

# Developing the emotion regulation skills of autistic pupils in a residential special school



## EMOTION REGULATION

Emotion regulation describes an individual's ability to understand what emotions they are feeling, and then to manage how and when they express them.

Being able to regulate our emotions helps us to interact with others and our environment, and allows us to engage in learning.



## THIS PROJECT

Autistic people are more likely to have difficulties learning to regulate their emotions, so research to help us understand how schools can support the development of these skills is important. This project aimed to explore how Hill House School, a residential special school, support their young people to develop their emotion regulation skills.

## METHODOLOGY

**Participants:**  
4 young people and 17 staff members were involved in this project.

- Methods:**
1. Staff wrote down their observations from working with the young people
  2. I observed the young people at Hill House School
  3. I conducted semi-structured interviews with staff

**Analysis:**  
Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022)



## RESULTS

From the information gathered, four themes were generated to explain how Hill House School supports their young people to develop their emotion regulation skills.

### Theme 1: Evolutionary Ethos

Evolution is a core part of the school's ethos, at an individual and whole school level.

There is the view that "everyone around these children needs and wants to grow", and the school proactively support staff development.

### Theme 2: Reciprocal Relationships

Positive, trusting relationships between young people and staff are important at Hill House. These elements were described as important:

- Conveying a calm persona
- Consistency of approach and routine
- Getting to know young people as individuals.

### Theme 3: Communication: attuning, asking and adapting

Staff attune to all types of emotional communication, including facial expressions, body language and behaviour.

Staff seek and respect young people's views.

Staff adapt their communication so it is accessible for the young people.

### Theme 4: Expressing emotions every day

Emotions are explored through direct interventions (e.g., Transporters, 'clever actions', Zones of Regulation) and indirectly through labelling and validating emotions.

Young people have opportunities to try and use different emotion regulation strategies.

## CONCLUSIONS

Hill House School staff were found to prioritise building relationships, and getting to know their young people as individuals, in order to provide bespoke support to develop their emotion regulation skills.

The focus was not only using specific intervention programmes, but the context, culture and relationships within the school.

By Joanne Bennett (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

With thanks to the young people, families and staff at Hill House School.



THANK YOU