

“Emotion Regulation”

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Emotions serve a purpose; they alert us to something occurring in our surroundings which could either be beneficial or problematic. Emotion Regulation, a module of Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), teaches how to manage our emotions while increasing positive experiences. There are three goals within emotion regulation; they are, understanding one's emotions (primary & secondary), reducing emotional vulnerability and decreasing emotional suffering.

Our minds have three states: reasonable (also called rational) mind, emotional mind and the balance of the two: Wise Mind. A cornerstone of DBT, and the regulation of one's emotions, is functioning within wise mind in order to recognize our feelings while responding in a rational manner. Many of the DBT skills we teach at Four Winds help patients to work on remaining and functioning in wise mind.

Emotions, though necessary, can often be overwhelming. Sometimes it may feel as though our emotions are controlling us. Helping patients to discover how their thoughts and behaviors contribute to their emotions is a large part of emotion regulation.

In a sequence much like a chain reaction, and, when our reasonable mind is not in control; thoughts and perceptions we have about an event can cause us to have negative emotions. These negative emotions in turn can cause a physiological response (what the emotion feels like inside), which may generate an urge to behave in a negative way. The end of this sequence often results in having to deal with the consequence of our negative behaviors (the aftermath).

As patients often feel helpless, believing that their emotions control them “I can't help it, it's the way I feel,” it is important to help them feel comforted by the part they can actively play in the above sequence. Encouraging patients to examine the thoughts they had prior to feeling the emotion can help them to discover how thought is related to emotion.

Intense negative thought is correlated to intense negative emotion; just as positive thought is correlated to positive emotion. Negative self-talk often plays a large part in intensifying the negative emotions of anger, sadness, or fear. Working with patients on generating challenges to the negative self-talk can remove some of the power that it holds, and thereby decrease the intensity of the negative emotion.

It is also important to discuss how perspective is not fact. The way we see a situation may contain some fact, along with some assumption. It is helpful to make sure that our emotions and their intensity match the FACTS of a situation, rather than our assumptions or interpretations of the event.

Another important part of the sequence that needs to be examined is a “fork in the road,” where we can decide to follow an urge or not follow an urge. The emotion's physiological response can be strong, but it does not mean the urge that is created is in the driver's seat.



Learning how to utilize a skill called Opposite Action can put patients “behind the wheel” as they decide whether or not to follow an urge. Opposite Action involves doing the opposite of what the urge tells you to do and will often give a very different result. For example, if one is angry and the usual urge is to fight/yell/argue, (s)he might try taking deep breaths, talking quietly and politely. It is likely that this will yield a very different result, and above all else, will break an unhealthy and undesirable pattern for the patient.

A final, but nevertheless, important part of emotion regulation is to remember those things that help us remain healthy so that we are at our best. These are positive habits like treating physical illnesses, eating a healthy diet, avoiding non-prescribed drugs, sleeping well, and engaging in exercise - the very basics of a healthy body and mind.

Resources:

<http://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-worksheet/dbt-emotion-regulation-skills>

https://www.dbtselfhelp.com/html/emotion_regulation1.html

https://www.dbtselfhelp.com/html/emotion_regulation_handouts.html

Editor’s Note: The adult therapy team, both inpatient, partial hospital and intensive outpatient, at Four Winds Saratoga teach and utilize DBT skills to help patients develop more adaptive methods of coping. This treatment is particularly useful for patients who exhibit emotional dysregulation or self destructive behaviors. We concentrate on the reduction of “Crisis Driven Behaviors” in an effort to increase emotional regulation.

For information about our Adult Inpatient Services and our Partial Hospital Program and Intensive Outpatient Program for adults, please [visit our webpage](#) or call Clinical Evaluation Services at 1-800-959-1287.

