Session 6: Emotional Regulation

1. In-Session Exercises

Lesson Activities

This exercise includes the four lesson activities that explore common strategies for managing emotions and how you relate to them, as well as unpacking helpful and unhelpful strategies for managing emotions. Each tab contains the questions we will look at in the session, with space to record your responses. You can use either your PDF workbook, or you can click on the relevant tab for each activity to complete the activities using this on-line version.

Exercise 1

This exercise explores some commonly used emotion regulation strategies. While techniques for managing emotions are diverse, this list will help you understand how people commonly deal with feelings. As you read the description of each strategy (just click the 'Strategy Tabs' to move between them), think about if you have used it in the past and answer the questions that follow.

Strategy 1: Changing how you think about a situation to alter how you feel.

Example: Instead of thinking, "I failed this test, I'm stupid," you might rethink this as, "This test was tough, but I can learn from it and pass next time."

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="15" allow_attachment="yes"]

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="24" allow_attachment="yes"]

Strategy 2: Hiding outward signs of your emotions.

Example: Instead of thinking, "I failed this test, I'm stupid," you might rethink this as, "This test was tough, but I can learn from it and pass next time."

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="16" allow_attachment="yes"]

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="25" allow_attachment="yes"]

Strategy 3: Addressing the cause of unpleasant emotions to reduce their impact.

Example: Talking to your manager about reducing your workload to make it more manageable rather than feeling overwhelmed

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="17" allow_attachment="yes"]

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="26" allow_attachment="yes"]

Strategy 4: Using deep breathing or meditation to calm yourself.

Example: Taking slow, deep breaths when you feel your heart racing before an important event.

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="18" allow_attachment="yes"]

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="27" allow_attachment="yes"]

Strategy 5: Seeking comfort and understanding from other people.

Example: Calling a friend to talk about your bad day and receiving supportive words in return.

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="19" allow_attachment="yes"]

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="28" allow_attachment="yes"]

Strategy 6: Writing about your feelings to process and understand them.

Example: Keeping a journal where you write down your thoughts after a stressful day.

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="20" allow_attachment="yes"]

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="29" allow_attachment="yes"]

Strategy 7: Engaging in physical activity to improve mood and reduce stress.

Example: Going for a jog to release pent-up energy and feel more relaxed.

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="21" allow_attachment="yes"]

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="30" allow_attachment="yes"]

Strategy 8: Listening to music to soothe or uplift your mood.

Example: Listening to an upbeat playlist to feel more energised and happy.

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="22" allow_attachment="yes"]

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="31" allow_attachment="yes"]

Strategy 9: Watching a favorite TV show or movie to take your mind off things.

Example: Rewatching a movie you love to distract yourself from worries.

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="23" allow_attachment="yes"]

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="32" allow_attachment="yes"]

Exercise 2: 'Do Not Use' Strategies

While they might seem helpful at first, certain regulation strategies actually make challenging emotions overwhelming and more difficult to regulate in the long run. Although they may help you in the short term and in very specific situations, these strategies can make you feel worse or lead you to behave in ways you regret. Let's look at some examples of 'do not use' emotion regulation strategies and think about which (if any) of these strategies you may have used in the past (just click the 'Strategy Tabs' to move between them).

Strategy 1: Suppression

Suppression is when you deny, ignore, or push your feelings aside. Although suppression might seem to help in the short term because you feel better for a little while or it helps avoid conflict, if you do this often, the feelings you push away will likely come back
stronger later, causing more emotional pain.

Think of it like trying to push a ball underwater. Sure, you can do so, but it will take a lot of energy. Eventually, when you release the ball, it will always resurface, bouncing back with more force than before.

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="39" allow_attachment="yes"]

Strategy 2: Expressive Suppression

This means not showing your true emotions and hiding how you really feel from the outside world. For example, instead of showing your emotions through your facial expressions, body language, or words, you cover them up. When you do this, you're not being genuine because what you show isn't what you feel.

Using this strategy too much can lead to more intense emotions and make it difficult to bond with others. When you don't share your true feelings, people may find it difficult to trust or feel connected to you.

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="40" allow_attachment="yes"]

Strategy 3: Rumination

Rumination means repeatedly thinking about problems, unpleasant feelings, or difficult experiences. It's like your mind gets stuck in a loop, revisiting the same thoughts and analysing every detail of what happened without trying to find a solution. Doing this can, unsurprisingly, make you feel even worse than before and for longer.

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="41" allow_attachment="yes"]

Strategy 4: Avoidance

Avoidance is when you stay away from situations, places, people, or activities that might make you feel unpleasant emotions. While this might help you feel better at first, it can make you more anxious and likely to avoid similar things in the future. Over time, avoiding challenging emotions can stop you from learning how to cope with them and even make you even more sensitive to the things you're avoiding.

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="42" allow_attachment="yes"]

Strategy 5: Substance Use

This means not showing your true emotions and hiding how you really feel from the outside world. For example, instead of showing your emotions through your facial expressions, body language, or words, you cover them up. When you do this, you're not being genuine because what you show isn't what you feel.

Substance use (and abuse) includes behaviours like emotional eating, taking drugs, and using alcohol to avoid feeling a particular emotion or to 'feel better' when you are experiencing a difficult emotion. Like the strategies detailed above, this appears to offer short-term comfort and relief, but substance use does not address the underlying issues or emotions and can actually lead to more distress because feelings like guilt and shame may show up after engaging in these behaviours.

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="42" allow_attachment="yes"]

Exercise 3: 'Use With Caution' Strategies

Some strategies can help you manage challenging emotions in certain situations but are less effective if used too much or in the wrong way. These methods can give short- term relief and help with specific challenges, but relying on them too heavily can make unpleasant emotions more intense and harder to manage in the long-term. Let's look at a few examples of emotion regulation strategies that should be used cautiously, and think about which (if any) of these strategies you may have used in the past (just click the 'Strategy Tabs' to move between them).

Strategy 1: Distraction

Distraction involves taking your mind off how you feel by focusing on something else. This falls into the 'use with caution ' category; while it can prevent you from being completely absorbed in and overwhelmed by challenging emotions for a while, it won't help in the long term. Once you stop distracting yourself, the emotions will come back, sometimes even stronger than before.

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="36" allow_attachment="yes"]

Strategy 2: Positive Imagery

Distraction involves taking your mind off how you feel by focusing on something else. This falls into the 'use with caution ' category; while it can prevent you from being completely absorbed in and overwhelmed by challenging emotions for a while, it won't help in the long term. Once you stop distracting yourself, the emotions will come back, sometimes even stronger than before.

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="37" allow_attachment="yes"]

Strategy 3: Venting

Venting is talking about how you feel around others, which can help you release unpleasant feelings and provide some relief from them. However, if you keep dwelling on and venting about challenging feelings or their triggers, it can actually make you feel worse instead of better.

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="38" allow_attachment="yes"]

Exercise 4: 'Use' Strategies

Some regulation strategies are helpful for most people in diverse situations and contexts. These methods can help you manage challenging emotions to provide immediate relief, safeguard your relationships, and provide long-term benefits like improved well-being and a more positive outlook on life. Let's look at some examples of 'Use' emotion regulation strategies and think about which (if any) of these strategies you may have used in the past (just click the 'Strategy Tabs' to move between them).

Strategy 1: Deep Belly Breathing

Deep belly breathing involves taking slow, deep breaths to expand your belly fully. This simple technique is helpful in almost any situation and works for most people because it triggers the body's relaxation response, which reduces stress and encourages calm.

Deep breathing is particularly effective for managing intense emotions like anxiety and anger because it helps you focus on your body instead of getting lost in thoughts that make your emotions worse.

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="33" allow_attachment="yes"]

Strategy 2: Muscle Relaxation

This method involves tensing and then relaxing different muscle groups in your body, which reduces physical tension and helps you feel relaxed and calm. By focusing on tightening and relaxing different muscles, you become less 'stuck in your head' and more aware of physical sensations, allowing you to release tension held in your body and feel better as a result.

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="34" allow_attachment="yes"]

Strategy 3: Expressive Writing

Expressive writing, or journaling, involves writing down thoughts and feelings about emotional experiences. Writing about emotions is an effective way for most people to work through challenging emotions in almost all situations. It helps you organize your thoughts and ideas so that you can get a better understanding of what you are feeling.

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="35" allow_attachment="yes"]

2. Homework Exercises

Exploring Emotional Regulation Strategies

In this session, we explored emotion regulation using the ER wheel and learned that ER strategies fall into one of three categories: Do Not Use (harmful or unhelpful in most contexts); Use with Caution (may have mixed outcomes depending on the circumstances); Use (typically helpful to most people). During the session, you highlighted a strategy you want to try from the ‘use’ or ‘use with caution’ categories. You will practice this for homework, and we’ll follow up on how this worked for you in the next session. Please read the instructions carefully before completing the exercise.

Exercise 1

Instructions

Step 1: Review the appendix

The Appendix describes each ‘use’ and ‘use with caution’ strategy and provides guidance and step-by-step instructions for applying each strategy in real life.

Step 2: Review your strategy

Find the strategy you selected and practiced in the last session, and ensure you review the guidance thoroughly before practicing on your own.

Step 3: Practice the strategy

Between now and our next session, practice your chosen strategy when you experience difficult emotions. Follow the guidance and step-by- step instructions provided in Appendix A – these are the same steps you followed when practicing this in our last session.

4. Reflect: Record your experiences

Complete the questions and prompts to help you reflect on your experiences and whether your chosen strategy helped manage difficult emotions.

Overarching Goal

The goal is to explore and practice healthy emotion regulation strategies to find what works best for you. It’s okay if something doesn’t work perfectly the first time—this is a learning process. Your insights and reflections will help you understand which strategies will help you manage difficult emotions in the future.

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="1" allow_attachment="yes"]
[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="2" allow_attachment="yes"]
[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="3" allow_attachment="yes"]
[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="4" allow_attachment="yes"]
[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="5" allow_attachment="yes"]
[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="6" allow_attachment="yes"]

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="11" allow_attachment="yes"]
[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="12" allow_attachment="yes"]
[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="13" allow_attachment="yes"]

Exercise 2: Session Reflection and Looking Ahead

What did you get out of this session? Take a moment to reflect on what insights you gained and what you have learned about emotions, emotional intelligence, and yourself.

[progressally_note post_id="16645" note_id="14" allow_attachment="yes"]