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Contributing Factors and Outcomes Associated with Poor Affect Regulation

The emergence of affect regulation skills is a major developmental task that has significant implications for behavioral and emotional competence in children and adolescents. Authorities in the field have proposed a direct link between dysregulated affect and externalizing and internalizing problems such as aggression, violence, and depression. Interpersonal and affective consequences such as peer rejection, impaired empathy, and poor emotional awareness have also been associated with poor regulatory skills.

Consistent with previous research, the studies presented here support the view that some strategies for regulating affect (e.g., rumination, suppression) are less adaptive than others with respect to emotional and psychosocial functioning. In one study, high “ruminators” were found to experience maladaptive outcomes such as increased anger, aggression and depression. In another investigation examining the possible antecedents of affect dysregulation, children who bully others and witness bullying were found exhibit higher levels of dysregulated affect and show poorer emotional awareness and coping skills. Findings from a third study suggest that high levels of dysregulated affect may impair empathic processes, and that youth who exhibit both dysregulated affect and impaired empathy are at highest risk to behave aggressively. In contrast, higher levels of empathy appear to mediate the impact of other risk factors for aggression such as low self-esteem and poor regulation. Finally, supporting the importance of affect dysregulation in behavioral problems, it was found that emotions such as anxiety and

anger when paired with poor regulatory skills become significant predictors of aggression.