

Mental Illness Awareness Week 2019



Changing the Conversation with Your Teen: Understanding and Supporting Intense Emotions & Improving Well-being

Workshop in partnership with:





Joy Kolic

Nurse Practitioner at Canadian
Mental Health Association



Dr. Suzanne Chomycz

Clinical Psychologist at Sullivan
+ Associates Clinical
Psychology



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Question and Answer Panel



Joy Kolic
Joanne Books

Dr. Suzanne Chomycz
Jordan Berlinquette



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Format & Housekeeping.



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- **40** minute information session
- **15** minute break
(Refreshments/washrooms)
- **40** minute question & answer panel



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Key Topics.



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- **Understand** emotional dysregulation and how it negatively impacts teens
- **Learn** successful, research-supported strategies for talking to your teen about identifying and managing intense, distressing emotions (even if they are reluctant to talk to you about it!)
- **Discover** how to create and maintain open communication with your teen
- **Learn** how to help your teen identify and express their emotions appropriately



Defining Emotional Regulation



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Emotion regulation means being able to think constructively about how to cope with feelings. We want teens to have their feelings, but not be overwhelmed by them.

Examples of being overwhelmed:

- **TO FEEL DISCOURAGED BUT NOT GIVE UP**
- **TO FEEL ANXIOUS BUT NOT STAY HOME**
- **TO BE EXCITED BUT NOT GET SO CARRIED AWAY IN THEIR ENTHUSIASM THAT THEY USE POOR JUDGMENT IN MAKING DECISIONS.**



Why Emotional Regulation?



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- Emotion regulation leads to benefits in all areas of a teen's life.
- Teens who can regulate emotions:
 - Pay more attention, work harder, and achieve more in school
 - Are better able to resolve conflicts with peers
 - Have lower levels of physiological stress
 - Are better behaved
 - Are more caring towards others



Emotional Dysregulation.



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Inability, even when one's best efforts are applied, to change or regulate emotional cues, experiences, actions, verbal responses, and/or nonverbal expressions



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Regulating Painful Emotions.



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- Difficulties with regulating painful emotions are often central to behavioral difficulties of many individuals.
- E.g.
 - Suicidal behaviours/self harm
 - Substance abuse
 - Disordered eating
 - Emotion suppression
 - Over-control
- These are often behavioural solutions or patterns to escape unbearable painful emotions



What Leads to Emotional Dysregulation?



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- **Genetics:** wired that way
- **Trauma:** at critical points in our development can alter our brain structure in ways that make us more vulnerable to intense, negative emotions
- **Social environment** (particularly family): a tendency to invalidate teen's emotions and an inability to model appropriate expressions of emotion
- **Lack of emotion regulation skills**
- **Reinforcing consequences** of emotional behaviours (e.g., snapping at family → get your own way)
- **Emotional overload**



How to help teens emotionally regulation?



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- Setting aside time, every day, to listen to their concerns and validate them is vital
- **Barriers to this: You are...**
 - tired or hurried;
 - burdened or preoccupied;
 - angry;
 - or overwhelmed.



- Trying to limit emotions will not work, you can't stop someone from feeling something
- Likewise, teens don't become dysregulated because we "allow" their emotions, they become dysregulated because they need to express an emotion but don't know how
- This is when you start to see really big behaviours happening

“Setting limits on behaviour doesn't mean we need to set limits on feelings”



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Helping Teens Emotionally Regulate.



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- Accept their feelings
- Guide behaviour; resist the urge to punish
- Model healthy emotion regulation



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Case study example:

Casey is a 16 year old girl who has difficulty regulating her emotions. There is a family history of mood issues and substance abuse. Casey currently lives with her grandmother as her parents are unable to care for her. She spends much time alone, unsupervised, and prefers to stay in bed all day. Casey complains of mood swings, fatigue, and boredom. She skips meals and does not want to text her friends. She also snaps at her grandmother and has been known to become physically violent when she does not get her way. Casey burns her arms/legs with a lighter when she feels sad or angry and has stolen alcohol in the past from a store “for fun”. Grandmother is looking for ways to help Casey manage her emotions appropriately.



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Skills We Can Teach Teens to Self-Regulate.



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1. Recognizing & Understanding Emotions.



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Teens who have difficulty regulating emotions may be able to recognize the tidal wave of distressing emotions that overcomes them (such as sadness, anger, guilt, shame, etc.) but by the time they recognize the tidal wave it's too late to do anything about it.

If the emotional process can be slowed down and examined it can become easier to make healthy decisions.



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First correctly recognize/label emotions.
Then...

Rate emotions:

Emotions come in different intensities, like the spiciness of salsa. Knowing when one is super angry versus just a little ticked off can be really handy because it helps to know what we need to cope with that feeling. It can help us to know when our upsetting feelings are starting to get better.



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Then...

Express emotions: (rather than hiding them)

This helps people to feel better, get along better with others (friends, family), and solve problems. Expressing feelings takes practice.



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2. Emotion Expression Skills.



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Feelings are meant to be shared.

- Expressing feelings make it easier to deal with those feelings
- Which feelings to share? Who can you express to?
- How do you talk about feelings?
 - Time & Place
 - Feeling + Reason + Request = Expressing Yourself
 - **I feel... when you... because... I need...**



3. Cognitive Emotional Regulation Skills.



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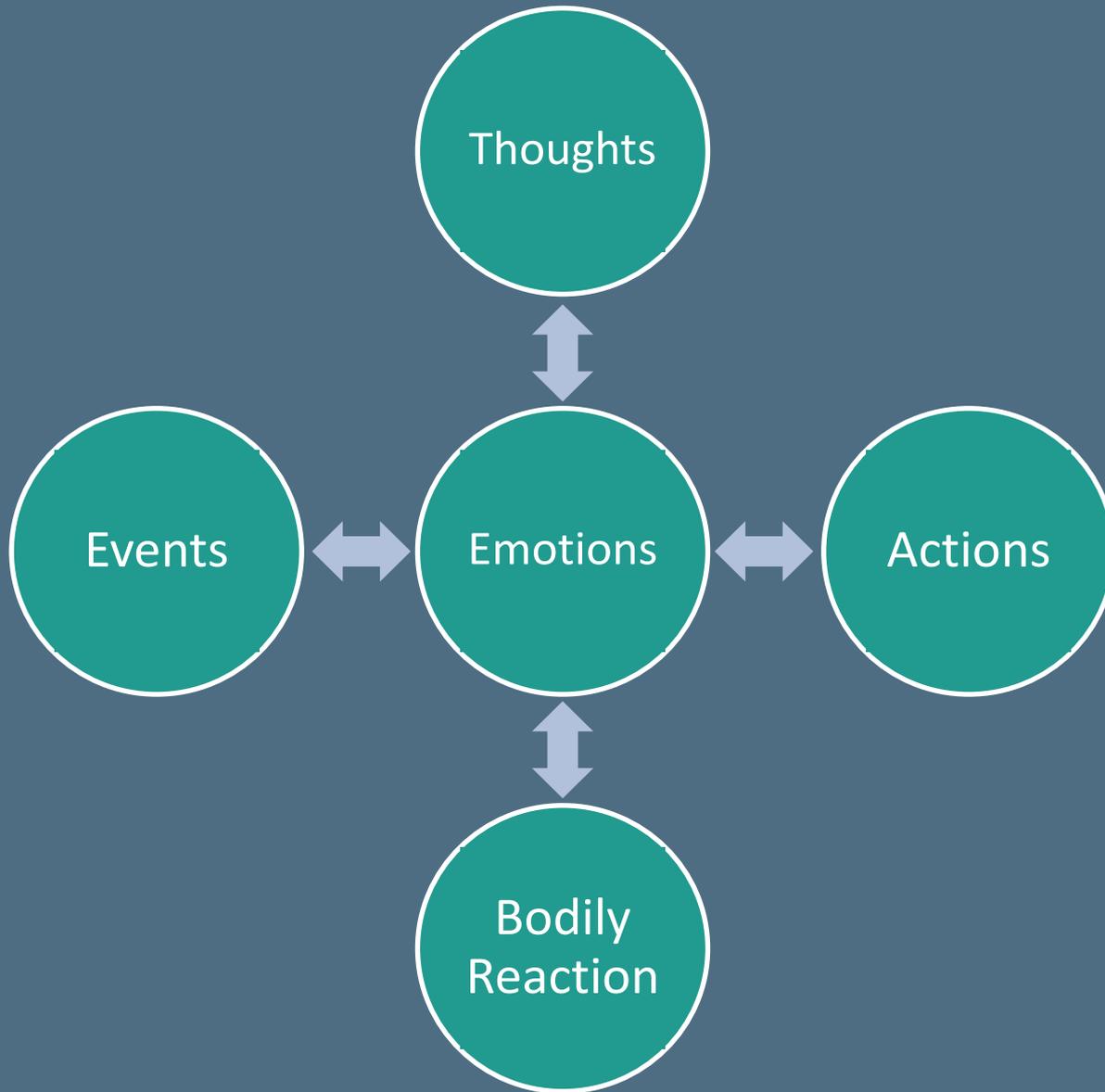


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Cognitive Skills:

- Different thoughts have different impacts on feelings and behaviours
- There are ways to help people think about and change their thoughts to help them feel better





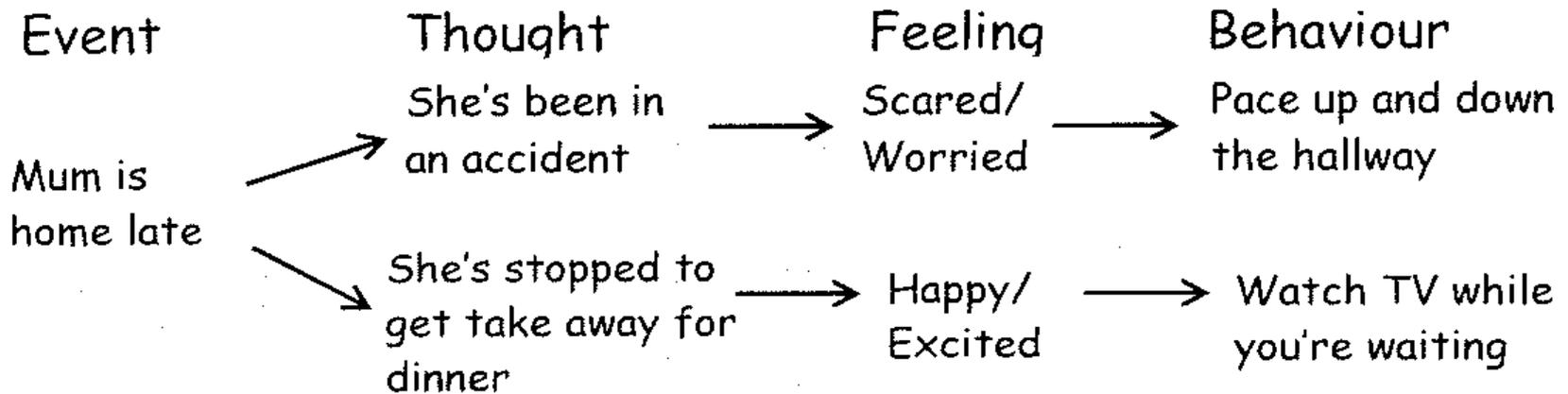
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Identifying Thoughts



What is the evidence for these thoughts?



4. Changing Emotions.



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Check the Facts

See if emotional reactions **fit the facts** of the situation. Changing your beliefs and assumptions to fit the facts can help you change your emotional reactions to situations.

Problem solving = Avoiding or changing a problem event

When the facts themselves are the problem, solving the problem will reduce the frequency of negative emotions.



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Opposite action = Acting opposite to an emotion's action urge

When your emotions do not fit the facts, **or** when acting on your emotions is not effective, acting opposite (all the way) will change your emotional reactions



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Check the facts

Deciding whether the emotion is justified helps tell us which skill will be most effective to use:

Is the emotion **JUSTIFIED**?

- Problem Solving Skills

Is the emotion **NOT JUSTIFIED**?

- Opposite Action Skill



Is the emotion justified?

Emotion	Is Justified When:
Anxiety /Fear	There is a threat to life, health, or well-being.
Sadness	You have lost something or someone, OR things are not the way you expected or wanted or hoped for.
Anger	An important goal is being blocked, OR you or someone you care about has been attacked, hurt, insulted, or threatened.
Envy	Another person or group has things you don't have and you want or need them AND there are as many reasons for you to have these things as the other person.
Jealousy	A relationship that is important to you is threatened or in danger of being lost.
Shame	You will be rejected from a very important group if characteristics of yourself or of your behavior are made public.
Guilt	Your own behavior violates your own values or moral code.



<u>Emotion:</u>	<u>Problem Solving:</u>
Anxiety/Fear	1. Remove the threat. 2. Avoid the threat.
Sadness	1. Retrieve what you have lost. 2. Accumulate positives. 3. Increase contact with rewarding people. 4. Avoid thinking about what you have lost. 5. Radically Accept (more on that later).
Anger	1. Overcome the obstacle. 2. Stop further attacks. 3. Avoid threatening people.
Envy	1. Improve yourself and your life. 2. Get others to be fair. 3. Avoid people who have more than you
Jealousy	1. Protect what you have OR 2. Leave the relationship
Shame	1. Find a new group that fits your values or that likes your personal characteristics OR 2. Change your behavior to fit in OR 3. Avoid groups who disapprove of you
Guilt	1. Repair the error 2. Make things better, repair the harm 3. Commit to avoiding that mistake in the future 4. Accept the consequences gracefully.

If emotion not justified, use opposite action?

Each emotion has an action. If we do the action, the emotion increases or stays around. One way to change an emotion is to do the opposite action.

<u>Emotion</u>	<u>Action Urge</u> <u>example</u>	<u>Opposite Action</u>
Anxiety/Fear	Avoid	Approach
Sadness	Withdraw	Get active
Anger	Attack	Gently Avoid, Be decent
Envy	Sabotaging, criticizing	Count your blessings
Jealousy	Accusing, spying	Let go of controlling others, Share
Shame	Hide	Be open
Guilt	Hide	Be open

Additional Skill: Radical Acceptance

It's when you stop fighting reality, stop throwing tantrums because reality is not the way you want it, and let go of bitterness.

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.



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What Has to Be Accepted?

- Reality is as it is (the facts about the past and the present are the facts, even if you don't like them).
- Everything has a cause (including events and situations that cause you pain and suffering).
- Life can be worth living even with painful events in it.



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Why accept reality?

- Rejecting reality does not change reality.
- Changing reality requires first accepting reality.
- Pain can't be avoided; it is nature's way of signalling that something is wrong.
- Refusing to accept reality can keep you stuck in unhappiness, bitterness, anger, sadness, shame, or other painful emotions.
- Acceptance may lead to sadness, but deep calmness usually follows.

Tools to help with emotionally regulating.

- Drawing/writing
- Stress ball
- Soft blanket
- Fuzzy socks
- Music
- Bath
- Breathing Exercises
- Mindfulness
- Visualizations (e.g., clouds passing, ocean waves)



5. Reducing Vulnerability to Emotions.



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Reducing Vulnerability

Accumulate Positive Experiences

Build Mastery

Cope ahead of time

Please



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**ACCUMULATE
POSITIVE
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In the short term: Do pleasant things that are possible right now to increase positive emotions

In the long term: Make changes in your life so positive events will occur more often

Work towards goals:

- Make list of positive events you want
- List small steps towards goals
- Take first step- “avoid avoiding”



BUILD MASTERY.

**Schedule one or more
activities each day to build a
sense of accomplishment**



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Building Mastery: Feeling Good about Learning Something New



Think of something that you like to do, or that you would like to learn how to do.

New Interest: _____

What are the steps that someone would take to learn how to do this activity, hobby, or interest (be specific)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

During the next week, pick on of these steps that will help you learn this new interest, and do it.

During the next week I will: _____



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**COPE AHEAD
OF TIME WITH
EMOTIONAL
SITUATIONS.**



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Create a plan ahead of time so that you are prepared to cope skillfully with emotional situations. Imagine yourself coping effectively.



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Cope Ahead: What is Your Emotional Fire Extinguisher



1. Future Challenging Situation:

Write down a difficult event or situation that you anticipate will happen during the next week. For example: Taking a test; or, an argument you tend to have with someone close to you.

Challenging Event Situation: _____

Explain what typically happens during these situations: _____

2. Alternative Outcome:

Explain how you would like to see the situation happen: _____

3. What is Your Emotional Fire Extinguisher

Identify what you can do differently to help you Cope Ahead so that you can increase your chance of having the alternative outcome that you would like to have.

Describe Your Emotional Fire Extinguisher: _____

“PLEASE”



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Treat **P**hysical **L** illness

Take care of your body. See a doctor when necessary. Take medication as prescribed.

Balance **E**ating

Pay attention to your food intake. Make sure to get enough nutrition.

Avoid Mood-Altering

Stay off non-prescribed drugs like alcohol. Be aware of drugs caffeine intake.

Balance **S**leep

Try to get the amount of sleep that helps you feel good. Try to keep a regular sleep schedule.

Get **E**xercise

Do some sort of exercise every day; try to build up to 20 minutes of intense exercise.



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Thank You!

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Q&A Discussion Questions

1. How can you approach the topic of emotion regulation with your teen when they do not want to talk to you?
2. All teens struggle to regulate their emotions at some point. How do you know when this is appropriate teen behaviour or something that requires immediate intervention?
3. What are signs/symptoms of problematic emotion dysregulation in teens?



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