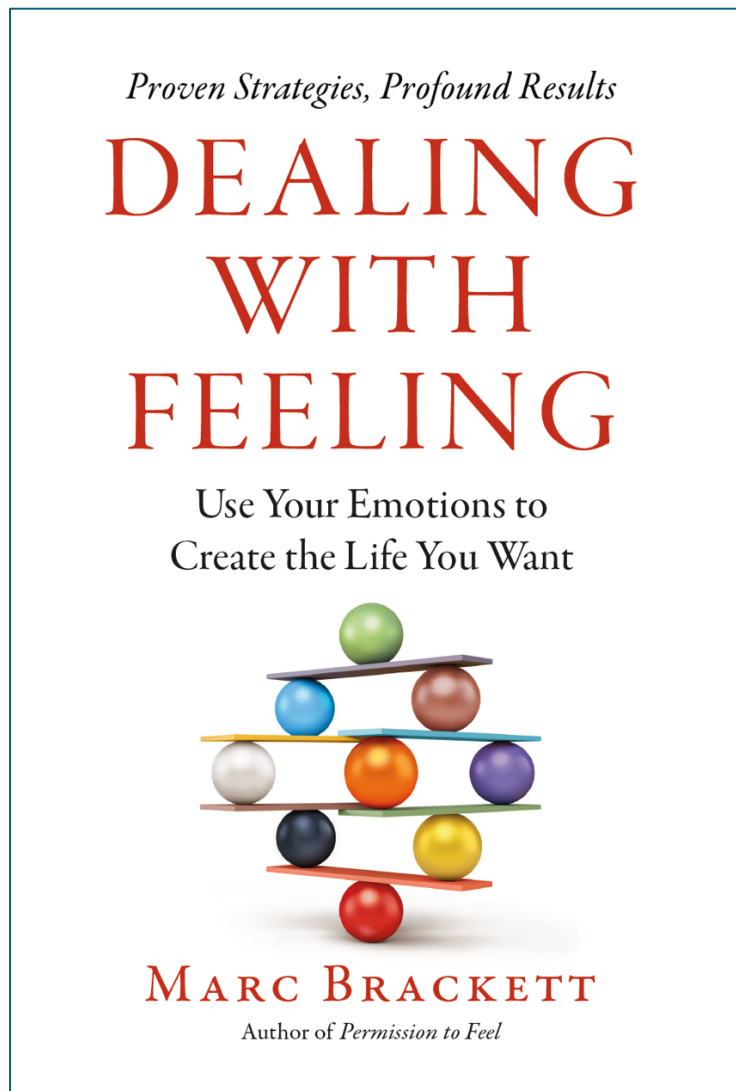


Discussion Guide

for



Visit www.marcbrackett.com for more resources. To learn more about the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, visit www.ycei.org. For information about our school-based approach to teaching emotional intelligence, RULER, visit www.rulerapproach.org

Introduction: A Life-Changing Skill That Must Be Learned

1. Frankl's quote suggests freedom lies in our response—where in your life has this been true?
2. When you hold the “lens” Marc describes to your own life, what patterns do you notice in how you react to feelings?
3. Which past emotional reactions would you most want a “do-over” for—and what would you do differently?
4. Why do you think society often believes emotions are “fixed” parts of personality?
5. How do you react to the claim that success is proportional to how well you deal with feelings?
6. Have you ever felt ashamed of a time you messed up? How do you balance self-compassion with accountability?
7. Why do you think emotion regulation feels harder in family contexts than in professional ones?

Part One: Where Are We Now?

Chapter 1: Imagine a World

1. Which “imagined world” scenario felt most utopian, and which felt most achievable?
2. What stood out to you most in the imagined workplace, family, or school examples?
3. In which parts of your life do you most long for the kind of emotionally intelligent world Marc describes?
4. What “dangerous conversation” have you avoided—and what holds you back?
5. What do you think would change if public policies were evaluated for emotional impact?
6. If you had to picture your community practicing better emotion regulation, what would you see differently?
7. Marc ends with “So—how do we get there?” How would *you* answer that?

Chapter 2: Seven Reasons We Can't Deal with Our Feelings

1. Which of the seven reasons resonated most personally with you?
2. Which of the seven reasons feels easiest to change in your own life? Hardest?
3. What messages did you get as a child about emotions—spoken or unspoken? If your early lessons about feelings were a movie title, what would yours be and why?
4. Which “quick fix” traps do you fall into most often, and what's their cost?
5. How did your experience of school line up with Marc's description of SEL?
6. Why do you think society invests more in treatment than prevention when it comes to emotional health?
7. How do gender, race, or culture influence which emotions are “acceptable” to express where you live or work?

Part Two: Definitions

Chapter 3: What Is Emotion Regulation?

1. Marc argues that emotion regulation is learned, not innate—what convinces you of that?
2. How do you distinguish between “feeling an emotion” and “regulating an emotion”?
3. When do you think it’s wise *not* to regulate but simply to feel?
4. How does Marc’s framing challenge misconceptions that regulation means suppression?
5. What metaphors (like “toolbox” or “muscle”) best capture how you view regulation?
6. Which emotions feel hardest for you to regulate? Why?
7. How might you apply Marc’s emotion regulation formula to helping you better regulate your emotions? $ER(G+S) = f(E + P + C)$?

Chapter 4: Emotion Regulation in Action

1. What’s your personal go-to unhelpful strategy when you’re stressed or experiencing another strong emotion?
2. What’s your personal go-to helpful strategy when you’re upset? Why is it effective?
3. How do you balance “accepting” vs. “shifting” emotions?
4. Why might small, daily regulation strategies matter as much as big ones?
5. How can you tell when a regulation strategy is a “quick fix” vs. a lasting solution?
6. What does failure to regulate look like in your relationships?
7. Which emotion regulation practice do you want to test this week?

Chapter 5: What Is Co-Regulation?

1. What is co-regulation? How is co-regulation different from empathy or support?
2. Who in your life has been your most effective co-regulator? Why?
3. What happens in relationships when co-regulation is absent?
4. Do you think people should only respond to *requests* for co-regulation or offer it uninvited?
5. What makes you resistant to letting others help regulate your feelings?
6. How does co-regulation shift power dynamics in families, schools, or workplaces?
7. How might society look if we normalized co-regulation?

Chapter 6: Co-Regulation in Action

1. Which of Marc’s examples of co-regulation felt most powerful?
2. Can you recall a moment when co-regulation transformed a difficult situation? What role did tone, timing, and presence play?
3. Have you ever “failed” to co-regulate? What did you learn?
4. How can teachers or leaders co-regulate without overdoing it for others?
5. How can technology help—or hurt—our ability to co-regulate?
6. Which co-regulation strategies feel most natural to you? Least natural?
7. Who is one person you might get better at co-regulating with? Why?

Part Three: Building Blocks

Chapter 7: Rethinking Your Beliefs About Emotions

1. What beliefs about emotions were you raised with? Which still stick?
2. How do your beliefs about emotions show up in your parenting, teaching, or leading?
3. What's one belief you'd like to unlearn? One you'd like to reinforce?
4. Why might seeing emotions as "weakness" be harmful?
5. How might a fixed or growth mindset about regulation influence whether we regulate well or poorly?
6. Were you surprised by the research presented on emotion malleability? Why or why not?
7. How could you challenge others' unhelpful beliefs without shaming them?

Chapter 8: Labeling Your Emotions Precisely

1. How precise are you with your own feeling words—beyond "stressed" or "fine?"
2. How did Marc's examples of mislabeling emotions land with you?
3. Which emotion words do you overuse? Underuse?
4. How might a richer vocabulary enhance your relationships?
5. What were your thoughts on the research presented on the power of affective labeling?
6. What has been your experience with the Mood Meter (or the HowWeFeel App)? What do you learn from it?
7. How can schools and workplaces normalize a richer emotional vocabulary?

Part Four: Strategies

Chapter 9: Quieting Your Mind and Body

1. Which calming techniques resonate most with you?
2. How do you notice stress in your body?
3. What's the difference between short-term soothing and long-term regulation?
4. Which breathing exercises are hardest for you to practice consistently?
5. Why do you think some people resist breathing exercises?
6. Which of the mindfulness practices that Marc shared did you like the most and the least? How did you feel after trying them?
7. What "reset ritual" could you add to your daily life? What will get in the way of you doing this regularly?

Chapter 10: Redirecting Your Thoughts

1. What thought patterns trigger your strongest emotions?
2. How do you balance optimism with realism when reframing?

3. How does redirecting thoughts differ from denial or toxic positivity?
4. Why might cognitive reappraisal or reframing feel harder in moments of grief or trauma?
5. Which distancing strategies feel the most realistic to you?
6. When have you seen visualization help a child, student, or colleague? Which visualization strategies do you use?
7. What are the dangers of over-relying on thought redirection?

Chapter 11: Cultivating Your Emotional Strength through Relationships

1. Who in your life best strengthens your regulation ability?
2. How would you describe “emotionally intelligent relationships” you have experienced?
3. Which “feelings mentor” attribute (non-judgmental, good-listener, empathic/compassionate) is the hardest for you to apply in your relationships? What can you do to grow in this area?
4. How do you choose who to share your rawest emotions with? What’s the link between vulnerability, trust, and regulation in relationships?
5. How do you support others without depleting your own emotional reserves?
6. How might workplaces foster stronger emotion-regulating relationships?
7. Which relationship in your life could benefit from more intentional regulation?

Chapter 12: Optimizing Your Emotion Regulation Budget

1. How do you currently “spend” your emotional energy?
2. Which areas of life drain your emotional budget most quickly?
3. Which budget area (sleep, nutrition, physical activity) do you feel is working best for you and why?
4. How did your upbringing influence your emotion regulation budget strength or challenge areas?
5. How do your current relationships add to—or deplete—your emotional budget?
6. What budgeting shift would most change your daily well-being? Why do you believe that’s the case?
7. How might you design a more balanced emotional economy for yourself?

Part Five: Practice Makes Permanent

Chapter 13: How Children Learn to Regulate Emotions

1. If you could go back, what emotional lesson would you teach your younger self?
2. What lessons about emotions did you learn—or not learn—as a child?
3. What role does modeling play vs. explicit instruction?
4. How might cultural or generational norms shape how kids learn emotions?
5. What’s one practical way you could teach a child about regulation?

6. How did the method Marc used to teach kids how to regulate emotions sit with you? What makes it easy or difficult to facilitate these kinds of conversations with kids?
7. How do you think technology complicates how kids learn to regulate?

Chapter 14: Becoming the Best Version of Yourself

1. How do you define your “best self”? What is your core best-self attribute?
2. Which strategies from the book do you want to practice more intentionally?
3. What role does self-compassion play in becoming your best self?
4. What obstacles get in the way of you practicing regulation consistently?
5. How do you balance striving for improvement with accepting imperfection?
6. What legacy do you want to leave in how you deal with emotions?
7. What’s your one biggest takeaway from *Dealing with Feeling*?

Epilogue: A Vision Realized

1. How would you describe this book’s core message in one sentence?
2. Which part of Marc’s final vision resonated most deeply with you? Do you believe we can realistically move toward that world? Why or why not?
3. What small actions can you commit to that bring us closer to it?
4. How do you imagine future generations benefiting if we succeed?
5. What role do leaders play?
6. What responsibility do *you* feel after reading this book?
7. What changes give you hope that we’re already on the right path?