

Dealing with Everyday Emotion and Stress

Dr. Kristin Jones, DHSc LMHC

Dalia MacDonald, LMHC

What we will be discussing today:

- Importance of managing stress and emotions
- Healthy ways of looking at emotions
- How emotions work
- Skills and strategies for dealing with difficult emotions

Importance of managing emotions and stress

- Prevention of major mental health problems
 - Addressing emotional issues early leads to better prognosis and smoother recovery
- Improve emotional balance and wellbeing
- Improve work performance and productivity
- Improve relationships

Stress

- Stress is a person's physical or emotional response to demands, changes or pressures in life
 - Common causes: money, relationships, illness, work, technology, social media
 - Staring at a computer/phone screen activates the sympathetic nervous system
 - Leads to activation of the nervous system in the absence of a threat
- Stress can lead to the following:
 - Greater vulnerability to agitation, feelings of overwhelm, frustration, difficulty concentrating, and negative mood
 - May be difficult to relax and quiet the mind
- Common symptoms of stress:
 - Difficulty breathing, difficulty sleeping, fatigue, headache, muscle aches, high blood pressure, chest pain, indigestion/heartburn, eye discomfort or blurry vision, anxiety or panic attacks

Dealing with Stress: *Emotional Hygiene*

Importance of stress management

- Chronic stress is linked to mental, emotional, and medical problems
- May lead to great difficulty in managing everyday emotions

Emotional Hygiene: Practices to reduce stress and vulnerability to painful emotions

- Health practices: nutrition, exercise, sleep
- Mindfulness/meditation/yoga
 - Helps to balance the nervous system
- Time in nature:
 - 20 minutes without distraction lowers cortisol
- Meaningful goals linked to values
- Self-care practices
 - Gratitude, journaling, relaxation (massage, bath, etc)
- Socializing
- Hobbies

Healthy ways of looking at emotions

What are emotions and how emotions work



Healthy ways of looking at emotion

What is an emotion?

- Emotions are biological responses to internal and external cues.
- Developed through evolution and serve important survival functions.

Emotions have four parts:

- 1) **Cognitive** – Thoughts, beliefs, and expectations
- 2) **Subjective Experience** – The way an individual experiences emotion; pleasure, discomfort and perceived intensity of emotion
- 3) **Physiological** – Changes in the body such as heartbeat, breathing, pupil dilation, etc.
- 4) **Behavioral** – Urges to act in certain ways and expression of emotions

Healthy ways of looking at emotions

- **Emotions are neither good nor bad, neither right nor wrong**
 - They just ARE, so it is unhelpful to judge them
- **Having an emotion is different from acting on an emotion**
 - When a strong emotion arises, all you need to do is recognize and feel it—you do not need to act
- **Emotions are not facts**
 - When emotions are very powerful, however, they can feel just like “the truth.”
- **You cannot get rid of emotions**
 - They serve important survival functions
 - Be willing to radically accept your emotions as they arise
- **Emotions are time limited and subside after reaching a peak of intensity**
 - Emotions act like waves
 - A wave of emotion lasts approximately 90 seconds
 - However, emotions “love themselves” and can be self-perpetuating
 - If an emotion lasts longer than 90 seconds, something is reactivating it

Emotion Model

Emotional Experiencing

What automatically happens inside of you.

- Biological changes
- Body sensations
- Action urges

Interpretations

How you understand or make sense of what happened through your thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions.

Prompting Event

Any internal or external event that prompts or triggers an emotional reaction.

Emotional Expression

Emotional reactions that others can see; can be under your control.

- Body language (posture, gestures)
- Facial expression
- Words
- Actions

Emotion Name

Aftereffects

- Memories
- Thoughts
- Physical functioning
- Behavior
- Secondary emotions



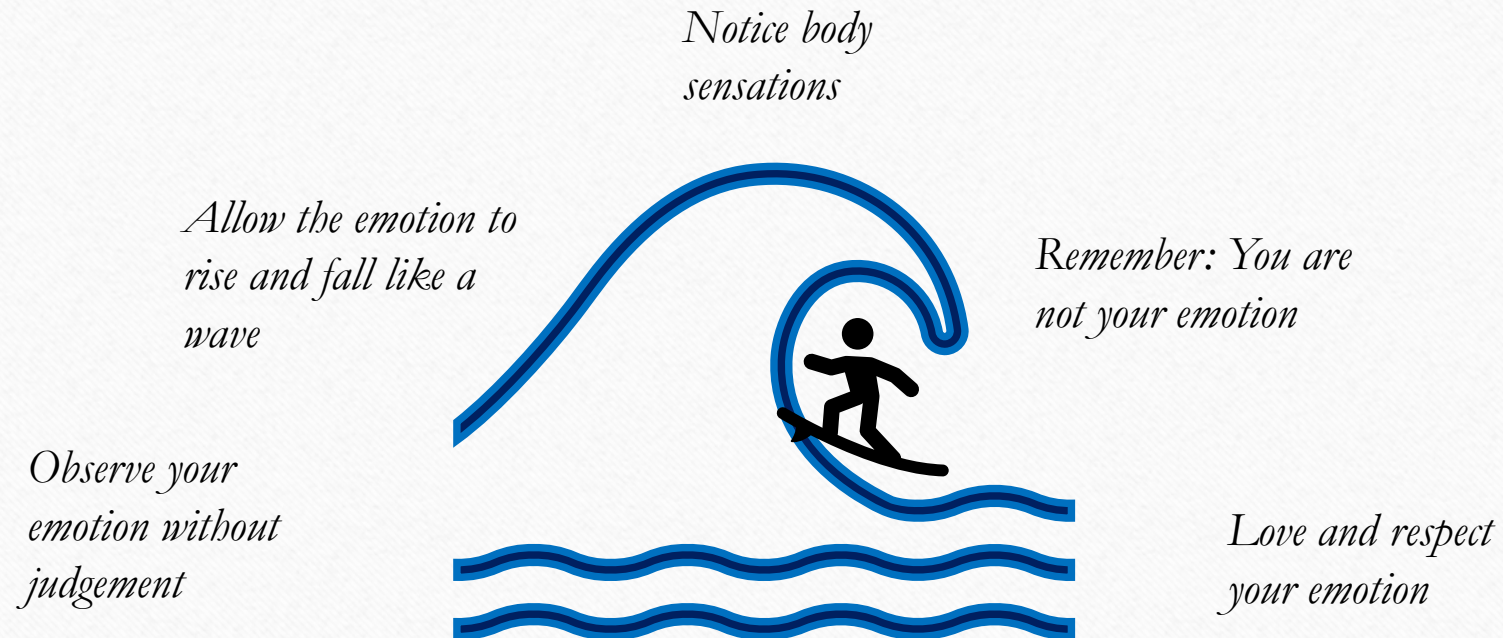
Vulnerability Factors

Things that make you more sensitive to an emotion being set off.



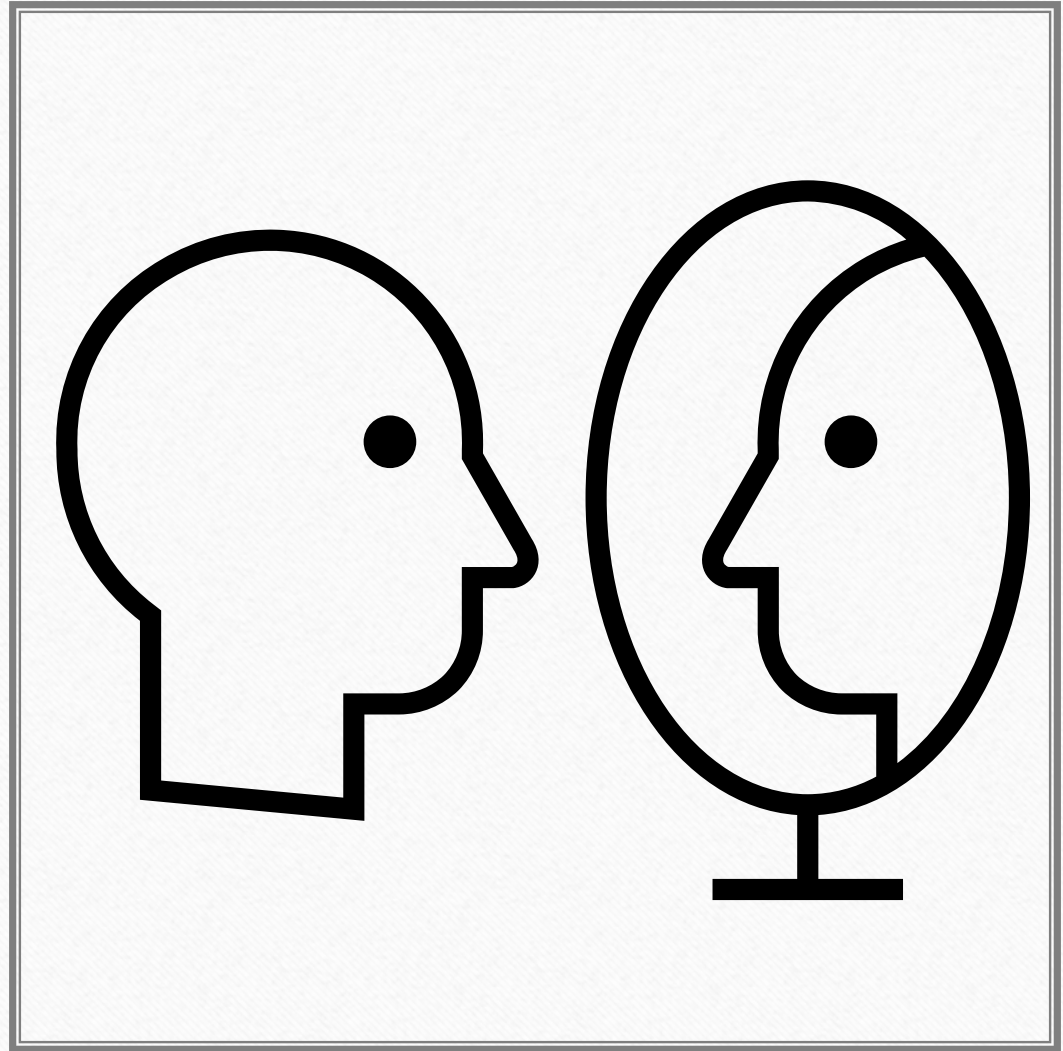
Mindfulness of Current Emotion

- Research shows that labeling an emotion and understanding where it is coming from helps to regulate it
- Research also has shown that consistently trying to suppress or block emotions can actually make it worse
- Learning to tolerate/experience emotions instead of trying to get rid of them is key for regulating emotions



The importance of self- validation of emotion

“Speaking” to the emotion in an
understanding way helps it to quiet



Self-Validation: Communicating Understanding and Acceptance

What is self-validation?

- Acknowledging that your emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are real and understandable given your experiences, history and/or biology.
- Finding the **kernel of truth** in your perspective or situation; verifying the facts of a situation.

Validation



Agreeing, liking, or praise

Important things to validate:

Your feelings/emotions,
beliefs, opinions, and thoughts

Sufferings and difficulties

Facts of a situation

The valid (and *only* the valid)

How do you self-validate?

- 1. Pay attention to yourself:**
 - Instead of dismissing your experiences, pay attention to your emotions, thoughts, sensations, and urges.
- 2. Reflect back to yourself:**
 - Describe your feelings without passing judgment.
 - Examples: “Wow, I’m feeling really angry!” or “I’m feeling a little nervous right now.”
- 3. Respond in a way that shows that you take yourself seriously:**
 - Accept that it is OK to have your emotion(s).
 - Example: “It’s OK to feel sad.”
- 4. Be understanding with yourself:**
 - Acknowledge that the emotion may make sense in the situation.
 - Show tolerance for yourself and your emotions.
 - Do not judge your emotions (or yourself).
- 5. Acknowledge what is valid in the moment:**
 - Facts about the situation; your own emotional experiences.
- 6. Show equality:**
 - Do not compare your experiences as being less important or valid than others.
 - Don’t catastrophize or fragilize your experiences compared to others.

Common Thinking Mistakes

How thoughts impact emotions



Thinking Mistakes: What are they?

- Common (often habitual) ways of thinking that are often negatively biased and inaccurate.
 - Exaggerated thought patterns not based in fact
 - Leads to interpret or see things as more negative
 - Can lead to painful emotions and ineffective reactions to events
 - More likely when emotionally vulnerable or stressed
- Important to recognize thinking mistakes and develop more balanced and fact-based thoughts



Common Thinking Mistakes

Black-or-White/All-or-Nothing Thinking

- Seeing things in rigid and extreme ways.
- If you don't do well on a test or project, you are a loser who isn't good at anything.

Catastrophizing (Fortune-telling)

- Only predict the worst-case scenarios instead of recognizing other more likely outcomes.
- "I will never a partner."

Overgeneralization

- You draw broad conclusions that extend beyond the current situation
- "I had a difficult first day at work so I'm sure that it will be a disaster."

Emotional Reasoning

- Taking your emotions as fact. "I feel . . .; therefore, it is true.
- "I feel like a terrible person, therefore I am a terrible person."

Mind-Reading

- You "know" what other people are thinking without asking them.
- "She thinks I'm bad at my job."

Common Thinking Mistakes

Should Statements

- You have a fixed or rigid idea of how you or someone else “should” act.
- “It’s terrible that I got angry, I should always be pleasant.”

Labeling

- Describing things in an overgeneralizing and extreme way.
- “I burnt my toast. I am such an idiot!”

Personalization

- You personalize things that have nothing to do with you.
- “My colleague was short with me; I must have done something wrong.”

Mental Filter

- You selectively see or hear only negatives and ignore positives.
- “Because my boss gave me one piece of negative feedback (and also said numerous positive things), I am terrible at my job.”

Disqualifying the Positive

- You find reasons to invalidate or disprove positive qualities, experiences, or actions.
- “I did well in that one work project because I got lucky.”



Changing Unwanted Emotional Responses

5 Ways to Deal with a Problem

1. Do nothing and stay miserable
2. Do something that makes things worse
3. Change how you think or feel about the situation
4. Problem solve the situation
5. Accept the situation as it is

Three skills to change unwanted emotional responses



Check the Facts

In order to change unwanted emotions, you first need to check the facts.

- Sometimes, just checking the facts will create a shift.



Opposite Action

If your emotion doesn't fit the facts or if acting on the emotion may interfere with your goals

- Use opposite action to change the emotion.
- Acting opposite to your emotions—all the way, over and over again—will change your emotional reactions



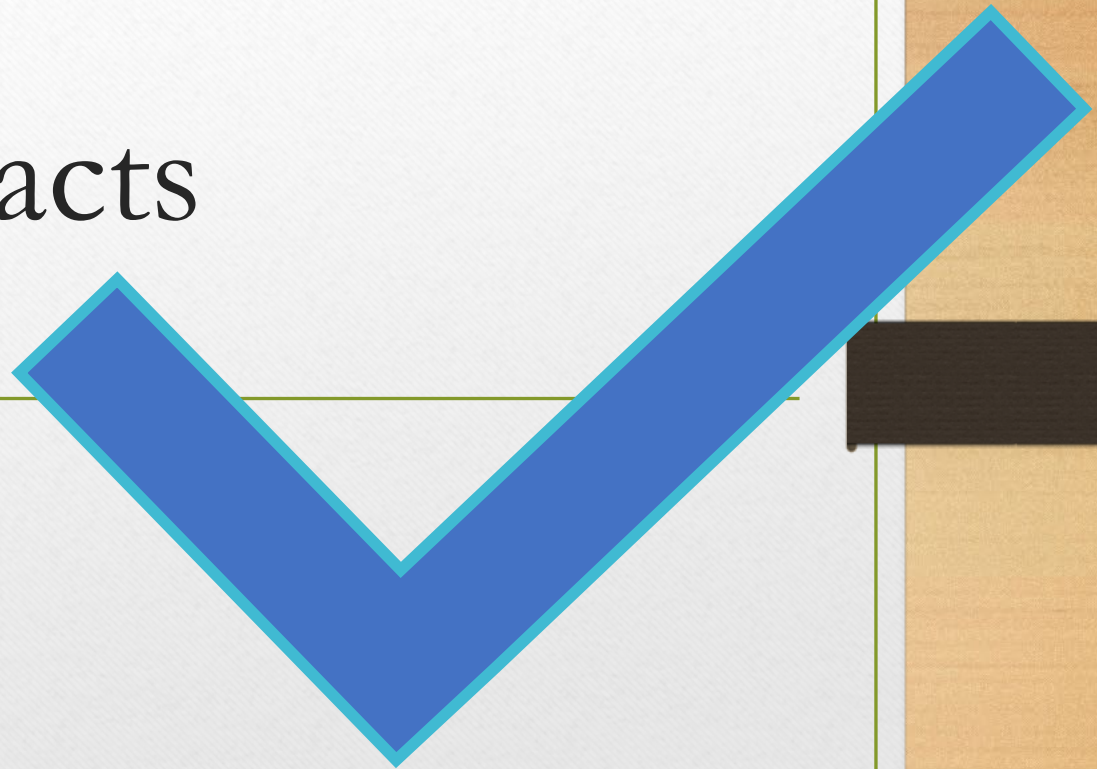
Problem Solving

If the emotion does fit the facts then the situation you are in is the problem

- Use problem solving to find the most effective solution.
- Using problem solving may help to reduce the frequency and intensity of uncomfortable emotions

Check the Facts

Use to rethink thoughts and
emotions fit the facts



Why check the facts?

Emotions, urges, and distress are often set off by our thoughts and interpretations of events, not by the events themselves.

- **Event → Thoughts → Emotions**

Emotions can also have a big effect on our thoughts about events.

- **Event → Emotion → Thoughts**

Evaluating thoughts by *checking the facts* can help change unhelpful thoughts and painful emotions.

How to Check the Facts with Thoughts/ Emotions

- 1. Ask yourself: What event is prompting my thoughts or emotion?**
 - Describe the facts that you observed.
 - Challenge your judgments and thinking mistakes.
- 2. Ask yourself: What are my thoughts, assumptions, or interpretations about what happened?**
 - Consider other possible interpretations.
 - Look at all sides of a situation and other points of view.
 - See if your thoughts and assumptions fit the facts.
- 3. Ask yourself: Am I assuming that there is a threat?**
 - Label what the threat is.
 - What is the probability that the threat will really happen.
 - What are other outcomes that could happen?
 - Identify outcomes with greater probability than the threat.
- 4. Ask yourself: Does my emotion, its intensity, or thoughts fit the facts?**
- 5. What thoughts are more fitting of the facts?**
 - Identify other thoughts that fit the facts.

Opposite Action

Use opposite action when your emotion does not fit the facts or if acting on the emotion would interfere with your goals

Opposite Action

- Every emotion comes with physiological changes, cognitive patterns, and action urges
 - You can change your emotion by acting opposite
- Practice Opposite Action when:
 - Your emotions don't fit the facts or
 - Acting on the emotional urge would be ineffective
- Examples of Opposite Action →

Emotion	Action Urge	Opposite Action
Fear	Avoid or run away	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breathe slowly, lift your head, shoulders back, relax your body • Do what you are fearful of again and again. • Approach what you are fearful of • Do something that increases your sense of mastery, control, or competence.
Sadness	Withdraw or isolate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get active and move your body • Avoid avoiding • Do something pleasant and be mindful of the pleasant experience • Do something that increases your sense of mastery, control, or competence
Anger	Attack (verbal or physical)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breathe slowly, relax your body, unclench your fists and jaw. Half-smile and willing hands • Do something kind or gently avoid the person or situation • Perspective shift. Think about it from the other person's perspective • Consider good reasons for the situation

How to Practice Opposite Action, Step by Step

1. Identify and name the emotion that you want to change.
2. **Practice Check the Facts:**
 - Check to see if your emotion is justified by facts.
 - Check also whether the intensity and duration of the emotion fit the facts.
 - For example:
 - If you are in a car and someone cuts you off, feeling irritation may fit the facts.
 - However, experiencing intense anger or having the urge to engage in road rage may not fit the facts because the anger is too intense for the facts of the situation
3. **Identify and describe your action urges**
 - Use nonjudgmental language
4. **Ask your self:** Will acting on this emotion be effective in the current situation?

Opposite Action, Step by Step

- *If your emotion does not fit the facts or if acting on your emotion will not be effective **act opposite:***

5. Identify what opposite actions would be for your emotion action urges

- Refer to the Quick Guide to Opposite Action Handout

6. Act opposite all the way to your emotional action urges

- Act all the way with mind, body, and behavior
 - Act opposite with facial expression, posture, thinking, actions, what you say and how you say it
- If you do opposite action half-way, it will not work

7. Act opposite over and over again to your action urges until the emotion changes

Problem Solving

Use when an emotion fits
the facts and the situation is
the problem



Why learn how to problem solve?

- When you have an unwanted emotion that fits the facts, which means the facts are the problem
 - What is needed is problem solving
- Problem solving is an essential skill for regulating emotion
 - You don't just want to put out fires
 - It is important to address situations that continuously lead to painful emotions to prevent them in the future
- Learning how to effectively problem solve is an important skill for creating a life worth living
- Problem solving can help change difficult emotions in problem situations
- You may need problem solving when acting on your emotion will not be helpful

Types of Problem Situations that may call for problem solving

Chronic problem situations

One-time problem situations

Situations that you habitually avoid because they prompt painful emotions

Situations or people who prompt painful emotions and emotions that lead to destructive behavior

Recurrent failures to stop destructive or ineffective behavior

Repeat problem situations

Options for Problem Solving

01

Act on the
emotion

02

Change or solve
the situation

03

Avoid or leave the
situation

04

Change your
thoughts or
interpretations
about the
situation

Options for Problem Solving

1. Act on the Emotion

- A primary function of emotions is to motivate action.
- When an emotion fits the facts, action urges could be possible solutions.
- Action urges that produce basic emotions can serve to solve common problems.
 - Examples:
 - If your house is on fire, you run to escape.
 - If you do something wrong, you apologize and make amends.

2. Change or solve the situation

- Sometimes, acting on an emotion urge may only provide temporary relief, when long-term relief is really needed
 - Develop a strategy to change or solve the problem situation.
- Example:
 - Running away from a cockroaches in your kitchen will only help to temporarily reduce the fear. You need to problem solve how to get rid of the cockroaches by, for example, hiring an exterminator.

3. **Avoid or leave the situation**

- When you can't change the situation, you may choose to avoid or leave the situation
- Example:
 - After repeated unsuccessful attempts to develop a friendly relationship with a co-worker who treats you rudely, you may decide to avoid unnecessary contact with that person.

4. **Change your thoughts or interpretations about the situation**

- Some situations may not be changeable or avoidable
- Changing how you think about the situation may be effective
- Examples:
 - You are an attorney with a difficult client. You could discontinue working with that person, or you could decide find positives in continuing to work with the client or find empathy/sympathy for the client's challenges.

Options for Problem Solving

Conclusions



Emotions are part of life and developing a healthy relationship with them is important



Incorporate emotional hygiene practices into your daily routine to reduce vulnerability to painful emotions



Learning to skillfully navigate painful emotions and deal with difficult situations is important for mental and physical health, as well as for career and relationship success



Consult a mental health professional for more guidance and support

Questions?

Dr. Kristin Jones:

kjones@jonestherapyandcoaching.com

To learn more skills and strategies for balancing emotions, visit Jones Mindful Living, an online emotional wellness platform.

www.jonesmindfulliving.com

Private practice:

www.jonestherapyandcoaching.com

Dalia Macdonald:

dmacdonald@macdonaldcg.com

Practice website:

www.macdonaldcg.com