

**Calming the Emotional Storm:
Emotion Regulation Skills**

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Objectives

Participants will:

- Have an understanding of how the biosocial theory contributes to emotions dysregulation
- Learn skills to help clients manage emotions more effectively, including:
 - The role of mindfulness in emotion regulation
 - The importance of naming and validating emotions
 - Opposite to Emotion Action
 - Nonjudgmental stance
 - Accumulating positives (and addressing "motivation")
 - Cope Ahead

Biosocial Theory: Review

Pervasive emotional dysregulation is the result of two main factors:

1. A biological predisposition to emotional vulnerability (high sensitivity) AND
2. A pervasively invalidating environment (e.g. the abusive home, the poor fit, the chaotic home)
 - Where the individual's internal experiences are regularly judged, punished, minimized, ignored, etc.

BioSocial Theory: The Invalidating Environment

Consequences of the emotionally vulnerable child growing up in the invalidating environment:

- The child doesn't learn to label or trust her private experiences, including emotions; instead, she learns to search her environment for cues on how to think, feel, and act
- She therefore doesn't learn to modulate emotional arousal; or how to respond appropriately to distress
- "Problem Behaviors" are the result of unhealthy attempts to regulate emotions

Mindfulness in Emotion Regulation

1. Reducing dwelling or rumination
2. Helps in identifying and labeling the emotion
3. Increasing pleasurable emotions
4. Relaxation
5. Managing urges
6. Getting to know yourself

Emotion Regulation Skills

Mindfulness of Current Emotion:

- Often when a person is experiencing pain, she focuses not just on the pain in the present, but on her expectation that the pain will continue, and perhaps that it's already gone on for so long.
- Being mindful to the current emotion is about focusing on the pain – or the pleasure – just in this moment.
- Being mindful to pleasant emotions helps us to enjoy them more.

Emotion Regulation Skills

Mindfulness of Current Emotion: radically accept your emotion and allow it to flow over you like a wave; experience it without being taken over by it.



Emotion Regulation Skills

It is extremely important to be mindful to painful emotions, in order to get used to them & learn that they do go away on their own. However, it is equally important to be mindful to pleasant emotions, and to learn to enjoy experiences as they are occurring, rather than missing out on those pleasant emotions.



The CM “How” Skill of Nonjudgmental Stance

Judgments often increase the intensity of emotions; reducing our judgments will help us reduce the painful emotions we’re experiencing

This isn’t about stuffing emotions or opinions, but rather helps us express these things more assertively - state your opinion, be descriptive or talk about how you feel, but take the judgments out of it.

Emotion Regulation

Understanding and Naming Emotions

Look at the function or job of emotions:

- Motivation: emotions motivate and organize us for action; the urges associated with many emotions are “hard-wired” (e.g. fight/flight/freeze response)
 - Emotions save time in getting us to act in important situations – this is especially helpful when we don’t have time to think things through
 - Strong emotions help us overcome obstacles

Emotion Regulation

Understanding and Naming Emotions

Look at the function or job of emotions:

- Communication: Facial expressions are also hard-wired and communicate faster than words; our facial expression, body language, and tone of voice communicate our emotions to others – whether we intend it or not (e.g. wearing the mask)

Emotion Regulation

Understanding and Naming Emotions

Look at the function or job of emotions:

- Validation: emotional reactions can give us important information about a situation – e.g. gut feelings/intuition; this can be helpful if it motivates us to check the facts, but not if we take the response as fact
 - Consider the “feeling” one more sense – take it into consideration, but don’t allow it to make the decision for you
 - E.g. “If I feel hurt, my partner meant to hurt me”; “I feel anxious, therefore there must be something to be fearful of”.

Emotion Regulation

1. Understanding and Naming Emotions

CM “What” skills of Observing and Describing Emotions: increases awareness of all the components of the emotional experience (prompting event, interpretations, physical sensations, facial expression & body language, action urge and the actual action, and after-effects), which increases the individual’s understanding of the emotion (including simply naming it) and allows for self-validation.

Emotion Regulation Skills:

Observing and Describing can also be used as exposure therapy to emotions, which also teaches the individual that they *can* tolerate the emotion and that it does not last forever, but decreases in intensity.

Emotion Regulation

Reducing Vulnerability to Emotion Mind:

By Increasing Positive Emotions:

- Build positive experiences: in the short-term, do pleasant events daily; in the long-term, work toward goals that lead to a **life worth living** (e.g. productive activity, relationships, health)

Building Mastery

(From CM module: Reducing vulnerability to EM through lifestyle changes: **STRONG** (balance Sleep, Treat mental and physical illnesses, Resist drugs and alcohol, One thing a day to build mastery, balance Nutrition, and Get exercise)

Emotion Regulation Skills

Managing extreme emotions with self-validation:

The client must learn to validate herself, accepting her emotions, thoughts and experience in general rather than judging these; and learning to trust that her response is valid even if it's not what others want or expect.

Example: "Joe"

Emotion Regulation Skills

Primary Emotions:

Situation – Interpretation – Primary Emotion

Secondary Emotions:

Situation – Interpretation – Primary Emotion
– Interpretation – Secondary Emotion

- How you feel about your feelings
- Family of origin messages often feed into these patterns; identifying these messages can be helpful

Emotion Regulation Skills

There are three ways to self-validate (Van Dijk, 2012):

1. Acknowledging the presence of the emotion: for example, "I feel anxious."

- By just acknowledging the emotion, and putting a period on the end of that sentence rather than going down the road of judging it, you are validating your anxiety.

Emotion Regulation Skills

There are three ways to self-validate:

2. Allowing: giving yourself permission to feel the feeling: for example, "It's okay that I feel anxious."

- Here, not only are you not judging the feeling, but you're going one step further and saying "this is okay" – again, not that you like it or want it to hang around, but that you're allowed to feel it.

Emotion Regulation Skills

There are three ways to self-validate:

3. Understanding: this is the highest level of self-validation and the most difficult.

- In this form of validating, not only are you not judging the emotion and saying it's okay to feel it, you're going one step further and saying you understand it: "it makes sense that I feel anxious going into situations with new people because I was bullied as a child."

Emotion Regulation Skills

Changing Unwanted Emotions With Opposite to Emotion Action

1. Identify the emotion and the urge associated with it
2. Validate the emotion
3. Check the facts (is the emotion warranted or justified?)
4. If the emotion is not warranted (or if it is and you still want to reduce the emotion), act opposite to the urge in order to reduce the emotion.

Emotion Regulation Skills

Opposite to Emotion Action

<u>Emotion</u>	<u>Urge</u>	<u>Opposite</u>
Anger	Attack	Gently avoid/be civil
Fear	Avoid	Approach
Sadness	Withdraw	Reach out
Guilt/Shame	Stop the behavior	Continue the behavior

Emotion Regulation Skills Opposite to Emotion Action

With Opposite Action, the idea is not to *avoid* the emotion, but rather to help reduce it so that it is more manageable. The idea behind this skill is that, once we have an emotion, we tend to act in ways that keep the emotion going (e.g. when we're angry, we might yell at the other person, which feeds our anger). By acting opposite to the urge attached to the emotion, the emotion is reduced in intensity and we can then access Wise Mind.

Emotion Regulation Skills Opposite to Emotion Action

- Figuring out if the emotion is warranted/justified
 - e.g. with anxiety – is your life, health, or well-being at risk?
 - e.g. with anger – is an important goal being blocked? Are you or someone you care about being attacked, hurt, threatened, or treated unfairly? (it's not as important if it's justified because anger is often justified, but gets in our way)
 - e.g. with shame – will you be rejected by a person or group you care about if characteristics of yourself or of your behavior are made public.
- Stop feeding the emotion, do the opposite to your urge
- Doing OA with pleasurable emotions?

Emotion Regulation Skills

Cope Ahead: Scuba example

When to use Cope Ahead:

- For situations you're fearing
- When you know your emotions are likely to interfere with your skills use
- In new situations where you're unsure of your skills, and this insecurity may elicit an emotional reaction that will make it very difficult for you to manage the situation effectively

Emotion Regulation Skills

Steps to Cope Ahead:

1. Describe the situation that is expected to be a problem (what's the catastrophe?)
2. Decide which skills you'll use to help you cope effectively
3. Practice! – imagine yourself in the catastrophe, using the skills and being effective – be specific!

Overview of DBT Skills

There are four modules in DBT:

1. Core Mindfulness Skills
2. Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills
3. *Emotion Regulation Skills*
4. Distress Tolerance Skills

The ER skills are typically the third module I teach in group; remember flexibility and adaptability of DBT!

Thank You!!!
