

No Hard Feelings – Feel It, Face It, Thrive!

SESSION 6 WORKBOOK



WELCOME BACK TO SESSION 6



So last session we covered:

- ✓ We looked more closely at one part of our emotional experiences – thoughts.
- ✓ We saw how our thoughts influence how we feel.
- ✓ We discussed how thoughts can become automatic and lead to thinking traps.
- ✓ Lastly we learned how to question our thinking traps to come up with other ways of thinking about emotional situations.

How did you get on with the home tasks?

Any questions before we move on to today's material?

Do you remember our discussion around building a new house? This week we are still on the third floor but we are moving into the middle room – countering our emotional behaviours.

GOALS FOR TODAY

- ✓ To learn about the behaviours associated with strong emotions.
- ✓ To understand how these behaviours influence emotional experiences.
- ✓ To identify and counter different types of emotional behaviours.



COUNTERING OF EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOURS

The next room on the third floor of our house provides skills to identify and evaluate emotional behaviours – the behaviours that you use to manage strong emotions.

Emotional behaviours can be helpful eg running away from a snarling stray dog when feeling fear or phrasing negative feedback carefully to prevent yourself from feeling guilty about how you handled things.

But sometimes these behaviours are not consistent with the situations at hand eg avoiding a meeting when you feel anxious about giving a presentation.

Emotional behaviours serve to avoid uncomfortable emotions in the short term but can limit our lives in the long term. Can you begin to think of your emotional behaviours?

WHAT ARE EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOURS?

The term emotional behaviours refers to the things we *do* to manage our emotions.

There are several ways our actions can be affected by our emotions.

First – every emotion is naturally associated with specific actions that are called *emotion driven behaviours*. We have already discussed how natural behaviours linked with each emotion can be helpful.

Eg sadness prompts us to withdraw to process a loss or setback, while anger motivates us to defend ourselves when we have been wronged.



EMOTION DRIVEN BEHAVIOURS

Let's have a think about the helpful behaviours associated with common emotions:

Emotion	Behaviours
Anxiety	
Guilt	
Happiness	
Other emotions>	

However . . .

Sometimes the emotion driven behaviours that we engage in when feeling a strong emotion are not so helpful.

For example, imagine you snap at your significant other because you have had a bad day at work?

We can all relate to lashing out at someone we love when we are stressed about something even though we know it won't solve the problem

So why do we do it?

Often we react in ways that reduce distress in the short term so snapping at someone might make you feel a little better while doing it – kind of like scratching an itch. This might feel like a release of tension but the relief is short lived because these behaviours can lead to long term consequences that can make us feel worse later on (e.g., arguments with partner or guilt for lashing out).

When we totally avoid certain situations, events or activities we call this **overt avoidance**.

EXAMPLES OF SUBTLE AVOIDANCE



STOP
THINKING



DISADVANTAGES

When we use our subtle behavioural avoidance, cognitive avoidance or safety signals we send ourselves the message that we couldn't possibly cope with the full brunt of an emotional experience.

This then keeps us stuck in the cycle of avoidance and maintaining negative beliefs about emotions.

In general all of these categories of what we might call *unhelpful* emotional behaviours make us feel better (at least a little bit) in the short term but lead to more negative emotions in the long term.

Each of us may engage in unique, idiosyncratic emotional behaviours that relate to our lives.

Can you think of what your might be? Write them in your workbook or in your notes.

What are your short and long term consequences?

SAFETY BEHAVIOURS – WHY DO WE DO THEM?

Unhelpful emotional behaviours provide short term relief from distress.

When a behaviour makes us feel better, even if just for a little while, it is reinforced.

In other words the relief you feel is a powerful motivator to engage in that behaviour again.

Think of it like this:

If you were in a great deal of pain and pushing a button administered pain medication that made you feel better, you would keep pushing that button. Reinforcement that is immediate, like feeling relief as soon as you perform an emotional behaviour, is really difficult to break – even when we know it will backfire in the long term!

Let's do an exercise . . .

Think of a time you were really embarrassed. Write it down – what happened, what were you doing and what were you thinking and feeling.

Be really descriptive!

For the next minute hold that memory in mind – really focus on it.

How successful were you in thinking about it? Very, somewhat, a little or not at all?

Now for the next minute, absolutely *do not* think about the embarrassing memory – you can think about anything else apart from that memory.

Again, how successful were you at *not* thinking about it? Very, somewhat, a little or not at all?

REFLECTIONS

Did you find it difficult to avoid thinking about the memory?

A lot of people find that it's an impossible task!

You may have been able to hold thoughts about the memory off for a little while but it probably took a lot of effort trying to distract yourself (maybe singing a song to yourself or trying to look at something else).

Generally when we let our guard down the thoughts come rushing back. By telling ourselves to push away a particular thought we are basically confirming to ourselves that the thought is bad and worthy of avoiding.

In other words avoiding these thoughts makes it seem like they are so terrible that there is no other way to manage them than to forcefully push them away. When something is really dangerous it draws our attention to it so we can cope- that's why suppressing thoughts makes them come up even more.

SO HOW DO WE BREAK THE CYCLE?

One of the best ways to break the cycle of experiencing overwhelming strong emotions is to replace a current emotional *behaviour* with an alternative *behaviour*.

For example, if you are feeling sad you could exercise or text your friends instead of taking a nap.

This skill is called choosing an *Alternative Action*. That is – engaging in an action that is different to what you've done before when you experience strong emotions.

The next few slides will explore some alternative actions. There are a lot of them so we won't work through them all but they are in your workbooks for you to read over.

EXAMPLE: EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOUR Vs ALTERNATIVE ACTION

EMOTION	EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOUR	ALTERNATIVE ACTION
FEAR	Escape, avoid placed, pick fights, make threats	Stay in the situation, approach, speak calmly, give compliments
SADNESS	Withdraw, nap, avoid enjoyable activities, listen to sad music, move slowly, no eye contact	Call friends, make plans to go out, schedule activities, listen to upbeat music, be active, walk quickly, stretch, push-ups, make eye contact
ANXIETY	Over prepare, avoid, seek reassurance, worry/ruminate, pay extra attention to physical sensations, tap feet or hands	Set a time limit on how long and then do something fun, face the situation, resist and talk about something else, practice mindfulness or problem solving, maintain full eye contact with both feet on the floor, hold hands together on lap.
ANGER	Fight, yell, break things, clench fists, make sarky comments, clench jaw, vent, pace, get too close to people.	Take a break before responding – go a walk, talk in an even tone, move slowly and put items down gently, relax your hands, spread your fingers out, relax facial muscles, pay a compliment, tell a funny story, consider the other persons perspective, stretch gently, take a big step backwards.
GUILT / SHAME	Withdraw, avoid eye contact, speak softly ruminate, maintain a hunched posture, apologise excessively, deny yourself something to make up for what you did.	Contact others, make eye contact, use a full voice, anchor in the present, sit/stand straight, apologise only once (if warranted), talk about something else, engage in enjoyable activity (text friend, eat food you like, listen to music.

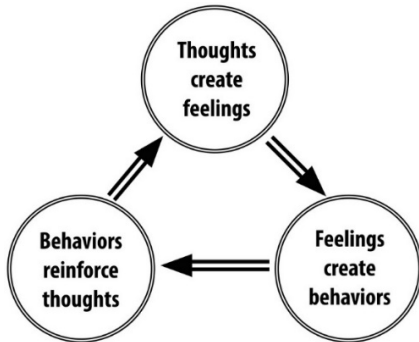
ALTERNATIVE ACTION

Approaching your emotions instead of avoiding them is an important form of **Alternative Action**.

This means we engage in activities that bring up the emotion you are currently avoiding?

Why might we do this?

Over time changing how you behave can also change how you feel.



Changing how we respond to one of these components can change the whole experience

STUCK IN TRAFFIC: LOOKING FOR ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS

Alternative Feelings :
Calmer, relaxed

Feelings: Angry, irritable, annoyed frustrated.
Thoughts: This is out of order. I am in a hurry. They are in my way

Alternative Thoughts
If I shout at them I will just feel guilty afterwards and beat myself up. There is nothing I can do but wait

Alternative Behaviour:
listen to the radio, Focus on anchoring

Behaviour: Shout at other drivers Sound my horn swear
Body State: Tense, shaking, feel sick, jumpy, on high alert.

Alternative Body State:
Calm, no tension, relaxed

Another important part is that Alternative Actions requires you to *do* something.

DO SOMETHING

THINKING OF ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS

Sometimes it can be really tough to think of an alternative action. If you find yourself getting stuck it can be helpful to start thinking of the most extreme opposite action that you can.

For example, if someone's emotional behaviour when feeling sad is to spend time alone then the most extreme opposite might be going to a huge concert or talking to every stranger they see.

These behaviours might not be feasible.

But, if you start to scale back then you can get an Alternative Action that works for you.

It may be that you choose to talk to two strangers, or call a friend and suggest doing something together.

Thinking of the most extreme opposite can help you start the brainstorming process.

EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOURS FORMS

It would be helpful to begin to identify some of your typical emotional behaviours and to start working on developing alternative behaviours.

Let's use the practice form in the workbook or on the website.

Start to list the emotional behaviours you think you engage in, and if you can, list alternatives.

Read over the workbook to remind you of the differing kinds of behaviours we have discussed.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Today we discussed emotional behaviours – actions that we take to manage strong emotions.
- ✓ These strategies often lessen distress in the short term but tend to make things worse in the long term.
- ✓ However because they bring down distress (even if just for a moment) we are likely to keep engaging in them the next time we encounter an uncomfortable emotion.

- ✓ Further, using emotional behaviours reinforces the idea that we cannot handle a given situation making us likely to rely on them in future.

We discussed changing unhelpful emotional behaviours by engaging in Alternative Actions such as engaging with and experiencing an emotion you usually avoid which can help break the cycle by changing the intensity of your emotions. It also increases your confidence that you can handle experiencing the situation/emotion.



1. Every emotion has emotional behaviours associated with it.
2. All emotional behaviours are bad.
3. Examples of emotional behaviours include outright avoidance, subtle behavioural avoidance, cognitive avoidance and emotion driven behaviours.
4. One way to counter emotional behaviours is to approach situations you usually avoid.

HOMEWORK

Homework for the week ahead is:

- ✓ Begin identifying the emotional behaviours that apply to you using the home practice sheet.
- ✓ Use the Home Practice sheet to start considering new behavioural responses to your strong emotions.
- ✓ Practice your mindfulness of emotion.

Thank you for attending week 6.

See you next week for week 7.

Form 14.1 Changing Your EDBs

This worksheet is to help you generate ideas about how to engage in opposite action, rather than your customary EDBs, in response to common triggers. Articulating the possible positive consequences of the opposite action may increase your motivation to change your EDBs.

Situation/trigger	Emotion	EDB	Opposite action	Positive consequence of opposite action
<i>Ex-husband</i>	<i>Sadness, guilt, worthlessness. Anger as a secondary emotion.</i>	<i>Diet, exercise, complaining</i>	<i>Writing in journal or talking to friend about sadness</i>	<i>Possibly learning something new or getting a new perspective. Actually dealing with sadness instead of making myself more sad and lonely by being underweight.</i>

Worksheet 14.2

Identifying Your EDBs and Opposite Actions

Recent, frequent, and problematic EDBs and possible opposite actions

The next part of the homework is to make a list of key EDBs that are parts of your emotional problems, and list some ideas for how you can do alternative opposite actions. Remember, there can be a lot of problems with EDBs—they can become automatic, they don't usually work, they teach you that you can't deal with your emotions, they teach you that emotions are dangerous, they tend to make the emotions stronger over time, and so on. Even if it isn't clear what the direct positive result would be of turning them around, if you know that they are a part of your emotional issues, then it is probably a good idea to try to reverse them. The first row is filled out as an example.

EDBs What is the action? What is the emotional situation?	Opposite Action
<i>Dieting or exercising after I have talked to my ex-husband. Raging at him. Ignoring how sad I really feel.</i>	<i>Talking to a friend or writing in my journal about how I feel when I talk to him. Trying not to focus too much on my anger (which may be a secondary reaction) but really the sad or guilty feelings underneath. Making sure I eat a good meal, and don't exercise in response to these feelings. Giving myself some time to feel sad.</i>

MY NOTES

