

## Emotional Regulation Strategies for Neurodivergent Teens

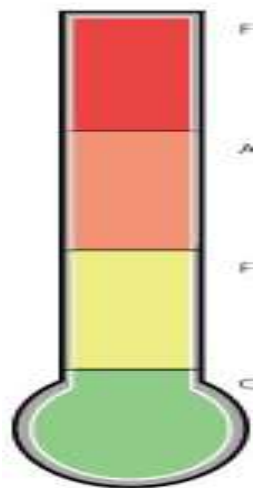
This worksheet is about understanding your nervous system — not fixing your feelings. All feelings make sense. They are signals, not problems.

### 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.



**RED ZONE** – This zone is when we are overwhelmed by our emotions. When you are in this zone you are out of control and have trouble making good decisions.

**ORANGE ZONE** – This zone is when you are about to lose control.

**YELLOW ZONE** – This zone is when you have a small loss of control.

**GREEN ZONE** – This zone is like a green light – you are good to go. You may feel happy, calm, and focused.

#### ● 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