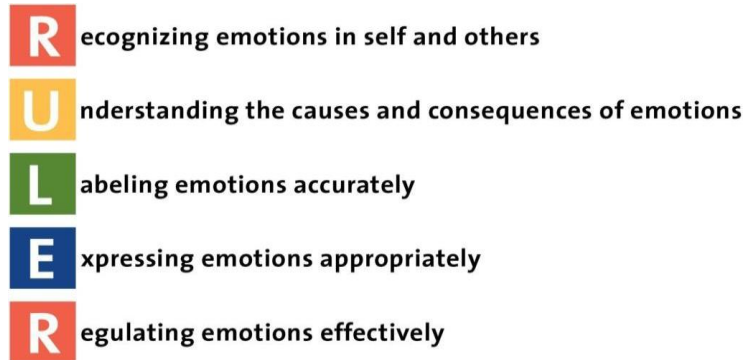


Emotional Regulation Tips for Parents of Athletes

1. Emotions are data. Human beings are hardwired to experience emotions. That's part of the human experience. This means that when we feel things, this is a response to what we're going through. All emotions are 'good' and 'valid' and NEED to be expressed. When we try to ignore emotions, they tend to bottle up and then explode at the wrong time. The best way to prevent explosion of emotion is keep an eye on them daily.
2. Keep in mind that your kids learn from your expression of emotion. Meaning that if you are quick to lash out, your child is observing that and the subconscious message you are sending is that emotions can't be controlled, and you are a victim to them. While you are coaching your child on more effective methods to handle emotions, be mindful of how you demonstrate this within yourself. We learn how to handle (or not handle) emotions often from our surroundings as children. Consider what you were taught about emotions (often that we don't talk about them) and what messages have you unknowingly sent to your kids about emotions?
3. Encourage your child to get curious about what the emotion is, and where it's coming from. This is something I say to my kids: "I can tell you're upset, and I'm wondering what you're feeling?" and "I wonder what could have caused you to feel this way?" Curiosity can be a great way to give the brain a little space and allow for a non-judgmental exploration of the emotion.
4. Often kids lack the language to express what their feeling, and if it's intense remember to not allow yourself to take on the emotion they are feeling. Take a deep breath, remember your role is to help guide your child (not to remove all bad feelings – even when you want to) to better understand and express themselves. I remind myself that their experience is not about me, and my goal is to prepare them for dealing with hard things 20+ years down the road when I'm not around.
5. Allow your kid to guide the discussion, while keeping an eye on their expression. Sports can be full of a variety of emotions and it's appropriate for them to have multiple emotions to even a single event. Help them label the emotion, and potentially which part of them feels what. For example, a recent conversation with my daughter involved her recognizing that a part of her was disappointed her team lost a game, while a part of her felt pride for specific improvements she made. People often assume they can't feel both and then shame themselves for feeling good when their team lost. It's fine to feel pride and disappointment at the same time.
6. When in doubt, hug them. Based on the Tend-and-befriend response to stress, caring for another human in response to stress triggers the release of oxytocin. Oxytocin's nickname is the love hormone and is a neurotransmitter that helps the brain's social instincts. Elevated levels make you want to connect with others. This helps to reinforce trust and connection that can be vital in extreme personal moments of distress.

This process is from Mark Brackett, author of Permission to Feel, Founder & Director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. His research has focused on teaching Teachers to use the RULER process to help kids develop emotional intelligence.



- Recognize emotions in yourself. What are you feeling right now in relation to energy and pleasantness? Where do you feel it in your body? Be specific.

- Understanding the cause. What might have caused my feelings or reaction? What is really behind the feeling?

- Labeling emotions. Name what you are feeling. Be specific.

- Express your emotions. Describe 1 way you can express the emotion(s) you listed above. Be specific.

- Regulating emotions. Pick a strategy to use to help regulate the emotion(s):
 - 1. Mindful breathing: Focus on slowing breathing down and relaxing the body.
 - 2. Forward-looking strategies: Preparing for an anticipated negative emotion by modifying your environment to help you adjust.
 - 3. Attention-shifting strategies: Plan something to focus on that will prevent your focus from shifting to triggers for negative emotions.
 - 4. Cognitive-reframing strategies: Change the way you explain the situation in your mind.
 - 5. Meta-Moment: Pause, take a deep breath, then ask yourself “What would my best self do right now?” Make a plan to follow that path.