

ANNEX 1: Emotional regulation practices

This annex provides simple techniques to help you manage stress related to your work and to support caregivers who may feel overwhelmed. Practicing these techniques regularly helps you stay calm, focused, and effective in your counseling.

1 Why emotional regulation matters

When you experience stress, your body and mind can shift out of balance. You may feel anxious, tense, or disconnected. This is called **dysregulation**.

When you are **regulated**, you are calm, grounded, and able to think clearly. Regulation allows you to listen well, make good decisions, and help others feel safe.

During counseling, both **self-regulation** and **co-regulation** are important:

- **Self-regulation** → calming and grounding yourself first. These practices help you stabilize your nervous system, improving focus, emotional resilience, and your ability to support others.
- **Co-regulation** → using your calm presence to help others feel calm and safe. Once you are regulated, you can model calmness and help caregivers or children regulate in turn.

Regulation practices help bring you or someone you are supporting back to a state of calm and balance.

2 Types of regulation practices

There are two main types of regulation practices.



Soothing

Calm and settle when tense, overwhelmed, or worried
→ e.g. after an argument

Examples: Slow breathing, grounding, self-hug.



Activating

Boost energy when tired, withdrawn, or sluggish
→ e.g. after lunch or long sessions.

Examples: Stomping feet, shaking, gentle movement.

3 Different styles of practice

Each regulation technique fits into one of several styles, depending on what you are addressing (e.g., feelings of being overwhelmed, low energy) and how you are working (with yourself, with a caregiver, with a child). Choosing the right style helps you more directly support regulation.

- **Orienting:** Noticing your surroundings and connecting with the present moment. This helps signal to your nervous system: *we are safe now*.
- **Grounding:** Anchoring into your body or your environment (feet on floor, contact with chair, noticing body weight). This stabilizes and settles the system when you feel disconnected or floating.
- **Breathwork:** Using your breath intentionally to calm and regulate. Slow, steady or patterned breathing helps shift your nervous system from “alert” to “rest & digest”.
- **Movement:** Using gentle motion (or stronger motion if needed) to either release built-up energy (activating) or create gentle flow when energy is low. The body moves, the system relaxes or re-energizes.

- **Self-touch / Interoception:** Bringing awareness to your internal state through contact (hands on heart, chest, belly) or noticing sensations inside your body. This fosters self-soothing, reconnecting you to your internal safety signals.
- **Resource-oriented:** Drawing on internal strengths (you have done this before, you are capable) or external support (colleague, safe space) to build resilience and regulation. Regulation isn't only about calming; it's also about anchoring in strength and support.

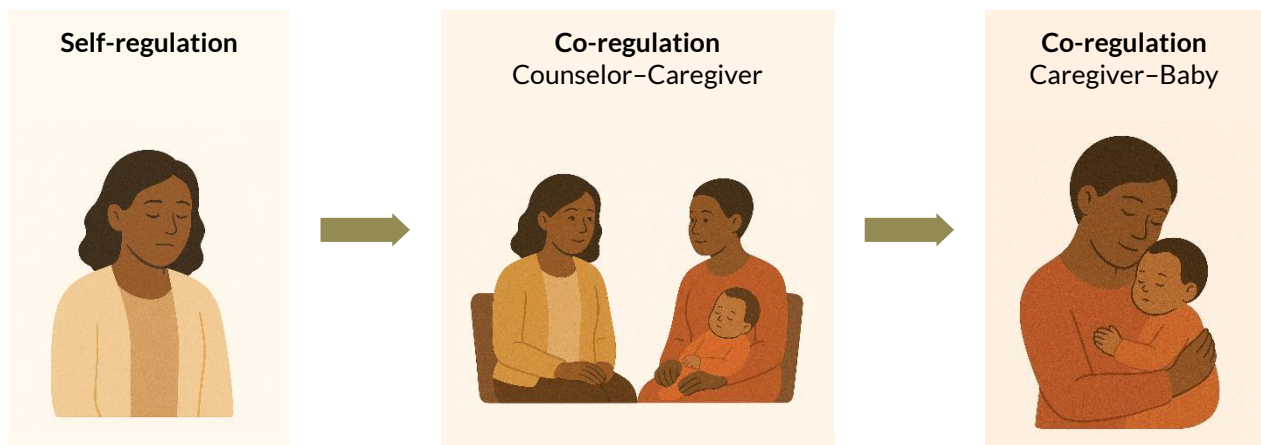
4 Your practice

A. Start with self-regulation practices

Regulation takes practice. Try one or two techniques each day and notice which ones work best for you. Over time, these practices become part of your personal “toolbox”, ready to use whenever you need to regain balance.

B. Gradually progress from self-regulation to co-regulation practices

Once you are comfortable regulating yourself, you can extend these skills to help others.



Self-regulation practices

Orienting practices



Orienting (Soothing):

- Gently look around and name three neutral or pleasant objects in your surroundings.
- State your name, location and the date to bring awareness to the present moment.
- Focus on your feet touching the floor or the weight of your body in a chair to anchor yourself.

Grounding practices



Physical grounding (Soothing):

- Notice the sensation of your feet pressing firmly into the ground.
- Feel the contact of your hands on your thighs or the surface you are sitting on.
- Slowly roll your feet side to side, focusing on the sensation.



5-4-3-2-1 senses check (Soothing):

- Identify 5 things you can see, 4 you can feel, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, and 1 you can taste (or imagine tasting).

Breathwork practices



Connecting with the breath (Soothing):

- Observe your natural breathing rhythm without trying to change it.
- Place a hand on your chest or belly and notice the rise and fall with each breath.



Doubling the exhale (Soothing):

- Inhale for a count of 2, 3, or 4, and exhale for double the count (e.g., 4, 6, or 8).



Candle breath (Soothing):

- Imagine softly blowing out a candle. Exhale through pursed lips with a slow, steady breath.



Physiological sigh (Soothing):

- Take two quick inhales through the nose (the second deeper) and exhale slowly through the mouth.

Movement-based practices



Shaking (Activating):

- Shake out your hands, feet, or body to release tension and discharge energy.



Stomping feet (Activating):

- Firmly stomp your feet on the ground and feel the connection with the floor.



Thumping thighs (Activating):

- Gently thump your thighs with your fists, moving rhythmically up and down your legs.

Interoception and self-touch practices



Self-holding (Soothing):

- Possible self-holds:
 - One hand on the heart and one on the belly.
 - One hand on the forehead, the other on the brainstem (back of the neck).
 - Hands gently cupping the ribs or resting on the thighs.
 - One hand on the sternum and the other on the upper back.



Dialogue with sensations (Soothing):

- Acknowledge physical sensations by observing and naming them (e.g., "I notice tightness in my shoulders").
- Use compassionate language, such as "I hear you, I notice this feeling."



Bilateral patting (Butterfly hugs) (Soothing):

- Cross your arms over your chest and alternately tap your upper arms.

Co-regulation practices

Orienting practices



Orienting together (Soothing):

- Guide caregivers to notice neutral or positive objects in their surroundings.
- Invite them to state their name or their baby's name as a grounding exercise.

With children: Encourage caregivers to observe their child's features, such as tiny fingers or their breathing rhythm.

Grounding together



Physical grounding (Soothing):

- Support caregivers in noticing their feet on the floor or their body in a chair.

With children: Help caregivers focus on the weight of their child on their lap or the warmth of skin-to-skin contact.



Present-moment awareness (Soothing):

- Encourage caregivers to observe small, neutral details in their environment (e.g., colors or textures).

With children: Invite caregivers to notice the smell, movement, or sound of their child.

Breathwork



Breathing together (Soothing):

- Model slow, steady breathing and invite caregivers to follow your rhythm.

With children: Encourage caregivers to breathe deeply while observing or holding their child, using the connection to calm both themselves and their child.

Movement-based co-regulation



Swaying together (Activating):

- Gently sway side to side with a caregiver to release tension and create connection.

Group practice: Learners stand in a circle, place one hand on the back of their neighbor's heart, and sway together.

With children: Support caregivers in rocking or swaying with their child, noticing the shared rhythm and connection.

Resource-oriented practices



External resource awareness (Soothing):

- Guide caregivers to focus on their connection to their baby as a source of grounding and strength.

Resources:



Mind My Peelings. *Understanding the Window of Tolerance and How It Affects You.*

Available at: <https://www.mindmypeelings.com/blog/window-of-tolerance>



Irene Lyon. *How to De-Stress in 7 Steps.*

Available at: <https://irenelyon.com/7steps/>



Irene Lyon. *A Field Guide to Your Nervous System.*

Available at: <https://irenelyon.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/IL-Field-Guide-to-your-NS.pdf>



Irene Lyon. *20-Minute Neurosensory Exercise (Audio Practice).*

Available at: <https://irenelyon.com/20-min-exercise>