating that those at the lower end of the self-regulation continuum are not a “lost cause!”

**Self-Regulation and Executive Function**

Mindfulness is an excellent way to build certain attention skills, which are part of a larger set of vital skills that allow us to plan, focus, remember important things, and multitask effectively.

These skills are known as executive function skills, and they involve three key types of brain functions:

1. **Working Memory**: our cache of short-term memories, or information we recently took in.
2. **Mental Flexibility**: our ability to shift our focus from one stimulus to another and apply context-appropriate rules for attention and behavior.
3. **Self-Control**: our ability to set priorities, regulate our emotions, and to resist our impulses.

These skills are not inherent from birth but are rather learned and built upon over time. They are vital skills for navigating the complex world we live in and contribute to making good choices and we set ourselves up to meet our goals and enjoy greater well-being.

**Characteristics of Self-Regulation**

- **Emotional Regulation** – the ability to recognize emotion, both in ourselves and others, and react appropriately.
- **Behavioral Regulation** – the ability to act in your long-term interest, consistent with your deepest values. Stosny, 2011
- **Self-Reflection** – the ability to see ourselves clearly and make good choices based on that knowledge.

**Emotional Regulation**

**Self-regulation**

Emotional Regulation that is achieved independently without the support of others

**Mutual regulation**

Emotional Regulation that occurs in the context of supportive social interaction

**Above strategies used in order to:**

- Maintain a well-regulated arousal state
- Recover from extreme dysregulation

**Mutual Regulation Goals**

- Expresses range of emotions
- Respond to assistance offered by partners
- Requests partners’ assistance to regulate state
- Responds to feedback and guidance regarding behavior
- Recovers from extreme dysregulation with support from partners

**Self-Regulation Goals**

- Demonstrates availability for learning and interacting
- Uses behavioral strategies to regulate arousal level during familiar activities
- Regulates emotion during new and changing situations
- Uses language strategies to regulate arousal during familiar activities
- Recovers from extreme dysregulation by self
Emotional Regulation Strategies

- **Behavioral Strategies** - Sensory-motor strategies
- **Language Strategies** - Words or other symbols
- **Metacognitive Strategies** - Ability to reflect on/talk about cognitive processes that support organization/regulation

ER Strategies

- Monitor emotional regulation
- Determine function of unconventional behavior
- Model appropriate behavior
- Address and identify dysregulation
- Redirect attention
- Teach “no”, “don’t like”, “stop”, “mad”
- Use positive behavior language
- “Take a break”

Areas of Sensory Activities – used to learn and manage arousal state, control, and relaxation.

- **Proprioceptive** – muscles and joints
- **Vestibular** – overall movement and gravity, swinging, trampoline, rocking chair, jump rope
- **Pressure** – combination of tactile and proprioception massage, heavy apron, bear hug, sofa cushion sandwich
- **Deep Muscle Work** – carry heavy items, move wheelbarrow, exercise bands
- **Oral** – chewing, sucking, crunching
- **Tactile** – vibrations, brushing, massage, sensory roller, fan (wind)

Good Worksheet Site – for handouts on self-regulation skills
[https://printableworksheets.in/worksheet/self-regulation-skills-for-adults](https://printableworksheets.in/worksheet/self-regulation-skills-for-adults)

Ten Emotion Regulation Skills - essential for personal happiness, success, and smooth-running relationships.
1. Identifying which specific emotions you’re feeling.
2. Identifying which specific emotions someone else is feeling.
3. The ability to start and persist with pursuing goals even when you feel anxious.
4. The ability to tolerate awkwardness.
5. The ability to have intimate conversations rather than stonewall, avoid, or flee.
6. The ability not to crumble when someone is pressuring you.
7. The ability to soothe your own emotions.
8. The ability to soothe other people’s emotions.
9. Can you wait?
10. Do you know how to manage your positive emotions?

Behavioral Regulation

Scope of Goods Sought – these behaviors demonstrate a life that is well lived.

- **Life** – Physical Needs and Factors for Healthy Living and Physical Functioning
- **Knowledge** – Desire for Information and Understanding about Oneself and the World
- **Excellence in Play and Work** – Desire to Engage in Leisure, Mastery at Work and Recreation
- **Agency** – Desire for Independence, Autonomy, Choice, Goal Formulation
- **Inner Peace** – Emotion Regulation, Equilibrium, Competence
- **Relatedness** – Desire to Establish Bonds with Others
- **Community** – Desire to be Connected to Similar Social Groups
- **Spirituality** – Desire for Meaning and Purpose of Life
- **Happiness** – State of Being Reflecting Overall Experience of Contentedness in One’s Life
Self-Reflection
Self-reflections is the examination and contemplation of our thoughts and actions. It encompasses not only what we do, but why we do it. It allows us to monitor what is going on, to be aware of the nature and quality of events as they occur, and to perceive their meaning.

Self-awareness is the foundation for emotional intelligence, self-leadership, and mature adulthood. Self-awareness is a skill. In any skill, learning goes through four primary stages.

**Stage 1: Unconscious Incompetence**
Competence is unknown.

**Stage 2: Conscious Incompetence**
We are now aware of the fact that we don’t know things. It is this stage that brings up feelings of weakness and inadequacy, feelings that our egos would like to avoid. This stage of learning requires commitment, a personal decision to follow through. This step requires self-compassion, discipline (the cultivation of will), and hard work.

**Stage 3: Conscious Competence**
Commitment to consistent practice with devotion, patience, and friendliness toward yourself, with management through the many plateaus and extended periods of hard work (practice) that occur in the learning process. Observation of progress builds confidence. Remembering where you once were, you can marvel at your improvements. You still need to focus intently on the object of learning (perhaps a new skill), but your development is undeniable.

**Stage 4: Unconscious Competence**
The real magic occurs at this final stage of alchemical transformation. From total darkness, awkwardness, discomfort, and frustration experienced in stages 1 and 2, through the herculean efforts of consistent practice in stage 3, emerges a new level of being. With unconscious competence, a conscious focus is no longer needed to perform a skill effortlessly. This automatic response allows us to enter an absorbed, thoughtless state, often called being “in the zone” or “in the flow.” We witness it in great athletes, musicians, orators, and anyone who walks the path of self-mastery.

**Activities for Self-Reflection**
- Mindfulness
- Meditation
- Yoga, Tai Chi
- Grounding Techniques
- Assessments – personality, temperament, A.C.E.’s, Strengths, etc.
- Journaling – personal narrative, personal visions, etc.
- Mirroring, Shadow Work, Inner Dialogue, etc.
- Observing Others – feedback, mentoring, coaching, etc.

**Factors that impact our ability to consciously choose positive strategies:**
1) Our capacity for self-reflection with the ability to see ourselves as separate intentional beings with the ability to access and name our experience separate from the other.
2) Our perceived level of risk or danger.
3) Our level of fear and/or anxiety in a situation.
4) The degree of our real or perceived dependence on another or the situation.
5) The degree we trust our own competence and ourselves.
6) The degree we trust the "other".
7) Our motivation and commitment to a particular outcome.
8) Our predominant and secondary attachment strategies.

The greater our capacity for self-reflection with an awareness of our own experience; knowing that we’re separate intentional beings, knowing we can choose our response, and honoring our own experience as important... the more self-soothing options are available to us.

**CBT – Cognitive Behavior Therapy**
CBT is based on the idea that your thoughts are what cause your feelings and behaviors, not external stimuli like people, situations and events. That is, it’s not the stimuli that causes your emotions, but it’s how you interpret and perceive that stimuli. The benefit of this insight is that you can change the way you think, so that you feel and act better, even if the
situation hasn’t changed. As you can see in the illustration above, there is a cycle of consequences with everything you do. This plays a great part in your overall feelings.

**Cognitive:** A term describing your thoughts and anything to do with the mind's function, e.g. thinking, understanding, learning and remembering.

**Behavioral:** A term describing how we respond to stimuli, such as the things we do as well as the things we do not do.

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![CBT Diagram](http://www.online-therapy.com/cbt)

**P.L.E.A.S.E.**

Your body and mind are closely linked, and the health of one directly affects the other. An unhealthy body will make it difficult to manage your emotions. The acronym “P.L.E.A.S.E.” can be used to help you remember important aspects of this connection.

- **PL** Treat Physical Illness
- **E** Eat Healthy
- **A** Avoid Mood Altering Drugs
- **S** Sleep
- **E** Exercise

**Check the Facts**

Maybe you can look back at your life and think of a few situations where you overreacted. Or you might notice that something once felt like a big deal when it was really pretty unimportant. You can check the facts in the moment to help reduce the intensity of these extreme emotions.

**Ask yourself the following questions to check the facts:**

1. What event triggered my emotion?
2. What interpretations or assumptions am I making about this event?
3. Does my emotion and its intensity match the facts of the situation? Or does it just match my assumptions of the situation?

**Do you want to be “right” or “happy”?**

**Self-Regulated Learning**

Three components: **cognition, metacognition, and motivation.** The cognition component includes the skills and habits that are necessary to encode, memorize, and recall information as well as think critically. Within the meta-cognition component are skills that enable learners to understand and monitor their cognitive processes. The motivation component
surfaces the beliefs and attitudes that affect the use and development of both the cognitive and metacognitive skills. Below are suggestions for how to develop self-regulation in the adult education classroom.

- **Cognitive strategies** – skills and habits necessary to encode, memorize, and recall.
  - Problem solving strategies
  - Critical thinking skills

- **Metacognitive knowledge** – understand and monitor cognitive processes.
  - **declarative knowledge** (knowledge about oneself as a learner – the factors that influence performance),
  - **procedural knowledge** (knowledge about strategies and other procedures)
  - conditional knowledge (knowledge of why and when to use a particular strategy)

- **Motivation** – attitudes and beliefs that affect the use and development of cognitive strategies and metacognitive knowledge.
  - self-efficacy (degree to which one is confident that one can perform a task or accomplish a goal)
  - epistemological beliefs (beliefs about the origin and nature of knowledge)

This process happens in three steps:

1. **Planning:** the student plans her task, sets goals, outlines strategies to tackle it, and/or creates a schedule for the task.
2. **Monitoring:** in this stage, the student puts her plans into action and closely monitors her performance and her experience with the methods she chose.
3. **Reflection:** finally, after the task is complete and the results are in, the student reflects on how well she did and why she performed the way she did (Zimmerman, 2002)