



MANAGING STRONG EMOTIONS

Our feelings are our emotional response to the world, but that doesn't mean they are always an accurate reflection of situations. In a distressed state, we can jump to conclusions. Irrational thoughts can cloud our judgment. To release tension we may say or do destructive things we later regret. This damages relationships and hurts those we care about - usually the last thing we want to do.

Confusing and overwhelming inner responses can be managed by gradually learning to build up tolerance for them. When we develop the capacity to tune into intense feelings we no longer need to act out or space out to avoid them. By recognising these feelings, and accurately labeling them, we slowly transform these feelings from nameless, confusing inner sensations to words. Learning to contain strong emotions takes self-awareness, commitment and practice and the development of self-soothing and solid self-care practices.

The following suggestions may also help.

- **Develop your emotional vocabulary.** Gain mastery over emotions by learning to recognise and name feelings such as anger, hurt, sadness, confusion and fear.
- **Learn to become aware of the state you're in.** Signs of emotional distress include racing thoughts, pacing, blaming, negative self-talk, a raised voice, increased heart rate or body tension. Make a list of your own signals.
- **Stop when you're wound up.** Take some long, slow, deep breaths and think about the choices you have about how you respond.
- **Disengage from whatever has upset you.** See your aroused emotional state as your top priority and work at calming yourself down.
- **Beware of overreacting.** Make a commitment that when you're feeling churned up and ready to react strongly you will under-react instead. This gives you time to consider what you need to do.
- **Use positive self-talk.** Remind yourself: 'This will pass. I can handle it. The important thing is I don't overreact and make matters worse.'
- **Beware of irrational thinking.** When we're wound up we may believe what we tell ourselves. Later, when we calm down, we realise these things just weren't true.
- **Learn how to sit with feelings.** When we tune into feelings, they can be uncomfortable but when we accept them, instead of fighting them, they often dissipate.
- **Do something physical.** This has a calming effect on the body.
- **Postpone dealing with the issue until you're more relaxed.** Resist the urge to react impulsively. Impulsive actions are often those we later regret. Any discussion while you're in an intense, emotional state is likely to lead to a bad outcome.
- **Consider booking a counselling appointment.** If a particular issue continues to distress you, a counsellor can help you express your feelings and find a way to deal with the issue.
- **Consider writing a letter - but don't send it.** Expressing your distress to someone who has upset you by writing can help to relieve the tension of unspoken words. Afterwards you might like to read your letter to a counsellor or friend and dispose of it.
- **Consider writing a poem or drawing a picture.** Expressing feelings creatively can be a powerful outlet.

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