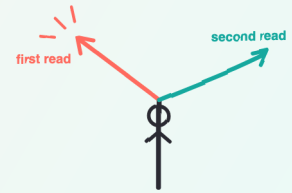


Emotion Management

What happens between the trigger and what you do next. The skill is the second read – before the first one runs the hour.



● What it is

Emotion management is the moment between a trigger and a reaction – a lost game, a correction, a plan that changed at the last minute. Not the feeling itself, but the **read** of it: what you decide the thing means. For most people the read keeps updating as more comes in. Yours tends to lock on the first one – fast, and usually the harshest – and it runs the next hour.

The tell: you can be razor-sharp about everything else and still get hijacked by something small, and stay hijacked long after the trigger's gone. The size of the reaction isn't how much you care. It's the first read, running unopposed.

● Why it's harder for ADHD

Regulating a feeling means holding more than one read of the situation at once – and that mental workspace is exactly what ADHD weakens, so it locks onto the first one. **The popular advice – "calm down, try harder" – aims at impulse control, the wrong target.** The real gap is the missing second read; Barkley's work puts this kind of emotional control at the center of ADHD, not off to the side.

● The brake comes online late

The part that pauses to weigh a reaction before acting isn't finished maturing until the mid-20s, and later still in ADHD. The reflective pause loses the race to the impulse.

● The body floods and is slow to settle

The alarm fires hard and the calming system is sluggish, so you're physically revved with no quick internal off-switch. No point reasoning it out while you're there – the thinking part is offline until the body comes down.

● What helps

● Cool the body first

The feeling is physical before it's anything else, and there's no second read while you're hot. Step away, move, slow the breath – out longer than in – to bring the body down a notch so the thinking part comes back online.

● Self-talk

One rational line to break the spiral, said fast and not argued with. It names the feeling as a feeling, not a fact: "This is the first read, not the facts." Step over it – dwelling makes it compound.

● The second read

The actual skill, and the one the evidence backs over willpower. Name the thought driving the reaction, force two other explanations for the same facts, then pick the one a calm person would bet on. The CBT built for ADHD drills exactly this – not relaxation.

● Don't act while hot

The feeling is real; the urgency is fake. Nothing gets sent, said, or decided at the peak – those are the ones you regret. A standing rule ("nothing big for ten minutes") takes the decision out of the moment.

● Practice when calm

Two reps, both off the court. Run the second read in writing on things that already happened, until it's fast enough to use live. And build the gap it needs with a few minutes of daily attention practice (notice the mind wander, come back; the return is the rep) – short and anchored, or an ADHD brain drops it. Medication widens that gap too; it doesn't teach the skill.

▶ Action Card – When a Feeling Takes Over

Learn it when you're calm; keep it where you'll see it.

COOL DOWN • WHEN YOU FEEL IT CLIMBING

- 1 Step away and move – leave the room, screen, or conversation for five minutes; walk it off, breathe out longer than in. Cold water on your face helps.
- 2 Say the line: **"This is the first read, not the facts."**
- 3 Don't send it, say it, or decide it while you're hot.

GET THE SECOND READ • ONCE YOU'RE DOWN A NOTCH

- 4 Write the thought driving it, in one line – *"He ignored me on purpose."*
- 5 Write two other reasons it could be true – *"He didn't see it." "He's busy."*
- 6 Ask: what would a calm friend say is most likely?
- 7 Pick the response that fits that read – and do that one.

The first read is the fastest, not the truest. Anything big waits until you've got the second one.

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