

# Emotional Adversity (end with deep breathing)

Today, the topic of discussion is Emotional Adversity. But, without going too much into what that is, we will be doing a few exercises to start it off.

Pasted on the walls are a few words, some we may associate with, some we may not. I want us all to take a few minutes and just think about them. As we come to the end of October, I'd like us to take five minutes and reflect. Think about the highs and the lows, what went well and what did not, which part was your favourite and which part was your least favourite.

Let's lay ourselves a bit vulnerable here. I hope that we can build a bit of trust now and open up, whatever said here will stay here. Let's consider this a safe space for the next few minutes. We will go around one person at a time and we will share which words on the wall we associate with the most, you can even add a few more if you'd like.

(Activity Session - Identify your emotion)

So, here we see that we all experienced different emotions over the past few weeks, but did we know that, as we go through the motions of experiencing each emotion, that we are faced with emotional adversity?

**SKIP PAGE**

Emotional adversity speaks to the difficulties we face when trying to control and manage our feelings or emotions.

And to add a bit more context, your **emotions** are your mental reactions to situations which influence strong feelings that cause physiological and behavioural changes, and **adversity** refers to difficult situations.

We all experience a wide range of emotions, with the experience comes the issue of dealing with it. One of the common ways in which we do that is through defence mechanisms.

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Defence mechanisms are tools of regulating our emotions, some healthy, some unhealthy. We are all prone to using defence mechanisms, no matter how emotionally intelligent or mature you are, and it's important to know, during emotional adversity, these are commonly used.

Here I have the 10 most commonly used defence mechanisms. With a raise of hand let us know if anyone sounds like you, it will also help us to get to know you a bit better.

### (Activity Session - Identify the Defence Mechanisms)

**Denial** - I refuse to accept reality or facts, I may block external events or circumstances from my mind so I don't have to deal with painful feelings or events.

**Repression** - when unpleasant thoughts, painful memories, or irrational beliefs upsets me I unconsciously choose to hide them in hopes of forgetting them entirely. But although they are hidden, they still unintentionally affect my actions and relationships.

**Projection** - I may project (or displace) my thoughts or feelings onto someone else because they make me uncomfortable.

**Displacement** - I try to satisfy my impulses by directing strong emotions and frustrations I have about one person onto another person or object that doesn't feel threatening.

**Regression** - when I feel threatened or anxious I may unconsciously "escape" to an earlier stage of development. If I struggle to cope with events or behaviours, I may return to sleeping with a cherished stuffed animal, overeat foods they find comforting, or begin chain-smoking or chewing on pencils or pens. I may also avoid everyday activities because I feel overwhelmed.

**Rationalisation** - I may attempt to explain undesirable behaviours with my own "facts." It makes me feel comfortable with the events, even if I know it I am not okay with it. Though I didn't get the promotion at work today, it was okay because I didn't want the promotion anyways.

**Sublimation** - This type of defence mechanism is considered a mature, positive strategy. I redirect strong emotions or feelings into an object or activity that is appropriate and safe. So, instead of lashing out at my coworkers during a stressful shift, I choose to channel my frustration into a kickboxing class. I also redirect my feelings into music, art, or sports.

**Reaction formation** - I know how I feel but I choose to behave in the opposite manner. When I feel angry I act overly positive because I don't think I should be feeling this way.

**Compartmentalization** - I protect the different elements of my life by separating it. I don't discuss personal life issues at work, I block off, or

compartmentalise, that element of my life. This helps me to carry on without facing the anxieties or challenges while I am in an opposite setting or mindset.

**Intellectualization** - When in a trying situation, I remove all emotion from my responses and instead focus on quantitative facts. After getting fired from my job, I spent my days creating spreadsheets of job opportunities and leads.

Thanks for participating.

Acknowledging which defence mechanism represents you, tells us a lot about how you regulate your emotions. During emotional regulation, we do one of two things: expressive suppression or cognitive reappraisal. Where the reappraisal says: "I control my emotions by changing the way I think about the situation I'm in". While the suppression says: "I control my emotions by not expressing them."

If time allowed it, I would've given you the Emotional Regulation Test along with the Adversity Coping Capability Test. But, to conserve on time, I will only conduct the ACC Test. The Adversity Coping Capability Test helps you identify your perceived capability to overcome stressful events. (Hand out Papers – Ask for assistance )

Within this noble profession of yours, your adversity coping capability will be of utmost importance. Not only do you have students stressing you, but the paperwork is tedious, administration isn't always working with you, your superiors are not being nice, your colleagues ticks you off every now and then, and not to mention home and personal issues. The last thing you need is your cup to overflow. So, I would like you to take 3 minutes and complete this test and we will discuss the scores after.

Who scored 1.00-2.99?

Who scored 3.00-4.30?

Who scored 4.31-5.00?

Nice job everyone.

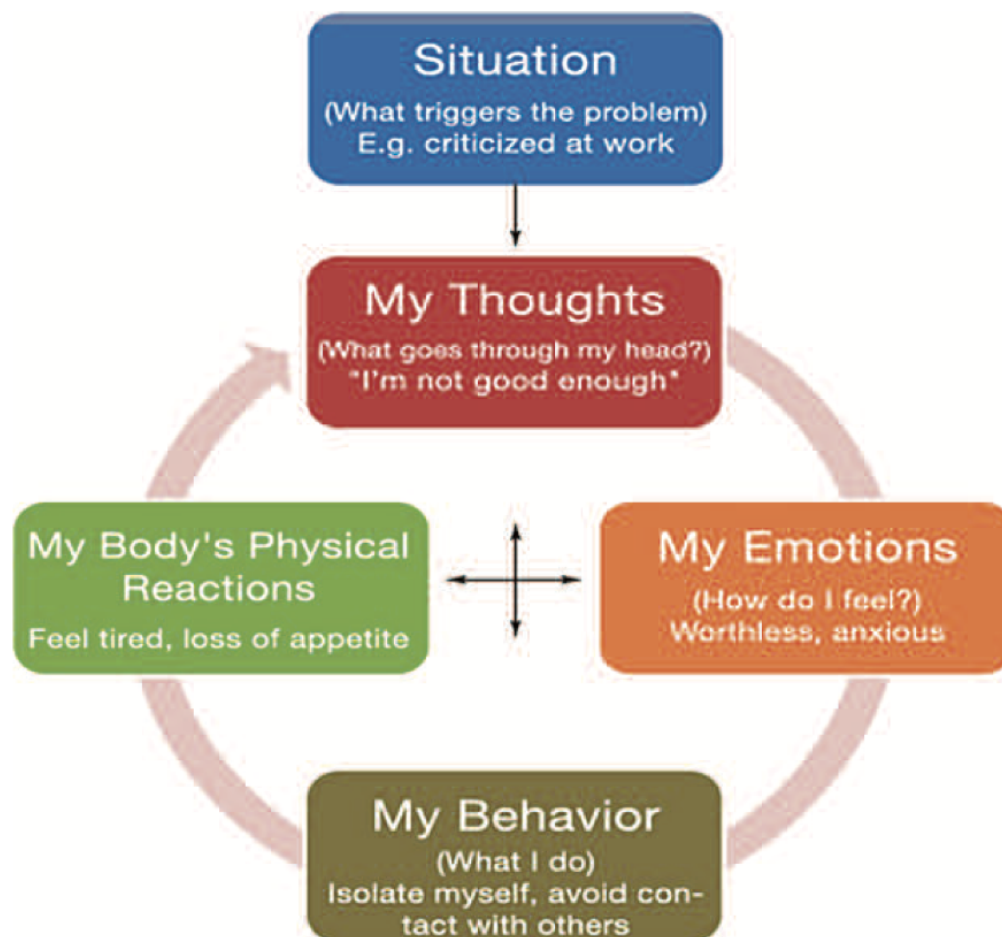
Now, it's important to establish that there is no shame in having a low resilience. Why? Because this means that now you are aware of how resilient you are, and you have the opportunity to do something to increase that level of resilience.

We want to first start with emotional intelligence. Attack it from the core. Did you know that something is wrong? Do you know how to identify when there is a shift within yourself or someone else? Do you know how other individuals' actions and words affect you? This is where emotional intelligence comes in.

Emotional Intelligence helps you control your impulses during stressful situations, recognize your thoughts and emotions towards adverse situations and how they affect our behaviour. It helps you to become more aware of your strengths and weaknesses, curates empathetic skills within you, and teaches you how to communicate more effectively and efficiently. It also helps you to mitigate conflicts.

With this highlighted, how emotionally intelligent you are, is directly linked to how well you overcome emotional adversities. And with emotional intelligence comes emotional regulation. When we experience these heavy emotions, it is important that we know how to regulate them in order for them to not become overwhelmingly uncontrollable, to the extent where you are left with little capacity to cope and reason.

And when I say regulate, I'm referring to you processing your emotions. What you do when you are faced with a positive or negative emotion, and if you notice that this action actually takes place.



Emotional regulation comes hand-in-hand with emotional intelligence. If you are emotionally intelligent, you should be able to exert control over your own emotional state. This means, you learn how to reduce your anger and anxiety in a challenging situation, hiding visible signs of fear or sadness, as well as focusing on reasons to feel happy or calm when your present situation wants to prove otherwise.

We want to be able to reduce the complications that emotional adversities may have in our lives. This includes bringing home burdens to school because you don't know how to properly compartmentalise, lashing out on another coworker because you can't get at your boss, performing poorly on appraisals because of anxieties, displacing your emotions for Mr Lewin on your H.O.D. because they are the next best thing to getting back at administration. We don't want it affecting our professional life and reducing our work ethic, and we don't want it affecting our personal life either. We want to be able to go home and accept the love our family has to offer without ruminating on how horrible the kids were today. Knowing how to overcome emotional adversity allows that.

To do that, we need to first learn how to improve our emotional regulation capability, so as to decrease dysregulation. Learning how to regulate your emotions puts you in a position to understand your emotions, decrease negative emotions, and control your actions. There are different ways in which we can achieve this, but I'll be looking at 3 proven scientific ways in which it can be developed:

### **1. Consistent self-awareness appraisals -**

This is where we practise daily self-evaluation to stay updated with our emotions, new likes and dislikes and the whole works. This helps us to face the emotions that we are inclined to suppress or eliminate if someone asks because of the pain they cause. This helps us to search for better ways to deal with our emotions because we cannot neglect the fact that they are there. This ensures long-term wellbeing with a permanent solution to emotional distress.

### **2. Practising self-soothing -**

When we self-soothe we do things such as meditate using music, taking a walk, having a relaxing bath or a massage, using reminiscence therapy to think

back on our day and what we can do better the next time. Self-soothing, as the name suggests, helps us to relax and reduce the toxic effects of emotions that may persist such as anger, sadness, and neglect.

### **3. Attentional control -**

During this, we divert our attention away from the negative emotion itself and look at the situation from a different POV. Let's say during lunch Ms Holmes came to you to speak about your consistent tardiness for work. Yes, you might feel sad at the end of the conversation, a bit embarrassed, sure, but what else? Take away from it, the possible embarrassment that you're feeling and look at why the conversation took place in the first place. What did you learn coming out of that conversation? You have also gained insight on how you can avoid that confrontation in the future.

Taking this approach towards emotional regulation will help you to manage your emotions during conflicts and confrontations, compartmentalise your feelings from home so it doesn't completely influence your work ethic when on school grounds, and helps you to lead a healthier emotional life as well. This also helps to direct you in the path of finding positive ways to carry out emotion-focused coping.

We will always be faced with emotional adversities, it is our responsibility to ensure that we come out on the better end of it all.

While regulating your emotions, you'll learn that you're also coping with your stressful situation. Today you will learn how to apply the emotion-focused coping mechanisms used in managing emotional adversity.

### **Emotion-focused coping Mechanisms**



“...emotion-focused coping includes all the regulative efforts to diminish the emotional consequences of stressful events” (Schoenmakers et al., 2015)

**Journaling:** Writing about stressful events is a way of releasing negative energy. Describing what happened can increase perceptions of control, and might even help a person brainstorm solutions, which is also a problem-focused coping strategy.

**Selective Attention:** After a difficult day at work, focusing attention on the positive things that happened can reduce the anxiety of the negative events that occurred that day.

**Reframing:** Changing one's perspective on a negative event can actually turn it into a positive. Try not to dwell on defeats, but instead look at opportunities to learn from mistakes and improve.

**Recognize Cognitive Distortions:** Some people have a tendency to see even positive events as negative. This is a type of cognitive distortion that can become very destructive. Learning how to recognize when you are over-analyzing a situation and looking for negatives is the first step to stopping this destructive habit.

**Exercising:** We all know that exercising is good for the body. But it is also a great way to release steam. If you exercise hard enough, the brain will actually release endorphins that will put you in a much better mood.

**Creative Expression:** Painting, sculpting, or playing a musical instrument can take the negative energy from stress and turn into a form of creative expression.

**Seeking Social Support:** Simply talking about stressful events with friends and family has several benefits. It allows one to vent those negative emotions, increases a sense of control, and knowing that other people support you can be comforting in and of itself.

**Downward Comparison:** Comparing one's situation with others that have it worse may not sound like a nice thing to do, but it reduces the negative feelings a person has about their situation by making it seem not so bad after all.

**Forgiveness:** A lot of stress can come from the actions of other people in our lives. Either a rude comment or an act of workplace sabotage can make a person feel angry, vindictive, and unfairly treated. But dwelling on those actions only makes matters worse. Allowing yourself to forgive others is a way to stop the chain of negativity before it does too much harm.

In conclusion, to overcome emotional adversity, let's learn to understand what makes us TICK.

T – tells us what's happening (bodily cues)

I – identify our emotions

C – Collect our thoughts and adjust our actions, and

K – Keeps us sane

Deep Breathing Exercise

This is the end of my presentation, do you have any questions?

### Adversity Coping Capability (Acc) Test

#### Citation

Smith, B. W., Dalen, J., Wiggins, K., Tooley, E., Christopher, P., & Bernard, J. (2008). The brief resilience scale: assessing the ability to bounce back. *International journal of behavioural medicine*, 15(3), 194-200.

Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) tests your perceived capability to overcome stress.

Respond to each statement below by circling one answer per row		Strongly Disagree	Disagr ee	Neutra l	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>BRS 1</b>	I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times	1	2	3	4	5
<b>BRS 2</b>	I have a hard time making it through stressful events	5	4	3	2	1
<b>BRS 3</b>	It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event	1	2	3	4	5
<b>BRS 4</b>	It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens	5	4	3	2	1
<b>BRS 5</b>	I usually come through difficult times with little trouble	1	2	3	4	5
<b>BRS 6</b>	I tend to take a long time to get over setbacks in my life	5	4	3	2	1

**Scoring:** Add the value of your responses then, divide by the total number of questions answered (which should be 6) for your final score.

**Total score:** \_\_\_\_/6

**My score:** \_\_\_\_\_ (average)

**Example:** 24 (my score when added)/ 6 (the total number of questions answered)  
= 4 average; thus, normal resilience

<b>BRS Score</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
1.00-2.99	Low resilience
3.00-4.30	Normal resilience
4.31-5.00	High resilience