

# **EMOTION REGULATION AND ITS ROLE IN SELF-INJURIOUS BEHAVIORS**

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## LECTURE OBJECTIVES

- 1- Discuss Emotions and their function.
- 2- Discuss the cycle for explaining emotions.
- 3- Discuss non-suicidal self-injury, parasuicidal behaviors and their function.
- 4- Discuss skills to regulate emotions.



# WHAT ARE EMOTIONS?

- Definition- notoriously difficult due to the variations in conceptualization of the mind-body connection.
- For the purpose of this presentation and based out of a Dialectical Behavioral Theory:
- Emotions are particular types of patterned reactions to events” –Linehan, 1993
- Emotions are a psychophysiological experience of an individuals state of mind that interact with biochemical (internal) and environmental (external) factors.



## IMPORTANT DISTINCTIONS

- Emotion versus the behavioral result of the emotion- mainly the emotion and the expression of the emotion
  - Example- Anger: if someone is hitting and screaming we might say “that person is very angry”.
  - This is inaccurate- at the point of the behavioral reaction the person is now expressing the emotion and doing so inappropriately.
  - People often behave in ways that are in direct result of the emotion they experience :
    - Crying, pacing, screaming, etc.



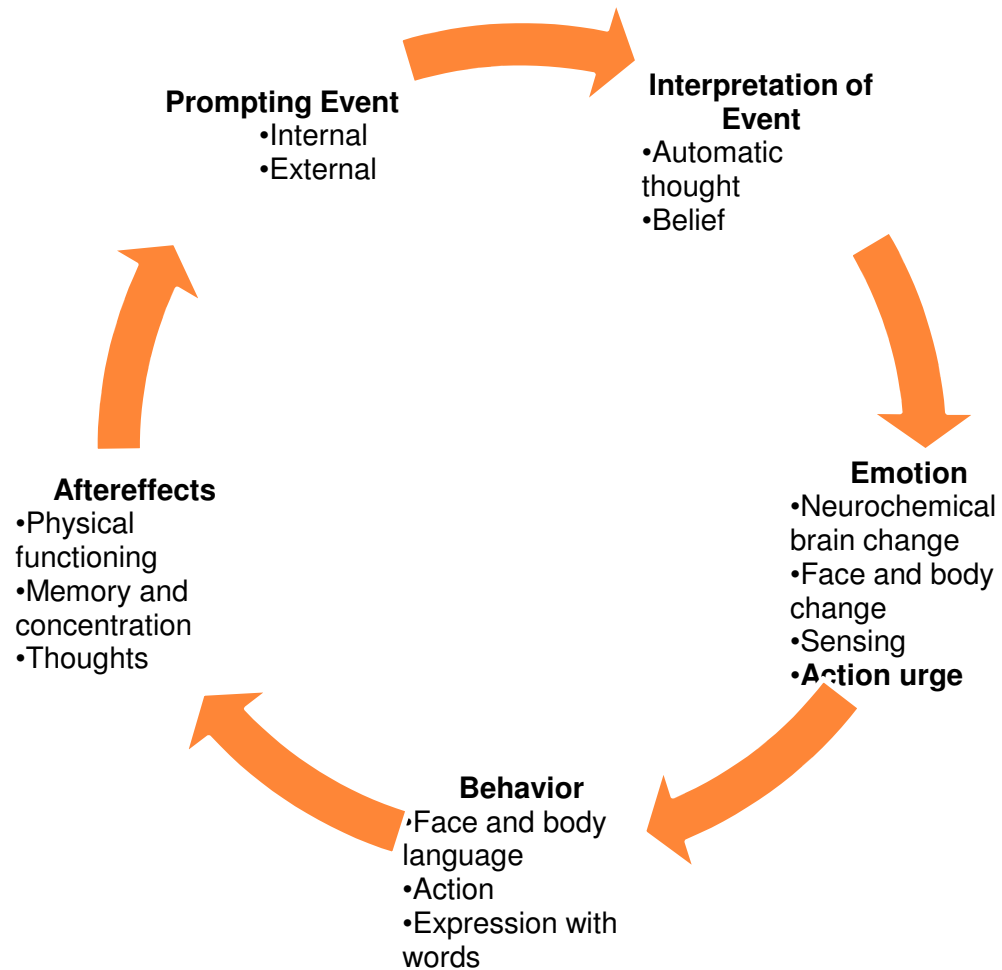
# IMPORTANT DISTINCTION

- Emotion Versus Feeling:
- Feelings are perceptions about things, people and situations.
- You can have feelings about the emotions you experience.
  - “I am not feeling well today”, “I don’t feel right about this situation”
- You have different parts of the brain that lead to emotional states and different parts of the brain that lead to feelings about these states.
  - A case in point: A fMRI study showed that when subjects experienced the emotion of sadness, certain brain areas became activated, yet when they formed a feeling about their sadness, other brain domains were aroused.





# MODEL FOR DESCRIBING EMOTIONS



# EMOTIONAL URGES

- Along with basis emotions ALL of our emotions have universal innate urges and are seen across the animal kingdom

| Emotion  | Innate Urge  | Human Behavior    | Animal Behavior |
|----------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Anger    | Attack       | Yell/hit          | Snap/bite       |
| Sadness  | Withdraw     | Isolate           | Hide            |
| Fear     | Fight/Flight | Run/Attack        | Run/Attack      |
| Surprise | Fight/Flight | Gasp/Jump         | Flinch/Run      |
| Disgust  | Retreat      | Facial expression | Turn head away  |
| Shame    | Hide         | Head down         | Tail down, hide |



# WHY CANT I GET RID OF THE EMOTIONS THAT I DON'T WANT???

- All emotions serve a function that is necessary for survival.
- **MOTIVATE AND ORGANIZE ACTION**
  - Emotions have hard-wired urges
  - Emotions save us time when we need to act in important situations.
  - Important when we don't have time to think
  - Can help us overcome obstacles



EXAMPLE: A BEAR WALKS IN RIGHT NOW!



What would you feel? What would you do? What would you NOT do?



# EMOTIONS COMMUNICATE TO AND INFLUENCE OTHERS

- Facial expressions are a hard-wired part of emotions
- Facial expressions communicate faster than words
- Non-verbal expression is at least 70% of how we communicate.
- When it is important to communicate something to others it is very hard to change our emotions
- Whether planned or not, the communication of emotions influence others.



## EXAMPLE

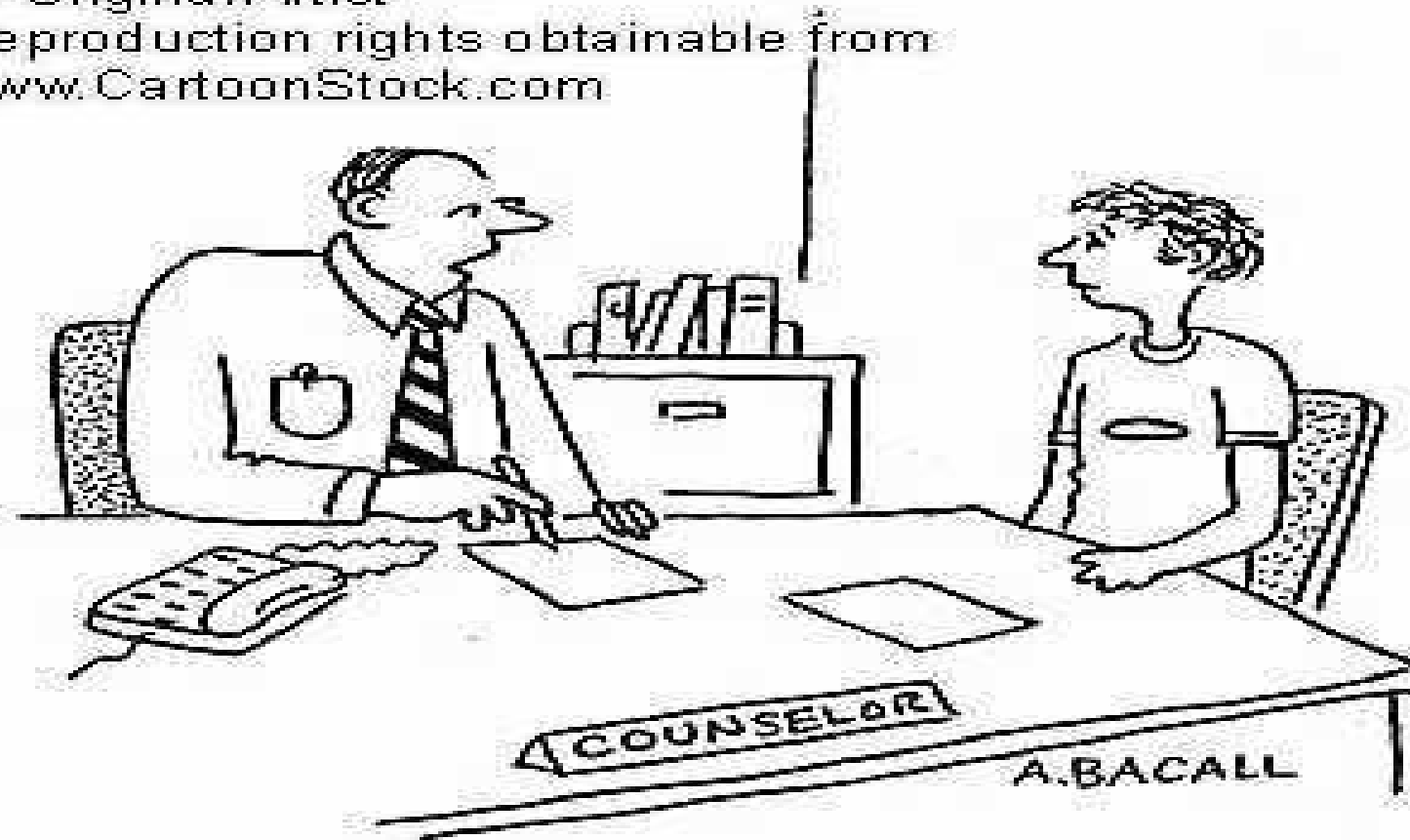
“Im FINE!” Nothing is wrong AT ALL!



What are you laughing at??



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**“Before you continue your emotional tirade,  
let me know if you’re picking up on my  
nonevaluative and empathetic listening.”**



# EMOTIONS COMMUNICATE TO OURSELVES

- Emotional Reactions can give us important information about a situation
- Gut feelings can be like intuition that there is something we need to consider about the situation
- Help us check the facts of the situation
- Problems arise when we treat emotions as facts
- Stronger the emotion the more directly we relate it to absolute fact.
  - “Because I feel nervous, I must be incompetent”.
  - “I feel very confident about this! It must be right”!
  - “Because I love him/her, then the relationship must be ok”



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**“You say you have a horrible sense of doom and futility? Let’s explore where that might be coming from.”**

# HOW DO WE REGULATE OUR EMOTIONS?

## Autonomic Nervous System-

Like it sounds this is a biological system that functions automatically.

- Sympathetic Nervous System- Activated- fight, flight, freeze
  - Occurs during the “in breath”
- Parasympathetic Nervous System- Calms system down- time to relax
  - Occurs during the “out-breath”-
  - Hence why deep breathing works.



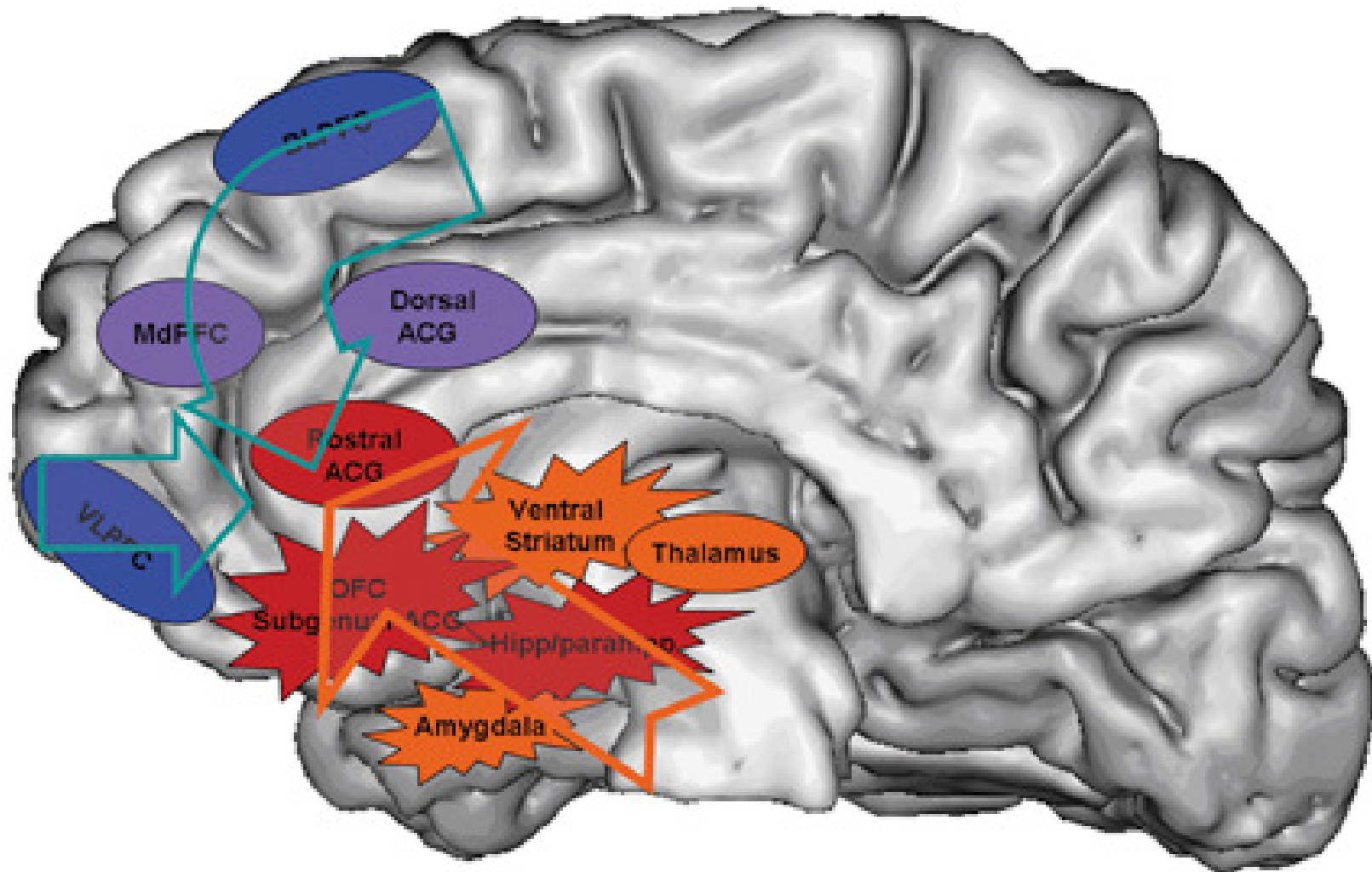
## REGULATING EMOTIONS

- We are all born with the ability to regulate our emotions.
- Sucking reflex- breast feeding/thumb sucking



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**Orienting/Emotion Identification**  
**Automatic Emotion Regulation**  
**Voluntary Emotion Regulation**  
**Regions Implicated in Both Automatic and Voluntary Emotion Regulation**



# FACTORS THAT REDUCE EMOTION REGULATION

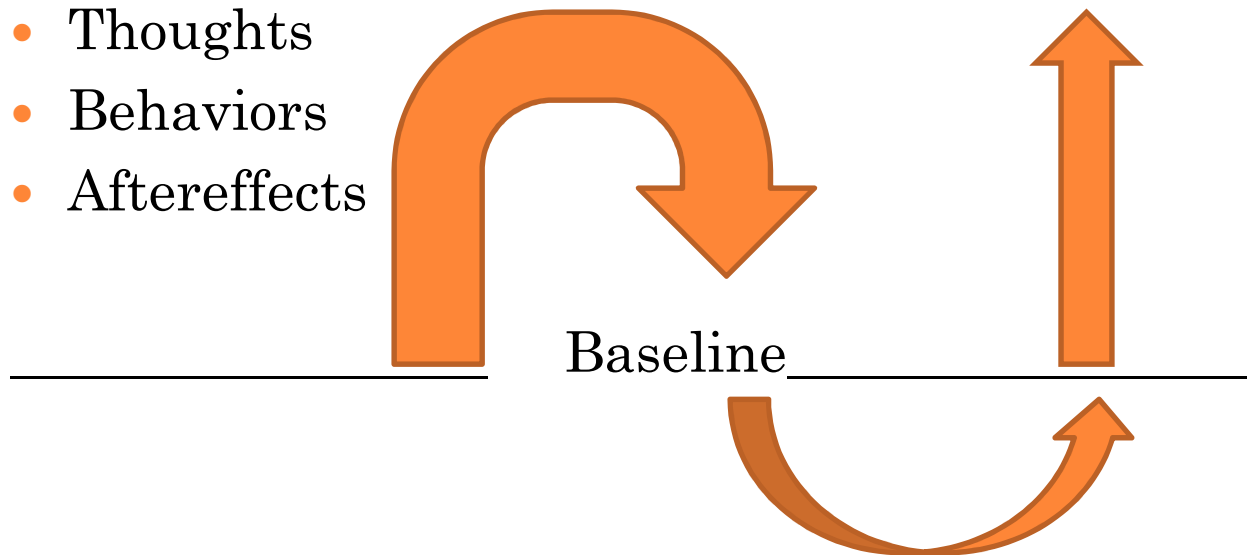
- Biology – spectrum of emotional sensitivity
- Lack of Skill- Never learned what to do with “negative emotions”.
- Reinforcement of Emotional Behavior- when your highly emotional your environment reinforces you.
- Moodiness- mood not skills take control
- The Emotional Sea of Dyscontrol – feel like you are drowning in intense emotions
- Emotion Myths – emotions are bad/weak or extreme emotion are “part of who you are”.



# HOW DO OUR EMOTIONS GET DYSREGULATED ?

- Although our emotions have a natural  $\frac{1}{2}$  life, on average 5-10 minutes, they can be maintained for a longer duration by:

- Thoughts
- Behaviors
- Aftereffects



## EXAMPLE OF UN-NATURAL EMOTION REGULATION....

- Anyone need a smoke break??
- ACh or Acetylcholine is our brains natural chemical that promotes emotion regulation.
- Nicotine mimics ACh in the brain and un-naturally regulates emotions.
- This is why you may feel more relaxed after a cigarette OR may crave cigarettes in highly emotional states; stressed, sad, anxious AND may even feel some relief.
- BE AWARE... it's a TRICK!!



# EMOTION DYSREGULATION

- It is unnatural for our bodies to stay in an activated state for longer than is needed to serve the emotions function.
- This is seen in prolonged anxiety disorders. Our bodies actually develop illnesses due to the sympathetic nervous system being overly activated.
  - High Blood pressure
  - Heart disease
  - High Cholesterol
- Some people learn how to regulate their emotions in unhealthy ways.





# SELF-HARM AND OTHER NON-SUICIDAL BEHAVIORS

# NON-SUICIDAL SELF-INJURY AND PARA-SUICIDAL BEHAVIORS

- Definition- any behavior of which the intention is not suicide but in turn could result in death or severe injury/damage.
- These behaviors include but are not limited to
  - Self-mutilation- cutting/scratching/burning
  - Excessive substance use- drinking/drugs/combination
  - Eating disordered behaviors
  - Reckless Driving
  - Unprotected Sex
  - Physical fights
- *For the purposes of this lecture we will refer to all of these behaviors as “self-harm”.*



# MYTHS ABOUT SELF-HARM

- 1- If the wound isn't that bad then the problem isn't that serious.
- 2- People that self injure need to be committed to psychiatric facilities
- 3- Its only attention seeking behavior
- 4- Its used to manipulate others
- 5- Self-harmers are dangerous to others
- 6- They do not feel the pain
- 7- Self-injury is a personality disorder
- 8- Only teenage girls self-injure
- 9- Self-injury is always an unsuccessful suicide attempt
- 10- There is nothing you can do to help someone that self- injures.



# SELF-INJURY VERSUS SUICIDE

“a person who truly attempts suicide seeks to  
end all feelings whereas a person who self  
mutilates seeks to feel better”

~Favazza



## WHY IT WORKS

- Self-injury works because it reduces tension and restores a sense of psychological equilibrium
  - Helps a dysregulated person return to their emotional baseline
- Self-injury has powerful communication aspects
  - “I am in pain” and/or “ please understand my pain”
  - “I am in need and don’t know how to ask for it/or don’t think I deserve it” etc
- Self-injury provides a sense of control and empowerment
  - In chaotic or invalidating environments.



# VULNERABILITIES TO SELF-HARM

- Depression (labile emotion, irritability, loneliness, isolation, hopelessness)
- Anxiety (weak coping and/or social skills)
- Impulsivity
- Low self-esteem
- Perfectionism
- Confused sense of self (including sexual orientation)
- Internal locus of control (self-blame)
- Awareness of self-harm by peers/family
- Impaired family communication
- Hypercritical environment
- Violent/dysfunctional family
- Use of cigarettes, alcohol, & drugs
- Criminal history



# COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF PEOPLE WHO SELF-HARM

- Interpersonal Chaos
- Labile Affect/ Emotional dysregulation
- Impulsiveness
- Confusion about Self
- Emotional Vulnerability- highly sensitive, highly reactive, slow return to baseline.
- Invalidating Environment



# INVALIDATING ENVIRONMENT

- Usually starts in childhood/family of origin
- “Poorness of fit”- temperaments/personality
- Child’s expression of private experiences are dismissed
  - “Your not sad, you have no reason to be sad!”
- Child learns to distrust internal cues
  - “This is normal/safe/love”- when being mistreated
- Child “ups the volume” to convince others that what they’re feeling is real.



## REASONS THAT PEOPLE SELF HARM

- To stop bad feelings
- To feel something, even if pain/to relieve feeling numb or empty
- To punish self
- To feel relaxed
- To give self something to do when alone
- To communicate to someone, even if response is negative/not desired
- To feel self-control over a situation
- To ask for help
- To feel more a part of a group (more often seen in teens)



# FUNCTIONS OF SELF HARM

- Automatic-negative Reinforcement:
  - to stop bad feelings
- Automatic-positive Reinforcement:
  - to feel something
- Social-negative Reinforcement:
  - to avoid doing something unpleasant and unable to express needs or lack of desire assertively.
- Social-positive Reinforcement:
  - to communicate to others needs/wants and get a response.





# EMOTION REGULATION SKILLS

# BALANCING EMOTIONAL VULNERABILITY PLEASE SKILL

- Taking care of your body=taking care of your mind.
- PL- Taking care of any physical illnesses; including chronic pain.
- E- Balanced eating- not too much or too little. Consult the food pyramid. Omega-3 rich foods. Stay hydrated
- A- Avoid mood altering drugs/non-prescribed drugs/alcohol. Consider caffeine intake.
- S- get amount of sleep that works for you. Keep your sleep schedule consistent. Consult “Sleeping Healthy Guide” if sleep is disrupted.
- E- Exercise. Work up to 20 minutes a day. Releases the same Neurotransmitters that are found in medications such as SSRIs (example- Prozac).



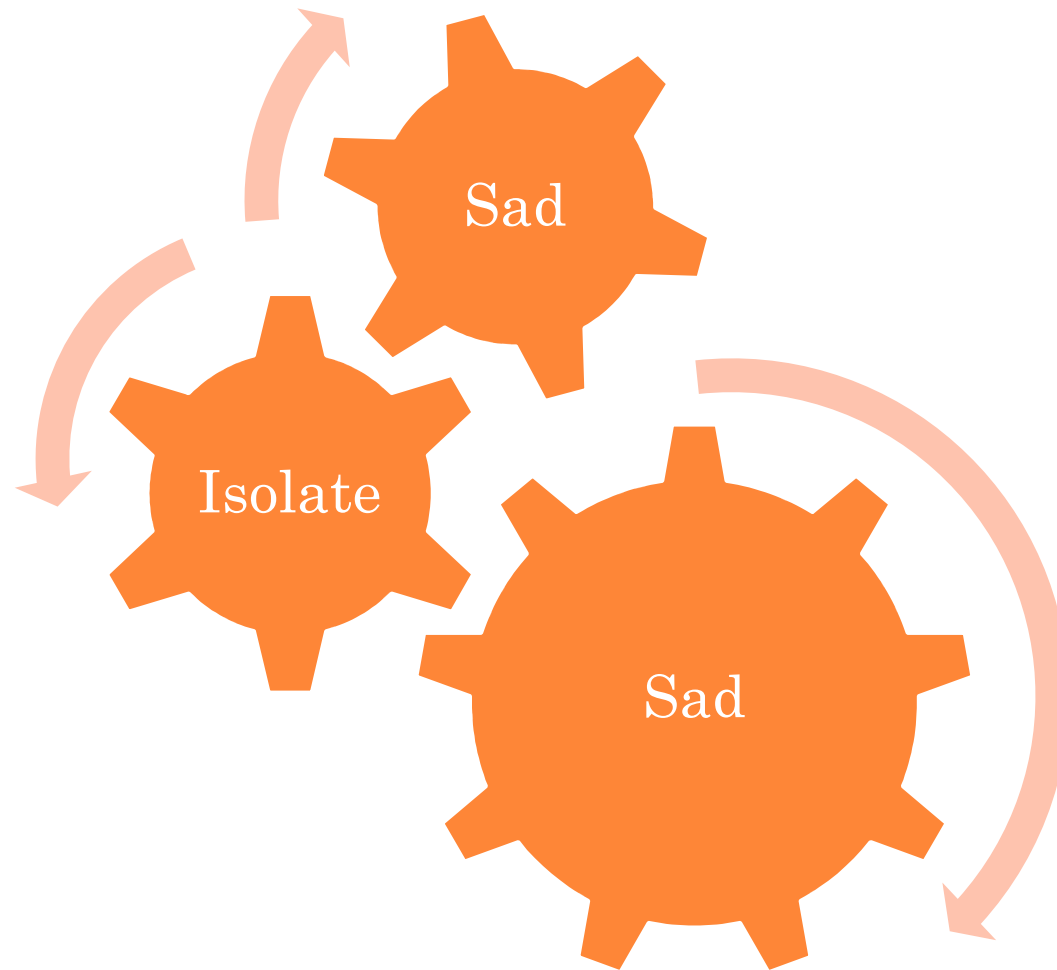
## OPPOSITE TO EMOTION

- All our emotions have a natural innate behavioral urge that it is associated to (slide #8)
- When we act in congruence with that urge the intensity of the emotion increases.

When we act opposite to the urge the intensity of that emotion decreases.



# CONGRUENT WITH THE EMOTION URGE



THIS CHRISTMAS, HEEL THE LOVE.



Owen Wilson Jennifer Aniston

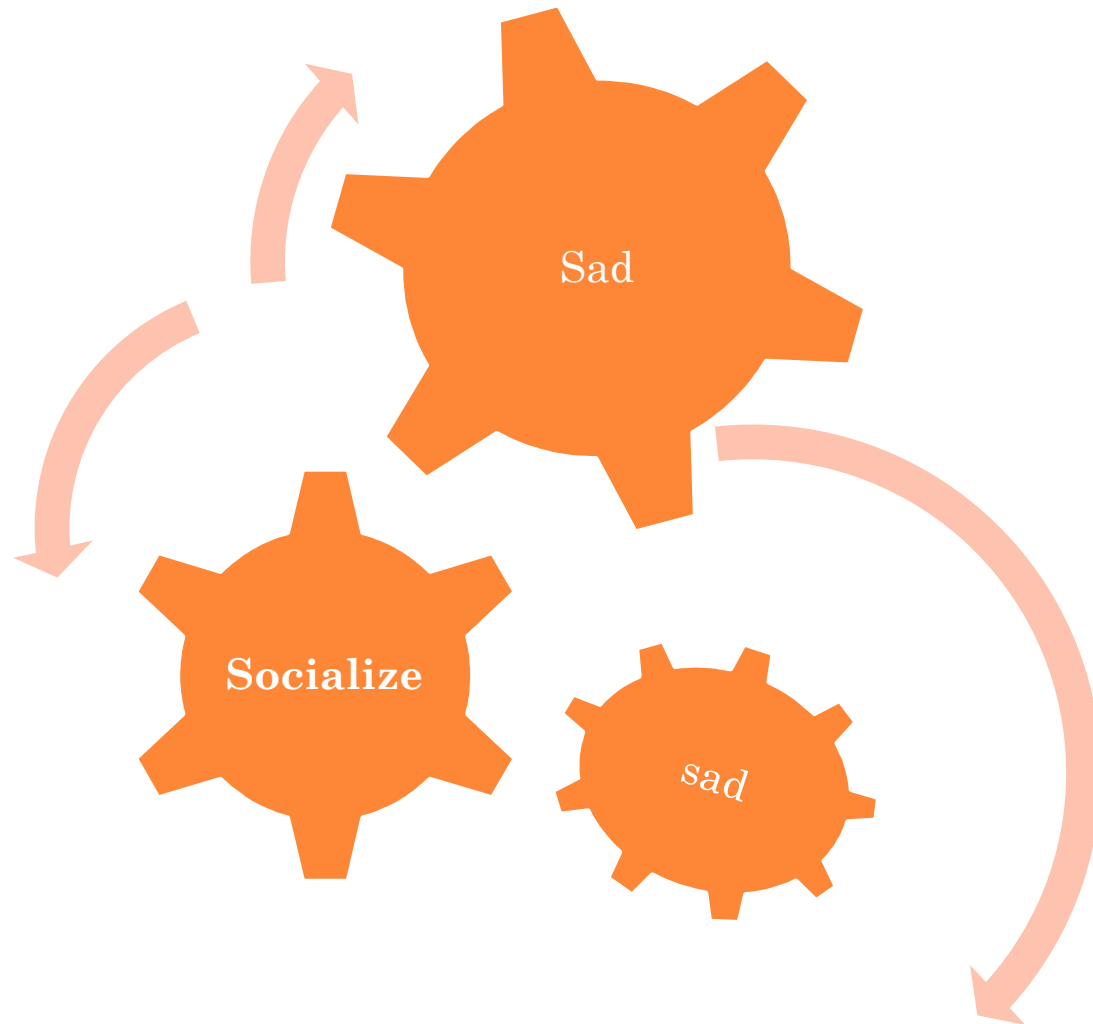
# Marley & Me

LIFE AND LOVE WITH THE WORLD'S WORST DOG

REGENCY 



# OPPOSITE TO EMOTION URGE



OPPOSITE TO ISOLATE IS.....



# OPPOSITE TO EMOTION STEP-BY-STEP

- 1- Identify the emotion YOU want to change
  - What do I feel? What is the emotion name?”
- 2- Identify the Action Urges
  - What do I want to do? Will it be helpful?
- 3- Act opposite ALL the way or it wont work
  - 100%- throw yourself in
- 4- Repeat until emotional sensitivity goes down and your tendency to act on the emotion goes down.
- Doing this will allow you the freedom to respond versus react.



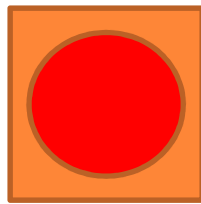
# EXAMPLES OF OPPOSITE TO EMOTION ANGER

- Anger is justified when:
  - An important goal is blocked/prevented
  - You or someone you care about it attacked or hurt (physically/emotionally)
  - You or someone you care about is insulted or threatened by others.
- Acting opposite of urge to Attack (innate)
  - Gently Avoid
  - Do something a little bit nice
  - Imagine understanding/ Use Empathy
  - Relaxed posture
    - Willing hands
    - ½ Smile
    - Breath slowly deeply

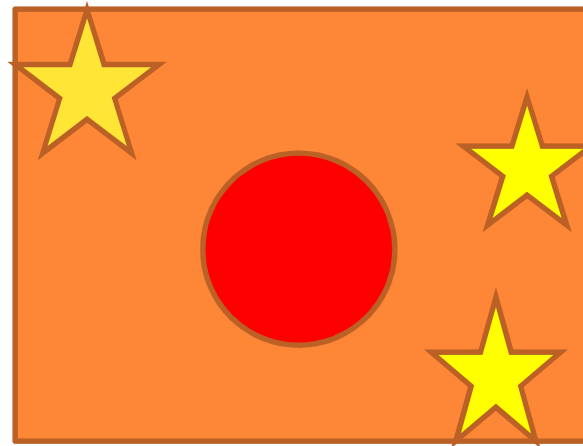


# MINDFULNESS OF EMOTION

- Suppressing an emotion (or trying to) only increases suffering
- Steps 1-4
- 1- Observe your Emotion- step back and just notice. Like a wave- coming and going.
- What do you notice when you take a step back?



Vs



# MINDFULNESS OF EMOTION CONTINUED

## 2- Practice Mindfulness of your bodily sensations

- Where in your body do you feel sensations
- Experience them as fully as you can
- Observe how long it takes before the emotion decreases

## 3- Remember you are not your emotion

Do not necessarily have to ACT on the emotion  
Remember times when you felt different

## 4- Practice loving your emotion

Respect your emotion/ don't judge  
Remember that your emotions have a function  
Radically accept your emotion- it is what it is...  
cause and effect relationship



## RESOURCES

- *Self-Mutilation: A Helping Book for Teens Who Hurt Themselves.* (1999) Alicia Clarke
- *Skills Training Manual for Treating Borderline Personality Disorder.* (1993) Marsha Linehan
- *Cognitive Behavioral Treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder* (1993). Marsha Linehan
- *Dialectical Behavior Therapy with Suicidal Adolescents* (2006) Alec Miller, Jill Rathus, Marsha Linehan, & Charles Swenson



# QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, FEEDBACK??

## Contact Information

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