The Art of Being Calm: Five strategies to help soothe and contain overwhelming emotions.

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Objectives

• To understand and distinguish between emotions and mood
• To learn about the role or function of various emotions
• To highlight five strategies or tools that can be practiced to regulate overwhelming emotional states and restore calm
Mindfulness Meditation
What Are Emotions?

• The APA definition:
  • “A complex reaction pattern, involving experiential, behavioral, and physiological elements.”
  • They are the route for how individuals deal with matters or situations they find personally significant. *(Psychology and Counseling News, 2019).*

• Three components of an emotional experience:
  • Subjective experience.
  • Physiological response.
  • Behavioral or expressive response.

• Provide meaning, texture, richness, joy, and connection with others.
• Feelings are developed from an emotional experience.
• Moods are “short-lived,” low-intensity emotional states.
  • Lack stimuli.
  • No clear starting point.
  • A mood is often defined as a state of being “stuck” in an emotional experience.
Myths vs. Facts

Myths

- "There is a right way to feel in every situation."
- "Telling others about bad feelings is a weakness."
- "Negative feelings are bad."
- Emotional = Out of Control
- "Emotions can happen for no reason."
- "If others don’t approve of my feelings, I shouldn’t feel the way I do."

Facts

- Humans are born with the capacity for basic emotions, including anger, joy, seeking, surprise, fear, and disgust.
- Shame and guilt require more cognitive development and emerge later in life.
- They can be self-perpetuating.
- Emotions have function.
- Emotions are not facts.
The Function of Emotion

- Facilitates decision-making
- Prepares and motivates individuals to take action
- Provides information about the environment
- Used to communicate with or influence others
- Self-validation
Strategies to Restore Calm

• Emotional Dysregulation: Difficulty or inability in coping with experience or processing emotions
  - Intensification: (i.e., panic, intrusive thoughts, ANS reactions)
  - Deactivation (i.e., dissociation, de-realization, suppression)
1. Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Lying or seated position
- Tense and release each muscle group in sequence from head to toe (4-8 seconds):
  - Forehead, eyes, mouth, jaw, neck, shoulders, back, chest, biceps, forearms, hands, abdomen, quadriceps, calves, and feet
- Focus attention on the tension and release
- Kids version: Hard Pasta/Soft Pasta
2. Diaphragmatic Breathing

- Lying or seated position
- One hand on chest, one on abdomen
- Inhale normally through nose, imagine air bypassing chest and going into abdomen
- Exhale through mouth—‘shhh’ sound, exhale is slightly longer than inhale
- Focus attention on expansion and flattening of abdomen
- Kids version: Smell the cake and blow out the candles
3. Self-Soothing

- The 5 Senses
- Draw awareness to taste, touch, smell, hearing, and vision
- Focus attention on the things that are comforting or that you love
- For example: Sitting by a fireplace with a cup of tea, taking a bath with candles, going to a favorite chair, listening to music and driving.
4. Time Management

- Highest, Medium, Lowest
- A visual defining what is important and what isn’t
- Primary vs. Secondary Goals
- Low priority behaviors that often increase stress and take time away from what matters
  - Worry, ruminating thoughts
  - Social media/games
  - Defending being “right”
  - Procrastination behaviors

"And in the end, it’s not the years in your life that count. It’s the life in your years."

Abraham Lincoln
5. Visualization

- Visualize a safe and relaxing place, real or imagined
- Incorporate as many details as possible using all of the senses (i.e. What do you hear, smell, hear, taste, etc.?)
- Imagine yourself relaxing in this scene
  - When you notice difficulty, tell yourself that you are letting go of tension
- Know that you can come to this place any time you like.
References

• https://online.uwa.edu/news/emotional-psychology/.


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