

Emotional Regulation Practices

Understanding and Labelling Emotions

One of the most powerful tools in emotion regulation is simply identifying and naming the emotion you are feeling. This is the use of descriptive labels for their feelings rather than vague or general terms. The idea behind this skill is a sound one – that to manage an emotion, you must first know what it is. Also, it is important to recognise that there is a difference between primary and secondary emotions, along with how to address each in the most helpful way.

- **Primary emotions:** the initial reaction to an event or to triggers in your environment.
- **Secondary emotions:** the reaction to your primary emotions or thoughts. (These usually exacerbate the intensity of the primary emotion – they are a knock-on effect)

Primary emotions are often completely natural reactions to things around us – like being sad when a loved one dies, or angry when someone is rude to us. However, secondary emotions are more dangerous and more within our control – we generally have more of a choice about how to respond to the fact that we are sad when someone dies. Secondary emotions can push us towards behaviours that are destructive and maladaptive, making it essential to learn how to accept your primary emotion in the first instance, without judging yourself for feeling it.

There are also myths surrounding emotions that need to be addressed, such as the idea that there is a “right” and a “wrong” way to feel about certain events or situations. Our emotions are unique, organic experiences that cannot be moulded to fit ideas of what is “normal.” It can be destructive to ignore or deny your emotions in order to push them toward a certain norm, as emotions are in fact adaptive evolutionary traits. They developed because they helped us function better, both by helping us to communicate with others and also by alerting us to things in our environment that are beneficial or potentially problematic.

Learning to better understand, recognise, and label emotions is an enormously helpful skill to have, and will give you a good foundation for managing your emotions. Not only will it help you regulate your emotions, but it will also help you understand and empathise with others. To do this building our emotional vocabulary is a crucial step. There are more negative oriented emotions than

positive oriented ones, and some of the terminology are really about degrees of differentiation. In order to survey a full list of useful emotional language please click on the PPT document contained in the [Link to Emotional Language List](#). One helpful way to use this resource is to choose a few words and practice using them in your conversation, verbal and even written expression – consciously.

Practising Mindfulness

Helps us become more aware of our thought patterns, our emotions, and how our thoughts and feelings affect our reactions to events.

If your mind, has you jumping on the thought train (i.e., one thought leads to another, and then another and/or which leads to a “should/ should-have” thought, which then generates a judgment). To halt the thought train, the first step is to get up on the Balcony and detach yourself from the thought by commenting on or telling yourself about the thought itself – that you are having

(**EG.**, “There’s a thought about the errand I need to run after work”).

This process is actually the same one that tricks the Amygdala – as it keeps the Neo-cortex busy, however from and internal observer (Balcony and noticing perspective), rather than the habituated ‘thought train.’ Just this act can help you refocus on your current practice and remind yourself that you have thoughts, but you are not your thoughts.

There are two categories of mindfulness skills: “what” skills and “how” skills.

“What” skills

- Observe – noticing from a distance
- Describe – naming using the most accurate emotional language you can
- Participate – PAUSE and consciously choose to re-focus and/or dismiss and/or comment to disempower train

“How” skills

- Non-judgmentally – notice and delete any language that has should/should not; must/must not; ought/ought to or ought not ...
- One-mindfully – consciously focusing on one thing at time, choosing to come back and not get scattered
- Effectively – holding discipline by reminding yourself of core values and

choosing to initiate them

Emotional Pain

Emotional pain is the foundation of all negative and destructive behaviour. Releasing the pain changes the behaviour. And whilst some types of pain are easy to notice. If a person's spouse has recently died or if a person's girlfriend left him for another man, the emotional pain is clear. Other behaviours, however, may make it harder to even identify the pain. **EG**, procrastination, anxiety, depression, or overeating may be the result of emotional pain, but the person is not aware of the pain underlying the dynamic. However, whether the pain is obvious or hidden, the pain is the source of and causes the dysfunctional behaviour.

For many people, identifying the pain is actually the more challenging task. Many negative feelings about us and problematic behaviours are actually the consequence of emotional pain. Releasing the pain changes the negative self-feelings and thus the resultant behaviour.

There are two results of clearing emotion pain:

1. The first result is that the suffering being experiencing when thinking about the event is no longer present and the event is not as 'charged' as it was.
2. The second result is less immediately obvious. Some painful events are more foundational. For example, if a person was raped during their teenage years, many feelings/thoughts and behaviours may have been driven by the pain of that event. When the pain is released, the driving force behind those feelings/thoughts and behaviours is no longer present. This second consequence is that there may be a sense of demotivation for several days. There just is not any reason for feeling and doing those old pain-driven behaviours anymore. After a few days, this kind of empty listless feeling goes away and new motivations, interests, desires may arise that reflect the new pain-free spirit that had been covered up by the pain.

Perhaps the most important emotion regulation skill, learning to let go can be very difficult but is worth the effort you invest.

Humans tend to become stuck when attempting to process negative emotions. Instead of simply letting them go, we often hold even tighter to them, obsessing over every little bit of our emotional experience and wondering why it is happening to us.

Identifying Emotional Pain. Identifying emotional pain is sometimes obvious such as when there are feelings of rejection, or someone says something hurtful or there is an experience of significant loss. The pain that underlies other reactions may not be so obvious. Feelings of being overwhelmed or anxiety about doing things indicate that emotional pain is present. An overly intense angry reaction to a situation can also indicate that you feel hurt (pain) using anger to overcome the hurt. Obsessively thinking about how you could have changed the outcome of a situation also indicates an underlying pain. In this case, you are trying to avoid pain by altering the situation. There is an underlying pain when:

1. Remembering an event causes emotional pain.
2. You feel overwhelmed or anxious.
3. You have an overly intense angry reaction.
4. You are constantly thinking about what you could have done differently to change the outcome of the situation.
5. When you are procrastinating.
6. When you felt guilt or shame.

When beginning to learn to clear the pain using either of the two processes below, it is recommended that the Mentee begin with a painful event that it is easy to remember where the pain is easy to feel. Events such as the breakup of a relationship or some other loss or the pain of a failure are usually events whose pain is evident. After applying and learning how the process works, and have seen what exact approach works best, then move on to behaviours in which the pain is less obvious.

It is also helpful to recognise that ‘this too shall pass.’ Our joy and happiness are all the sweeter because of the counter experience of our suffering and pain.

What follows are two different processes for dealing with the clearing of pain. You may wish to practice with both – as one will collaborate better with different people. The instructions are designed to be read so that the Mentee can follow along.

Before we begin there are two warnings in both of these approaches.

Do NOT deeply or intensely connect with the pain. Intensely connecting with the pain is not necessary. In fact, it is a bad idea. Nobody wants to feel pain. Letting yourself experience the pain may actually make it harder for you to

stay with the release process. Identifying the pain of the event, just follow the steps outlined as they are described.

Do NOT release more than 2 separate pains in one session. Psychological and behavioural patterns are created as a result of emotional pain. Removing that pain, removes the driving force or motivation for those patterns or behaviours' existence. Because people's sense of identity about who they are is significantly impacted as a result of these patterns and behaviours, removing the pain underlying those dynamics removes that sense of who they are. Thus, a part of the identity is overturned. Once the pain is removed, people naturally begin creating new patterns and behaviours that are not based on the pain. However, a transition time is necessary for this to emerge. If too many pains are released in short succession, they can make the process seem threatening to the self rather than a liberation of the self. (Who am I now without this pain that I identify with so strongly?)

Emotional Pain Release (Method 1)

1. **Observe your emotion.** Acknowledge that it exists, stand back from it, and get yourself unstuck from it.
2. **Imagine and then try to experience your emotion as a wave,** coming and going. You may find it helpful to concentrate on some part of the emotion, like how your body is feeling, or some image about it.
3. **For example, you could use this imagery:**
4. *"I see in my mind's eye, an ocean wave flowing through me"* (but not so big that it knocks me over)
5. **Do not try to push the emotion away.** This makes it bigger and increases our suffering. Do not reject the emotion.
6. **Do not judge your emotion.** It is not good or bad. It is just there. There are no bad emotions, just emotions. Anger, fear, sadness are all painful emotions, but they are not bad. Everyone has them, and they are just as valid as the happy emotions.
7. **At the same time, do not hang onto your emotion.** Do not rehearse it over and over to yourself. Do not escalate it or make it bigger. Sometimes when we feel a very painful emotion, like anger or a deep grief, we hold onto it, or we intensify it, making it stronger and stronger, in our efforts to deal with it or to give it our full attention. Try not to do this. Just let it be however it is. This can result in a lessening of the pain.
8. **You are not your emotion.** Your emotion is part of you, but it is not all of you. You are more than your emotion.
9. **Do not necessarily act on the emotion;** having the emotion does not

mean that you have to act. You may just need to sit with the emotion. Often, acting can intensify and prolong the emotion.

10. **Practice LOVING your emotions.** This can be a difficult concept. Why would we want to love painful emotions?

We can learn to love our emotions just the way we can learn to love (accept) anything else about ourselves or our experience that we cannot change – our age, our height, freckles, the birds that sing early in the morning and wake us up, the weather, the size of our feet, allergies, etc.

Remember that acceptance (love) and approval are two different things. You do not have to like your freckles, but they are there, and you cannot change that, so if you just accept or love them, you will feel a lot better than if you keep fighting the idea that they are there.

Emotional Pain Release Process (Method 2)

1. **Close** your eyes and sit comfortably, legs uncrossed.
2. **Identify** the painful memory.
3. **What colour(or sound)** is the pain?
4. **Where** is the colour(or sound) located in the body?
5. **Visualise breathing** into where that colour(or sound) is in the body.
6. **Visualise the pain** coming out of your body –start with where the pain is located, coming directly through the skin like a thick fog or stream. The out-breath should be very slow. (Count it out 1.....2.....3.....)
7. **Breathe the pain** (colour or sound) out of different areas of the body. Start with breathing into the middle of the brain and breathing out the centre of the forehead (the third eye). Do this 3 times.
8. **Breathe** into the middle of the brain and then breathe/flow the colour/sound - pain out your eyes and into the air. 3 times.
9. **Breathe** into your chest and breathe/flow the colour/sound – pain down the arms and out of the palms of the hands and into the air. 3 times.
10. **Breathe** into your abdomen and breathe/flow the colour/sound – pain down your legs and out the bottoms of your feet. 3 times.
11. **Breathe** into your abdomen and breathe/flow the colour/sound - pain out your naval area. 3 times.
12. **Re-evaluate** by scanning the whole body from the top of the head to the bottom of the feet – not forgetting the arms – checking and asking if there is any colour/sound - pain left in the body. If there is, do the breathing and breathe/flow out that part of the body. 3 times.

13. **When** there is nothing left, re-evaluate the event.
14. **Remember** it by bringing it to mind again.
15. **Does the event** still feel “charged?” If there is any guilt, shame or anxiety related to that event, then there is more emotional residue to be processed and released.
16. **A reaction** of sadness, grief, or regret means that the pain has been released.
17. **If** the sadness, grief, or regret is causing more pain, repeat the process focusing on that particular feeling.

Dealing with Overwhelm and/or Anxiety about Doing Something

When people feel overwhelmed and/or anxiety about things they have to do, they often do some form of hiding behaviour such as watching TV, drinking, eating, or working. However, the feeling of being overwhelmed or anxiety about doing things is never the result of what is happening, what we have to do, or any activities we have to do. Rather, we feel overwhelmed or anxious because of the thoughts we say to ourselves. Thoughts such as “I can’t do all this” trigger other negative thoughts and feelings such as “I’m going to fail” which, in turn, creates emotional pain.

For example, Peter felt overwhelmed at work because he felt he had too many things to do. The negative belief that was being triggered was “I can’t.” Underlying that belief was the belief, “I’m going to fail.” Releasing the pain of “I’m going to fail” cleared the feeling of being overwhelmed.

Steps for processing the pain underlying the feeling of being overwhelmed or anxious about having to do things:

1. When you feel overwhelmed or anxiety, ask yourself, “what am I saying to myself?” Common thoughts are “It’s too much,” “I can’t manage it,” “nothing I do matters anyway.”
2. What is the consequence of the thought? For example, if it is “too much” then “I’m going to fail.” Or “If I can’t manage it, no one will love me.”
3. Feel the pain of the thought. On a scale of 0 – 10 how painful is it?
4. Do the emotional pain release process (method 2)

NOTE : A worksheet for dealing with Overwhelm and Anxiety release is available [here](#).

This last template is very useful for other specific emotions. All you need do is replace the first two steps in the process described above and on the work page, with the alternate emotional elements.

Some examples are:

Instructions for Freeing yourself from obsessive thoughts

1. Write down what you are thinking about.
2. In your thinking, are you trying to change the outcome of what actually happened?
3. If you are trying to change the outcome of what actually happened, focus on what actually happened. What are you saying about yourself in regard to that outcome? Examples are “I’m not good enough,” “I never get what I want,” “I’m a loser,” “I’m a failure.”

Releasing the pain underlying intense anger

1. Describe the event about which you are angry.
2. What is the negative feeling underlying the anger? Examples: shame, humiliation, weak, powerless.

Releasing the pain underlying an irrational feeling such as shame or guilt

1. Identify the memory that you feel guilty or shameful about. Describe it.

Paying Attention to Positive Events

Humans are surprisingly good at filtering out the positive and focusing on the negative. It is natural, but it is not helpful! So, if you notice you are paying too much attention to the negative, pause and refocus onto the positive. You can practice by doing one small, positive activity every day, focusing on the good parts of the activity as you do it. Ignore minor issues and notice the enjoyment, pleasure, and fun! Some small, positive activities include:

- Have a good, healthy of your favourite – an unrushed meal.
- Watch a movie.
- Visit with friends or family.
- Visit a local attraction like a zoo or museum.
- Go for a walk.
- Put on headphones and do nothing but listen to music.

- Have a picnic.
- Give yourself a relaxing night in.
- Try a new hobby.

How Big is My Problem?

Sometimes we 'over-react' or 'over-estimate' the size of the problem or issue. It is helpful to get some sense of reality in terms of magnitude. So, let us look at a quick scale we can use to gain some perspective.

There are five levels a problem can potentially be on, starting with the most serious and moving towards the less serious.

Level 5: Emergency – Tornado, fire, physical danger, serious injury
Potential emotions: Enraged, terrified, hysterical, furious, panic

Level 4: Big Problem – Fighting, getting lost, someone else gets hurt
Potential emotions: Upset, scared, mad, anxious, overwhelmed

Level 3: Medium Problem – Minor accident, being disrespected, feeling sick
Potential emotions: Worried, frustrated, exhausted, hurt

Level 2: Little Problem – Forgetting to do something, losing something, cannot decide what to do
Potential emotions: Unhappy, disappointed, annoyed, embarrassed, confusion

Level 1: Glitch – Losing a game, not getting the supply or inputs you want, being a bit late
Potential emotions: Okay, Content, Fine, Calm

Use this handy guide to identify the size of the problem and decide how you can best respond to the situation – to ensure your actions are to scale.

Radical Acceptance

Sometimes no matter what we try we find that we are unable to keep painful events and emotions from consuming us – our thoughts run amok, and we are at a loss to know what to do – how to shift things and gain back our authorship over our lives, our emotions, and reactions. When we find ourselves stuck in this hard place it is the time to consider the process of Radical Acceptance.

It sounds paradoxical, but the act of accepting that we are feeling emotions we

would rather not feel can be the key to letting go of them. When we accept that we are suffering, we stop running from the difficult emotions and turn to face them – and when we do, we might see that it was not the big bad monster we thought it was, but a smaller and more manageable beast.

To find the background to, and a worksheet for this process please click on the [Link to Radical Acceptance Process](#) along with the worksheet for undertaking the process is to be found [here](#).

Welcome back !

We hope you found the process helpful and have developed the confidence to use it with any Mentee who has become stuck.

Amygdala Vaccination Process

This is a more generic process, which focuses on our ability to observe and shift our reactive responses to a range of triggers. The stages of this process are implemented over a three-week period. For each day of the process, the Mentee needs to keep a record of the process. Depending on your cycle of sessions you may wish to have the Mentee check in with you digitally with feedback on a weekly basis so you can coach them through any difficulties informally.

Please note that there are references in this process to other parts of Phase 2. Notably NLP Anchoring, Amygdala Hijack, Relaxation Response and Radical Acceptance Practice.

As always, we recommend you try out this process for yourself in order to have the experience in advance of any work you might do with your Mentee.

This range of approaches is of course not all of the tools available for working with emotional regulation. And within the Golden Key Mentor Development Program there are a wide range of other tools and frameworks that also work to deal with emotions.

When you feel you have understood these approaches and their application – you may return to the main session on EQ .