

Emotional Regulation: Opposite Action

adapted from a concept by Marsha Linehan

Page 1 of 2

Emotions are directly wired to our biology. Emotional Regulation becomes a problem when emotions overwhelm our physical responses. The Opposite Action skill allows us to choose to respond in the opposite manner from what our biological responses would normally activate us to do.

Certain biological states tend to make us more susceptible to difficulties with emotional regulation. Think about the word “HALT” to help you recognize these states:

Hungry: Tells us we need to eat or drink – activates appetite and/or thirst

Angry: Tells us we need to deal with a situation – activates fight/flight/freeze

Lonely: Tells us we need companionship and interaction – activates interactions

Tired: Tells us that we need rest – activates rest/sleep cycles

When experiencing any of the states above we are especially vulnerable to problems with emotional regulation and should be prepared ahead of time to use emotional regulation skills.

INSTRUCTIONS

Use the outline below to practice Emotional Regulation using Opposite Action.

Then on the next page use the form to brainstorm some possible ways to use Opposite Action to build your Emotional Regulation skills. Write them down and practice them to gain experience using the skills.

EMOTION	OPPOSITE ACTION
Anger gets us ready to attack or defend. It activates us to fight, flee or freeze.	Express reasons why you're angry in a calm, kind manner or walk away from the situation.
Shame gets us ready to hide from others. It activates us to isolate ourselves.	Seek to reach out to others. Head up, stand up straight, make eye contact, own the feeling.
Fear gets us ready to flee or to freeze. It activates our fight/flight/freeze response.	Confront the fear by going towards it. Build courage by making room for the feeling.
Depression gets us ready to be avoidant. It activates us to minimize contact and increase isolation from others.	Get active; engage in eye contact and assertiveness; “fake it ‘til you make it”; two-minute rule
Disgust gets us ready to reject other or a situation or to distance ourselves. It activates our avoidance response.	Push through the situation one step at a time: “What’s the smallest thing I can do to make a difference right now?”
Guilt gets us ready to acknowledge perceived wrongs. It activates us to seek forgiveness and reconciliation.	Offer sincere apologies; work to rectify wrongs and strive to prevent them from happening again.

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Page 2 of 2

Name _____ Date _____

EMOTION	OPPOSITE ACTION I COULD TAKE
ANGER	
SHAME	
FEAR	
DEPRESSION	
DISGUST	
GUILT	
OTHER (NAME BELOW)	