

BOOKS CAN HELP GUIDE CONVERSATIONS AROUND DYSREGULATION IN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

Regulation, or the ability to manage and choose appropriate emotional responses, is what is expected from students in traditional school settings. However, trends of dysregulatory behavior, or the inability to manage emotional outbursts, are on the rise in most schools across the United States, causing teachers to ask for resources to support their classroom management (Elias, 2022). Dysregulation can look different depending on the student and situation, but common displays include destruction of property, yelling or tantruming, refusal to leave the classroom, physical violence, and hiding. Multiple resources exist which can be beneficial in handling these situations. However, this article outlines the reasons why the specific application of books in the classroom can be a resource in “reappraisal,” or regulating and reflecting on a variety of student behaviors (Davis & Levine, 2013). Each of the sections below illustrates the use of books to guide conversations around dysregulation and includes specific titles and ready-made lesson plans.

Reason One: Regulated Students Need Time to Reflect on Dysregulatory Episodes



Teachers know that inclusive practices are extremely beneficial to students receiving special needs services; their math and reading abilities improve, their social awareness heightens, and their behavior gets a boost (Hanushek et al., 2002). They also know that regulated students can have negative reactions to the behaviors they see or try those behaviors out themselves (Berg & Aber, 2015 & Abry et al., 2017). The worst-case scenario can become real: regulated students regress in behavior and/or academics (Fletcher, 2009 & Gottfried, 2014). It often gets put upon teachers’ shoulders to “fix” everything happening in their classroom. To help your regulated students after a student gets violent or destructive, try doing a targeted read-aloud. For example, *Clovis Keeps His Cool* by Katelyn Aronson provides an example of a character struggling with his emotions and having a large outburst that scares his peers. Books like this can address reappraisal, giving students an example of what dysregulation looks like and laying out the reasons for misbehavior in a child-friendly way (Davis & Levine, 2013). Reappraisal also allows the teacher to discuss how to handle situations in the books and to provide classroom discussion surrounding a fictional character, rather than a classmate.

[Sample Lesson Plan for Regulated Peers →](#)

Reason Two: Dysregulated Students Need to See Themselves in Literature

We shouldn’t just consider regulated students, but also the student whose emotions get out of control. Often, their home life coupled with high levels of cortisol can cause big reactions to small problems (Evans & Kim, 2007 & Hudley & Novac, 2007). Not only that, but they may also have a diagnosed disability, which may cause them to struggle to interact with their peers (Sullivan et al., 2012 & Tamm et al., 2021). Due to all these obstacles, students with disabilities tend to engage in the bullying cycle more often than their peers; usually first as a victim, then as a bully themselves (Rose & Espelage, 2012). One of the targets of doing an intentional read-aloud is to humanize students with disabilities, as children often stereotype quickly. In fact, all students make decisions quickly and can exclude or include certain peers for the entire school year based on a single incident (Blair et al., 2016). Having book characters also struggle with emotional outbursts is extremely important to allow dysregulated students to feel fellowship and community. A great example to use is *Simon Steps into the Ring* by Marylene Monette. This book features a student who is in the hot seat after having an emotional outburst and shows how he thinks of himself after. This is a reappraisal technique that allows the student to reflect on their own actions by using the character as a proxy (Davis & Levine, 2013).

[Sample Lesson Plan to Reintegrate a Dysregulated Student →](#)

Reason Three: Teachers Need Resources That Are Ready to Use and Easy to Implement

Finally, it would benefit teachers and build their toolkit to have resources handy to address dysregulation. Teacher expectations and attitudes have a tremendous effect on students, their behavior, and their achievements (Meier et al., 2006). However, teachers are struggling with misbehavior and defiance in classrooms and many teachers name that as a top reason for wanting to find new employment (Lopes et al., 2012). To prevent this, social-emotional learning needs to be prioritized (McKown, 2017). Not only that, but teachers who intentionally use reappraisal strategies increase their students' educational memory, leading to higher test scores and student ability (Davis & Levine, 2013). Reading a children's book and having an authentic class discussion is a quick, low-prep way to instigate a reappraisal strategy. It takes the stressful situation of dysregulation, and applies new characters, but the same principles to the situation, allowing students to ask questions, deeply discuss the issue without fear of hurting feelings, and ruminate on what they just learned.

See our Mackin Title List, Books for Dysregulation Reflection for books you can use for a variety of situations when dealing with dysregulation in your classroom!

[Mackin.com list of Books for Dysregulation Reflection →](#)



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