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The Regulation Bowl

Complete User Guide

*A simple coping tool for when you're dysregulated
and your thinking brain is offline*

What Is The Regulation Bowl?

The Regulation Bowl is a coping skills tool designed for moments when you're dysregulated — anxious, overwhelmed, stuck, scrolling endlessly, ruminating, or spiraling. It's a physical bowl filled with colored activity cards. When your thinking brain is offline and you can't figure out what to do, you close your eyes, reach in, and let your body choose what it needs.

This isn't a planning system. It's not a goal-setting framework. It's an emergency toolkit — something you reach for when you're in the middle of dysregulation and need to interrupt the pattern.

The Problem It Solves

When you're dysregulated, your prefrontal cortex — the part of your brain responsible for decision-making and planning — goes offline. You know you need to do something, but you can't think of what. Lists overwhelm you. Choices paralyze you. Your usual coping skills feel completely inaccessible.

That's where the Regulation Bowl comes in. It removes the need to think. You close your eyes. You reach in. Your body chooses. You do what the card says. No decisions. No planning. Just action.

The Four Categories

The Bowl contains four types of activities, organized by color:

GREEN — Movement

Activity, action, getting your body moving, releasing energy. When you need to discharge activation or break out of frozenness.

Examples: Walk around the block, do 10 jumping jacks, dance to one song, stretch for 5 minutes, shake your body out

BLUE — Calm

Soothing, resting, relaxing, quieting, grounding. When you need to come down from hyperarousal or find your center.

Examples: Notice your breathing for 2 minutes, hold an ice cube, splash cold water on your face, listen to one calming song, lie down with eyes closed

YELLOW — Productivity

Getting something done, checking things off, forward motion. When you need to feel competent or create order in your environment.

Examples: Wash 5 dishes, clear off one surface, make your bed, take out the trash, put away 5 things

ORANGE – Creativity/Learning

Making, playing, exploring, engaging your mind in new ways. When you need to shift your mental state or reconnect with curiosity.

Examples: Doodle for 5 minutes, do a crossword puzzle, play Wordle, listen to 10 minutes of a podcast, read one page

How It Works

Step 1: Notice You're Dysregulated

You're anxious. Stuck. Scrolling. Ruminating. Frozen. Spiraling. However dysregulation shows up for you, notice it.

Step 2: Go to Your Bowl

The Bowl should be somewhere visible and accessible — on your desk, kitchen counter, nightstand. Somewhere you can get to it when you need it.

Step 3: Close Your Eyes and Reach In

This is crucial. Close your eyes. Don't look. Let your hand find a card. Trust what it pulls out — even if it's not what you think you need.

Step 4: Do What It Says

Open your eyes. Read the card. Do that activity. No substitutions. No "I'll do it later." No "but I don't feel like it." Just do it. Five minutes. Ten minutes. Whatever it says.

Step 5: Notice What Shifts

Something will shift. Maybe small, maybe big. Your nervous system will start to come back online. You'll feel slightly more present, slightly more grounded. That's enough.

Why Your Body Chooses (Not Your Brain)

When you close your eyes and reach into the Bowl, you're bypassing your thinking brain. Your body knows what it needs — more than your mind does when you're dysregulated.

You might think you need calm, but your body pulls green. You move, and you realize you were stuck in freeze. You might think you need productivity, but your body pulls blue. You rest, and you realize you were running on fumes.

Trust what your body chooses. It knows.

How to Make Your Regulation Bowl

What You Need

- A physical bowl (any bowl — mixing bowl, decorative bowl, whatever you have)
- The printable activity cards (free download at emergence-project.com)
- Printer and paper (colored paper recommended but not required)
- Scissors

Step-by-Step

1. **Download the cards** from emergence-project.com — there are 48 activity cards (12 of each color)
2. **Print them.** You can print on colored paper (green, blue, yellow, orange) OR on white paper (the colored backgrounds will still show)
3. **Cut out the cards** along the dashed lines. Put on music or a podcast and just cut. It's meditative.
4. **Put all the cards in your bowl.** Mix them up. Don't organize them. Just jumble them together.
5. **Place the bowl somewhere visible.** Your desk. Kitchen counter. Nightstand. Somewhere you'll see it and can access it easily when dysregulated.

That's it. You now have a Regulation Bowl.

Making It Yours

The cards I've created are a starter set. As you use the Bowl, you'll discover what actually works for YOUR body, YOUR space, YOUR life.

Add handwritten cards with activities that resonate with you. Remove cards that don't work. Adjust the activities to fit your reality.

Example: The card says "walk around the block" but you live somewhere that doesn't feel safe. Change it to "walk around your apartment 5 times" or "walk up and down your stairs" or "march in place for 2 minutes."

The Bowl evolves with you. That's the point.

Frequently Asked Questions

What if I pull a card and really don't want to do it?

Do it anyway. That resistance is information. Often the thing you don't want to do is exactly what you need. Your body knew. Trust it.

Can I pull multiple cards?

Sure. Sometimes two or three cards come out stuck together. That's fine. Do them all, or just do the first one and see if you need the others.

What if I'm too dysregulated to even get to the Bowl?

Then you might need external support first — call someone, text a friend, use a crisis line. The Bowl works best for moderate dysregulation, not crisis-level overwhelm.

Do I have to use colored paper?

No. The colored backgrounds will print on white paper, and your body will still choose what it needs. Colored paper is nice but not required.

Can I use this with kids?

Absolutely. Adjust the activities to be age-appropriate. Kids are often even better than adults at letting their bodies choose without overthinking.

What if I keep pulling the same color over and over?

Pay attention to that pattern. Your body might be consistently needing something you're not giving it enough of. Maybe you need more movement. Maybe you need more rest. Listen to what your body is telling you.

The Philosophy Behind the Bowl

Bottom-Up Regulation

Traditional coping skills often rely on top-down processing — using your thinking brain to calm your body. But when you're dysregulated, your thinking brain is offline. The Regulation Bowl uses bottom-up processing — changing your body state through action, which then allows your brain to come back online.

Somatic Wisdom

Your body holds wisdom that your mind can't access when you're in distress. The Bowl honors that. It trusts that your body knows what it needs, even when your mind is spinning or blank.

Reducing Decision Fatigue

When you're dysregulated, every decision feels impossible. The Bowl removes decisions. You reach in. You do the thing. That's it. The simplicity is the point.

Interrupting Patterns

Dysregulation creates loops — rumination, scrolling, freeze, panic. The Bowl interrupts those loops with concrete action. Even if the action feels small, the interruption itself is powerful.

Integration with Other Practices

The Regulation Bowl works well alongside:

- **Therapy** — Bring your Bowl to sessions. Talk about what your body keeps choosing. It's information.
- **Internal Family Systems (IFS)** — Different colors often resonate with different Parts. Notice which Parts are drawn to which activities.
- **Trauma work** — The Bowl can help you build a window of tolerance and practice co-regulation with yourself.
- **Meditation/mindfulness** — The Bowl is a form of embodied mindfulness — noticing, choosing, doing, observing.

Remember

The Regulation Bowl isn't about being perfect. It's not about always making the "right" choice or never being dysregulated.

It's about having something concrete to reach for when you're struggling. It's about trusting your body. It's about interrupting patterns that keep you stuck.

Your body knows what it needs. The Bowl just helps you listen.