

emotion regulation

This is a **little better zine**.

It doesn't have the solutions to your big problems, but the skills inside can make coping a **little** easier when life is difficult.

Learn more at **littlebetterzine.com**

Managing my strong emotions is important to me because:

► Understanding Emotions

Most emotions are **reactions to situations**. Emotions help in two different ways: emotions help you to **understand your needs** and express them to others, and emotions **motivate** you to cope with situations. Here are common emotions everyone feels from time to time:

- **sadness** – reaction to a loss or setback
- **anger** – reaction to someone being treated unfairly
- **fear** – reaction to a perceived threat or physical danger
- **guilt** – reaction to your own disappointing behavior
- **shame** – reaction to rejection from others
- **enjoyment** – reaction to your needs being satisfied
- **love** – reaction to having a meaningful connection
- **pride** – reaction to achievement or recognition
- **surprise** – reaction to something unexpected
- **disgust** – reaction to something offensive

Every emotion has three components: **thoughts** (what you think about a situation), **physical sensations** (changes felt in your body), and **behaviors/urges** (how you act out your feelings).

Recall situations where you felt the emotions listed above and consider the thoughts, sensations, and behaviors/urges you experienced in those situations.

► Anxiety and Avoidance

Anxiety is different than other emotions. Anxiety is a reaction to uncertainty. People feel anxious when they don't know how they will cope with a future situation or with **another deeper emotion**. Anxiety can motivate you to **avoid** situations and emotions that you think will be too distressing or painful.

Avoidance is a **short-term coping strategy** for reducing anxiety, but frequent avoidance may cause long-term problems by preventing you from understanding deeper emotions and making it harder to achieve your goals.

► Choosing the Situation

Before entering a situation or starting an activity, **make a prediction** about how you think it will make you feel. Be intentional about the situations you enter or avoid.

If you feel an urge to avoid a situation, consider the reasons and consequences. Will avoiding a situation because you feel anxious prevent you from achieving your goals? What deeper emotions (besides anxiety) might arise in the situation? If it is important for you to enter a situation that you feel an urge to avoid, you can use the following skills to manage your emotions.

► Changing the Situation

Identify which difficult emotion you are feeling in the situation. If you are feeling anxiety, try to identify the **deeper emotion** that you are worried about feeling. Consider **all parts** of the situation you might **change** in order to give the situation a different emotional impact. For example:

- change your location in the situation, or the location of others
- change how you interact or communicate with others
- change the physical environment
- change the timing or order of events in the situation
- change how you ask for help or offer help to others
- change the physical sensations you experience in the situation (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste)
- consider your personal strengths and change how you make use of them in the situation

► Changing Your Focus

Sometimes people focus their thoughts on things that provoke or prolong negative emotions. Notice the **repetitive thoughts** you have about **past events** that can't be changed and **future events** that haven't happened yet. Focus your attention on something in the **present moment** that makes you feel curious, peaceful, amused, safe, or grateful.

► Changing Your Thoughts

How you think about a situation affects how you feel. Many people have **automatic thoughts** (assumptions) about situations which lead to negative emotions:

- **fortune-telling** – assuming bad things will happen even when other outcomes are also possible
- **catastrophizing** – assuming unwanted events will lead to unbearable or overwhelming consequences
- **personalization** – assuming you are personally responsible for unwanted events, or assuming you are being intentionally targeted by others in negative interactions

Try to imagine **alternative outcomes** or **alternative explanations** for the situation that give it a different emotional impact. Ask yourself these questions to challenge the automatic thoughts that cause negative emotions:

- What positive, neutral, and mildly negative outcomes are also possible in this situation?
- If an unwanted event or “worst case scenario” did actually happen, what are some different ways I would cope?
- What if a negative interaction with another person isn’t really about me? What are some alternative explanations for the negative interaction? (Assume I didn’t do anything wrong)

Take your time thinking through alternatives – don’t rush. Automatic thoughts happen quickly, but changing these thoughts with alternatives takes more time and effort.

► Changing How You Feel Emotions

Some painful emotions are unavoidable, but **no feeling is final**. Instead of resisting or avoiding unwanted emotions, imagine each emotion is a wave – you can ride the wave as it rises and falls. Healthy activities can also change how strong emotions feel:

- **physical activity** releases emotions from your body
- **creative activity** releases emotions from your mind
- **mindful activity** helps you learn what an emotion is teaching you about a situation