Handouts for Managing Really Difficult Emotions
Overview:
Managing Really Difficult Emotions

MINDFULNESS OF CURRENT EMOTIONS
Suppressing emotion increases suffering.
Mindfulness of current emotions is the path to emotional freedom.

MANAGING EXTREME EMOTIONS
Sometimes emotional arousal is so high that you can’t use any skills, particularly if the skills are complicated or take any thought on your part.
This is a skills breakdown point.
Crisis survival skills are needed.

TROUBLESHOOTING AND REVIEW
There are many ways to change emotions.
It can be helpful to have a list of the important skills to look at when you can’t remember the skills you need to regulate your emotions.
Mindfulness of Current Emotions: Letting Go of Emotional Suffering

**OBSERVE YOUR EMOTION**
- Step back and just notice your emotion.
- Experience your emotion as a WAVE, coming and going.
- Now imagine surfing the emotion wave.
- Try not to BLOCK or SUPPRESS the emotion.
- Don’t try to GET RID of or PUSH away the emotion.
- Don’t try to KEEP the emotion around.
- Don't HOLD ON to it.
- Don’t AMPLIFY it.

**PRACTICE MINDFULNESS OF BODY SENSATIONS**
- Notice WHERE in your body you are feeling emotional sensations.
- Experience the SENSATIONS as fully as you can.
- Observe how LONG it takes before the emotion goes down.

**REMEMBER: YOU ARE NOT YOUR EMOTION**
- Do not necessarily ACT on your emotion.
- Remember times when you have felt DIFFERENT.

**PRACTICE LOVING YOUR EMOTION**
- RESPECT your emotion.
- Do not JUDGE your emotion.
- Practice WILLINGNESS.
- Radically ACCEPT your emotion.
EMOTION REGULATION HANDOUT 23

Managing Extreme Emotions

Follow these suggestions when emotional arousal is very HIGH—so extreme that your ability to use your skills breaks down.

First, observe and describe that you are at your SKILLS BREAKDOWN POINT:

- Your distress is extreme.
- You are overwhelmed.
- You cannot focus your mind on anything but the emotion itself.
- Your mind shuts down; your brain stops processing information.
- You cannot solve problems or use complicated skills.

Now check the facts. Are you really “falling apart” at this level of distress?

If no, USE YOUR SKILLS.

If yes, go to Step 1: You are at your SKILLS BREAKDOWN POINT.

Step 1. Use crisis survival skills to bring down your arousal:
(See Distress Tolerance Handouts 6–9a.)

- TIP your body chemistry.
- DISTRACT yourself from the emotional events.
- SELF-SOOTHE through the five senses.
- IMPROVE the moment you are in.

Step 2. Return to mindfulness of current emotions.
(See Emotion Regulation Handout 22.)

Step 3. Try other emotion regulation skills (if needed).
Troubleshooting Emotion Regulation Skills: When What You Are Doing Isn’t Working

CHECK YOUR BIOLOGICAL SENSITIVITY

- **ASK:** Am I biologically more vulnerable?
  - Do I have untreated physical illness or distress?
  - Am I out of balance on eating, use of drugs, sleep, exercise?
  - Have I taken medications as prescribed?

- **WORK** on your PLEASE skills.
  1. Take care of physical illness and distress.
  2. Take medications as prescribed. Check if others are needed.
  3. Try again.

CHECK YOUR SKILLS

- **REVIEW** what you have tried.
  - Did you try a skill likely to be effective?
  - Did you follow the skill instructions to the letter?

- **WORK** on your skills.
  1. Review and try other skills.
  2. Get coaching if you need it.
  3. Try again.

CHECK FOR REINFORCERS

- **ASK:** Do my emotions . . .
  - COMMUNICATE an important message or influence people to do things?
  - MOTIVATE me to do things I think are important?
  - VALIDATE my beliefs or my identity?
  - FEEL GOOD?

- **IF YES:**
  1. Practice interpersonal effectiveness skills to communicate.
  2. Work to find new reinforcers to motivate yourself.
  4. Do PROS AND CONS for changing emotions.

(See Emotion Regulation Worksheet 1.)

(continued on next page)
**CHECK YOUR MOOD**

- **ASK:** Am I putting in the time and effort that solving my problem will take?
- **IF NO:**
  1. Do PROS AND CONS for working hard on skills.
  2. Practice RADICAL ACCEPTANCE and WILLINGNESS skills.
  3. Practice the mindfulness skills of PARTICIPATING and EFFECTIVENESS
     (See Mindfulness Handouts 4 and 5.)

**CHECK FOR EMOTIONAL OVERLOAD**

- **ASK:** Am I too upset to use complicated skills?
- **IF YES, ask:** Can the problems I am worrying about be easily solved now?
  - **IF YES,** do PROBLEM SOLVING.
     (See Emotion Regulation Handouts 9, 12.)
  - **IF NO,** practice mindfulness of CURRENT EMOTIONS.
     (See Emotion Regulation Handout 22.)
- **IF** your emotions are too high for you to think straight:
  - Go to TIP skills.
     (See Distress Tolerance Handout 5.)

**CHECK FOR EMOTION MYTHS GETTING IN THE WAY**

- **CHECK FOR:**
  Judgmental myths about emotions (e.g., “Some emotions are stupid,” “There is a right way to feel in every situation”)?
  Beliefs that emotions and identity are the same (e.g., “My emotions are who I am”)?
- **IF YES:**
  1. Check the facts.
  2. Challenge myths.
  3. Practice thinking nonjudgmentally.
EMOTION REGULATION HANDOUT 25

Review of Skills for Emotion Regulation

Reduce Emotional Vulnerability
1. Accumulate positive emotions
2. Build mastery
3. Cope ahead
4. PLEASE skills

Change Emotional Thoughts and Interpretations
Check the Facts

Reduce Emotional Prompting Events
Problem Solving
Distraction

Manage Aftereffects
Repeat for Secondary Emotions
Distress Tolerance Skills

Reduce Emotional Reactions and High Arousal
Crisis Survival Strategies
Mindfulness of Current Emotions

Change Emotional Reactions
Opposite Action (all the way)
Opposite Body Language
Opposite Words

Name Emotions
Describe Emotions