

Emotion Regulation Skills in Children and Families: Assessment and Treatment Strategies

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Workshop Goals

1. Develop a working definition, and understand, different components of emotion regulation
2. Develop strategies with which to assess regulatory skills
3. Identify effective treatment strategies for helping children and families with the emotion regulation process

Workshop Outline

- Theoretical background
- Conceptual framework
- Empirical evidence
- Clinical application
- Examples

Emotion Regulation (ER): Working Definitions

...a modulation of emotion and behavior that helps facilitate interaction between the individual and the environment (Thompson, 1994)

...refers to changes in emotion (e.g., duration and intensity) or other psychological processes (e.g., social interaction or memory) due to activated emotions...and looking at changes in valence, intensity, and duration (Cole, Martin, and Dennis, 2004)

...a system composed of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional aspects of functioning that enables effortful control of attention and emotion for the purpose of goal-directed behavior or adaptive functioning (Blair & Raver, 2012 ; Calkins, 1997)

Theoretical Background: Process Model of Emotion Regulation (Gross & Thompson, 2007)

Provides a framework for understanding selected emotion regulation strategies that occur before, during, or after an emotion-generative process

Antecedent-focused - processes that occur before emotion generation

- Situation selection – action to increase or decrease the target emotion based on the situation
- Situation modification – actively modifying the physical environment to alter the emotional impact
- Attentional deployment – directing attention in a situation in order to shift emotional impact
- Cognitive change – shifting situation appraisals to shift emotional significance

Response-focused - processes that occur after emotion generation

- Refers to any direct physiological, experiential, or behavioral responding

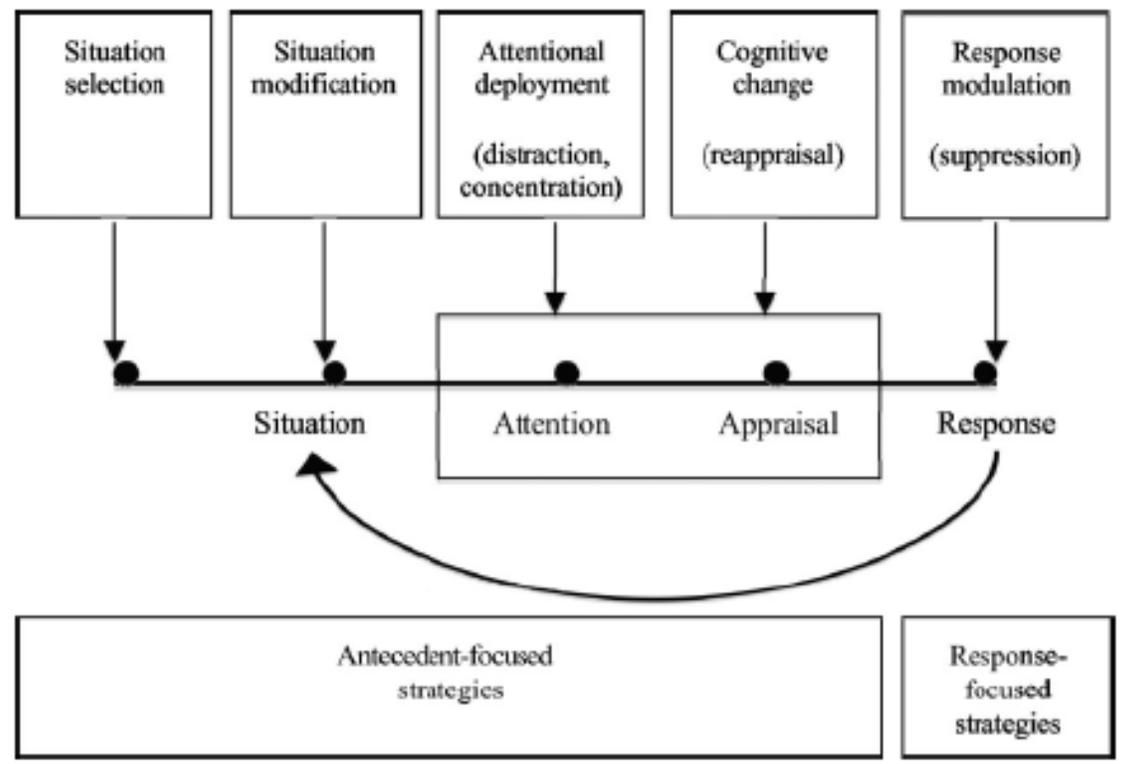


Figure 1. Process model of emotion regulation (Gross & Thompson, 2007; Webb, Miles, & Sheeran, 2012).

Theoretical Background: Dynamic Systems Theory

(Thelen & Smith, 2006)

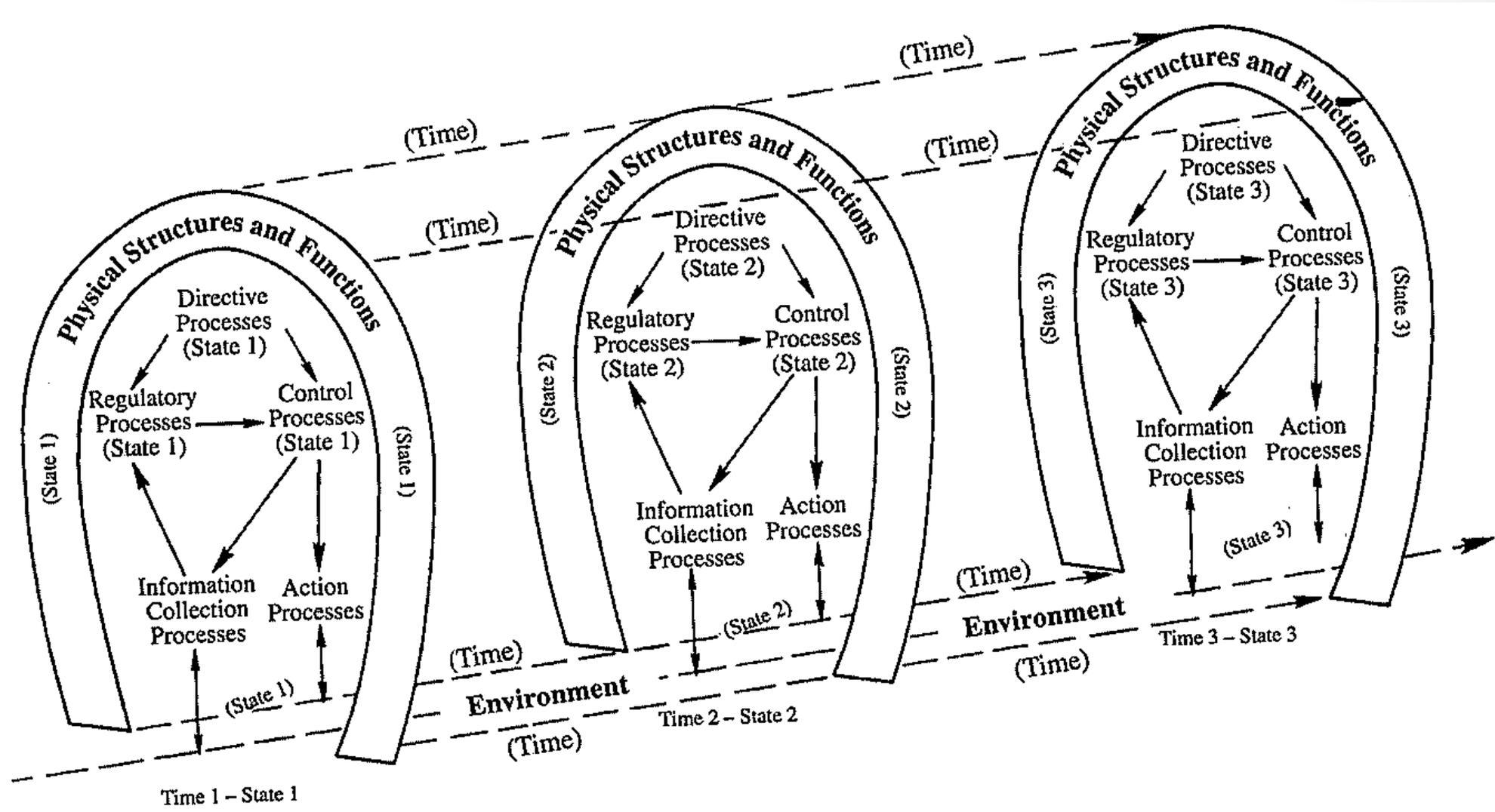
Perspective that allows us to look at emotions and emotion regulation as relational (arising from dynamic relationship between the individual and environment), self-organizing systems, and processes of change (not static states)

Derived from both systems thinking in biology and psychology and the study of complex and nonlinear systems in physics and math

Refers to changes over time among elements that are interrelated systemically

Two key features of any physical or biological system:

- Development can only be understood as the multiple, mutual, and continuous interactions of all levels of the developing system, from the molecular to the cultural
- Development can only be understood as nested processes that unfold over many time scales, from milliseconds to years



Conceptual Framework

Emotions

- Identification
- Valence
- Intensity

Emotion Regulation

- Individual process
 - Baseline state
 - Rate of change
 - Peak intensity
 - Neurological and biological structures
- Strategies
 - “accelerators”
 - “decelerators”
- Familial process
 - Socialization

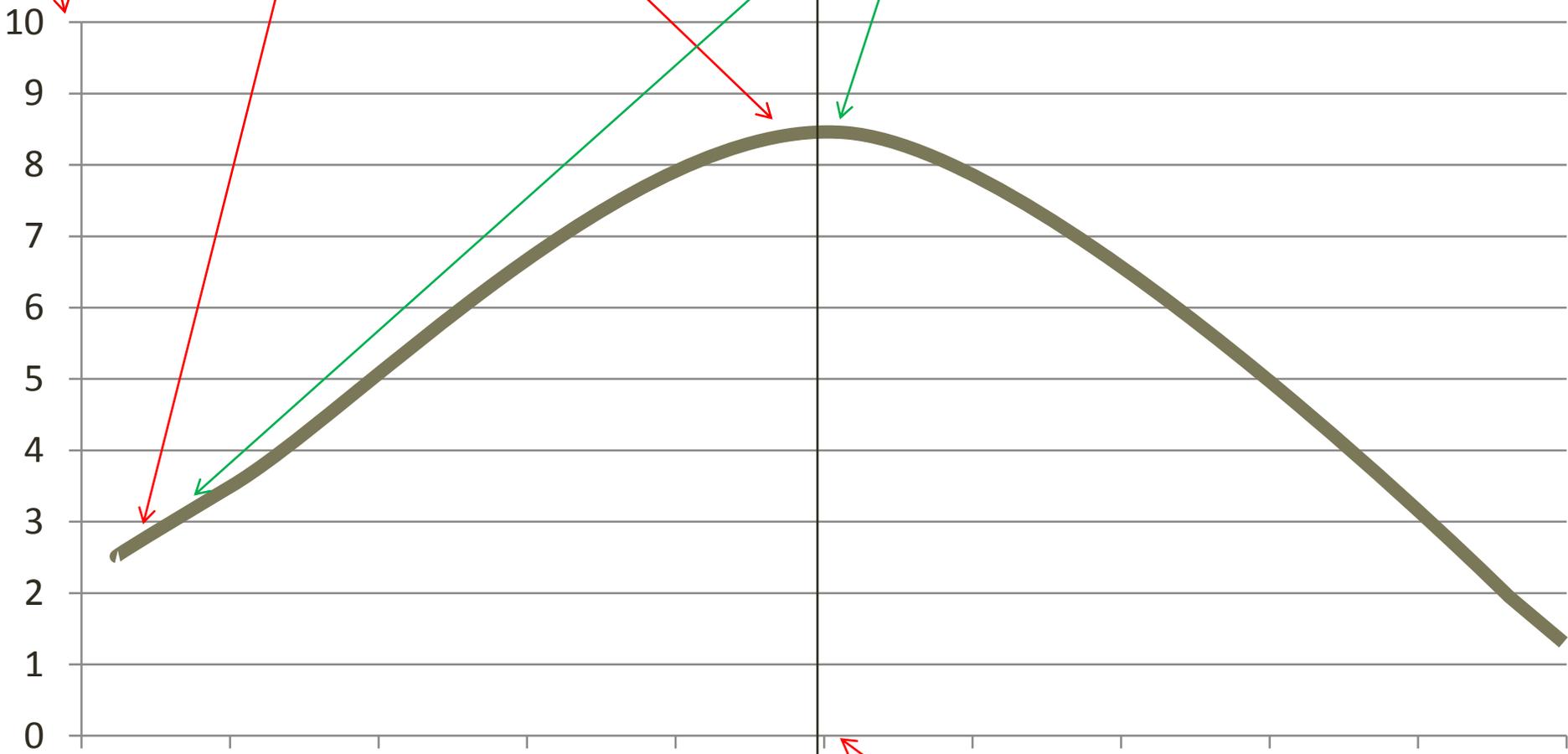
Emotion regulation strategies

Emotion ID & Valence

Intensity

Baseline

Peak



Anger

Time

Time to peak (rate)

Empirical Evidence

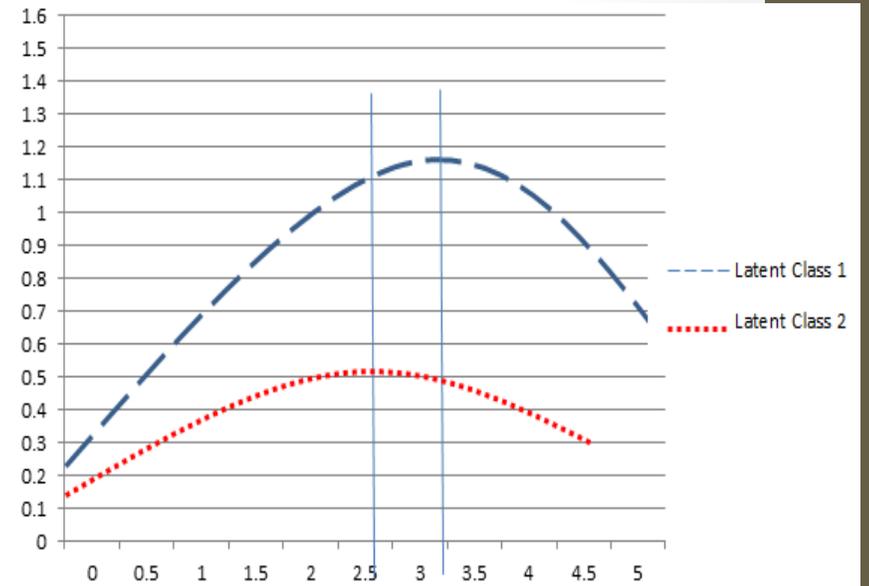
Parent socialization of emotion regulation (Cassano & Zeman, 2010)

- Parents play a primary role in children's emotional development through the process of socialization
- Observation of parent-child interactions in 62 families
 - Fathers and mothers
 - Children were 3rd and 4th graders
 - White, middle class
- Parents are less likely to respond in a supportive and constructive manner when led to believe that their child exhibits less effective management of sadness compared with children whose responses are within established age and gender norms.
 - Particularly strong for fathers when conversing with sons about sadness

Empirical Evidence (cont'd.)

Person-oriented analysis of emotion regulation (Jones Harden, Panlilio, Haring, Monahan, in preparation)

- Study aim is to employ a person-oriented approach to understand dynamic temporal changes in regulation of fear, as well as classify individuals based on trajectories
- Observation of 45 foster children and their foster mothers
- Children who have a higher probability of being in latent trajectory class 1 appear to display dysregulated responses to fear based on higher baseline and peak values. Children in class 1, however, appear to display more regulated responses to fear as elicited by a scary mask.



Clinical Applications

Assessment:

- Level of emotional awareness and identification
- Temperamental disposition and other factors that impact baseline states
- Parent-child dynamics
- Rate of change (regulatory processes)
- Awareness of intensity levels
- Strategies employed
- Timing of strategy implementation

Clinical Applications (cont'd.)

Treatment Strategies:

- Stepwise application of strategies based on assessment
- Identify goals related to situation that generates emotions
- Experiential exercises to elicit emotions, whether working with an individual or working in a parent-child and/or family setting
- Active and reflective listening strategies to acknowledge emotions generated by experience
- Engage in emotional awareness and identification process
- Acknowledge potential differences in emotional experiencing and different regulation pattern of each family member
- Help individuals and family members decrease baseline state prior to conflict
- Identify and replace “accelerator” and “decelerator” strategies with more situation-appropriate ones
- Identify optimal level for implementing strategies and help promote use

Clinical Applications (cont'd.)

Application:

- Parenting – to promote appropriate situation-specific regulatory skills
- ADHD – address inattentive and impulsive types
- ASD – awareness and regulation
- Depression
- Anxiety

Examples

- Case studies
- Audience cases

Thank you!!!