

Emotional Regulation

Great Minds Together

What is emotional regulation?

The process individuals use to manage and respond to their emotional experiences in **appropriate and adaptive ways**. Example: being able to walk away from conflict and not shouting back when a person says something that you don't like in an angry tone.



Why is this taught within DBT?

DBT addresses the biological vulnerability some people have towards **emotional dysregulation**. This can be characterised by inability to regulate emotions through emotional sensitivity, high anxiety, inability to walk away from conflict due to reactivity. DBT wants to teach people how to shift away from this and “**become the captain of your ship - the controller of emotions**”.

Why bother taking charge of emotions?

1. Emotionally dysregulated adolescents often have intense emotions such as anger, frustration, depression and anxiety.

2. Difficulty controlling these intense emotions often leads to distressed/impulsive behaviour such as risky online behaviour, missing school and suicidality.

3. Distressed behaviours such as fighting, drug use, binge eating, cutting and walking away when someone is talking to you are usually behavioural solutions to intensely painful emotions. This module teaches more effective solutions.

Goals of Emotional Regulation Training:

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Understand the emotions you experience: Learning why emotions are important and identifying emotions by using mindfulness (observe and describe) skills. **You have to know what you are feeling in order to change it.**



Reduce emotional vulnerability: You will learn how to keep unwanted emotions from starting in the first place and if they do, they hopefully won't feel as intense.



Decrease the frequency of unwanted emotions: By understanding what emotions do for you, learning to decrease emotional vulnerability and increase positive emotions, and practicing ways to reduce painful emotions when they occur, you will decrease the frequency of unwanted emotions.



Decrease emotional suffering: You are going to learn how to stop or reduce your suffering from unwanted emotions once they start. Emotional regulation works to reduce shame, anxiety, guilt, anger and sadness.

How will this be put into practice?

1. First, you will learn how to nonjudgmentally observe and describe painful emotions, accept them and let go using mindfulness skills.
2. Then, you will learn how to change your emotions through opposite action skills (taking an action opposite to how you currently feel).

An example of a skill taught to achieve this is:



COPE AHEAD



Cope Ahead Skill



This skill is intended to have us consider how we might be prepared in some way to help us reduce stress ahead of the time.

Rehearse a plan ahead of time so that you are prepared to cope skilfully with emotional situations:

- 1. Describe the situation that is likely to prompt uncomfortable emotions.** Check the facts. Be specific in describing the situation. Name the emotions and actions likely to interfere with using your skills.
- 2. Decide what coping or problem-solving skills you want to use in the situation.** Be specific. Write out in detail how you will cope with the situation and with your emotions and action urges.
- 3. Imagine the situation in your mind as vividly as possible.** Imagine yourself in the situation now, not watching the situation.
- 4. Rehearse in your mind coping effectively.** Rehearse in your mind exactly what you can do to cope effectively. Rehearse your actions, your thoughts, what you say, and how to say it. Rehearse coping effectively with new problems that come up. Rehearse coping effectively with your most feared catastrophe.
- 5. Practise relaxation after rehearsing.**

