

EMOTIONAL REGULATION - LESSON 3.3

Regulation Railroad

Lesson Spotlight

Learning how to listen to our BrainTree through the Regulation Railroad can help us identify the Strengths and strategies we need to regulate in healthy ways.

Materials

- Regulation Railroad Poster, post this in the Regulation Station area after the lesson (page 54 & 180)
- Regulation Railroad Worksheet, one per student (page 179)

Preparation

- Designate and label a small corner of your classroom as a dedicated space for the Regulation Station
- Add “Rock, Paper, Scissors” and “Grounding” sheets to the classroom Regulation Station (page 181)

Time

30 minutes

SEL Focus

Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Responsible Decision-Making

Instructor Overview

This lesson provides a practical process for students to engage in emotional regulation through the Regulation Railroad. Students will discuss and practice Strengths and strategies for emotional regulation, differentiating between calming and energizing strategies. The Regulation Railroad will serve as a process to draw upon throughout the remaining units and in everyday situations when emotions get big for students. This lesson also introduces the Regulation Station, a space in the classroom where students can engage in regulation strategies to calm down, or de-escalate, throughout the year. Instructors modeling and co-regulating with the class will improve understanding, retention, and application of the skills covered in this lesson.

Talking Circle (4 min)

Invite students to the Talking Circle.

“We’ve been talking about how we experience all kinds of different emotions in big and small ways. We’ve also been talking about how to use our Strengths to help us be strong and resilient, even when things get hard. Let’s think about our BrainTrees for a moment. When a tree experiences a thunderstorm, it can get shaken up. When we experience challenges in life, we can also get a little shaken up. Our sensations, emotions, and thoughts can get bigger and feel out of balance. However, just like strong trees, strong brains and bodies can withstand storms and even grow stronger from them! Today, we are talking about different things we can do to stay balanced and healthy when we experience the ups and downs of life and the big emotions that can come with them.

“Let’s start by sharing with a partner one way that you connected to a Strength on the Strengths wheel in the last week, and one emotion you experienced by using that Strength. For example, maybe you practiced Generosity this week by helping a friend, which made you feel happy and proud, or maybe you connected to the Spirituality Strength by practicing thankfulness and it made you feel more peaceful. Turn to a neighbor and share.”

Give the students one or two minutes to pair share.

Regulation Railroad (10 min)



“Have you ever felt like your emotions were out of control, like a train running off the tracks?” Get a show of hands.

EMOTIONAL REGULATION - LESSON 3.3

Regulation Railroad

"Sometimes, when I am feeling a big emotion, like anger, anxiety, or sadness, it can feel like the emotion is in control instead of me; that's called dysregulation. When our emotions get big and dysregulating, it can feel hard to take back control. However, we have been learning about how our brains and bodies are connected with our emotions. When we listen to our Roots and our Trunks, we can use our Branches and Leaves to make healthy choices to bring our big emotions back down to size. That process is called regulation.

"So, when we are dysregulated and our emotions feel like they are running us off the rails, we want to use different Strengths and strategies to regulate and get that train back on the tracks. We are going to practice this using the Regulation Railroad, which is a silly name to help us remember how to do something really important.

"When you feel like your mind is starting to go off its tracks and you are not in control of your emotions, we want to be able to put on our conductor hats and take ourselves through the Regulation Railroad stops." Bring the class' attention to the Regulation Railroad Poster.

"Once we notice we are starting to feel dysregulated, the first stop is to check in with our body to locate the emotion:

"Stop 1: What do I notice in my body? What are your Roots telling you? What are you feeling physically? For example, does your stomach hurt, are your shoulders tight, is your heart beating fast, are your eyes tearing up, or are your hands sweaty?

"Once you have a sense of what's going on in your body, then you can bring your brain and body to **Stop 2**. This is where we identify the emotion:

"Stop 2: What emotion do I feel? What is your Trunk telling you? For example, is your heart beating fast because you are excited, or because you are anxious? Does your stomach hurt because you are hungry, or because you feel sad?

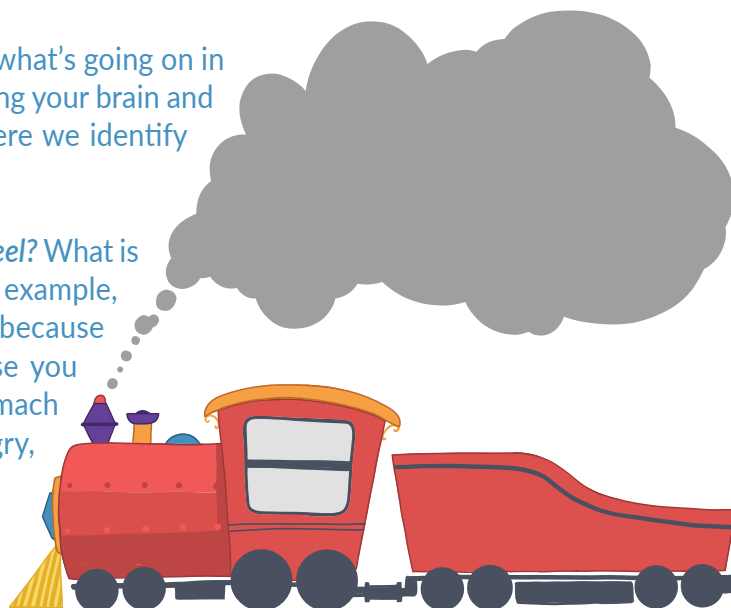
"Next is **Stop 3**. This is where we identify how big or small the emotion is:

"Stop 3: How big is the emotion? Can you rate the emotion on a scale of 1 – 5, 1 being a small emotion and 5 being a very big emotion? Notice how big the emotion feels for you.

"Now you have the information you need to bring your brain and body back on track. You know where in your body you feel the emotion, you know what it is that you feel, and you know how big it is. The last stop is the Regulation Station. At this final stop, we use our Branches and Leaves to decide what we need to do to regulate.

"Stop 4: The Regulation Station: What will I do to regulate myself? What Strengths and strategies can you use to get your brain and body back on track? Would turning to one of the Strengths on the Sources of Strength wheel be helpful? For example, maybe taking ten deep breaths as a Healthy Activity, talking to a Trusted Adult or Mentor about what you are feeling, or practicing Spirituality by being mindful or thankful would be helpful. Does anyone have an example of a Strength or a strategy that you have used to regulate?" Get a few popcorn answers.

"Thanks for sharing, there are so many more examples of Strengths and strategies we can use to regulate our emotions in healthy ways, and we will continue to explore and practice these together throughout the year."



EMOTIONAL REGULATION - LESSON 3.3

Regulation Railroad

INSTRUCTOR NOTE

We highly recommend creating a safe space in the classroom that students can access when they are experiencing big emotions. The Regulation Station can include different regulation tools such as:

- Relax and Release Exercise
- Sources of Strength wheel
- Breathing activities
- Coloring activities
- Stress ball
- Glitter jar
- Mindfulness prompts
- Thankfulness prompts
- Mindfulness activities
- Music with headphones
- Sources of Strength worksheets
- Art and journaling supplies
- Pass to see the counselor

Include your student's ideas. Share and borrow ideas and strategies amongst your colleagues that can be incorporated into the Regulation Station. Involve students in the creation of your Regulation Station, and continue to add to the resources available throughout the year*

**If a student is accessing the Regulation Station, this can serve as an invitation for the instructor/teacher to check in with that student and provide an opportunity for connection and co-regulation.*

Energizing Activity (7 min)

"When we're feeling down, tired, bummed, or bored, we might want to try out an energizing strategy to regulate our emotions. Let's try practicing this using the Regulation Railroad together.

"Stop 1: Take a moment and notice how your body feels when you imagine feeling down, tired, bummed, or bored. What do you notice in your body?" Give students a few seconds to think about their answer.

"Stop 2: As you imagine, notice what emotions you might be experiencing." Give students a few seconds to think about their answer.

"Stop 3: Notice how big the emotion is for you on a scale of 1-5." Give students a few seconds to think about their answer.

"Stop 4: Let's try something to regulate ourselves as a class. If we're feeling tired, down, or bored, we can try an energizing activity to regulate together."

ACCOMMODATION

Modify the instructions of this game to meet the physical needs of your class.

"We're going to play a game of Simon Says. Let's all stand up. I am going to tell you to do something, but you should only do it if I say 'Simon Says' first. For example, if I say 'Simon Says, spin around', you would all spin around." Have the class spin. "But If I say sit down, you would not sit down, because I didn't say Simon Says first. OK, are you ready?"

"Simon says, do five jumping jacks.

"Simon says, touch your toes.

"Simon says, run in place."

This is intended to get the students energized, so allow them to run in place for ten seconds.

"Stop". If students stopped running in place, they are out.

"Simon says stop.

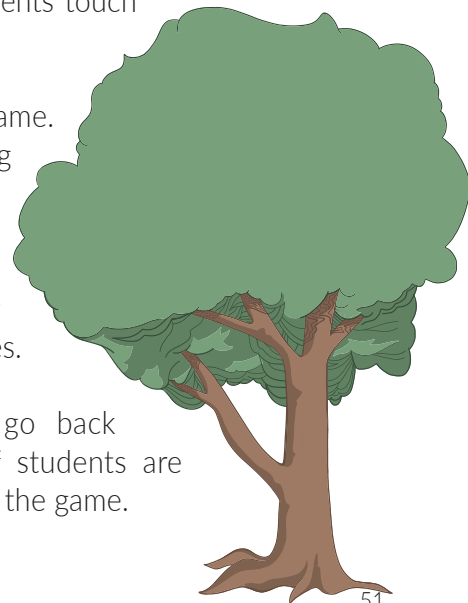
"Simon says wiggle your fingers.

"Simon says rub your hands together.

"Touch your nose." If students touch their nose, they are out.

You can conclude the game. Or if you continue playing this game, allow students who were out to join back in. Play several rounds as time allows, incorporating various energizing activities.

Invite the students to go back to their seats. It's OK if students are energized and chatty after the game.



EMOTIONAL REGULATION - LESSON 3.3

Regulation Railroad

"Who feels more energized after that?" Get a show of hands, no need to take answers at this time.

"What are some benefits to feeling energized?" Get a few popcorn answers (helps us stay awake and alert, helps us pay better attention to what's happening, we can focus and listen better, cheers us up, gets us talking/laughing/connecting with others, etc.).

"We won't be able to play a game like Simon Says every time we are feeling a bit low. What are some other ideas for how we might regulate with an energizing activity on our own when we are feeling down, bummed, tired, or bored during the school day in a way that wouldn't be distracting to others?" Record a few popcorn answers on the whiteboard (get a drink of water, use a fidget, bounce your leg, flex your muscles, take deep breaths, ask for what you need: to take a quick walk and get some air, or to stand in the back of the room and listen).

"Turn and share with a partner something you can do that is energizing when you need to regulate at home." Pair share.

Calming Activity (7 min)

"There are lots of positives to feeling energized. But, have you ever felt too energetic? What happens then?" Get a few popcorn answers (Hard to pay attention, fidgety, can't sit still, mood gets irritable, etc.). **"In those situations, it can be really helpful to practice a calming strategy to help us feel more balanced."**

"Notice how your body feels now that it is energized." Give students a few seconds to think about their answer.
"What emotion do you feel?" Give students a few seconds to think about their answer.

"How big is the emotion on a scale of 1-5?" Give students a few seconds to think about their answer.

"Now, let's try a calming activity to help us regulate our emotions. Take a slow, deep breath in, and then slowly exhale. Keep breathing deeply." Pause for a few seconds.

"Now, look around the room, and notice five colors that you can see." Pause for a few seconds.

"Once you've identified five colors you can see, I invite you to close your eyes, if you feel comfortable. If you don't want to close your eyes, that is OK too—just focus

your eyes on a spot on your desk or on the ground in front of you. Now, notice four things that you are touching right now." Pause for a few seconds.

"Notice three things that you can hear." Pause for a few seconds.

"Notice two things you can smell." Pause for a few seconds.

"Finally, notice one thing that you can taste." Pause for a few seconds.

"Keep breathing deeply, as you slowly open your eyes or look up." Pause for a few seconds.

"With a show of hands, who feels more calm after that activity?"

"What are some other calming regulation strategies we could use at school or at home?" Record a few popcorn answers on the whiteboard (breathing exercises, going outside, taking a nap, listening to calming music, visualizing a calm place, etc.).

Pass out the Regulation Station worksheets to students.
"Let's take a couple of minutes to begin filling out our own Regulation Railroad worksheets. Write down what Strengths and what calming and energizing strategies you would like to use to help you regulate. You can copy some of the ideas we have on the board if they feel helpful to you." Give the students a few minutes to fill out their worksheets. If they don't have enough time to finish their worksheets, that's OK.

MY REGULATION RAILROAD

1 What do I notice in my body?

2 What emotion do I feel?

3 How big is the emotion?

4 What will I do to regulate myself?

STRENGTHS I CAN USE:

CALMING ACTIVITIES	ENERGIZING ACTIVITIES

Talking Circle (2 min)

“As we finish today’s lesson, let’s take a moment to hear each other’s ideas. Turn to a partner, and share two things you wrote down on your worksheet.” Give the students one or two minutes to share.

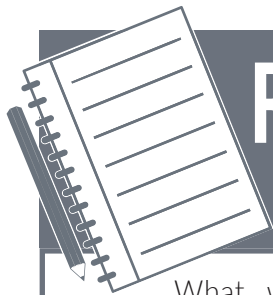
“Thank you all for your participation today!” After students have shared with a partner, have them put their Regulation Railroad worksheets in a place where they can access it for the following lesson.



EVERYDAY APPLICATION

The Regulation Railroad can be a helpful tool to use with your class throughout the school day. It can also be helpful in the case of planned or unplanned events that may cause disruption to the typical school day. For example, field trips, fire drills, shelter in place, assemblies, lock in/out, or simply if you are seeing that your class is dysregulated (high or low energy). For some students, school safety drills or special events can be highly dysregulating, causing fear, anxiety, hyperactivity, or activating their Fight-Flight-Freeze response. Co-regulating with students after these experiences is a valuable process to both communicate safety and connection as well as teach healthy regulation skills.

Consider talking with school administration about adding regulation strategies as a part of school safety drill protocols.



REFLECTION

Take a moment to reflect on this lesson. We encourage you to capture your reflections in a notebook or a journal.

What was a highlight from this lesson?

What would you do differently the next time you teach this lesson?

What is a Strength you noticed in a student or in your class during this lesson?

What is something you noticed or learned about yourself during the lesson?

Is there a story or experience from this lesson that you’d like to capture or remember?

Other thoughts or reflections?

We would love your feedback on what worked well and what could improve to help Sources of Strength continue to grow.

Scan this QR code or visit www.sourcesofstrength.org/elementaryfeedback to give feedback on this lesson!



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