



Adult Mental Health Team

Managing Strong Emotions

A guide to help you cope

Recovery Focus

This booklet has been designed by clinicians who are experienced in working with people with a wide range of mental health conditions.

The North and West adult mental health team work in a collaborative way to help them find a way to cope with their symptoms. This way of working is called a recovery approach.

The workbook is arranged across four key sections:

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1

Understanding and recognising emotions

When we have had persistent distressing experiences during our lives we can emotionally react more often to certain situations. Sometimes this may be to situations that others may not find distressing but your own distress can be very intense and difficult to manage.

There are skills to help us regulate our emotions that help us cope with situations.

Emotions, thoughts and what we do or feel are all linked and become vicious cycles. Changing one part of the cycle will help improve the situation and help you feel better.

If we try and suppress emotions or 'bottle them up' there is a danger that we will become overwhelmed and react in a negative or dangerous manner.

Sometimes our outbursts can hurt other people or ourselves. The key is to learn how to express how we feel in a healthy, safe manner.

Learning to label your emotions

There are a wide range of different emotions and it can be difficult to know what we are feeling.

How are you feeling?



Happy



Joyful



Content



Silly



Sad



Angry



Scared



Worried



Confused



Surprised



Hurt



Embarrassed

The table below can help you to identify what emotion you may be feeling. Practise filling in the sections by asking yourself the questions and labelling your emotions.

Prompting event <i>What was happening?</i> <i>Where? When?</i> <i>Who with?</i>	
Interpretation <i>What meaning was I giving to the situation?</i>	
Body sensations <i>What did I feel in my body?</i>	
Body language <i>What did my body do? How did it move?</i> <i>(eg. posture, facial expression, body movement, gestures)</i>	
Action urge <i>What did I feel like doing? (eg. running away, attacking, withdrawing)</i>	
Label the emotion <i>(eg. anger, sadness, fear, guilt)</i>	

2

Exploring your own emotions and their impact

Our emotions impact upon our thoughts, bodily reactions and behaviours. Some examples of common emotions are shown in the table below.

Emotion	Thoughts
Anger <i>Frustrated, irritated, impatient, resentful, enraged, peed off, fury, insulted</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I've been disrespected, ● I've been treated unfairly ● It's not fair ● I've been let down ● I won't stand for it
Anxiety <i>Nervous, on edge, apprehensive, frightened, panicky, terrified, scared, petrified</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I'm in great danger right now ● The worst possible thing is going to happen ● I won't be able to cope with it

Bodily reaction	Behaviours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adrenaline response ● Tense ● Fired up ● Energised ● Breathing and heart rate increase ● Difficulty concentrating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Argue ● Shout ● Slam ● Smash ● Sulk ● Snap ● Swear ● Confront
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adrenaline response ● Tense ● Shaky ● Sweaty ● Hot ● Energised ● Breathing and heart rate increased ● Difficulty concentrating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Avoid people or places ● Fidget ● Escape/run away ● Coping or safety behaviours

Being able to recognise and label our emotions is an important step. Fill in the table below with your own examples for some of the difficult emotions you have experienced in the past.

Emotion	Thoughts	Bodily reaction

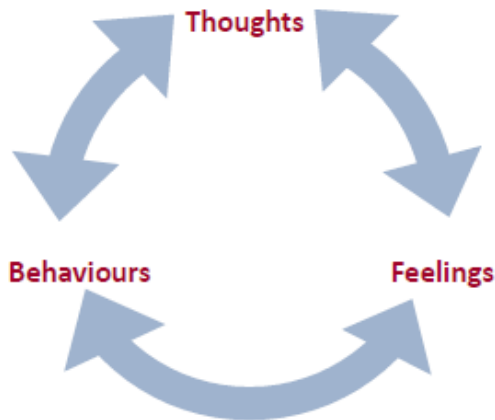
Think about what thoughts, bodily reactions and behaviours followed the difficult emotion. What was the situation? What were the consequences?

Behaviours	Consequences

3

Strategies to cope with strong emotions

We have looked at how our emotions can affect our thoughts, feelings and behaviours, often in a negative way and leading to negative consequences. Now we are looking at strategies to deal with these emotions in a more positive way.



Act opposite

When we experience really strong negative emotions, it's easy to get caught up into the old pattern of using unhelpful and damaging coping strategies such as using substances, self-harming, having outbursts or developing unhealthy eating habits.

Emotions are closely linked to our bodies and each emotion has a particular behaviour linked to it. The word "emotion" can be described as E-MOTION (Elicit Motion). Emotion causes us to react and move in certain ways.

If emotions cause our bodies to react in certain ways then doing something different – doing the opposite ('opposite action') – can affect and help change our outlook.

This table shows some examples of emotions, their action urges and the opposite action that can be used to better regulate the emotion. Try to fill out the table with some ideas of your own.

Emotion	Action urge	Opposite action
Fear	Run away, avoid	Approach: go anyway and participate fully
Anger	Attack	Gently avoid, be kind, see their perspective
Sadness	Withdraw	Be with others, increase activity

Self-soothing

Feel good in the face of a very difficult situation by doing something nice for yourself. When self-soothing try and stimulate as many of your five senses as possible.

It can be useful to think of some ideas in advance and make a self-sooth box to turn to in moments of crisis.

Vision

What do you find calming and enjoyable visually?

Do nature scenes calm you down?

Does watching a fish tank, fireplace, the ocean or even clothes spinning in the dryer help you move to a calmer mind? How about looking at the clouds or stars in the sky?

Write down three things which you enjoy looking at:

1

.....

2

.....

3

.....

Touch

Try to find the time to have a soak in a warm bath or spa. Get a massage or ask a friend to rub your shoulders. Try taking a small swatch of suede, silk or velvet and keeping that in your wallet for when you need to feel something nice.

What three things physically feel good to you?

Hearing

1

2

3

What do you like to listen to?

Do you find the sound of nature enjoyable, the sound of children playing, great music? Try to take a moment and listen to the background. Can you hear the wind, music, children playing somewhere in the distance?

Name three sounds that you enjoy:

1

2

3

Smell

Do you have a perfume or cologne that you enjoy? Wear it, spray it in the air and let yourself enjoy the scent. Try and keep a small vial of it with you in your purse, pocket or car, and take it out when you need a boost.

Name three scents that help calm you down:

1

2

3

Taste

Find a mint or brand of chewing gum that you enjoy and keep it handy. Or try some sour sweets. Pop them in your mouth and take a brief moment to savour the flavour.

Identify three small things you could use to stimulate your taste buds:

1

2

3

Positive affirmations

Hearing a positive statement about ourselves can help us develop a more positive attitude. Create a statement that has meaning for you and repeat it. Write it down and use it every day, every week or every month.

Practise regularly – to allow positive affirmations to work you must use them whenever you notice that you have a negative thought: immediately turn it around by using your affirmation.

For example:

- I am strong
- I am a good and worthwhile person
- People like me, I am a likeable person and I like myself
- I have a lot to be proud of
- I can achieve anything I want to achieve
- I know I can master anything if I practise continually
- All is well right here, right now
- I hold my head up high.

Can you think of some examples of your own positive affirmations? Write them in the space below:

Changing the way we think

Thoughts play such an important role in our distressing emotions so it can be very effective to notice these thoughts and learn to think differently, or to think about thoughts in a different way.

When you start to feel upset take a moment and try asking yourself the following questions:

- What am I reacting to?
- What is it that's really pushing my buttons here?
- What is it that I think is going to happen here?
- What's the worst (and best) that could happen?
- What's most likely to happen?
- Am I getting things out of proportion?
- How important is this really? How important will it be in six months?
- What harm has actually been done?
- Am I expecting something from this person or situation that is unrealistic?
- Am I overestimating the danger?
- Am I underestimating my ability to cope?
- Am I using that negative filter? Those 'gloomy specs'? Is there another way of looking at it?
- What advice would I give to someone else in this situation?
- Am I spending time ruminating about the past or worrying about the future? What could I do right now that would help me feel better?
- Am I putting more pressure on myself, setting up expectations of myself that are almost impossible? What would be more realistic?

- Am I mind reading what others might be thinking?
- Do I believe I can predict the future?
- Is there another way of looking at this?
- Just because I *feel* bad, doesn't mean things really *are* bad.
- Am I jumping to conclusions?

Metaphors

Use metaphors to try to see things differently. Metaphors can help us understand thoughts in a different way. Try using some of the following:

Passengers on the bus

You can be in the driving seat, whilst all passengers (thoughts) are noisily chattering, being critical or shouting out directions. You can allow them to shout but you can keep your attention focused on the road ahead.

The river

Items floating down the river, perhaps leaves or bits of mucky debris (thoughts, feelings, images), instead of struggling to stay afloat, we can stand on the bank watching our thoughts, images and sensations go by.

The beach ball

We can try to stop our thoughts, like trying to hold a beach ball under water, but it keeps popping up in front of our face (intrusive distressing thoughts). We can allow the ball (our thoughts) to float around us, not intruding, just letting it be.

Thought train

We can think about sitting on the train, watching the scenery (thoughts, feelings, sensations) go by as we look out of the windows, or we can be standing on the station platform watching the thought train pass by – we don't have to jump on it.

The tunnel

When we get anxious driving through a tunnel the best option is to keep going to the other end, rather than stop or look for an exit in the tunnel. This feeling will pass, there is an end to this tunnel.

Dealing with distress

Think of a difficult situation you have dealt with in the past. Use this table below to practise identifying and better dealing with your emotions.

Prompting event <i>What was happening? Where?</i> <i>When? Who with?</i>	
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Body sensations <i>What did I feel in my body?</i>	
Body language <i>What did my body do? How did it move? (eg. posture, facial expression, body movement, gestures)</i>	
Action urge <i>What did I feel like doing? (eg. running away, attacking, withdrawing)</i>	
Label the emotion <i>(eg. anger, sadness, fear, guilt)</i>	
Choose action <i>What will help most? Can I or do I need to change this situation?</i> <i>How can I reduce distress?</i> <i>Which strategy is most appropriate?</i>	
Outcome <i>What helped? What didn't help?</i> <i>What could I have done differently?</i>	

4

Dealing with setbacks

Taking steps towards a healthy lifestyle can have a real impact on our stress levels and mood. It is important to spend time thinking about your own emotions and what can impact on your management of these.

Create a positive management plan by exploring and listing any known past trigger factors that you are aware of. This is an ideal way to help you to overcome setbacks.

Setbacks are a normal part of recovery; you have acquired lots of new skills and understanding, and are still moving forward. Acknowledge the progress you have made and keep on going.

List your known trigger factors and then talk them through. For example, waiting in queues, being verbally insulted, feeling ignored, feeling afraid, these are specific individual factors that could impact upon your own emotions.

1

2

3

4

5

Developing healthy habits

Unhealthy habits can put your health or the health of others at risk. It can be challenging to overcome engrained habits or behaviours, but focusing on the benefits of positive change can boost your motivation.

Alcohol

Alcohol can interfere with your mood, quality of your sleep and impact your ability to cope and control behaviours. This can be unhelpful if you are trying to overcome problems with anger or anxiety.

You might think that consuming alcohol would help you sleep but as your body processes alcohol overnight it can wake you up. Some people use the numbing effect of alcohol to avoid thinking about or facing problems. This approach can be damaging and make things worse. Drinking a lot and often can lead to a pattern of addictive substance misuse.

Drugs

Many drugs have a sedative or stimulant effect on the body which can have an impact on your sleep and mood. Using recreational drugs and other substances can make things worse and developing a habit of regular or increasing use can lead to addictive substance misuse.

Smoking

The content of cigarette smoke and nicotine replacements act as a stimulant. This can have an impact on your sleep and your mood. Some people say that smoking helps them to cope with stress but smoking is known to have a negative impact on long term physical health.

Caffeine

Caffeine can trigger a reaction that is similar to the symptoms of anxiety and can reduce the quality of sleep. Try not to have anything caffeinated to drink like tea, coffee, hot chocolate and some fizzy drinks within four hours of bedtime.

Surroundings

Notice the impact of your environment on your mood, consider noise, temperature and light. Your comfort and the tidiness of your surroundings can all have an impact on your mood. It can also effect your sleep and your overall ability to cope with problems. Try to take practical steps to resolve any particular issues.

Now you have some ideas to inspire healthy changes to your lifestyle, why not try them out? You could ask a friend for support. If you build them into your daily routine they won't seem like such a chore.

Healthy eating

What you eat and drink can have a significant impact on both your mood, sleep and physical health. Consider making changes towards having a balanced, nutritious diet and avoid food with a lot of fat or sugar. Try to eat regular meals and stay hydrated. Consider what you eat and drink close to bedtime; caffeine, alcohol or a large meal can interfere with your sleep.

Exercise

Keeping fit and active can improve your physical health, mood and ability to cope with problems. Try to get at least some gentle exercise each week. While exercise can also help us sleep, try not to be too active close to bedtime as this can keep you awake.

Routine

Routine can help give structure to your life. Patterns can be set as we react the same way or do the same thing in certain situations. Our body can begin to expect and follow such routines. For example, taking time to relax and unwind before bed and getting up at the same time.

Good relationships

Support from friends and family can really help us to cope better. It can also mean that we overcome problems more quickly and for longer. It can be really helpful to talk through difficulties with friends. You could discuss ways of coping and some of them might have been through something similar.

Communication

Done clearly, this allows you to express yourself and get your message across to others. Careful and engaged listening also helps you to understand what other people have to say. Good communication can help you to feel better understood, you may also see an improvement in your relationships.

- Listen carefully to what others have to say. Don't get distracted
- Try to avoid assumptions and misunderstandings. You could do this by repeating back or paraphrasing what was said. Check whether you have understood correctly
- Don't jump to conclusions or try to mind-read. Ask questions if you are unsure
- Try to understand the meaning and emotions expressed by the other person. It can be helpful to know why they are saying something to you.

Expressing yourself

Think about what you mean to say before saying it. Also, consider what others might take from your comments.

- Try to be as clear as possible
- Don't immediately get defensive or fight back. Try to understand more about what the other person feels and why they have said something
- Express your own emotions in an appropriate and considered way. Avoid using an angry or confrontational style. Otherwise this may cause the other person to react in fear, hurt or frustration.

Styles of communication

There are a range of communication styles that different people use at different times. Some are more effective and appropriate than others, depending on the situation. The three most common are passive, aggressive and assertive communication.

Passive

- You prioritise the needs of others over your own
- You go along with what other people want to do
- You don't express or make known your own needs or desires
- You may find it difficult to say 'no' to someone
- You fear people in authority
- You cannot stand being criticised.

This style of communication can mean that you don't feel listened to by others. If such a pattern builds up then people may not expect to hear your opinion and can become used to ignoring you. You may end up accepting work or favours despite feeling that they may be unfair.

Aggressive

- You prioritise your own needs above the needs of others
- You're always forcing your point through
- You can't stand not getting your own way
- You ignore other people and do not listen to their opinions and expressed needs.

This can be quite a confrontational style of communication which can lead to alienation. People may feel that they do not enjoy being with you because you do not take their opinions into consideration.

Assertive

- You try to balance your own needs against the needs of others
- You take time to listen to other people's points of view
- Expressing a preference before negotiating in a polite and constructive fashion
- Believing that everyone should have an opportunity to express their needs
- You have respect for yourself and respect for other people.

Being assertive involves being aware of your own needs and then you can express these with confidence. Your attitude and approach should be calm, confident and considerate.

Being assertive is about achieving an appropriate balance between the two extremes of aggressive and passive communication styles. It can be hard to be assertive, especially if you feel anxious or intimidated by a situation. It may help to practice particular techniques and strategies.

Techniques and strategies

You may find it more difficult to communicate in certain situations. It may be helpful to rehearse or role-play different scenarios. This can help you to gain confidence in difficult situations. Here are some helpful tips on being assertive:

- Communicate succinctly
- Maintain appropriate eye-contact
- Be polite but firm
- Keep a calm, relaxed tone of voice and body posture.

'I' statements

You may be unhappy about someone's behaviour. It is best to communicate to them how you feel about the situation, this tells the other person how you feel and paves the way for a helpful discussion of the situation. This is different from a 'you' message which attacks or accuses the other person.

Imagine this situation; you had cooked a meal several evenings on the run. Each time your partner or flatmate arrived late and the dinner had been spoiled.

Calmly saying:

"I get very upset when you arrive late for dinner. I put a lot of energy into making it. I feel that it's a waste if the food is cold or overdone."

Rather than:

"You're always late for dinner. You're selfish and inconsiderate. You can make your own dinner from now on."

Scratched record

This can be useful with strangers when you have a specific task. For example, when taking something back to a shop. It consists simply of repeating your point several times no matter how the other person tries to divert you.

Imagine this situation: taking a pair of trousers back to the shop.

Customer: *"I'd like to return these trousers because they've got a mark on them."*

Sales Assistant: *"Hmm...well, it's only a small mark. It will probably wash off."*

Customer: *"I'd still like them changed please."*

Sales Assistant: *"We don't have any more of that size in stock."*

Customer: *"I would like a replacement pair please."*

Being more aware of your emotions and reactions will help you gain better control. Practising the techniques and strategies will help you to move forward in a more positive way.

Use the notes section at the back of this booklet to list difficulties or successes in managing your emotions to identify areas to explore and discuss further.

Concerns or complaints

If you have any concerns, complaints or comments about your experience of our service then please tell a member of the team or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on freephone 0800 328 7971

Notes

Notes

Notes

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These booklets were created specifically to assist our set 4 follow up sessions identified for clients following assessment, to assist with understanding of symptoms, learning strategies to promote coping, facilitate recovery and promote well-being. We have received some wonderful feedback from clients and clinicians during the developmental stages which has been incorporated into the booklets.

If you would like to have information translated into a different language, please contact the Equality and Diversity Team at: EqualityandInclusion@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk

Arabic يُرجى الاتصال بنا إذا كنتم ترغبون في الحصول على المعلومات بلغة أخرى أو بتسبيق مختلف.

আপনি এই তথ্য অন্য ভাষায় বা আলাদা আকারে **Bengali**

পেতে চাইলে অনুগ্রহ করে আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন।

Urdu اگر آپ یہ معلومات دیگر زبان یا مختلف فارمیٹ میں چاہتے ہیں تو برائے مہربانی ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

Chinese 若要以其他語言或格式提供這些資訊，請與我們聯繫

Polish Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku lub w innym formacie, skontaktuj się z nami.

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