



The TOOLBOX

TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THEIR EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL NEEDS



HOW CAN I CALM DOWN WHEN MY EMOTIONS ARE RUNNING HIGH?

TOOL: Prevention | Intervention

TARGET AUDIENCE: Teens

TOOL INTENDED FOR: Teens

DESIGN

Jeanne Lagacé-Leblanc
Claudia Verret
Line Massé



HOW CAN I CALM DOWN WHEN MY EMOTIONS ARE RUNNING HIGH?

TOOL: Prevention | Intervention

TOOL INTENDED FOR: Teens

TARGET AUDIENCE: Teens

- Teens who have difficulty managing their emotions, particularly children who are stressed, impulsive, inattentive, hyperactive, oppositional, aggressive, anxious, depressed or those with autism spectrum disorder.

NEEDS AND BEHAVIOURAL MANIFESTATIONS

- Difficulty managing emotional states that can lead to emotional escalation.
- Difficulty regaining a state of calm and well-being after experiencing an intense emotion.

SPECIFIC GOALS

- To help the teens manage their emotions in order to avoid emotional escalation or regain a state of calm and well-being after experiencing an intense emotional state.

DESIGN

Jeanne Lagacé-Leblanc (Research Assistant) – Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières

Claudia Verret (Full Professor) – Université du Québec à Montréal

Line Massé (Full Professor) – Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières

HOW CAN I CALM DOWN WHEN MY EMOTIONS ARE RUNNING HIGH?

It's sometimes difficult to manage the range of emotions that we may experience during adolescence. We may feel more emotional, edgy and we may also have more intense reactions. Sometimes our emotions "are all mixed up" or we keep everything inside when we don't know what to do with these overly intense emotions. There are various strategies to help you calm the negative emotions you feel. It's best that you try several strategies, since there isn't only one right way to calm down. The following are some tips to help you better manage your emotions.

Take the time to reflect on the intensity of the emotions experienced

To help you assess the intensity of your emotions, you can use a scale of 1 to 10. For each level, you can associate words that describe your emotion or emotional state, for example, 1 = very calm and 10 = very depressed. You can also imagine a thermometer on which intensity levels describe anger, e.g.: 1) calm, 2) irritated, 3) annoyed, 4) frustrated, 5) furious or verbal cues (words used, tone of voice, etc.) or non-verbal cues related to emotion (sweaty hands, red face, clenched fists, brows, etc.). When you are in a difficult situation, determine the emotion on a scale and assess your level of well-being. This is an important step that will help you choose a way to feel better. Depending on the intensity of the emotion, the method chosen will be different. For example, if you're at 3, a few slow breaths may help you regain your composure; if you're at 10, it would be better to withdraw to calm down.



Detect situations that trigger loss of control

Think about past situations where you've lost control. Are there similar situations? Are you able to identify what triggered the tantrum or loss of control? If you aren't able to do this, you can always discuss it with your parents or friends. Once the main triggers are identified, make a plan to prevent these situations: "If X happens, THEN I'll do Y." There's thus less chance that you'll lose control of yourself if these situations arise.

Withdraw to a place where you feel good

Think of a place where you feel good, whether it's in a room in the house (e.g. under your bed covers) or at school (e.g. in the library). If nothing comes to mind, you can set up a space where you can withdraw to calm down when the emotions you are experiencing are too strong or the negative emotions are too intense. You can decorate this space with soft colours and dim lights, put on quiet music and do an activity that will help you reduce your stress level (e.g. write your diary, draw a mandala, squeeze a stress ball, flip through a magazine, etc.). This place will be your relaxation space that will allow you to temporarily withdraw and where you can regain calm.

Control your breath

Breathing techniques may seem simple or boring to you, since you “inhale and exhale” every moment. As long as you do the exercise mindfully, these techniques are very effective and easy to use. They will allow you to relax quickly and in any situation or context. To be effective, breathing must be deep and slow. The abdominal breathing technique, which aims to use the belly muscle (diaphragm) to take deep breaths, is highly recommended. The cardiac coherence technique is also another very effective and easy-to-use technique. To practise this technique, there are various apps that you can download directly to your cell phone (e.g. RespiRelax, CardioZen, Kardia Respiration, Relaxation).

Abdominal breathing technique

1. Place your hands on both sides of your abdomen.
2. Exhale to empty your lungs of air and make way for fresh air.
3. Inhale slowly and deeply through the nose.
4. Using your hands, feel your abdomen swell like a balloon.
5. When your abdomen is full of air, hold your breath for three seconds.
6. Exhale gently and slowly through your nose or mouth, as if there's a candle in front of you and you shouldn't blow it out.
7. Repeat these steps three to five times.

Use muscle relaxation techniques

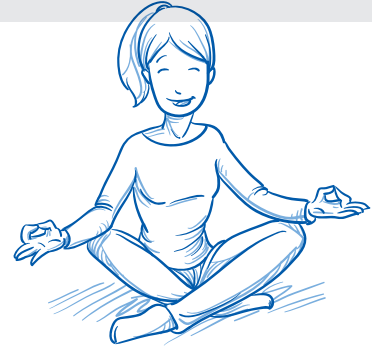
Muscle relaxation can help you reduce the tension associated with intense emotion. There are three main types of techniques:

- 1) Stretch/release: Stretch a body part as far as possible, hold the position for a few seconds, then gently release and balance the part;
- 2) Dropping: Lift a body part and then drop it gently without momentum;
- 3) Contraction/release: Contract muscle groups for a few seconds from head to toe (e.g. for the head: forehead, eyebrow, nose, chin) while focusing on the physical sensations of tension that contraction causes, then releasing, this time focusing on the feelings of muscle relaxation.

These three techniques can be done in different environments, but for starters, you can experiment with them on your bed. Various apps (e.g. PMR - Progressive Muscle Relax, Superchill, Calm) and online video clips (on YouTube) and audio clips (e.g. PasseportSanté.net podcasts) have helpful tutorials for practising guided breathing or muscle relaxation.

Practise yoga or mindfulness meditation

To promote optimal relaxation, you can also practice light yoga, for example, before going to bed. There are various online tutorials suitable for all levels. Yoga not only has physical effects, but also helps to better manage emotions. Yoga can help you increase positive emotions and get rid of negative emotions. It's a foolproof happiness cure!



Meditation can help you manage your emotions in different situations of your daily life by having a fully attentive mind. You could take 1 minute to refocus just before an exam, write a reminder in your diary to be present (stay in touch with what you're experiencing) or do something (e.g. visualize a very good mark on your exam copy, a discussion with your parents without arguing, etc.). It's up to you to find the strategy to stay Zen!

Clear your head

When you dwell on thoughts that make you experience negative emotions or when you're having trouble changing the negative emotions you're experiencing, it may be helpful to direct your attention to something else.

This will help you regain a state of well-being and regain control of your emotions. Various ways can easily be used: mental imagery activities (positive visualization), counting backwards, singing, doing mental exercises, making a mandala, retreating to a quiet corner, drawing, listening to music, etc. These ways will help you take a step back from the situation and the intense emotions it caused.

Do intense physical activity

Physical activity, especially if it's intense (e.g. running, jumping rope, jumping on a trampoline, stationary bike), can help reduce physical tension associated with intense emotions. Make sure you choose an activity that you enjoy and that brings you pleasure. The duration of the activity does not have to be long; the important thing is that you do it as often as possible to reduce and prevent tension. You can even make it more fun by inviting a friend to practise a sports activity with you.

CONCLUSION

It should be kept in mind that these strategies are not effective for all situations or for all teens. You may prefer some techniques over others. The important thing is to try various strategies and find what works for you. Emotions are part of life. The good news is that there are many ways to learn how to better manage them. There will be many benefits for you, your family and friends. You can also talk about strategies with an adult (e.g. parent, professional), who can help you deal with the very intense emotions you may experience during adolescence.

Massé, L. & Verret, C. (In press). Aider les jeunes à mieux gérer leurs émotions difficiles. Dans N. Gaudreau (dir.), *Les conduites agressives à l'école*. Presses de l'Université du Québec.

Verret, C. & Massé, L. (2017). *Gérer ses émotions et s'affirmer positivement*. Chenelière Éducation.

Verret, C. & Massé, L. (In press). La mise en place de mesures d'apaisement pour favoriser l'autocontrôle des élèves du primaire et du secondaire. Dans N. Gaudreau (dir.), *Les conduites agressives à l'école*. Presses de l'Université du Québec.

