

From Thrills to Skills: Fostering Emotion Regulation among Youth

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Mental Health and Well-being Among Youth

DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

- › 39% of Ontario high-school students experience moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety and depression (Boak et al., 2018)
- › The prevalence of mood and anxiety disorders in young people has doubled from 2012 to 2020 (Statistics Canada, 2023)
 - Most prevalent in women ages 15-24 (Statistics Canada, 2023)

WELL-BEING

- › 1 in 5 Canadians experience a mental health illness every year (Smetanin et al., 2011)
- › Canadian youth self-reported poorer mental health ratings from 2019-2023 (Statistics Canada, 2024)
 - Girls aged 12-17 are more likely to report declines in mental health (Statistics Canada, 2024)

OTHER CONCERNS

- › In 2020, about 1 in 4 hospitalizations in youth aged 5-24, was a result of mental health conditions (The Canadian Institute for Health Information [CIHI], 2022)
- › People with a mental illness are twice as likely to have a substance use disorder compared to the general population (Rush et al., 2008)

Contributing Factors to Mental Health and Well-being

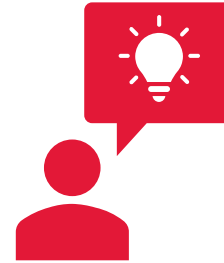
- Individual factors (e.g., resilience, personality, biopsychosocial)
- Social connectedness, mattering
- Stressors
- Relationships (e.g., peers, romantic)
- Family issues (e.g., pre-natal, hereditary)
- COVID-19 Pandemic
- Diversity, equity & inclusion

- **Emotion regulation**

What is Emotion Regulation?



Refers to an individuals' ability to influence which emotions they experience, when they experience them, and how they experience & express these emotions (Jacobs & Gross, 2014)



3 key theoretical frameworks:

Process Model (Gross, 1998): strategies to manage emotional experiences

Abilities Framework (Tull & Aldao, 2015): general emotional skills (e.g., awareness of emotions, acceptance of emotional experiences)

Interpersonal Model (Zaki & Williams, 2013): strategies individuals use to seek regulation from others

Successful Emotion Regulation

5 Key Principles:

- 1) Able to experience a wide range of emotions
- 2) Can adjust the strength and duration of emotions
- 3) Shift smoothly between different emotions
- 4) Align emotional expressions with cultural norms
- 5) Use language to help manage emotions

(Thompson, 1994; Howells, 2018)



We can approach ER difficulties with these guiding principles

Emotion Dysregulation

Dysfunctional emotion regulation processes:

- 1) ineffective or extreme ER skills

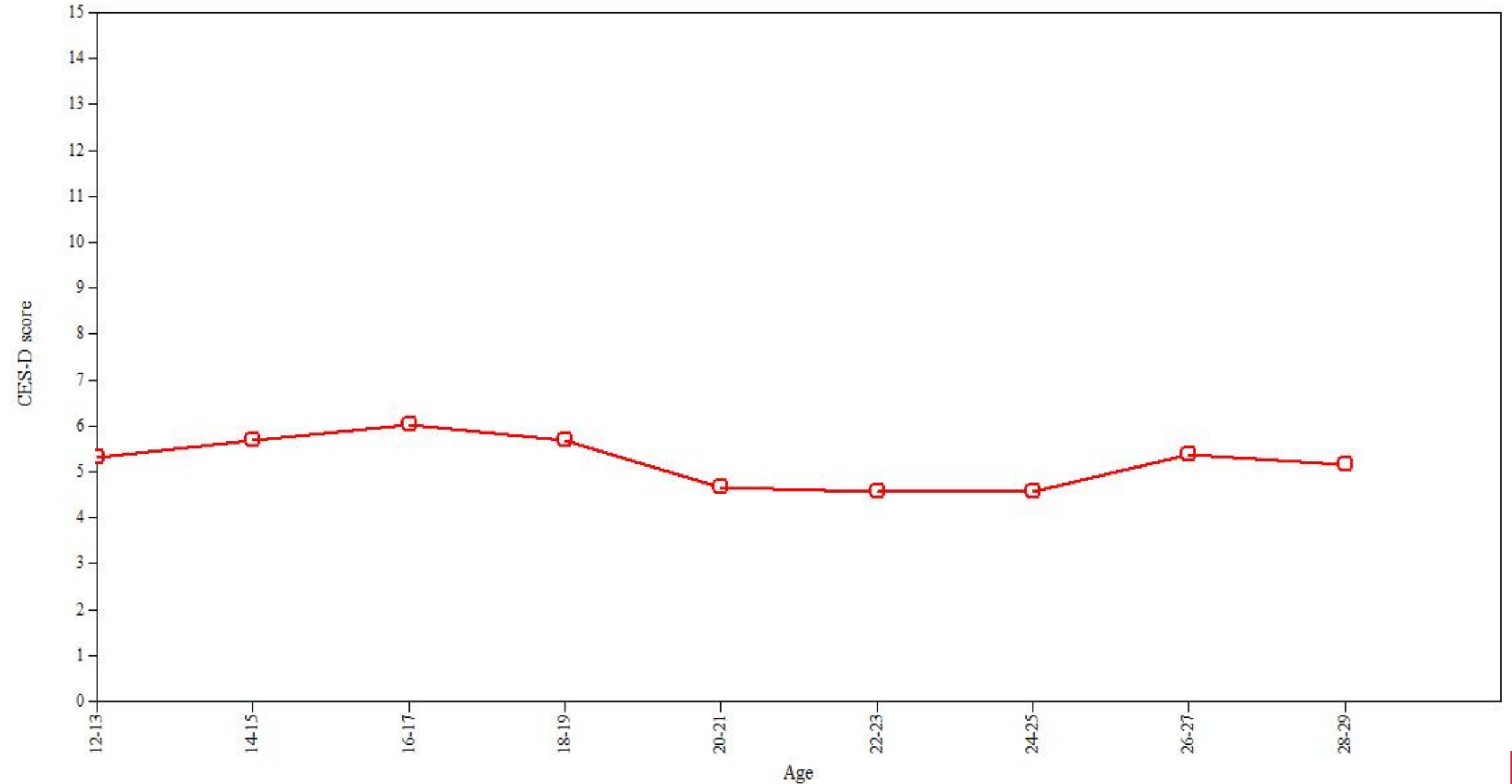
Young adults often describe feeling flooded by emotions, lacking control, and feeling confused or frustrated by their emotional reactions

6 key dimensions:

- 1) Difficulty recognizing one's own emotions
- 2) Lack of clarity about what they're feeling
- 3) Struggles with accepting their emotions
- 4) Limited ability to access effective coping strategies
- 5) Trouble controlling impulses during intense emotions
- 6) Difficulty staying focused on goals when feeling negative emotions

(Cole et al., 1994, Gratz & Roemer, 2004, Howells, 2018)

Mean Sample CES-D (Center for Epidemiologic Studies – Depression Scale, 9-item) Scores by Age



Developmental Trajectories

Children (ages 7-12)

- › Improved ability to identify emotions
- › Begin using more complex emotion regulation strategies (e.g., suppression, problem solving)

Adolescents (ages 13-17)

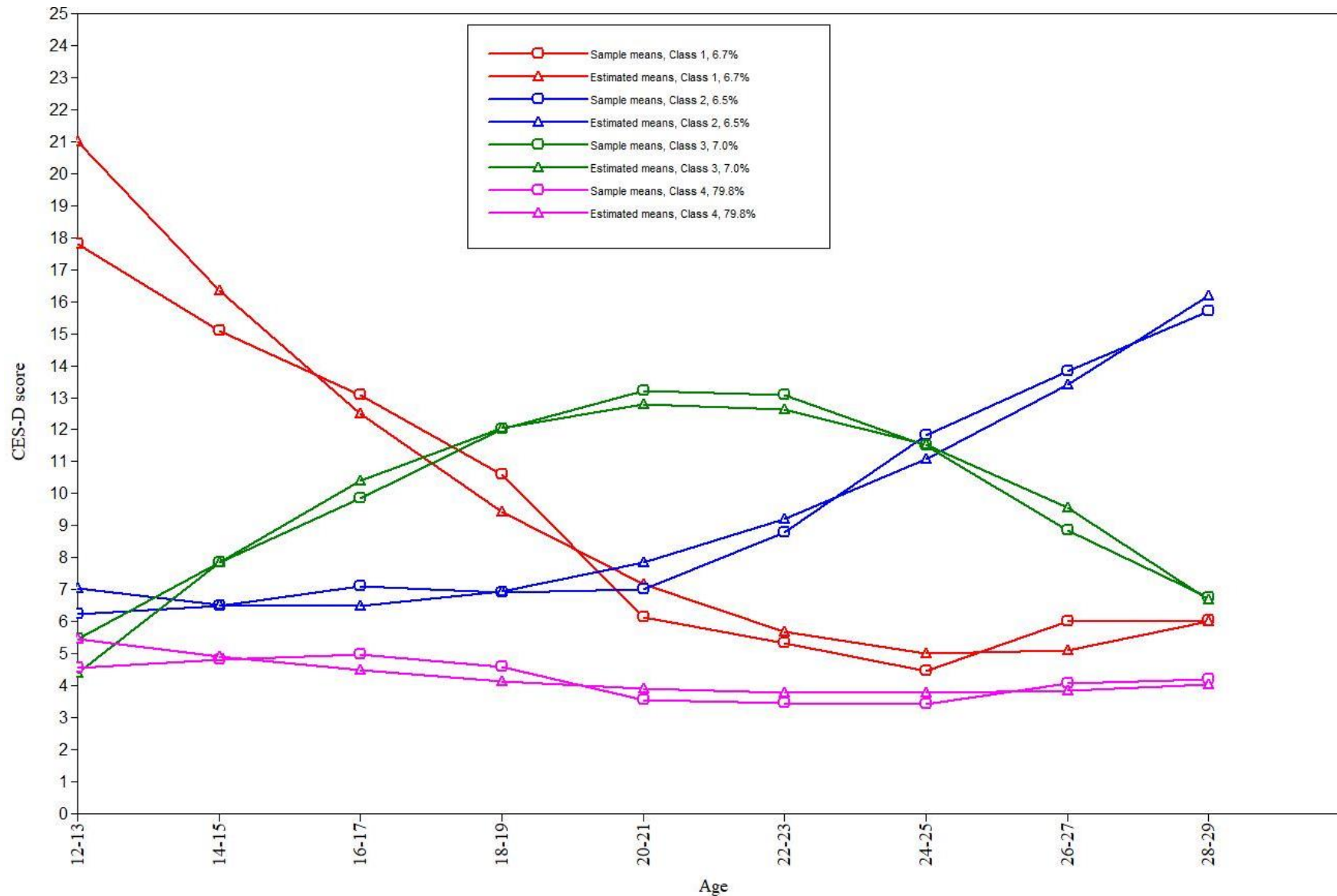
- › Potential for decreased abilities in regulating emotions due to considerable developmental changes
- › Rumination is one of the most commonly used emotion regulation strategies during this period

Emerging adults (ages 18-29)

- › Less research with this population
- › Emotion regulation abilities tend to improve from adolescence; however, use of select maladaptive strategies (e.g., suppression, rumination) appear to increase during this stage

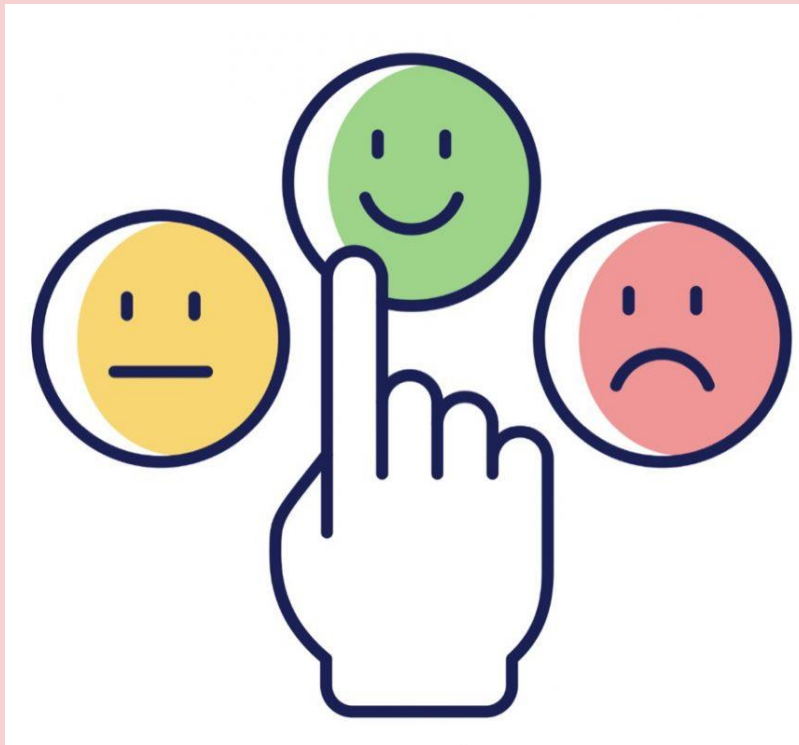
(Rawana et al., 2014; Zimmerman & Iwanski, 2014)

Four-class Unconditional Growth Mixture Model Estimated and Sample CES-D (Center for Epidemiologic Studies - Depression Scale, 9-item) Score Means by Age



Intrapersonal Emotion Regulation

Processes by which individuals manage and experience their own emotions (Gross, 1998)



Strategies Snapshot

- **Cognitive Reappraisal**
 - Modifying how you interpret a situation to alter its emotional impact (Gross & John, 2003)
- **Suppression**
 - Inhibiting the expression of emotion, though less effective for well-being (Gross, 2002)
- **Mindfulness**
 - Focusing on the present moment without judgment to reduce emotional reactivity (Kabat-Zinn, 2003)
- **Self-Compassion**
 - Treating oneself with kindness during difficult times, which can aid emotional recovery (Neff, 2003)



Interpersonal emotion regulation (IER)

DEFINITION

Refers to emotion regulations episodes that occur during social interactions, where individuals utilize others to help regulate their own emotions and meet their desired goals (Zaki & Williams, 2013)

EXAMPLE STRATEGIES

- Enhancing positive affect
 - Seeking others to increase positive feelings
- Perspective taking
 - Using others to be reminded to not worry or that others experience worse events
- Social modeling
 - Looking to others for examples of how to cope
- Soothing
 - Seeking others for comfort or sympathy

ER Flexibility

Definition: *The ability to switch ER strategy use in conjunction with changing contextual demands (Aldao, 2013)*

➤ Relationship to Outcomes

- Predicts long-term adjustment and protects against the effects of cumulative stress (Aldao, 2013)
- Related to successful social interactions (Gross et al., 2006)
- Adaptive ER flexibility promotes well-being and is related to decreased psychopathology (Aldao et al., 2015)
- Sometimes maladaptive
 - High ER flexibility does not mean strategy selection aligns with goals (Blanke et al., 2020)
 - May be context specific (Haines et al., 2016)

ER flexibility highlights the importance of measuring daily ER use

What does ER Influence?



General ER and Mental Health

Maladaptive ER use associated with:

- Increased internalizing and externalizing problems (Joormann & Stanton, 2016)
- Disordered eating (Hunt et al., 2017)
- Non-suicidal self-injury (Yates, 2009)

Depression and Anxiety:

- Maladaptive interpersonal emotion regulation depending on context (Hofmann & Doan, 2018)

General ER and Well-being

- Adaptive ER promotes successful transitions
(Tavernier & Willoughby, 2015)
- Higher number of interpersonal ER partners and perceived efficacy of those interactions associated with increased well-being (Cheung et al., 2015)



Specific ER Strategies and Outcomes



Intrapersonal

Cognitive Reappraisal (e.g., Levin & Rawana, 2022)

- Fewer internalizing symptoms
- Higher well-being

Suppression (e.g., Levin & Rawana, 2022)

- Increased internalizing symptoms
- Decreased well-being



Interpersonal

Enhancing Positive Affect (e.g., Chan & Rawana, 2021)

- Lower levels of internalizing symptoms
- Higher well-being

Soothing (e.g., Hofmann et al., 2016)

- Higher levels of anxiety
- Higher levels of depression

Our Research Findings

Brief mindfulness-based intervention is effective for decreasing anxiety and depression, and increasing well-being, in emerging adults (Diplock et al., 2024)

Emotion dysregulation is associated with reduced well-being and greater psychopathology (Levin & Rawana, 2022)

Interpersonal ER strategies are differentially related to internalizing symptoms, well-being, and relationship quality (Chan & Rawana, 2021).

Emotion dysregulation mediated the relationship between positive parenting behaviours and well-being (Lee, 2022)

Interpersonal ER general tendency and efficacy mediated the negative relationship between social anxiety and well-being (Onorato, 2022)

- Interpersonal ER related to higher well-being
- Social anxiety related to decreased interpersonal ER tendency and efficacy



EMA Project

- **Objectives:**
 - 1) Explore how emerging adults use intra- and interpersonal ER in their **daily lives**
 - 2) Understand how **individual and contextual factors** are related to daily emotions and ER
 - 3) Identify the ER strategies and abilities that are associated with **well-being and psychopathology**
- Used mobile-app based **ecological momentary assessment (EMA)**
 - Reporting on symptoms/experiences in real-time and in real-world environments, 5x a day, for 10 days
- Currently in the data analysis stage

Prompt View

What did you do to enhance or reduce the intensity of emotion by yourself?

- Thinking a lot about your thoughts/feelings
- Thinking of different ways to interpret the situation
- Coming up with a concrete plan for action
- Trying to accept your thoughts/feelings
- Trying to hide your thoughts/feelings
- Trying to ignore or push away thoughts/feelings
- Trying to distract yourself

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Prompt View

How helpful was trying to accept your thoughts/feelings in enhancing or reducing your emotions?

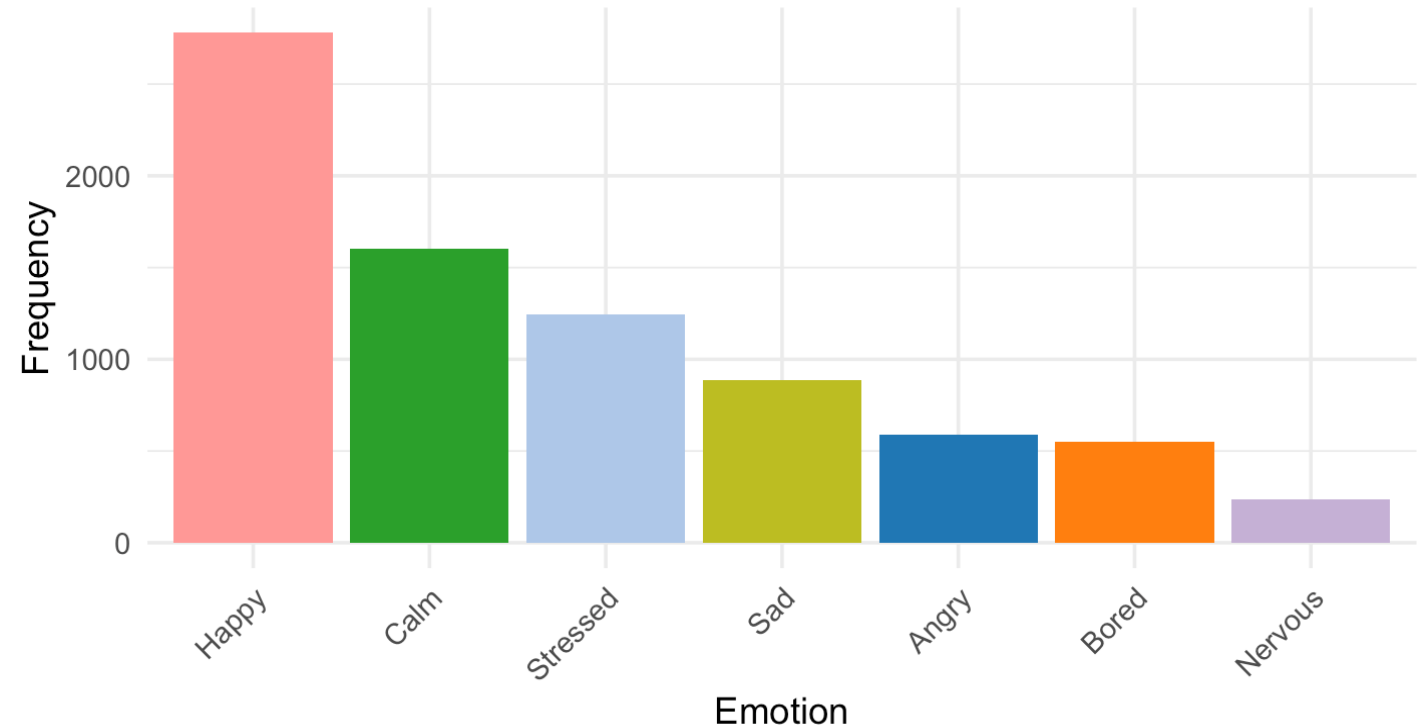
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Very unhelpful Very helpful

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What we know from our Research

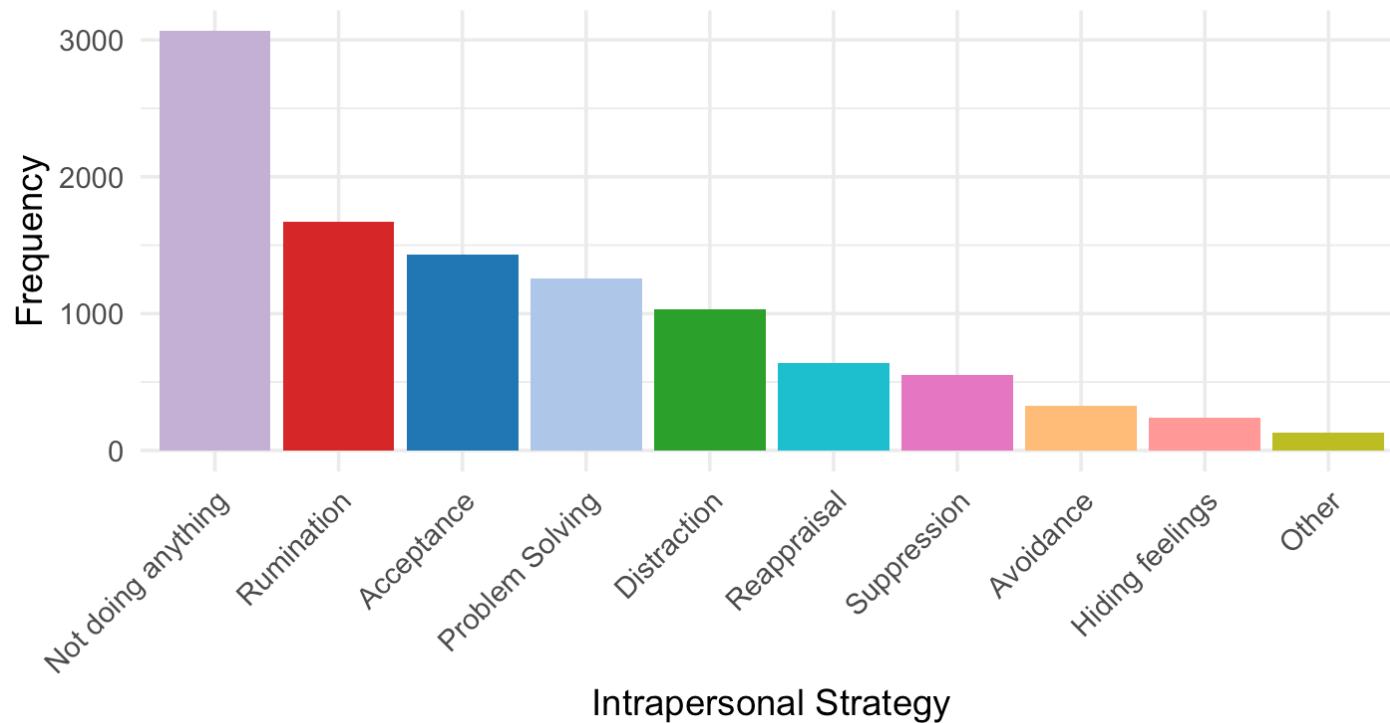
- Preliminary analyses from our EMA data
- What **emotions** are emerging adults reporting on daily basis?
- Is this what you expected?



Exploration into **daily** emotions suggests emerging adults are experiencing significant levels of **positive** emotions

What we know from our Research

- › What **intrapersonal strategies** are emerging adults reporting on a daily basis?

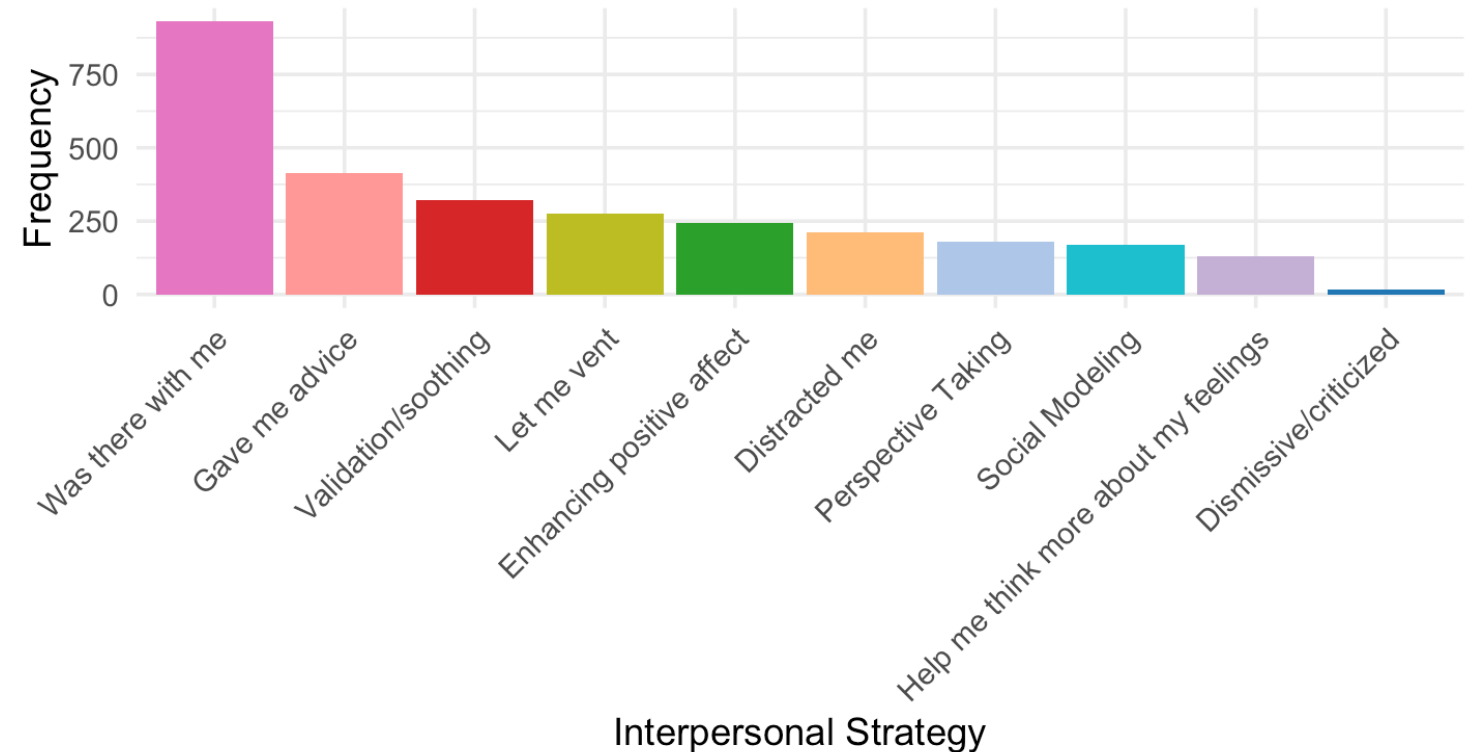


Majority of emerging adults are reporting not doing anything to regulate their emotions

How come this might be the case?

What we know from our Research

- › What **interpersonal strategies** are emerging adults reporting on a daily basis?



Emerging adults are experiencing a range of emotions, and it's helpful to be aware of and flexible with various ER strategies

Youth Scenario

- Majda is a 16-year-old and is in Grade 12. She is a First-Generation student (i.e., the first in her family to attend high school in Canada)
- She has two younger siblings in elementary school
- She enjoys art (e.g., drawing, painting, doodling)
- Majda feels like she matters to her family and has a few, close positive friendships
- She also has perfectionistic tendencies related to academics
- She obtains B grades and has challenges completing homework
- Majda struggles with anxiety (e.g., frequent excessive worrying; at times, feels like she cannot open up to her family & friends; difficulty falling asleep; difficulty concentrating on schoolwork).

Let's chat emotion regulation!



ER Work Sheet

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Emotion Regulation Strategies

Intrapersonal Emotional Regulation	Interpersonal Emotional Regulation
Processes by which individuals manage and experience their own emotions.	Emotion regulation episodes that occur during social interactions, where individuals utilize others to help regulate their own emotions and meet their desired goals.
Cognitive Reappraisal Modifying how you interpret a situation to alter its emotional impact. 	Enhancing Positive Affect Seeking others to increase positive feelings. 
Suppression Inhibiting the expression of emotion, though less effective for well-being. 	Perspective Taking Using others to be reminded to not worry or that others experience worse events. 
Mindfulness Focusing on the present moment without judgement to reduce emotional reactivity. 	Social Modeling Looking to others for examples of how to cope. 
Self-Compassion Treating oneself with kindness during difficult times, which can aid emotional recovery. 	Soothing Seeking others for comfort or sympathy. 
Emotion Regulation Flexibility The ability to switch ER strategy use in conjunction with changing contextual demands.	

Information adapted from Gross, 1998; Zaki & Williams, 2013

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Youth Scenario

Majda is a 16-year-old and is in Grade 12. She is a First-Generation student (i.e., the first in her family to attend high school in Canada). She has two younger siblings in elementary school and enjoys art (e.g., drawing, painting, doodling). Majda feels like she matters to her family and has a few, close positive friendships. She also has perfectionistic tendencies related to academics. She obtains B grades and has challenges completing homework. Majda struggles with anxiety (e.g., frequent excessive worrying; at times, feels like she cannot open up to her family & friends; difficulty falling asleep; difficulty concentrating on schoolwork).

Let's chat emotion regulation!

- What else do you want to know?
- What emotion regulation *challenges and strengths* does Majda have (interpersonally, intrapersonally, flexibility)?
- What emotion regulation *skills* could Majda and her family be supported with?
- Any other issues?



In Small Groups – Complete Worksheet (15 mins)

- What else do you want to know?
- What emotion regulation *challenges and strengths* does Majda have (interpersonally, intrapersonally, flexibility, others)?
- How does her age influence how you understand her emotion regulation?
- What emotion regulation *skills* could Majda and her family be supported with?
- Any other issues?



Youth Scenario Discussion

Scenario Take-Aways

- There are no right answers on what adaptive emotion regulation skills should be used! It can be person- and situation-dependent
- Intersectionality may play a role in Madja's anxiety and emotion regulation abilities (e.g., engaging her family to support her)
- Using a strengths-based approach (e.g., leveraging art, close relationships) with Madja can ensure that tailored support is provided
- Emotion regulation interventions for this age group are limited, especially digital ones

Workshop Summary

- Mental health and well-being significant concerns for young people
- Emotion regulation matters & can be helpful
- Defining Intrapersonal and interpersonal ER, emotion flexibility
- Daily / big picture assessment helps
- Key research findings (e.g., no one size fits all ER strategy)
- Emotion regulation skills can be taught and strengthened
- Application to case-based scenario
- Next steps are delving into emotion regulation interventions

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How can we support emotion regulation among youth?

ⓘ Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.



Thank You

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