



REHABILITATION
SERVICES
PATIENT EDUCATION MANUAL

Emotion Regulation Skills

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THE GOALS OF EMOTION REGULATION



1. **UNDERSTANDING YOUR EMOTIONS**

The first step in regulating emotions is learning to identify and label your emotions. Learning the purpose your emotions serve or the needs they fulfill is helpful so that you can identify what gets in the way of reducing painful emotions.

2. **REDUCING EMOTIONAL VULNERABILITY**

The goal is to reduce emotional vulnerability by learning to decrease negative emotions and to increase positive emotions.

3. **DECREASING EMOTIONAL SUFFERING**

We can learn to let go of painful emotions by being *mindful* of them, instead of fighting them or walling them off. We can also learn to change negative or painful emotions by *acting* in a manner *opposite* to them.

EMOTION REGULATION SKILLS



These skills can help you control your emotions when under stress. The focus of these skills is to learn how to cope with emotional pain and to help increase positive emotional experiences in your everyday life.

Strategies include:

- 1. Learning to identify and label your emotions.**
- 2. Learning to understand the *functions* these emotions serve.**
- 3. Learning to reduce painful, negative emotions and to let go of emotional suffering.**
- 4. Learning to increase positive emotions.**

PREVENTION

(Or “How to stay out of Emotion Mind”)



- 1. Take care of your body. See a doctor when necessary. Take prescribed medications.**
- 2. Don't eat too much or too little. Stay away from foods that make you feel overly emotional (such as foods with lots of sugar or caffeine).**
- 3. Stay off non-prescribed drugs, including alcohol.**
- 4. Try to get the amount of sleep that helps you feel good. Keep to a sleep program if you are having trouble sleeping.**
- 5. Do some sort of exercise every day; try to build up to 20 minutes of aerobic exercise.**
- 6. Try to do one thing each day to make yourself feel competent and in control.**

WHY LEARN TO OBSERVE AND DESCRIBE EMOTIONS?

Studies have shown that people who can identify their emotions move through depression faster. By learning to observe and describe your emotions, you learn both to be separate from them and also to *accept* them so they don't distress you so much.



In order to control your emotions, you must be able to separate or step back from them so you can think of using coping strategies. At the same time, remember to accept them as part of yourself and not something outside of you.

TAKING STEPS TO GET BACK IN CONTROL OF YOUR EMOTIONS



1. Start by taking a time-out.

2. Stop what you're doing....when you feel warning signs of strong anger or distressing feelings and you start to thinking angry or disturbing thoughts, tell yourself to *stop*. This may help you calm down and think more clearly.

3. TRY TO RELAX

Count to 10 or 100

Get a drink of water

Take a walk

Take several *slow deep breaths*

4. Return when you're calm...Once you've got your overwhelming emotions under control, go back and talk to the person or face the situation that triggered your emotional distress.

THE SPECIAL CASE OF *ANGRY FEELINGS*



Angry feelings almost always *follow* and *replace* a different initial emotion that is too “uncomfortable” to let ourselves acknowledge. We quickly skip over this uncomfortable feeling—so fast that we’re usually not even aware of it—and *replace* it with an angry type of feeling. The anger is really a *reaction* to that initial emotion, whether we’re consciously aware of it or not.

EXAMPLES

When you were too busy to talk to me, I felt < (**ABANDONED**) > “angry”.

When you don’t let me help you, I feel < (**OUT OF CONTROL**) > “frustrated”.

When you criticize me, I feel < (**INADEQUATE**) > “enraged”.

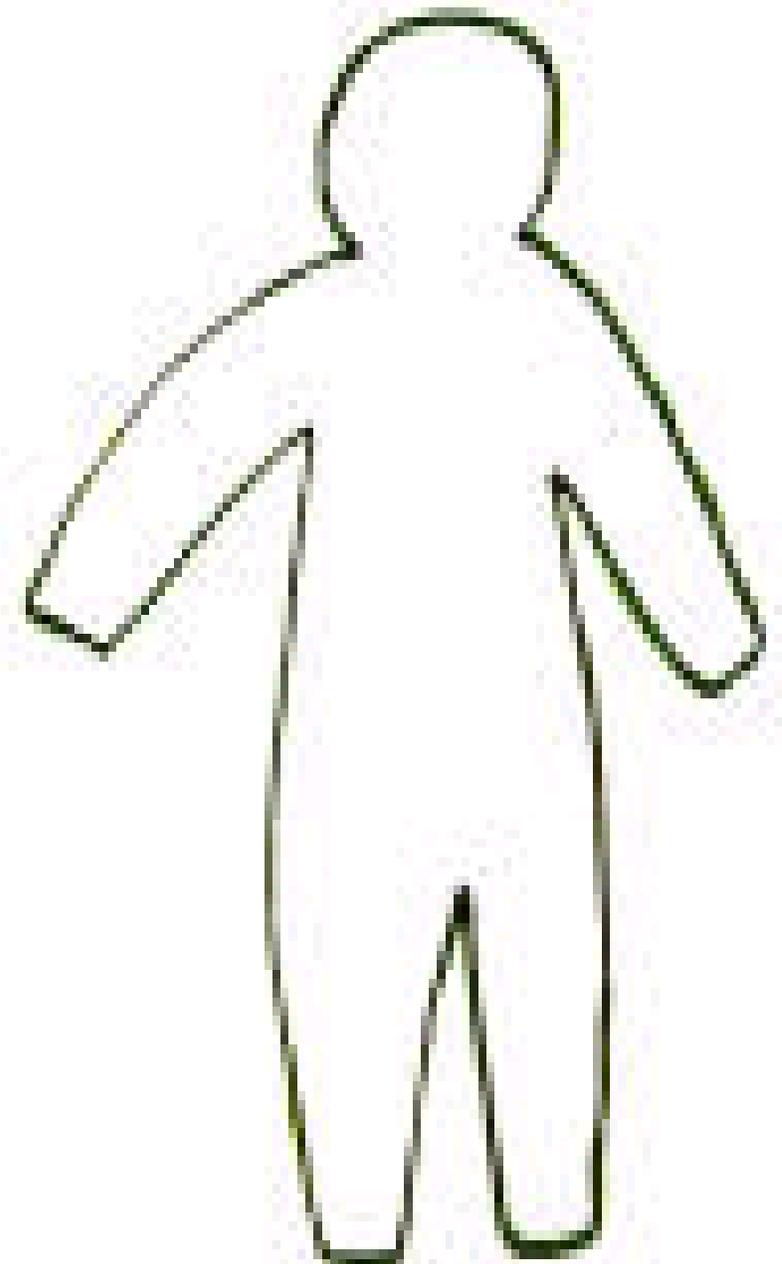
When you yell at me, I feel < (**ABUSED**) > “revengeful”.

When you don’t make time for me, I feel < (**UNIMPORTANT**) > “resentful”.

When you don’t stick to our agreements, I feel < (**POWERLESS**) > “infuriated”

ANGRY FEELINGS are valid and important, but are most beneficial when used as indicators that someone or something is triggering an uncomfortable feeling in you. To accurately figure out what you are reacting to, it’s necessary to *backtrack* and identify the feeling that came **FIRST** – before the angry reaction replaced it.

IDENTIFYING WHERE YOU EXPERIENCE EMOTIONS IN YOUR BODY



**Draw where in
your body you
feel:**

**LOVE
JOY
SADNESS
SHAME
FEAR
GUILT
ANGER**

**Which emotion is
easiest to identify?
Which is hardest?**

EMOTION DIARY

(How to observe and describe your emotions)

Choose two current or recent emotional reactions you had and fill out as much of the worksheet below as you can.

Record your *strongest* emotion of the day, or the *longest-lasting* one, or the one that was most painful or gave you the most trouble. Analyze that emotion. Fill out the “MINDFULNESS OF MY EMOTIONS” worksheet on the next page as well.

Day	Event (What happened?)	Emotion Function (What are you trying to communicate, how does it serve you, what do you need?)
_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____

Emotion: _____

MINDFULNESS OF MY EMOTIONS



EMOTION NAME(S):_____ **INTENSITY (0-100):**_____

Prompting **event** or trigger for my emotion (who, what , when where – just the facts):

Thoughts/interpretations (beliefs, assumptions): about the trigger...

Body sensations (where in my body do I feel this emotion? What was by body language—facial expression, postures?):

Action (What **did** I do? What **did** I say?):

How did the emotion affect me **afterwards**? (Were there **secondary** emotions? What did I **do** after the event or trigger?):

THREE WAYS TO LET GO OF EMOTIONAL SUFFERING



1. Observe your emotion

Notice its presence.

Step back!

Get unstuck.

Detach from your emotion.

2. Experience your Emotion

Experience it as a *wave*, coming *and* going. Try not to block emotion. Open yourself to the flow of the emotion. Try not to suppress emotion. Don't push the emotion away. Don't try to get rid of emotion. At the same time, don't try to *keep* emotion around. Don't hold on to it. Don't amplify it.

Remember: **You are not your emotion.** Don't necessarily *act* on emotion. Remember when you have felt different.

3. Practice *Loving* your Emotion

Don't judge your emotion. Practice *willingness*. *Radically accept* your emotion. Respect your emotion. Don't assume it's irrational or based on distortions.

HOW TO INCREASE POSITIVE EMOTIONS



1. **Build Positive Experiences Short Term**

Do enjoyable things that are possible *now*. Do one thing each day from the "Pleasant Events List" (see the Distress Tolerance Manual). For example: soak in the tub, do a crossword puzzle, play a game of cards, write something in a journal...

2. **Build Positive Experiences Long Term**

Make changes in your life so positive events will occur more often. Build a "life worth living". Work towards goals. Make a list of positive things you want to have happen. List small steps towards goals. Take the first step. Attend to relationships. Repair old relationships. Reach out for new relationships. Work on current relationships. Avoid avoiding...avoid giving up.

3. **Be Mindful of Positive Experiences**

Focus your attention on the positive things that happen. Re-focus when your mind wanders to the negative. Accentuate the positive, dismiss the negative.

4. **Be *Un-Mindful* of Worries**

Distract yourself from thinking about when the positive experience will end. Distract yourself from thinking about whether you *deserve* this positive experience. Distract yourself from thinking about how much more might be expected of you now.

FOURTEEN QUESTIONS

to help you remember what makes you feel better

- 1. My favorite movie of all time is...**
- 2. My favorite song of all times...**
- 3. My greatest accomplishment...**
- 4. My perfect day...**
- 5. My most cherished possession is...**
- 6. My favorite *cheer me up* music is...**
- 7. I enjoy reading...**
- 8. My fantasy vacation...**
- 9. I don't do it much, but I enjoy...**
- 10. If I could lighten up a little, I'd let myself...**
- 11. If I weren't so stingy with myself, I'd buy myself...**
- 12. Two people I admire are...**
- 13. I am proud of myself for...**
- 14. I am grateful for...**

TRY AN EXPERIMENT:



1. Rate your current mood

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10

Worst.....Best

2. Think of an activity that you find pleasant

(Walking in nature, taking a bath, doing your nails, drinking a cup of good coffee, etc.)

3. **IMAGINE** yourself doing this activity....be in it 100%. Experience the activity with all your senses...let yourself *daydream* about it.

4. Now rate your mood again

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10

Worst.....Best

What did you observe? Did anything shift for you? Notice that even thinking about doing a pleasant activity makes you feel better. Allow yourself to have “*IMAGINE*” breaks during the day and see what happens.

RESOURCE LIST FOR ADDITIONAL READINGS

This manual is part of a four manual series discussing Mindfulness Skills, Distress Tolerance Skills, Emotion Regulation Skills and Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills. If you would like additional reading materials or resources related to the skills discussed in these manuals, we would like to direct you to the following:

Don't Let Your Emotions Run Your Life: How Dialectical Behavior Therapy Can Put You in Control by Scott E. Spradlin, MA, New Harbinger Publications, 2003.

The Feeling Good Handbook by David D. Burns, M.D., Penguin Books, 1999.

Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness by Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D., Dell Publishing, 1990.

Guided Meditations, Explorations and Healings by Stephen Levine, Doubleday, 1991.

The Language of Letting Go by Melody Beattie, Hazeldon Foundation Meditation Series, 1990.

Practicing the Power of Now by Eckhart Tolle, publisher New World Library, (www.newworldlibrary.com), 1999.

The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook by Martha Davis, Ph.D., New Harbinger Publications, 2000.

The Spirituality of Imperfection by Ernest Kurtz, Ph.D., Bantam Books, 1994.

Turning Suffering Inside Out: A Zen Approach to Living with Physical and Emotional Pain by Darlene Cohen, Shambhala Publications, 2000.

Women, Anger & Depression: Strategies for Self Empowerment by Lois P. Frankel, Ph.D., Health Communications, Inc., 1992.

TAPES AND CDs

Guided Mindfulness Meditation by Jon Kabat-Zinn, Stress Reduction CDs and Tapes, P.O. Box 547, Lexington, MA 02420 or www.mindfulnessstapes.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Many of the materials discussed in these manuals are based on the works of Marsha M. Linehan, Ph. D. as presented in her books **Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder** and **Skills Training Manual for Treating Borderline Personality Disorder**. Both are available through the Guilford Press, 1993.