

EMOTIONAL REGULATION

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WHAT IS EMOTIONAL REGULATION?

Emotional regulation is one's ability to constructively experience and respond to an emotion.¹ For example, let's say you are feeling sad. Emotional regulation would allow you to identify that emotion, tolerate its presence, and help you to take meaningful action, such as self-soothing.

Emotional regulation can be broken down further into three separate parts:

1. acceptance of the emotion,
2. tolerance of the emotion, and,
3. modification of the emotion.²

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF EMOTION?

Humans are emotional beings and therefore we are meant to experience a range of emotions.

Often we try to categorize emotions into "good emotions" and "bad emotions"; but, emotions in and of themselves are neutral. They are simply sources of information and can be used to help us take purposeful action.³

It can be helpful to understand what our basic emotions are trying to tell us. The following is a general, but helpful guide:

Anger - the perception of intrusion,
Anxious - the perception of threat, and,
Sadness - the perception of loss.⁴

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO FEEL OUR FEELINGS?

Emotions are often incredibly messy, inconvenient, and uncomfortable, so many of us try to avoid feeling them. This is called experiential avoidance. It occurs when we intentionally try to control or avoid distressing internal experiences.⁵

So what exactly happens when we don't feel our feelings? Our emotions have no where to go! This often results in our emotions building up over time. Commonly, this can cause our emotions to come out in alternative and less desirable ways, such as "blowing up" or feeling overwhelmed.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO FEEL OUR FEELINGS? (Continued)

Lastly, there is a famous saying by Dr. Daniel Siegel: “name it to tame it.”⁶ Dr. Siegel suggests that in order for us to respond constructively to our emotions, we have to be able to identify them successfully.⁶ As such, emotional regulation skills are foundational in understanding and identifying our emotions. The more we practice feeling our feelings, the more in tune we become with them.

EMOTIONAL REGULATION PRACTICE

A simple and quick emotional regulation practice is the A.N.D. exercise.⁷ It involves bringing curious awareness to physical sensations in your body, while practicing to describe and name them with feeling words.⁷ It allows us to slow down and tolerate being with our emotions instead of simply reacting to them.⁷

Use the following script to help guide you:

Aware: Bring your awareness to any bodily sensations. You can do this by scanning your body and taking gentle notice of whatever physical sensations are there. For example, maybe you notice a sensation in your stomach, chest, or head.

Name: Begin to put names and labels on your sensations. Use any term that comes to mind, for example: “bubbly”, “tight”, “wavy”, etc.

Describe: Lastly, try to describe the sensation with an emotion word, such as “anxious”, “sad”, “angry”, etc. Take a few deep breaths here as you allow yourself to experience the feeling.



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References

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