

Emotional Regulation Strategies for Neurodivergent Teens

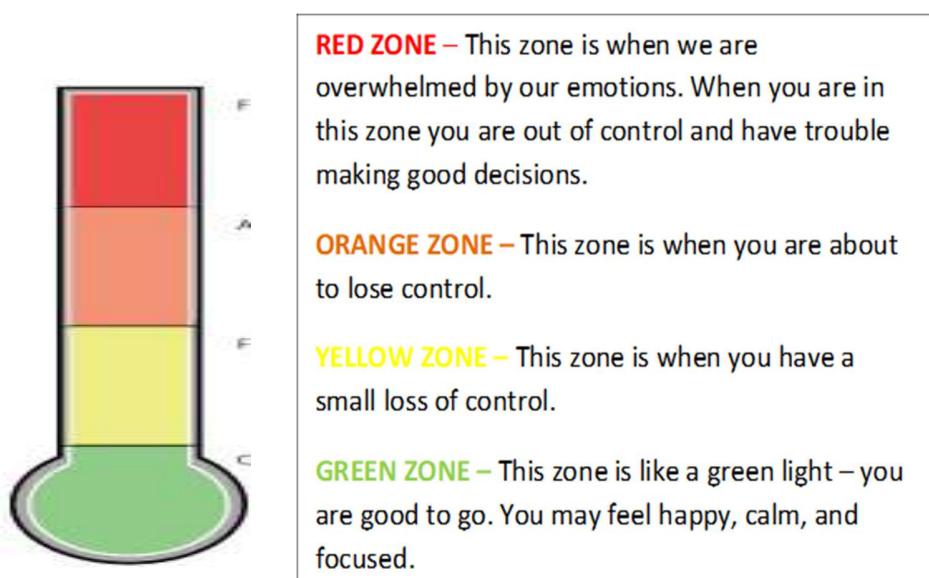
This worksheet is about understanding your nervous system — not fixing your feelings. All feelings make sense. They are signals, not problems.

1. Emotion Thermometer

Feelings aren't good or bad — they're **signals**.

The Emotion Thermometer is a way of noticing **how big a feeling feels**, so you can choose what might help in that moment.

Everyone moves up and down this thermometer every day. Nothing here means you're “too much” or doing anything wrong.



● GREEN ZONE – “I’m okay”

- You might feel calm, focused, settled, or even happy
- Your body feels manageable
- You can think, talk, and make decisions more easily

👉 This is when things usually feel easiest.

🟡 YELLOW ZONE – “Something’s starting to feel off”

- You might feel annoyed, worried, restless, or uncomfortable
- Your body might feel tense or buzzy
- You’re still coping, but it takes more effort

👉 This is a **signal**, not a failure. Catching feelings here can really help.

🟠 ORANGE ZONE – “I’m close to overload”

- You might feel frustrated, overwhelmed, panicky, or tearful
- Thinking gets harder
- You might feel the urge to escape, shut down, or react

👉 This is your nervous system asking for support.

🔴 RED ZONE – “I’m overwhelmed”

- Feelings feel huge and uncontrollable
- Your body may go into fight, flight, freeze, or shutdown
- It’s very hard to think or talk things through

👉 This is **not the time for problem-solving**. This is the time for safety and regulation.

Why this matters:

- Neurodivergent brains often feel things **more intensely and more quickly**
- Small things can push the thermometer up fast — especially after stress, masking, or rejection
- Learning your zones helps you **understand yourself**, not change who you are

The goal is **not** to stay in the green zone all the time.

The goal is to:

- Notice where you are
- Be kind to yourself
- Choose something that helps your body feel safer

2. Regulation Supports (Choose What Helps)

Movement Supports (for built-up energy)

- Walking, stretching, pacing, jumping
- Rocking, swinging, rhythmic movement
- Carrying something heavy or short tidy-up bursts
- Sports, dancing, trampolining

Best for: anger, restlessness, overwhelm

Calming & Sensory Supports

- Deep pressure (weighted blanket, tight hug if welcomed)
- Slow breathing, box breathing, humming
- Quiet space, low lighting, noise-cancelling headphones
- Warm shower, bath, wrapped blanket
- Fidgets or soft textures

Best for: anxiety, sensory overload, emotional flooding

Connection Supports

- Sitting beside a trusted adult in silence
- Watching a show together
- Petting an animal
- Texting a safe person
- Doing something side-by-side (gaming, drawing, baking)

Best for: loneliness, rejection, shame

Thinking Supports (once calmer)

- Naming the feeling ("This feels like rejection")
- Separating facts from interpretations
- Writing or drawing the worry
- Gentle reframes ("What else might be going on?")
- Coping statements ("This feeling will pass")

Best for: rumination, rejection sensitivity, social misunderstandings

Remember

You don't have to feel better straight away.

You're allowed to need support.

Your reactions make sense.

Strong feelings don't mean you're weak. They mean your nervous system is trying to protect you. Dr. Malie Coyne