

DBT Skills: Introduction to Emotion Regulation

Objective

To learn the DBT skill of identifying feelings, then observing and naming them as a way of helping you to regulate your emotions.

You Should Know

Most of us go through the day experiencing a range of emotions—from pleasant to unpleasant, some of which are in our awareness and others are out of our awareness. Sometimes the emotions that happen outside of our awareness can cause us to make poor decisions, say things we regret, or take actions that cause us or others harm.

You can learn specific skills that can help with “emotion regulation,” that is, controlling your emotions and keeping them more in balance rather than shifting between extremes. In this worksheet, you will learn about the range of emotions and then practice simply observing and naming your own.

What to Do

In order to manage an emotion, you need to know what it is. The first step in learning emotion regulation is to become familiar with the range of emotions that we can experience. Read the following list of pleasant and unpleasant emotions.

Pleasant

affectionate
amused
appreciative
calm
caring
comfortable
confident
curious
delighted
empowered
encouraged
excited
friendly
fulfilled
grateful
hopeful
joyful
loving

mellow
open
optimistic
passionate
peaceful
pleased
relaxed
relieved
rested
safe
satisfied
secure
strong
surprised
thrilled
trusting
warm
Unpleasant
aggravated

agitated
ambivalent
angry
annoyed
anxious
apprehensive
ashamed
bad
bored
confused
contemptuous
depressed
disappointed
disconnected
discouraged
disgusted
disheartened
edgy
embarrassed

enraged
exasperated
exhausted
frightened
frustrated
furious
guarded
guilty
helpless
impatient

insecure
irritated
lonely
needy
nervous
overwhelmed
remorseful
resentful
restless
sad

scared
self-conscious
suspicious
tense
terrified
tired
uncomfortable
unhappy
upset
vulnerable

Are these feelings all familiar to you? Which ones are? Which ones aren't? Write some reflections on the lines below the list.

Now, note down a few situations or experiences in which you become aware of (notice) your feelings in the coming week. By labeling your feelings, you can use the power of your mind to take a step back and assess (mindfulness), then, over time, learn how to make a good choice about what to do next.

Start with PLEASANT or UNPLEASANT. Then try to identify the general feeling you notice, such as HAPPY, SAD, ANGRY, SCARED. Then, if you feel ready, try to be more specific. Use the above list of feelings as a guide, but feel free to use different words for feelings that come to mind that might not appear on this list.

Day	Situation/experience when you noticed a feeling	Pleasant or unpleasant?	General (happy, sad, angry, scared)	Specific (see list)
Sunday				
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				

Reflections on This Exercise

1. What emotions did you become aware of that you weren't previously aware of?

2. What was the main obstacle you encountered in identifying your emotions?

3. What was easy about it? What would you like to do to continue the practice of naming and noticing your emotions? Be specific.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in this area?
