

An Acceptance-Based Emotion Regulation Group Therapy for Deliberate Self-Harm

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(updated on 2/10/2010)

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The enclosed materials represent a work in progress, and an attempt to integrate several acceptance-based behavioral therapies into a comprehensive approach to the treatment of emotion dysregulation, experiential avoidance, and self-harm behavior among women with borderline personality disorder (BPD). This treatment was conceptualized as an adjunct to ongoing individual therapy (of any form). This treatment was not designed to serve as a comprehensive treatment for all difficulties associated with BPD. Instead, this treatment was meant to directly and explicitly target emotion dysregulation and emotional avoidance – processes that may be targeted less explicitly in standard treatments. These processes are thought to be potential mediators of maladaptive behaviors, and putative mechanisms of change in therapy; this group was developed to target these processes directly and, therefore, to augment standard outpatient therapy.

This group treatment draws most heavily from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999) and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT; Linehan, 1993). Therapists of this group should read both of these texts and become familiar with the theories underlying each treatment. Knowledge of other acceptance- and mindfulness-based treatments would also be helpful. In addition to integrating ACT and DBT, this group draws examples and exercises from Roemer and Orsillo's (2005) acceptance-based behavior therapy for GAD. Aspects of Greenberg's (2002) emotion-focused psychotherapy are included as well (in particular, the distinction between primary and secondary emotional responses and the different ways of responding effectively to each). In order to conduct this treatment skillfully and effectively, group therapists should familiarize themselves with the aforementioned treatments and their underlying theories and assumptions.

The conceptualization of emotion regulation underlying this group

This group was designed to teach self-harming women with BPD more adaptive ways of responding to their emotions so as to reduce the frequency of their self-harm behavior. The conceptual definition of emotion regulation on which this group is based (see Gratz & Roemer, 2004) emphasizes the functionality of emotions, and was influenced most directly by theoretical literature on emotion regulation in childhood (Cole, Michel, & Teti, 1994; Thompson, 1994; Thompson & Calkins, 1996). Whereas much of the literature on emotion regulation in adulthood emphasizes the control and reduction of

negative emotions, the childhood literature emphasizes the functionality of emotions and the problems associated with deficits in the capacity to experience the full range of emotions.

Thus, rather than equating regulation with “control,” the approach used here conceptualizes emotion regulation as a multidimensional construct involving the: (a) awareness, understanding, and acceptance of emotions; (b) ability to engage in goal-directed behaviors, and inhibit impulsive behaviors, when experiencing negative emotions; (c) flexible use of situationally-appropriate strategies to modulate the intensity and/or duration of emotional responses, rather than to eliminate emotions entirely; and (d) willingness to experience negative emotions as part of pursuing meaningful activities in life (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). As such, an emphasis is placed on the control of behavior when emotions are present, rather than the control of emotions themselves.

Moreover, the focus of the group is not on changing the nature of a client’s emotional experience, but on changing their relationship to this emotional experience. That is, this group does not seek to decrease emotional intensity, reactivity, or sensitivity, which are thought to be aspects of a client’s personality and dimensions of temperament that are both less amenable to change and also less in need of change (as they are not problematic in and of themselves). Instead, this group seeks to change the relationship that clients have to their emotions, promoting emotional acceptance and willingness and *behavioral control*.

This approach to emotion regulation should be made explicit and should be reinforced whenever possible, throughout the course of the group.

Other important themes that should be emphasized throughout the group

Whenever possible, and when in doubt, the following themes should be emphasized throughout the course of the 14 week group:

Functionality of emotions:

Emotions are functional. Emotions provide important information about our environment. This information can be used to guide our behavior and determine an appropriate course of action. When we act on the information provided by our emotions in an adaptive way, we are likely to respond more effectively to our environment.

Paradoxical consequences of emotional avoidance/unwillingness:

Emotional non-acceptance and avoidance may amplify emotions and contribute to the experience of emotions as undesirable and negative. There is a difference between emotional pain (which is a necessary part of life) and emotional suffering (which includes both secondary emotional responses that arise as a result of emotional non-acceptance, and failed attempts at emotional control/avoidance). Emotional acceptance/willingness results in less *suffering* than emotional avoidance, as it prevents the amplification of emotional arousal (despite not necessarily reducing the primary emotional response).

Emotion regulation requires the control of behavior when emotions are present, NOT the control of emotions:

Attempts to control emotions directly will likely backfire and have paradoxical effects. While we cannot control our emotional responses, however, we must learn to control our behaviors in response to these emotions (both the ways in which we express these emotions and the ways in which we act on the information provided by them). Focusing on the control of behaviors when emotions are present promotes an active stance toward the aspect of our experience that is actually controllable: our behavior. In addition, emotions will likely be experienced as less overwhelming and out of control if we both control our behaviors in response to emotions and eliminate efforts to control emotions directly.

Willingness is a choice, possible in each moment:

Although emotional willingness results in less suffering and promotes valued action, this is a *choice* that an individual may or may not make in each moment. The first goal of treatment is simply to become more aware of these choice-points, even if unwillingness is the option chosen in the moment. Because the choice of willingness can be made in every moment, however, one never loses the chance to make this choice. If a person chooses unwillingness in one moment, the very next moment provides that person with the option of choosing willingness. Of course, no one is expected to choose willingness all of the time, in every moment. Instead, the goal is to choose willingness more often now than in the past, to work toward actively practicing willingness in one's daily life.

Overall emphasis on process rather than outcome

Changing one's relationship to one's emotions and changing old patterns of behavior are a process. These changes are not expected to occur overnight, nor are they required to occur before progress is made. Initially, progress is made simply by increasing awareness of: old patterns, the consequences of one's behaviors, and the possibility of alternative responses. The first goal of the group is to increase awareness of moment to moment choices in everyday living, and the possibility of approaching internal experiences in a different way.

Initially, this takes the form of encouraging clients to identify the emotions that precede their urges to self-harm. The goal is simply to have clients reflect on their experience in this way, viewing behaviors and behavioral urges as connected to internal experiences, and directing their attention toward identifying possible emotional precipitants of their self-harm urges. Clients are not necessarily expected to be able to identify/label their emotions right away, and that is not the goal – the goal is simply to engage in this process of self-assessment.

Similarly, when emotional unwillingness and willingness are first introduced, clients are encouraged simply to reflect on (and increase awareness of) the experiential consequences of their choice(s). Moreover, clients are not expected to embrace the idea of willingness immediately; rather, the expectation is that clients will struggle with the material and attempt to make sense of it on the basis of their experiences. That process, that struggle, is where the benefits of the group are thought to occur. The goal is for clients to engage with the material, grapple with it, struggle with it, and ultimately come to practice a new stance.

Therapeutic stance

Group leaders need to model this treatment and its underlying assumptions as best they can. Emotions expressed by clients about the material, group, and/or group leaders themselves should be validated, and the functionality of these responses should be acknowledged. Group leaders should remain mindful of their own emotional responses and the ways in which they speak about these, modeling non-judgmental awareness, putting labels on their emotional experiences, and practicing acceptance and willingness in the room (e.g., not engaging in behaviors that function to avoid distress or discomfort when it arises; not sending the message, implicitly or explicitly, that distress needs to be controlled or avoided).

When clients make judgmental references to their own emotional responses, this should be called to their attention immediately, in a gentle, compassionate, and light-hearted way, and they should be encouraged to reframe their references to this experience in a more accepting way.

Group leaders are encouraged to share examples from their own lives in order to model for clients that the struggles they are engaged in are human struggles, and to demonstrate that clients are not expected to reach a state of choosing willingness, acceptance, or valued action at all times. However, it is important that all personal examples be carefully chosen so that the group leader is not sharing too much of her/his experience with the clients and/or taking up too much emotional space in the group (i.e., group leaders should not use examples that they have not yet fully processed on their own; also, examples should be relatively benign and not too emotionally charged). It is important to be mindful of intention when sharing about one's own experiences. The purpose is to provide a model of how both emotional willingness/acceptance and living a life consistent with one's valued directions are a constant process with which each of us struggle, continually losing our focus and/or choosing unwillingness and then recommitting to the process again.

Group leaders should remain mindful of possible examples of these processes as they arise throughout their daily lives. In fact, the importance of group leaders modeling the humanness of these struggles cannot be overemphasized – clients will be more inclined to non-judgmentally acknowledge their own struggles and work toward changing their relationship to their emotions if they

do not see themselves as flawed or inadequate for fighting their emotions or choosing unwillingness. Acceptance of one's struggles opens up the possibility of changing one's stance in a way that non-acceptance and judgment of these difficulties do not. To see that everyone has these struggles and no one "achieves" a state of ultimate willingness decreases shame and frames the goals of the group in a more realistic and achievable way. Past clients of this group have frequently commented that the group leaders' emotional openness, willingness to share personal experiences, and acknowledgment of their own struggles and need to recommit to the process again and again made it possible to connect with the material (and, ultimately, to change their relationship to their emotions) in a way that would not have been possible in the absence of the group leaders' self-disclosure of their own human struggles.

Group leaders should also be sure to model the language of willingness, defusion, and mindfulness. For example, the use of the word "and" in place of "but," and the use of non-pathological words when discussing emotional pain (e.g., talking about a client's feelings of sadness, rather than referring to these feelings as depression, etc.). Also, as mentioned above, non-judgmental language should also be used whenever possible, and, when judgments do occur, these should be explicitly acknowledged as such and reframed in a non-judgmental way.

When in doubt, fall back on promoting emotional acceptance and willingness, emphasizing the functionality of emotions, and emphasizing process rather than outcome.

Week 1:

Function of Self-Harm Behavior

Outline

I. Introduce group

- Introduce leaders, members, etc.
 - Members should be asked to provide their name, but not much more at this point
 - The leaders should speak to their training and background, and their interest and experience in treating self-harm and BPD. The commitment to and expertise in treating self-harm should be made clear
- Safety and Respect:
 - Emphasize the need for and importance of a collaborative, respectful environment; given that the group will focus on difficult topics, there is a need for a safe environment
 - Discuss that the vast majority of the group will focus on emotion regulation and people's experiences using the new skills, rather than self-harm per se; in addition, the only discussion of self-harm will be in the context of focusing on consequences or antecedents, and not on what exactly was done (in terms of specific details of behavior); group members should let others know if the discussion is serving as a cue for urges to self-harm

As you know, this group was developed to help people reduce their self-harm, which means that everyone in this group struggles with self-harm of some kind. And we believe that knowing that everyone in the group struggles with the same kind of behavior can be really helpful. Many people who engage in self-harm say that they feel terribly alone in this behavior, and as if they are the only one who struggles. So, we hope that knowing that you are not alone and that other people struggle with the same kinds of behaviors and urges is helpful. That said, the primary focus of this group is on emotion regulation, with most of the group spent teaching you new ways of responding to your emotions and having you discuss your experiences using the new skills. Therefore, even though everyone in the group does struggle with self-harm, the group is not really focused on this, but on learning new skills. In addition, because we want to make sure that this is a safe environment, any discussion of self-harm will come only in the context of focusing on the types of things that increase urges to self-harm and the consequences of resisting vs. acting on those urges. Because we want to make sure that the group feels safe to everyone, we don't spend time talking about the self-harm behavior itself or the things people do to harm themselves. And, for that reason, we believe that this will be a safe environment and that the content of the group should not increase urges to engage in self-harm. However, that said, if people ever start talking about something that is a cue for your self-harm or that may be increasing urges to engage in this behavior, please speak up and let us know.

- The Structure of the Group

Another thing that is important to talk about is the structure of this group therapy. There are actually a couple of different kinds of group therapies available to people. One of these is a process group, where the group members talk about their difficulties and get support from one another. That is a fairly unstructured group, where the role of the group leader is simply to oversee the discussion. Another type of group therapy is a skills group, where people learn new skills and new ways of responding in their lives. The leaders in this type of group are more active – they provide information and teach you a lot of things. This group is the latter type – a skills group – so, at various times throughout the next 16 weeks, I am going to provide you with all kinds of information, teach you new skills, and talk a lot! And, my hope is that this will be very

helpful to you. However, what I can guarantee is that simply listening to me speak for an hour and a half each week is not going to be enough – although we hope this will help, the real change with any treatment comes when you can incorporate what you are learning into your life. Most of your life is lived outside of this group – we are together for just a fraction of your week. So, even if the information we provide is helpful, you won't see real progress until you start to use this information in your daily life. Therefore, one important component of this group therapy is what you do outside of the group. In particular, each week you will be asked to try the new skills you have learned that week and monitor the consequences of those skills, as well as your urges to self-harm and the types of emotions and situations that bring on these urges. These assignments are considered to be the most important part of the group, and the way that the treatment will be most effective. It is by doing these assignments that we believe that changes in your life will happen. Then, at the start of group each week, we will discuss your experiences and your monitoring forms from the previous week, in order to learn about your experiences. Therefore, please make sure to bring your completed forms to group each week. In addition to discussing them at the start of group each week, we will be collecting these forms and making copies of them for the research part of this treatment (to see if the amount of homework people complete is related to the progress they make). So, it is very important that you complete these forms and bring them with you to group each week.

- We expect there to be a commitment to decreasing the behavior and we also know that lapses happen

Now, as I mentioned, the purpose of this group is to help you reduce your self-harm. And by virtue of your interest in and attendance at this group, we believe that you are also committed to reducing your self-harm (or else you wouldn't be attending a treatment to help you stop).

Therefore, we really do expect that you have made a commitment to stopping self-harm. However, we also know that human beings are not perfect and that lapses happen. And, in fact, lapses are particularly likely to happen when people believe that they have to be perfect. Therefore, I want to make it clear that although we do want you to make a commitment to stopping your self-harm, we also are not the type of treatment that will kick you out for doing the very behavior that got you into treatment. I am not sure if any of you have had this experience or not, but many clients we have worked with have told us stories of therapists kicking them out of treatment just for engaging in the very behavior that prompted them to get treatment – and we really don't see the utility of that approach. So, if you have a lapse, the most important thing is to learn from it and figure out what you can take from it to make a lapse less likely in the future.

- Basic premise of group: **Self-harm behavior serves important functions for the individuals who engage in it, and, as such, is reinforced; targeting these functions may help decrease the need for self-harm**

Now, the basic premise of the group is that self-harm serves important functions for the people who engage in this behavior. It is not done randomly or just for the heck of it; instead, it serves some very important purposes and helps people meet important needs. In fact, it is for just this reason that self-harm is so difficult to overcome. If it didn't do much for you, or didn't give you something you need, you probably wouldn't do it!

What this means, then, is that if you can find other ways of getting those needs met, your need for self-harm may decrease. Basically, you won't need it as much, because your needs will be met in other ways. So, let's figure out what functions your self-harm serves and the needs it helps you meet.

One way to do this is to identify the short-term and long-term consequences of self-harm, both positive and negative.

II. Discuss the functions of self-harm

- Complete the “Consequences of Self-Harm Behavior” worksheet in group

- Start with the positive, short-term consequences

- Emphasize that these consequences speak to the function of the behavior, and are likely why the behavior is so difficult to give up

Okay – so let’s start with this box up here – the positive, short-term consequences. Because, the thing is, it doesn’t do us any good to pretend that this behavior doesn’t have some positive consequences. Like I said, it is precisely because self-harm has some positive consequences in the short-term that this behavior is so difficult to give up. So, let’s figure out what it does for you so that we can figure out how to get those needs met in other ways that don’t have the same downsides as self-harm.

Another reason it can be useful to identify the positive consequences of self-harm is so that you can get in touch with the fact that the reason you engage in self-harm is not because you are crazy or weird or irrational, as people often say they have heard in the past. In fact, all of the functions of self-harm and all of the needs it helps people meet are basic human needs – and we believe that getting in touch with this fact will help target the shame that many people who engage in this behavior experience as a result. This will show you that you aren’t crazy for doing this – the needs self-harm helps you meet are real and very important!

- Assist clients in generating as many positive short-term consequences as possible, with a particular emphasis on emotion regulating consequences

- Emphasize the functionality of self-harm, and validate the purposes it serves (e.g., relief of distress, release of emotions, self-soothing)

- Validate the importance of getting these needs met, **in other ways**

Now, let’s take a step back and look at these positive short-term consequences of self-harm. Can you see why it can be hard to stop this behavior? Look at all of the needs it helps people meet. They are such reasonable needs, such basic human needs. Who wouldn’t want to know that they have a way of making themselves feel better when they feel upset, or of expressing their emotions, or of relieving tension or anxiety? Who doesn’t want to have a sense of control, especially when things are out of control, or a way of expressing themselves, or a way to be taken seriously? All of these are such reasonable needs – and all of them are incredibly important. Given that all humans have these needs and that they are completely reasonable, the goal of this treatment is not to simply get you to stop self-harming so that all of these needs go unmet. Instead, the goal is to figure out a way for you to get these needs met in other ways, without self-harm. Having you ignore those needs will not help you stop self-harm for long. However, finding other ways of getting these needs met will help you stop self-harm.

- Move to the positive long-term consequences. Make sure that at least some are provided, although note that self-harm doesn’t have many of these.

- Next, move on to the negative consequences, noting that self-harm generally has more negative consequences in the long-term than the short-term (another reason why self-harm is so difficult to give up).

- Once again, be as comprehensive as possible in listing the negative consequences
- Focus on differences in the short-term and long-term consequences of self-harm
- Emphasize the paradoxical consequences of self-harm in the long-term (i.e., how upper-left and lower-right quadrants of worksheet are opposites/mirror images of one another)

Now, what's interesting here is that the long-term negative consequences are actually almost the opposite of the short-term positive consequences. So, basically, all of the ways that self-harm helps you in the short-term tend to backfire in the long-term. And I think that is incredibly important to note. If you are using self-harm to feel better or release distress, you may actually end up feeling worse in the long-run than you did initially. And since you probably felt pretty bad to begin with, i.e., bad enough to self-harm, I am assuming you definitely don't want to end of feeling even worse! And that is the realization that can give people motivation to stop self-harm – when they realize that they may actually be increasing their distress and making themselves feel even worse in the long run, that can give them the motivation to stop this behavior.

- Discuss the “Functions of Self-Harm Behavior” handout
 - Emphasize that the functions listed are exactly the same ones as the consequences they came up with in the group [**This gives credibility to the group and also normalizes the self-harm experience**]
 - Note that many of these functions can be thought of as emotion regulation strategies
 - Continue to emphasize the paradoxical consequences of self-harm

Remember, though, that although self-harm may work in the short-term, providing temporary relief from overwhelming or unwanted emotions and helping you feel better in that moment, it tends to backfire in the long-term and actually make you feel worse. Now, one reason for this is because trying to shut down your emotions or not feel them at all just doesn't work. If it did, I doubt any of you would be in this group right now! Instead, as most of you have probably experienced, when we try to get rid of an emotion or shut it down completely, it tends to backfire in the long-run; the very emotion we were trying to get rid of eventually comes back, and when it does, it tends to be more intense and to come back more often. Therefore, we actually end up feeling worse!

Now, another reason that self-harm tends to backfire in the long-run has to do with the consequences of repeatedly trying to get rid of or avoid emotional distress. Basically, the more we try to avoid feeling emotional distress and the more we shut down this distress when we experience it, the less distress we can tolerate. It's similar to how people can lose their tolerance for caffeine. If you drink a certain amount of coffee each day, you will often build up a tolerance for that amount of caffeine, and it may not affect you very much.

However, if you stop drinking coffee for awhile, you will probably lose your tolerance for caffeine, and the same amount that used to not affect you will suddenly make your heart race or keep you from falling asleep at night. By not having that amount of caffeine on a regular basis, you lose your tolerance for it and it affects you much more. In the same way, by not allowing yourself to experience distress on a regular basis, and by shutting down your feelings when they reach a particular level, you eventually lose your tolerance for emotional distress until even small amounts of distress feel incredibly overwhelming. Over time, what might once have felt like a tolerable amount of distress begins to feel very

intolerable, as you lose your tolerance for experiencing distress. It's as if our range of emotional distress that we allow ourselves to experience and can tolerate experiencing becomes truncated the more we shut it down at a certain level. So, if we begin by shutting down our emotions when they reach a 50 on a 0 to 100 scale, over time that 50 becomes our new 100 and so we now start shutting down our emotions when they reach a level of 25. And eventually the 25 becomes the new 100 and so we start shutting down our emotions when they reach a 12.5, and so on, until eventually a level of distress that once might not even have registered as particularly upsetting now feels incredibly overwhelming.

- Note that human beings are more strongly influenced by the short-term consequences of our behaviors than the long-term consequences. Because the short-term consequences are more closely linked to our behaviors, they influence us much more.

III. Discuss the theory underlying the group

- Self-harm often serves an emotion regulating function
- Although self-harm may be effective in the short-term, it is much less effective in the long-term, and may paradoxically increase emotional suffering
- If we teach clients more adaptive ways of responding to their emotions (i.e., ways that do not exacerbate emotional distress or increase emotional suffering), emotion regulation will increase
- If emotion regulation increases, the need for self-harm will decrease
Thus, this is exactly what this group is focused on – the whole purpose of this group is to increase your emotion regulation so that your emotions feel less overwhelming and, therefore, you have less of a need to engage in self-harm. So, this group is all about teaching you emotion regulation.

Now, what exactly does that mean to you? When I say that we are going to teach you emotion regulation skills, what comes to mind? [Get clients to volunteer what they think that means and what they expect to be taught when treatments focus on increasing emotion regulation. Most of the time, clients will assume that you will be teaching them to terminate their negative emotions, control their feelings, and “get a grip”, as well as how to “suck it up” and stop feeling so bad (or expressing those feelings). Once they volunteer such answers, it is a good time to begin to emphasize the functional approach to emotions underlying this group, as well as the emphasis on emotional acceptance]. Ahh...that's what I expected to hear – and yet, as you probably know, that kind of thing just isn't that helpful! I don't know about you, but when I am feeling bad and someone tells me to suck it up or stop feeling that way, it doesn't actually help me feel better – it just makes me angry! So, that is not at all what we are going to teach you in this group. In fact, we are going to do almost the opposite of that. Unlike other times in your life when you might have been told that you should stop feeling a certain way or that your emotions were not valid, we believe that emotions are functional, valid, and serve an important purpose in your life. In fact, as we will discuss next week, they are evolutionarily adaptive. Therefore, it doesn't make any sense to try to get rid of them; in fact, we believe that not having access to your emotions or the information they provide is problematic. In addition, we don't believe it is actually possible to get rid of your emotions, and in our experience, attempts to do so tend to backfire. So, the purpose of this group is to help you get in touch with, understand, and accept your emotions, and not beat yourself up for feeling a certain way. We also want to teach you how to control your behaviors when you are really upset, rather than wasting your time trying to control your feelings themselves, which just isn't going to happen.

Specifically, the group will cover the following areas:

IV. Discuss the specific modules that will be covered in the group and the dimensions of emotion regulation that will be addressed

➤ Emotional awareness and clarity

We will help you learn how to get in touch with your feelings, and how to understand exactly what you are feeling; for example, you will learn to figure out exactly what combination of feelings you are having, not just “bad” but angry, sad, and a little lonely. The nice thing about this is that research suggests that simply being able to put a label on your emotions and having more clarity makes those emotions less overwhelming and so should help take the edge off of them.

➤ Emotional acceptance/willingness

Like we mentioned before, rather than trying to get you to get rid of your emotions, or squelch them whenever you have them, we are going to teach you an alternative way of responding to your emotions that does not involve fighting them.

➤ Modulating the intensity and/or duration of an emotion when needed, rather than eliminating or avoiding the emotion entirely (e.g., by redirecting attention toward something else, rather than away from the emotion)

That said, we also realize that it's helpful to know that there are things you can do to take the edge off of your emotions, so that sadness does not turn into depression and you know that you can modulate emotional arousal. Therefore, we are going to teach you skills for modulating your emotional arousal and taking the edge off of your emotions so that you can do what you need to do and focus your attention even when you are distressed. Unlike self-harm, though, we are going to teach you skills for regulating your emotions that won't backfire in the long-run.

➤ Controlling impulsive behaviors when experiencing negative emotions

➤ Engaging in desired behaviors when experiencing negative emotions

➤ Emphasize the need to control behaviors when emotions are present, rather than the need to control emotions themselves

We are also going to teach you skills for controlling your behaviors when you are feeling distressed, so that you can do the things you need to do even when you are upset (like concentrating at work or in class), and also so that you can keep yourself from acting impulsively or engaging in self-destructive behaviors when you are upset. As much as we don't believe it is possible to directly control your emotions or make yourself stop feeling a certain way right that moment, we do believe it is possible to learn how to control your behaviors even when you are feeling upset.

Finally, the last part of the group is focused on helping you figure out what you want out of life and what you are moving toward. If treatment only focuses on helping people to stop certain behaviors (like self-harm) or decrease certain symptoms, they can be left feeling unsure what to do next. Often, they are left asking “Now what? Now that I have stopped this behavior and decreased this symptom, what do I do instead?” Therefore, we believe it is very important to focus not just on what you are trying to stop or move away from, but also on what you are moving toward, i.e., what is meaningful and important to you. Thus, a major part of this group is focused on helping people begin to identify the things in life that matter to them and then take steps in those directions.

Homework

- Monitor urges to self-harm and the feelings associated with (i.e., preceding) these urges
 - Go over the Self-Harm Monitoring Form 1 in detail. Explain to clients how to complete this form.
 - Encourage clients to get into the habit of thinking about their urges in this way, and increasing awareness of the emotional precipitants of these urges
- Remind clients that homework will be collected, copied, and reviewed at the beginning of each group

Consequences of Self-Harm Behavior

	Positive	Negative
Short-term consequences		
Long-term consequences		

Functions of Self-Harm Behavior

Self-harm is thought to be a coping mechanism and emotion regulation strategy

- Self-harm may function to:
 - Alleviate distress
 - Relieve tension and unpleasant/intolerable feelings
 - Release emotions
 - Externalize emotional pain (i.e., transform intolerable emotional pain into more tolerable physical pain)
 - Escape emotional pain
 - Self-soothe
 - Communicate emotional pain
 - Express emotions
 - Validate emotional pain
 - Self-punish (and therefore alleviate guilt)
 - Provide sense of control
 - Divert attention away from painful internal experiences
 - Decrease dissociative symptoms (e.g., depersonalization)

Many of these functions can be thought of as emotion regulation strategies

- Self-harm may function to control, avoid, or escape intolerable emotional states

Self-harm may have paradoxical emotional consequences

- In the short-term, self-harm has positive emotional consequences
 - Appears to regulate emotions
- In the long-term, self-harm has negative emotional consequences
 - Self-harm actually increases emotion dysregulation in the long-term
 - Intolerance of distress leads to greater intolerance of distress
 - The more we avoid emotional distress, the less emotional distress we can tolerate

Behaviors are naturally more strongly influenced by short-term consequences than long-term consequences

- Self-harm behavior is reinforced because of its positive short-term consequences, but may interfere with emotion regulation in the long-term

Self-Harm Monitoring Form I

	Urges to self-harm (0-100)	If no urges, what factors contributed to this? What were the protective factors?	If urges were present, what feelings preceded the urge(s)?	Did you engage in self-harm? (circle one)	If no, what did you do instead?	If yes, what did you do?	Consequences of your decision (+ and -)
Monday ____ / ____				Yes No			
Tuesday ____ / ____				Yes No			
Wednesday ____ / ____				Yes No			
Thursday ____ / ____				Yes No			
Friday ____ / ____				Yes No			
Saturday ____ / ____				Yes No			
Sunday ____ / ____				Yes No			

Week 2:

Identifying Negative Beliefs about Emotions

Psychoeducation on the Function of Emotions

Outline

I. Review homework from Week 1

- Identify emotions that precede urges to self-harm.
 - In reviewing the homework, help clients to distinguish between emotions, thoughts, and situations. Many clients will discuss thoughts or situations that contributed to self-harm behavior. Assist them in identifying the emotions associated with those experiences and/or situations.
 - Use the homework as an opportunity to begin to help clients increase their awareness of their emotions. For example, if clients are having difficulty identifying an emotional experience, assist the client in identifying bodily sensations that may have accompanied the emotion.

Before we move into the new material for this week, I would like to begin by discussing the monitoring you did last week. In particular, I am wondering if folks noticed any particular types of emotions that tend to precede your urges to engage in self-harm (e.g., anxiety, anger, loneliness). Some people find that they are more likely to experience urges to self-harm when they are feeling particular emotions. They might find that certain emotions feel more okay or less distressing, but other emotions feel so bad that they almost always result in urges to self-harm.

You may also notice that it is not about the particular emotion you are experiencing, but the intensity of that emotion. Many people find that emotions become much more overwhelming when they are very intense, so it may only be intense emotions that lead to urges to self-harm. For other people, it may be the absence of an emotion, or feeling numbed out, that may bring on an urge to self-harm. Finally, you may find that the same emotions do not always lead to urges to self-harm, but only at certain times or under certain circumstances. It may be the case that particular emotions are linked to urges to engage in self-harm only when something happens during the day to exacerbate or intensify those emotions.

- Begin to identify adaptive coping mechanisms clients already use instead of engaging in self-harm

I also want folks to think about some things that you are already doing that may help you resist urges to self-harm. On your monitoring form, if you had urges to engage in self-harm and didn't act on those urges, what did you do instead? What helped to keep you from harming yourself? If we can figure out the things that you are already doing that help you resist your urges to self-harm, we can make sure you keep doing them. I have no doubt that all of you already have some coping skills you can use instead of self-harm; we just need to figure out which ones work best and make sure you use them more often. As much as we are going to be teaching you a lot of new skills in this group, we want to be sure to also not ignore the skills you already have.

II. Identify the presence of any negative beliefs about emotions that clients buy into and/or attach to

Today, I want to talk about one reason why emotions can feel so overwhelming and intolerable. Now, there are many reasons why this may be the case (e.g., our past experiences, our family history, etc.) and we will touch upon many of these throughout the course of the group. However, the one I really want to focus on today is the beliefs we have about our emotions, including why we believe we have emotions, what we believe emotions mean, and what we believe it means about us when we have these emotions.

- Handout and discuss the “Beliefs about Emotions” worksheet in group, focusing on identifying the beliefs to which clients are most attached (and which are most disruptive to their lives)

The beliefs listed on this handout are ones we have identified as important ones in our research and in the other groups we have done. These are some of the major negative beliefs about emotions that people often endorse. Therefore, I wanted to begin by discussing your experience of these beliefs. Do you have any of these? The first way to start to overcome these beliefs is to identify that they are there and then figure out why they are there. If we have a thought, it is there for a reason. These things don't just pop up out of the blue. It is there for a reason. We develop these thoughts over time and the more we have them, the more they take hold. So, I want people to identify which of these beliefs they have and then we can think about where these might have come from. In doing this, we can gain some insight into why we have these beliefs, which is the first step in reducing their impact on our lives

- Lead a discussion focused on helping clients identify their personal beliefs about emotions. Have them describe how the beliefs on the handout apply to them. Make sure that the clients stay focused on emotions and their beliefs about those emotions, as opposed to the urges they have or the behaviors they engage in. Also, begin to ask clients about the specific emotions to which these beliefs apply (e.g., *What emotions make you feel weak? Fear? Loneliness? Sadness?*).
- Make sure you spend some time on positive emotions as well. Do clients have negative beliefs about positive emotions as well as negative emotions? Which beliefs are more strongly tied to positive emotions?

- Identify how these beliefs were learned

- Ask the clients where they believe these thoughts came from. Many clients may focus on aspects of their upbringing. However, it will also be important to focus on larger contextual factors, such as society. As clients discuss the possible origins of these beliefs, make sure you validate this experience, especially in regard to how it makes sense that these beliefs would develop given the context clients are in or have been in.

If you think about it, it makes perfect sense that you have these beliefs. As I mentioned before, we don't develop beliefs like this out of the blue – we are taught them, directly or indirectly. So, if you were told that you should not feel a certain way, or if you were punished when you expressed a particular emotion, or if you were told “Cry and I'll give you something to cry about,” it makes perfect sense that you would learn that these emotions are unacceptable, scary, or bad. They were for you growing up and it was adaptive to learn this. It protected you to believe this because it probably saved you from some punishment, ridicule, or abuse.

In the ideal world, as kids are learning to label and express their emotions, what is supposed to happen is that kids have an emotion and express it, and then their parents come in and identify the emotion, explain it, and respond appropriately to it. The parents are supposed to reinforce the expression of the emotion and provide guidance and support in how to manage it. If this process happens as it should for years growing up, you learn how to identify, label, express, and regulate your emotions. It is how people learn to develop a healthy relationship with their emotions.

On the contrary, if you are brought up in a situation where you are told that you are not feeling what you believe you are feeling, or that you are really feeling the opposite of what you believe you are feeling, or that you are told you are wrong for feeling a certain way, then you do not learn how to identify or regulate your emotions, and you do not develop a

healthy relationship with your emotions. For example, your parents might say, “That is not what you are feeling.” or “Why are you crying – it is not a big deal.” If, from an early age, you are told that what you are feeling is wrong or incorrect, it makes sense that you would begin to question your feelings or develop these beliefs.

Now, a lot of these beliefs come from our upbringing or our experiences with our parents. However, many of these beliefs also come from how society thinks women should be or should act (e.g., women should not show anger; women should always smile and be polite no matter what; it’s okay for women to cry, but not for men to cry, etc).

The fact that you have these beliefs makes sense. When you are told something over and over again and don’t have any information to the contrary, these thoughts take hold. That is learning. The problem, though, is that these thoughts continue to have an impact on your behaviors even now, when you are not still in the same environment.

- Identify the impact of these beliefs on clients’ behaviors
 - Help clients to identify the consequences of these beliefs in terms of how they respond to their emotions and how they behave when they feel certain ways. Help them to identify how these beliefs influence how they feel about themselves when they have certain emotions.
- Introduce the concept of rule governed behavior, and distinguish this from behavior based on current operating contingencies (focusing especially on differences between the two in flexibility and adaptiveness)
 - Discuss the relevance of this to negative beliefs about emotions (they may once have led to adaptive behavior; once the context changed, the behavior may be less adaptive)

The reason I bring this up is because there is something called “ruled governed behavior.” What this means is that we learn something – we learn a belief or a thought – and eventually over time, we start responding to that thought. So, the rule (negative feelings are bad) causes us to act in a certain way (suppressing our feelings, avoiding certain emotions, etc.). This thought begins to govern our behavior.

Now, rule governed behavior develops initially because it helps us. These rules help us survive and be more effective in a particular context. For example, if you are hit because you are having a certain emotion, you learn to not cry – it is adaptive. However, the problem with rule governed behavior is that these rules don’t readily change. These rules aren’t sensitive to when our situations have changed. So, this means that these rules which were once incredibly adaptive and helped us survive may not be working so well for us anymore. They may not reflect the current situation we are in, and, in this new context, they may actually be causing us problems. They may be interfering with our lives. Although these rules once made us more effective, they may actually be making us less effective now.

Thus, when our situation changes, when we are no longer in the same context and have left the original environment in which we learned these rules and developed these beliefs, it is important to reassess these rules and modify our beliefs to be more useful in our lives. As I mentioned before, the fact that you have these beliefs makes sense and they once helped you. However, my guess is that they are not helping you any longer and may in fact be causing you more emotional suffering. Therefore, I am going to start to suggest some alternative beliefs that may be more helpful. I am going to present some research that may suggest that the things you learned growing up about your emotions and what they mean may not be accurate or helpful. In fact, some of these beliefs may be completely wrong.

And, I am going to rely on research to suggest some alternative beliefs that may be more helpful.

III. Provide psychoeducation on the adaptive nature and function of all emotions

- Discuss the “Facts about Emotions” handout

- In the discussion of this handout, make sure to tie back some of these points to things that the clients have discussed in reviewing their homework or in discussing their beliefs about emotions in the previous session.

The information on this handout is based on years of research about emotions. These are the objective facts about emotions.

The first thing to note: No matter what we may wish or desire, we cannot get rid of our emotions. They are hard wired in us. They have developed throughout history to serve a purpose, and are evolutionarily adaptive. They must be. If they weren't adaptive, they would have been phased out as we evolved. We would have lost our emotions like we lost our tails. However, the fact that we still have emotions means that they are evolutionarily adaptive and that we cannot get rid of them. And what this means is that if your two choices are (1) live with your emotions, or (2) make them go away completely, your only option really is to learn to live with them because they are not going to go away. You are not going to escape them. There is nothing we can do to change the fact that they are hard wired in us.

Now, related to the fact that our emotions are hard-wired and evolutionarily adaptive, they are found in all human beings and across all cultures. From the moment of birth, human beings have the capacity to experience and express anger, sadness, fear, surprise, joy, and disgust. So those are the six basic human emotions that we all have. Others then start to develop over time with experience and then you can start to see certain emotions emerging as more relevant depending on one's culture, but initially, these are the emotions that are just there. We are hard wired to have these basic emotions. These emotions are universal – we all naturally have them.

- In this discussion of emotions being functional, make sure to distinguish between guilt and shame (guilt is about a behavior and may be functional, shame is about oneself and is not functional).

So, why do we naturally have these emotions at birth? Well, the reason they are there is because these emotions provide us with information. They serve a function. Emotions are not random. We don't suddenly have an emotion for no reason – they are always cued or triggered by something. They tell us about our environment and our relationship with our environment. Emotions are our body's way of communicating with us. Therefore, if we go to extremes to avoid our emotions, we are missing out on a tremendous amount of information. It is almost like going around without one of your senses. You can function, but you are missing out on some very important information that is helpful and in many cases, necessary.

So, what do our emotions tell us? Take sadness as an example. One of the things that sadness tells us is that we have a loss. That we are missing something we need. It tells us that something is missing. And this is very important information that is adaptive evolutionarily. Think about it. Back in prehistoric times when we were living in caves and surrounded by dinosaurs, etc., let's say a mom lost her baby, or put it down and wandered off to go gather food. Because our emotions are functional, she might experience a feeling of sadness when she was away from her baby for too long. This feeling of sadness would provide information that she is missing something, that she is missing her baby, and would her to go look for and find her baby. Once she finds her baby, then, the sadness would go away. So, in this case, sadness was evolutionarily

adaptive. It allowed us to protect our young and made sure that our species continued to survive. It allowed early humans to stay together.

Now, these days we have sadness for more complex reasons, beyond simply losing someone or being without them physically. But the general function of the emotion is the same. When we feel sadness, it could be about the loss of a relationship or the loss of a sense of connection with someone. And this sense of sadness tells us that this relationship was important and maybe we should try to find some way to reconnect or reestablish that relationship. This is important information. Once it helped us to survive, but now it helps us to realize what is important or matters to us.

Now, take the example of fear. Fear is incredibly important, and very evolutionarily adaptive. Fear signals danger and threat. If we do not have access to feelings of fear, we cannot be aware that something is scary or threatening, and we won't be able to detect that we need to do something to keep us safe. Now, back in the day, fear (and all the experiences that go along with it, such as increased heart rate, shortness of breath, muscle tightness – basically the fight or flight response) kept us alive. It told us when we needed to flee a dangerous situation (e.g., seeing a bear). Now, of course, we don't often encounter bears in our current environment, but we still have that same response when we are in a situation that we view as dangerous or threatening, and we have that same urge to escape or take action – fight or flight.

Now let's consider the emotion of anger – another one that most people learn is a "bad" emotion. Once again, though, anger is actually an incredibly important emotion that provides us with very important information. And what anger tells us is that one of our rights, something we need or deserve, has been violated in some way. It tells us that some right we have has been infringed upon. This is really important information. Consider again what might have happened back in the day, in prehistoric times. Back then, if someone tried to take our food, we would get angry and fight. We would hit them on the head with our club and take back our food. Our anger served as a signal that something we needed and that was ours was in jeopardy of being taken by someone else. And acting on that anger helped us to survive. It was a way of establishing control.

Now, how we go about acting on that anger today is going to depend on the situation. We are probably not going to hit someone with our club, and doing something like that would probably not be the most effective action. Instead, it might be more effective to act on our anger by expressing it verbally or letting the person know that what they did was not okay, and needs to stop. We might also decide not to act on the anger at all right away because it wouldn't be wise to do so (for example, if we are in a situation where expressing anger might put us at risk for retaliation). Even then, though, it doesn't mean that what the anger is telling us and the information it is providing isn't important. It is, and we can use it to help us decide what to do next (for example, leaving the situation).

Another important aspect of emotions, and another reason they are so functional, is that they prepare us to act quickly. Every emotion includes a variety of instantaneous biological changes that prepare us to act quickly without thinking. If we were in a dangerous situation, we wouldn't have the time to sit and think about what we need to do. Instead, our emotions prepare us to respond quickly without thought.

Another important function of emotions is that emotions communicate to others. I am sure this is something you can all relate to. If you think about how you relate to people in your lives and how you respond to the people you interact with, it is probably quite clear that emotions communicate to others. Think about how you respond differently to other people, depending on the emotion they are expressing. If you need to ask someone for directions, are you more likely to approach someone who seems calm and happy, or someone who is frowning and looks upset? Our emotions

communicate more quickly than words, and sometimes the communication is also more salient. If someone you know looks sad but says they are feeling fine, do you trust their words or their emotions? Most of us probably buy into people's emotions more than what they say. And that again has to do with the fact that emotions are hard-wired into us and therefore they seem more genuine. Even if we are not always aware of what we are communicating, emotions do communicate and we respond to people based on the emotions they are expressing.

Another important function of emotions is that they deepen our experience of life. One thing about emotions being universal and adaptive is that it is human to have emotions. You really can't be human without having emotions. The capacity to experience emotions distinguishes us from other types of beings. Even though emotions can be incredibly overwhelming and painful at times, they are a part of being human, and that experience is important. They are communicating something to us, and they may even validate a part of our experience that may have been invalidated for years.

Another thing to note is that having "negative" emotions deepens our experience of our "positive" emotions. We cannot have one without the other. They are all part of the human experience. They help balance each other out.

- Throughout the discussion of this handout, make sure to ask clients what they think about this information. Do they agree/disagree with it? Do they agree/disagree with some points in particular?

IV. Begin to identify new ways of approaching and responding to negative beliefs about emotions in light of psychoeducation

- Revisit the "Beliefs about Emotions" worksheet
- Identify alternative ways of approaching/addressing these beliefs

Now, in thinking about what we just went over, I want you to turn back to that first sheet on beliefs about emotions, and begin to consider if these beliefs – which made so much sense given our histories – may not be 100% true. Perhaps these beliefs are not completely accurate. In fact, research would suggest that they are not. Also, I am fairly confident that these beliefs are not all that helpful any more, and that they probably increase your distress and emotional suffering. Therefore, it may be time to think about taking a step back from these beliefs and reassessing how well they are working.

So, my hope is that when these thoughts come up, you will take a step back and stop buying into them so much. My hope is that you will begin to consider other alternatives, and the possibility that these beliefs are not FACT or TRUTH. The goal is not to stop having these beliefs. They are going to be there. However, we can stop buying into them so much when they come up. We can keep ourselves from becoming too attached to these thoughts. And we can consider other ways of responding to and approaching our emotions – ways that may be more helpful to us.

So, let's turn our attention back to the original Beliefs about Emotions handout and see if we can identify some alternative beliefs that may be more helpful. Let's see if we can come up with some alternatives based on the information we reviewed today and the discussion we just had.

Homework

- Continue to generate alternatives to these negative beliefs about emotions, with an emphasis on identifying alternative beliefs that may be more helpful.

As we mentioned before, one reason our emotions may feel so overwhelming a lot of the time is because of these types of negative beliefs we have about our emotions. These beliefs about emotions do nothing more than make our emotions more painful and distressing. So, over the

course of the next week, I'd like you to continue generating some alternative beliefs that may be more helpful. Just like we started in group, I'd like you to use the Beliefs about Emotions handout to suggest some alternative beliefs to these negative beliefs about emotions. Consider this a work in progress. Just start thinking about possible alternatives to some of these beliefs. We will come up with many more as a group, but for now see if you can go through the sheet and come up with some good alternatives that may be more helpful to you.

- Over the course of the week, increase awareness of the negative beliefs about emotions that are most salient, influential, and common/persistent
- Develop personalized list of relevant negative beliefs about emotions to which clients are most attached
- Monitor the particular negative beliefs about emotions that follow different emotional responses (i.e., that occur in response to emotions)
- Track when these beliefs are more or less believable (i.e., when clients are more or less attached to these beliefs)
- At the end of the week, identify the contexts in which clients are most and least attached to their negative beliefs about emotions (i.e., the contexts in which clients are more and less likely to buy into these beliefs as literally true)

I also want you come up with your own personalized list of negative beliefs about emotions. I want you to identify the most prominent ones for you so that we can keep an eye out for them over the course of the group. Although you may believe many of these things to some extent, some of these beliefs are going to be much more relevant to you, and it would be helpful to know which are most prominent for each of you.

Relatedly, I also want you to begin to increase your awareness of the times when these beliefs are most likely to be present, and the times when you are most likely to buy into these beliefs when they come up. When do you find that you have these beliefs? What are the times (moods, being around particular people, time of day) when you are most at risk for buying into these thoughts?

- Continue to monitor urges to self-harm and the feelings associated with (i.e., preceding) these urges; in addition, identify the negative beliefs about emotions preceding urges to self-harm
 - Review the Self-Harm Monitoring Form II in detail. Explain to clients how to complete this form.

Beliefs about Emotions

- 1) Negative feelings are bad and destructive

Alternative approach: _____

- 2) Having some emotions is a sign of weakness

Alternative approach: _____

- 3) Certain emotions should be controlled at all costs

Alternative approach: _____

- 4) Negative feelings should be avoided

Alternative approach: _____

- 5) Emotions are not important

Alternative approach: _____

- 6) If I tried hard enough, I could stop myself from feeling bad

Alternative approach: _____

- 7) Some emotions should never be felt

Alternative approach: _____

- 8) Becoming more in touch with my emotions may cause me to lose control of them

Alternative approach: _____

Facts about Emotions

Emotions are universal

- Emotions are hard-wired
- All humans experience basic emotions, both negative and positive
 - Sadness, anger, fear, joy, surprise, disgust

Emotions are evolutionarily adaptive

- Emotions provide us with important information about our environment
 - Emotions signal the presence of threat, danger, loss
 - Anger signals that our rights have been infringed upon/violated
- Emotions organize us and prepare us for action
 - Emotions give us direction
 - Emotions guide our actions
 - Emotions help us make choices
- Emotions help us respond quickly
 - When in danger, we don't need to think...we can act to save ourselves

Emotions serve other important functions

- Emotions communicate to others
 - Scowling sends the message to stay away
 - Smiling sends the message to come closer, engage
- Positive and negative emotions deepen our experience of life
 - Positive emotions are positive only in comparison to negative emotions

Self-Harm Monitoring Form II

	Urges to self-harm (0-100)	If no urges, what factors contributed to this? What were the protective factors?	If urges were present, what feelings preceded the urge(s)?	What negative beliefs about emotions were present at the time? (list beliefs)	Did you engage in self-harm? (circle one)	If no, what did you do instead?	If yes, what did you do?	Consequences of your decision (+ and -)
Monday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Tuesday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Wednesday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Thursday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Friday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Saturday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Sunday ____ / ____					Yes No			

Personalized list of primary negative beliefs about emotions:

When are these beliefs most present? Are there certain times when these beliefs are strongest? Are there certain contexts or situations in which these beliefs are most believable or influential?

When are these beliefs less present? Are there certain times when these beliefs are less strong? Are there certain contexts or situations in which these beliefs seem less believable or influential?

Weeks 3-4:

Emotional Awareness

Outline

I. Review homework from Week 2

- Identify the contexts in which negative beliefs about emotions are most believable
- Identify the particular negative beliefs about emotions that most often precede urges to self-harm
- Continue to help clients distinguish between negative beliefs in general (e.g., negative beliefs about the self, etc.) and negative beliefs about one's emotions in particular

Let's begin today by talking about whether you noticed any of those beliefs coming up that we identified in the last group, as well as any situations where these beliefs may be particularly relevant. What beliefs stand out to you as being relevant to you? When did you find that these beliefs were particularly strong or salient? Were there other times when you didn't buy into these beliefs as much?

- Use the board to review the examples clients provide, with the goal of increasing clarity of the connection between (and distinction between) situations and internal experiences. In particular, help distinguish between negative beliefs about emotions and negative beliefs about the self.
- Go through an example for each client in the room. Try to have clients focus on beliefs that are not on the sheet from the previous group.
- Make sure to point out if clients use the word "should," and discuss how this is a good sign that people may be judging their emotions.

II. Discuss the "Emotional Awareness I" handout

So, as we talked about last week, emotions are there for a reason. They are hard-wired in us, and therefore, they must serve some purpose. They aren't a random occurrence. And, what this means is that if you try to get rid of your emotions, or push them away, or not feel them, it is not going to work. That's just not something we can do; we can't escape our emotions. And, trying to do so will probably make them stronger and make us feel worse.

On the other hand, if you allow yourself to experience your emotions – if you notice what you are feeling and figure out what those emotions are trying to tell you – they will pass. You can think about your emotions as someone knocking at the door. If you don't answer the door, chances are, the person is going to knock louder and louder and louder until you answer. However, if you answer the door when you first notice the person knocking, the knocking will not continue or get louder and you can figure out why the person was at your door to begin with. In the same way, if you acknowledge your emotions when they first appear, they will not need to continue to get louder in order to get your attention and they will eventually go away. In the short-term, it can be difficult to face your emotions or begin to attend to them, especially if you haven't been in touch with them for quite some time. If you ignore the knock at your door for too long, it can become more and more difficult to answer the door. However, if you do attend to your emotions and figure out why they are there, they really will pass eventually.

So, what I want to talk about today is how we can get in touch with our emotions. I understand that this might sound very unpleasant and scary; however, I can guarantee that this is something that is going to help you out tremendously in the end. We are going to start slow and then build from there.

- Provide psychoeducation on the different components of emotional responses:
 - Cognitive
 - Physiological/bodily
 - Behavioral (expressive/action tendencies)

So, the first thing you need to know is that emotions are made up of three different parts: Cognitive, physiological/bodily, and behavioral [Write out on board]. Every single emotion is made up of these three parts. The thing is, most of us are not aware of these parts.

The cognitive piece is probably what you think of when you have an emotion. It is the label you put on the emotion (e.g., I feel upset). Another part of any emotion (and related to the fact that emotions are hard wired in us) is how our body reacts. So, when we are angry, our body responds in a certain way (for example, with increased heart rate, muscle tension, etc.). And each emotion has a unique response in our body [Begin to ask clients to identify some ways their body feels when they have an emotion]. A lot of times, this is the component of the emotion that folks may be in touch with before they know exactly what they are feeling – i.e., before they are able to put a label on their emotion. The third piece (which often is what people are in touch with when they first start this work) is the behavioral piece. As we discussed last week, emotions prepare us for action. Therefore, one component of the actual emotion is this hard wired thing called an action tendency that prepares us to do something. So, oftentimes, what people are most aware of initially is what they want to do or what they have done. In addition to this action tendency, or action urge, the expression of the emotion, or the way we express it, is another piece of the behavioral response. So, sometimes, when you are sad, it is almost impossible to not cry and this is because this expressive behavioral response is part of the emotion.

- Provide psychoeducation on the levels of emotional awareness
 - Explain that the more components of an emotional response we are aware of, the more we will be able to identify exactly what we are feeling

Now, we vary in how aware we are of our emotions. There are actually different levels of emotional awareness, and these levels correspond to the different components of an emotional response and, in particular, which components we are aware of. Therefore, people's levels of emotional awareness will vary depending on the emotion and the situation. People are not at just one level all the time; we can move up and down depending on the emotion and situation. Some people might be better at labeling certain emotions (especially those that they experience a lot of the time, such as sadness). Also, if you have been pushing away emotions for some time, this might interfere with emotional awareness, and so you might be at a lower level now than you were when you let yourself experience your emotions. This also means that the more you allow yourself to experience your emotions, the higher your level of emotional awareness will be.

Now, the first level of emotional awareness is actually a complete lack of awareness. It is a vacancy of anything emotional. It is marked by just thoughts without any connection to what is going on in your body or how you want to act.

The second level is being aware of action urges. For example, I feel like throwing something. I feel like hiding from everyone. So, simply knowing what you feel like doing – what you are having urges to do – is being partly in touch with an emotion because action urges are part of an emotional experience.

The third level is being aware of physical sensations. So, your stomach tightening up or your heart racing. Again, that's closer to being aware of the complete emotion because you are now aware of a couple components of the emotion and have more awareness of what you are feeling. It's not quite the full picture, though.

The next step is called having an undifferentiated emotional response. What this means is that you are starting to get in touch with the cognitive component of the emotion and trying to put a label on the emotional experience. You are identifying that you are having an emotion but you really can't decipher exactly what it is. So, you might feel bad or upset – but you don't know exactly what you are feeling beyond just upset overall. This is often the level of emotional awareness we see among people in group. They are aware that they feel terrible but they aren't sure exactly what they are feeling. This level of emotional awareness is often where people find themselves when they push their emotions away for too long. That is, pushing emotions away doesn't actually make them go away – they are still there. However, in this case, the emotions often combine together and when they come out, they are just a big messy ball of emotions. So, people may feel bad or overwhelmed, but not really know exactly what emotions are there.

The next stage is the differentiated level of emotional awareness. Here, we are beginning to identify specific emotions that we feel, and we are putting labels on these emotions. So, I feel scared or lonely or sad or angry.

Finally, the last level of emotional awareness is having blended emotions. This level touches upon the fact that emotions rarely occur in isolation. That is, we can have multiple emotional experiences at the same time. That is what this stage captures. So, you might be in a situation where you feel both sad and anxious. Being at this stage means you are in touch with each emotion separately and all the pieces that go along with these emotions. In this stage, people are also aware of what on the surface might appear like contradictory emotional experiences, such as having positive and negative emotions at the same time. We often think that positive and negative emotional experiences cancel each other out; however, they can co-exist. For example, let's think about a mother saying goodbye to her daughter on the first day of school. She is likely very happy that her daughter is growing up and reaching this milestone. She is also likely sad for those very same reasons. Therefore, she is experiencing both happiness and sadness at the same time. This might also occur when you are doing something important, such as going on a job interview. You might be anxious but also excited about the prospect of having a new job. People at this stage of awareness are able to recognize all the emotions they are experiencing, regardless of their valence.

- Emphasize the importance of increasing emotional awareness
 - Facilitates identification of the information provided by emotions [Theme: Emotions are functional]
 - Decreases the extent to which emotions are experienced as overwhelming

Now, why is emotional awareness important? Well, the more you are aware of your emotions, the more information you will have about your environment, how best to respond to your environment, and how best to respond to your emotions. Because emotions provide us with important information, the more aware you are of your emotions, the more you can figure out what they are telling you and how best to respond to them. Being aware of our emotions allows us to better listen to our bodies and understand what our bodies are telling us about our environment and how we are in that environment.

Knowing what we are feeling provides us with important information about our environment and can help guide our behaviors. However, it is also the case that knowing exactly how we are feeling can actually make our emotions less overwhelming. If we can identify what we are feeling and put a label on those emotions, they tend to feel less overwhelming. Labeling an emotion takes the edge off of it, and increases our ability to respond to it in an effective way, allowing it to pass.

In addition, one thing that can happen when we aren't aware of our emotions is that they can build up over the course of the day, getting more and more intense until we finally notice them only when they are very intense. Basically, if we don't have a lot of emotional awareness, we might not be aware of our emotions until they are very intense. However, if we can work to identify our emotions at an earlier stage, as they are occurring, then they will be less intense and more easily manageable. Emotions often ramp up gradually, so if we can begin to identify the early indicators of an emotion, they may be less scary and easier to manage.

III. Begin to focus on ways to increase emotional awareness

- Discuss the first half of the “Emotional Awareness II” handout
- In order to increase awareness of emotions, we need to begin to examine (i.e., increase our awareness of) the following for different emotions (especially anger, sadness, anxiety, shame, joy)
 - What prompts the emotion?

What kind of situations tend to bring up particular emotions. This is important because if we know that a certain situation tends to bring up a certain emotion more times than not, this can help us figure out what we are experiencing.
 - What thoughts are associated with the emotion?

When you are having an emotion, what types of thoughts tend to be there? When you feel a certain way, what kinds of thoughts tend to run through your mind? Often, people are more aware of their thoughts than their feelings, so knowing the types of thoughts that go along with particular emotions can give you a clue about what you might be feeling.
 - What physical sensations are associated with the emotion?

The reason for focusing on the physical sensations of different emotions is that different emotions affect us differently – they feel differently in our bodies. In addition, they tend to be somewhat specific to each of us. That is, how you feel anxiety may be different than how I feel anxiety.
 - What action tendencies are associated with the emotion?
 - How does the person tend to act in response to the emotion?

Another thing that can be helpful in figuring out what emotion you are feeling is identifying what particular emotions make you want to do, as well as what you tend to do when you feel a particular emotion. Sometimes as we start to become more aware of our emotions, we are going to be aware of an emotion early on; however, other times, we might be doing some post-hoc work. We might act in a certain way (out of habit) and not be aware of all the things that led up to that action. However, this is still important information and we can revisit how we were feeling prior to engaging in that behavior.
- Complete the “Increasing Emotional Awareness” worksheet in group for several different primary emotions

- Write on the board and go through some common emotional experiences, such as anxiety, fear, sadness, anger, shame, etc. Have clients simply call out experiences that fit in each column.
- Inform clients to only write down the pieces that apply to themselves specifically.
- In going through this exercise, help clients understand that there are many different parts to an emotion, and even though we may have an action urge (an urge to do something), we don't have to do it.

Now, it's important to note that even though we may have an action urge, or an urge to do something, we don't have to do it. What we ultimately decide to do is going to depend on the situation and what we want to get out of a situation. We have a choice in how to respond. Emotions are not controlling us. They provide us with information, and it is up to us to determine how we are going to use that information.

[Note: Give clients the Emotion Words Supplementary Handout. Direct them to use this to help put a label on their emotions.]

IV. Begin to identify healthy, adaptive ways to respond to, act on, and express the emotion

- Discuss the second half of the “Emotional Awareness II” handout
- Discuss how to translate action tendencies into adaptive ways of responding to the information the emotion is providing

As I mentioned earlier, the reason it is important to know what emotions we are feeling is because emotions provide us with important information about our environments. If you know what you are feeling, you can start to learn from these emotions. Emotions also provide us with important information about what to do and the best way to act in our environment. They tell us how best to respond. Now, this isn't quite as neat and clean as it was back in the day, when we lived in caves and could act on our emotions directly in order to survive (e.g., when feeling angry meant we might need to hit someone with a club). However, even today, in our much more complex world, they still provide us with information and can be used to inform our behaviors.

So, once you have identified what emotion you are feeling, I want you to ask yourself what information that emotion is providing you. Ask yourself what that emotion is telling you.

Remember – emotions are not random. They are always telling you something. So, once you know what you are feeling, see if you can figure out what that emotion is telling you. Then, once you know that, try to figure out what you can do with that information. How can you act on this information? How can you use it to help you figure out how best to respond? If emotions provide us with important information – if they are functional – which we have already talked about – then it is always going to help us to figure out how to act on the information being provided by these emotions.

Therefore, when you feel an emotion, I want you to listen to your bodies and identify how you can act in an adaptive and healthy way given the information being provided to you.

- In this discussion, make sure to discuss the fact that although the presence of anxiety can signal threat (i.e., provide information that there is a threat), it can also provide information that what we are doing matters to us; i.e., it can signal the fact that we are doing something important or meaningful – something we care about.
- Discuss differences between acting on the information provided by an emotion and expressing or releasing an emotion

Of course, just because our emotions provide us with information and we connect with this does not mean that we will be able to act on this information immediately. Sometimes, it may take several days, weeks, or even months before we can act on this information. Therefore, in these cases, we need to also think about ways to express our emotions. This is important because of the action tendency associated with our emotions. As we discussed before, emotions have an action tendency associated with them that is hard-wired in; therefore, if we can find some way to express our emotions or to release some of that energy, this may reduce the intensity of the emotion, making it easier to modulate. This is what we mean with the expression piece. What can we do right now to get some relief or to take the edge off the emotion. Expressing an emotion is about releasing some of the energy associated with the emotion so that we can take the edge off the emotion. It is something we can do right away – something immediate. And sometimes, it may also be the same as acting on the information being provided by the emotion. However, in those cases when acting on the information provided by the emotion might take longer or might require multiple steps or extended planning, expressing the emotion is something we can do right away to take the edge off the emotion and to help it pass.

- Identify adaptive ways to express the emotion

If we can find some way to give some expression to our emotion or to release some of the energy associated with our emotions, this may reduce the intensity of the emotion, making it easier to modulate. So, when we talking about expressing our emotions, we are referring to the things we can do to relieve our emotions and take the edge off of them. Keep in mind that we are thinking about healthy behaviors here, like crying, talking to someone, running, hitting a punching bag, doing art work, screaming into a pillow, or throwing ice at an outside wall.

Homework

- Continue to complete and personalize the “Increasing Emotional Awareness” worksheets
- Review the Emotion Words Handout to familiarize self with various emotions **[Make sure all clients have a copy of this handout]**
- Complete the “Emotional Awareness Monitoring Form” once per day, focusing on identifying emotional responses and the information being provided by them, as well as ways of acting on and expressing emotions
- Continue to monitor urges to self-harm and the feelings associated with (i.e., preceding) these urges; continue to identify the negative beliefs about emotions preceding urges to self-harm

(Begin here at Week 4)

Outline for Week 4

I. Review homework from Week 3

- Ask clients how the monitoring homework went and whether or not they had any difficulties completing it.
- Most often, people will report difficulties identifying adaptive ways of responding to the information provided by their emotions, as well as adaptive ways of expressing the emotion. They will often report confusion about the distinction between these.

This is normal. Many people struggle with this particular homework assignment. And that makes a lot of sense. Many people who are in this group have probably spent years trying NOT to be in touch with their emotions, and trying to avoid awareness of their emotions. So, trying to change this pattern and figure out what you are feeling and what information those emotions are providing is a very new and different thing – something that goes against a longstanding pattern. However, as difficult and scary as this may be, it really is useful for the group and the more you practice being aware of your emotions, the more you will be able to figure out what you are feeling and what information those emotions are providing you.

In addition, there is a reason we do this in a group format. My experience has been that in the early stages of this process, folks are often better at identifying the emotions (and the information being provided by these emotions) of others, versus themselves. So, even if you weren't certain what emotion you were experiencing or the information it was providing, your peers may be able to help you figure it out. They are going to have a different perspective on the situation than you – more of an objective, observer perspective that may make it easier to identify what information is being provided by your emotions. Therefore, we often find that discussing your experiences with this monitoring in group helps shed some light on what you were experiencing and what information it was providing. Having more of an objective, observer perspective can also be useful in identifying how to act on the emotion being provided by these emotions.

I also wanted to clarify the distinction between acting on the information provided by an emotion and expressing or releasing an emotion. This is something that folks often express confusion about after doing the homework this first week. It can be really confusing to figure out the difference between acting on the information provided by an emotion and expressing an emotion. So, the point I wanted to remind everyone of before we begin our discussion is that expressing an emotion or doing something to release some of the energy that goes along with that emotion does not necessarily mean that we are acting on the information provided by that emotion. Expressing an emotion is often much more immediate than acting on the information provided by an emotion. So, if you are feeling sad, crying may be one way of expressing that emotion, and would probably help relieve some of the tension associated with the emotion of sadness, but it wouldn't necessarily be a way of acting on the information provided by that emotion. To do that, you would need to figure out what your sadness was telling you, what information it was providing, and then come up with a way of acting on this. For example, it might be telling you that you value and long for connection to others, in which case connecting with a friend or establishing new friendships with others may be two ways of acting on this information. The crying would simply be a way of releasing the energy associated with the emotion in the short term. So, you can think about expressing the emotion as a way of releasing some of the energy associated with an emotion, so that the emotion lessens in intensity, is easier to modulate, and will eventually pass. Acting on the information being provided by that emotion is generally more of an extended process; it may require a number of different steps and it may not be something that you can do right away. That

Gratz (2009) Emotion Regulation Group Therapy Manual
is why we think that it is important to identify both how to act on this information and how to express the emotion in the short-term.

So, let's start with someone's example.

- Go through the monitoring forms of each group member, starting with the situation, followed by the emotional response, and the information provided by that emotional response. Follow this with how the emotion was expressed and acted upon (or how someone might have expressed or acted upon the emotion in a healthy way).
 - It is best if this is a collaborative group discussion with a lot of feedback from other group members about each client's homework. Group leaders should facilitate the discussion and encourage active participation by all group members.

II. Continue to complete the “Increasing Emotional Awareness” worksheets in group for several different primary emotions

- Follow the same interactive process as in Week 3

Homework

- Continue to complete and personalize the “Increasing Emotional Awareness” worksheets until a worksheet has been completed for each primary emotion and/or relevant emotion

In the next week, fill out a couple more of the “Increasing Emotional Awareness” forms for any emotions we have not yet discussed in group that are relevant to you, with a particular focus on those emotions that you do not like to get in touch with or are harder for you to approach. These are the emotions that are going to be very important to address and connect with.

- Complete the “Emotional Awareness Monitoring Form” once per day, focusing on identifying emotional responses and the information being provided by them, as well as ways of acting on and expressing emotions
- Continue to monitor urges to self-harm and the feelings associated with (i.e., preceding) these urges; continue to identify the negative beliefs about emotions preceding urges to self-harm

Emotional Awareness I

Emotional responses are made up of different components

- Cognitive
- Physiological/bodily
- Behavioral
 - Expressive
 - Action tendencies

Emotional awareness can take place on several different levels

- No awareness/cognitive thought
 - e.g., “I feel like a loser”
- Action urges
 - e.g., “I feel like punching a wall”
- Physical sensations
 - e.g., stomach hurts, heart races
- Undifferentiated emotional responses
 - e.g., “I feel upset”
- Differentiated emotional responses
 - e.g., “I feel sad”
- Blended emotional responses
 - e.g., “I feel hurt, angry, and somewhat ashamed”

Emotional Awareness II

The greater number of components of an emotional response we are aware of, the more information we will have about our emotional experience, and the more likely we will be able to know exactly what we are feeling. By knowing exactly what we are feeling, we have a greater likelihood of responding to our emotions in an effective, adaptive way.

To increase awareness of an emotional response, ask yourself the following:

- What thoughts are associated with this emotion?
- What physical sensations are associated with this emotion?
- What action tendencies are associated with this emotion?
- How do I tend to act in response to this emotion?

Once you have identified what you are feeling, ask yourself the following:

- What information is this emotion providing me (e.g., information about my environment, about myself, etc.)?
- How can I act on this information in a way that is adaptive?
- What are healthy ways of expressing this emotion?

Increasing Emotional Awareness

Emotion: _____

What tends to prompt or elicit this emotion? What types of situations or interactions elicit this emotion?	What thoughts or appraisals are associated with this emotion?	What physical sensations are associated with this emotion? How does this emotion feel in my body?	What is the action tendency associated with this emotion? What does this emotion make me want to do or say?	What do I tend to do in response to this emotion? How do I tend to act when I feel this way?

Emotional Awareness Monitoring Form (*Please complete at least once per day*)

Situation	Emotion	What information is this emotion providing me about my environment?	How can I act on this information in a way that is healthy and adaptive?	What are healthy ways of expressing this emotion?

Weeks 3-4: Homework monitoring form

Self-Harm Monitoring Form II

	Urges to self-harm (0-100)	If no urges, what factors contributed to this? What were the protective factors?	If urges were present, what feelings preceded the urge(s)?	What negative beliefs about emotions were present at the time? (list beliefs)	Did you engage in self-harm? (circle one)	If no, what did you do instead?	If yes, what did you do?	Consequences of your decision (+ and -)
Monday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Tuesday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Wednesday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Thursday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Friday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Saturday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Sunday ____ / ____					Yes No			

Week 5:**Primary vs. Secondary Emotional Responses**Outline

I. Review homework from Week 4

- Assist clients in identifying the information provided by their emotions, as well as adaptive ways of acting on this information (encourage group discussion to generate possible ideas)

The information we are going to be discussing today draws directly upon the material from the past couple of weeks, and in some ways may actually resonate with you more because we are going to start to get into the complexity of emotions and how you likely experience your emotions, rather than the idea that we have been talking about in the past couple of sessions regarding how emotions are helpful, functional, and provide us with important information. Today, we are going to start talking about some of the emotions that might not be so helpful and that might be the ones you experience a lot more.

However, before we move onto this new information, I want to touch base again about some of the monitoring you have been doing. People are putting a lot of thought into these monitoring forms, and seem to be reflecting a lot on the consequences of their actions and different ways of responding to the things that happen around them. One thing I want us to really pay attention to in the future, though, is the specific emotions you feel in response to any given situation, or before you have urges to self-harm. Consistent with our focus the past couple of weeks, I want you to really spend some time figuring out what emotions were present after a stressor or experience, or before urges to self-harm. And what this means is that we should see words like anger, sadness, fear, happiness, loneliness, regret, disgust, guilt, shame, joy, anxiety, depressed, etc. written on those forms. So, as you continue to do these forms, I want you to look at the columns for “feelings” and “emotions” and make sure that you see feeling words listed. If you don’t and what you see instead is thoughts, or beliefs about yourself, or something else, then look at those thoughts and try to figure out what emotion underlies them – what emotion they are coming from.

So, for example, if you write down something like “I am a terrible person” – what kind of emotion might be underlying this belief? Guilt? Shame? Or, if you wrote something like “I can’t stand this” or “I hate everyone”, what emotion could that signal? Anger? Hopelessness?

A good rule is that if you notice that you are writing more than one word to describe your emotions (e.g., I feel like a complete loser), this might be a sign that you are not completely tapping into the emotional experience you are having. If you remember the levels of emotional awareness that we talked about a couple of weeks ago, the higher levels of emotional awareness had one word descriptions of emotions (e.g., sad, angry, anxious). Therefore, if you are using multiple words to describe your emotions, see if you can taper it down to just one descriptor that sums up your experience. Basically, just use what you write first as a starting point for figuring out what the exact emotion is that you are feeling.

Now, of course, this isn’t always going to be easy, but by being more specific with your emotions, it can make your experience feel less overwhelming. In addition, the sooner we can identify exactly what emotion we are feeling, the sooner we can figure out what information it is providing us and how best to act on that information. Knowing the emotion is the first step in figuring out what our bodies are telling us about our environment and our lives, and will provide the foundation for figuring out what to do with that information.

So, are there any emotions that you still are not sure how to identify? Any that we could go through as a group that would be helpful?

- Prior to discussing primary vs. secondary emotions, ask clients if there are any emotions they would like to go over as a group one last time (to facilitate awareness of those emotions and aid in their identification).

II. Provide psychoeducation on the differences between primary and secondary emotional responses by discussing the “Primary vs. Secondary Emotional Responses” handout in group

Okay, what I would like to talk about today is the difference between various types of emotions. Now, in saying “types” of emotions, I am not referring to specific emotions you may experience (like sadness, or anger, or loneliness). Instead, I am referring to the times we have certain emotions and how helpful they are. So, a couple of weeks ago I was talking about how emotions are helpful and provide us with information. We also talked about how emotions can come and go. Now, oftentimes, people have the experience that their emotions are not helpful and when they come up, they stick around for days. One reason for this may be that there are two types of emotions. Now, in the past few weeks, we have been talking about one type of emotion; however, it is the other type that many people experience the most and get “stuck in.” In particular, we can classify emotions as falling under one of two types of responses: Primary emotions and secondary emotions. So, what’s the difference?

- Primary emotional responses (initial reactions to a situation):
 - Functional
 - Adaptive
 - Motivate behavior: Have associated action tendencies
 - Pass rather quickly – come and go

Primary emotions are the emotions I have been talking about the past couple of weeks. These are the emotions that come up in response to various situations and that provide us with important information about our environment and our lives. They are the ones we experience in response to something that happens as we are going about our lives and interacting with others. For example, someone cuts you off in traffic and you get angry. Or, someone says something hurtful to you and you experience sadness. This is a primary emotional response. You have an emotional response that is directly the result of some kind of event. Now, these are the emotions that are rather fast acting. If the emotion is not triggered again, it will go away rather quickly (in about 45 seconds). Now, something could happen and it might refire again, but in general, our primary emotions don’t last that long. Something happens and we have an emotion that is designed to give us some information about what just happened and how we might want to respond, and then the emotion passes.

The problem is that most of us don’t experience just primary emotions – and we certainly don’t experience them as much (or as often) as we experience another type of emotion. In addition to primary emotions, people often experience secondary emotions.

- Secondary emotional responses (our emotional reactions to our emotions):
 - Are often mediated by judgments, negative beliefs about emotions, etc.
 - Make our emotions cloudier; make our primary emotional responses less clear
 - Interfere with functionality of primary emotions
 - Increase distress/emotional suffering

Secondary emotions are the emotions we have in response to our primary emotional experiences. So, let's say someone cuts you off in traffic and you feel angry. You then think that it is not okay to be angry and you are a terrible person for feeling anger. Therefore, you feel self-hatred, disgust, and shame. These are the secondary emotions. They are emotions you feel in response to another emotion. Now, unlike primary emotions, secondary emotions don't pass very quickly. They hang around for a long time. These are the emotions that I think many of you have been talking about and struggling with – they tend to be the ones that we are most aware of. And, unlike primary emotions, there is nothing good about these emotions. They are not functional and they don't provide us with any useful information. They simply tell us that we aren't okay with our primary emotions, and that we think we shouldn't experience them. They basically tell us that we are really good at beating ourselves up for feeling primary emotions. And my guess is that this is not something you don't already know quite well!

Another problem with secondary emotions is that they often occur so quickly in response to a primary emotion that they can actually mask or hide that primary emotion. Oftentimes, secondary emotions can occur so quickly following a primary emotion that you may not even be aware of the primary emotion – instead, the first thing you may be aware of is the secondary emotion. And, given that it is our primary emotions that are functional and that provide us with information, having them masked by a secondary emotion isn't going to be helpful. Secondary emotions prevent us from getting the information that our primary emotions are trying to convey to us and interfere with us being able to respond appropriately to the situation at hand.

In addition, secondary emotions can themselves lead to other emotional responses. For example, we may experience emotional responses to our secondary emotions. Basically, what this means then is that over time we can experience a gigantic ball of emotions that are very intense, hard to decipher, and hard to manage. In addition, as we start to have more and more secondary emotional responses, we may even begin to completely lose touch with our primary emotional experiences. It is almost like a well-learned habit. The process wherein you beat yourself up for having a primary emotion may become so quick that we aren't even aware of it anymore, and we go from an event to a secondary emotional response almost immediately.

You can think about the difference between primary and secondary emotions as a difference between "emotional pain" and "emotional suffering." So, when something bad happens to us, we feel emotional pain. We feel angry, sad, or upset. And emotional pain is part of being human. We will all experience emotional pain as part of living our lives. It is unavoidable. However, emotional pain is different from emotional suffering, which is what most of you probably experience the most. Emotional suffering comes from our secondary emotional responses, and is much more intense and long-lasting than emotional pain. Given how common secondary emotions are to most folks in this group, my guess is that most of you have been experiencing intense emotional suffering associated with secondary emotions, and that you really don't often experience the emotional pain of primary emotions. and my guess is that if we could help you get decrease your secondary emotions, your emotional suffering would decrease dramatically and you would feel a lot better. You would still experience emotional pain, but you would not experience the emotional suffering you have likely been experiencing for a very long time.

So, the bottom line is that secondary emotions are not helpful. And, as much as I believe that primary emotions are helpful and need to be experienced, I also believe that secondary emotions are something we could all do without. I don't think it is useful (or possible) to avoid your primary emotions, but I do think it would be great to put an end to secondary emotions. If we can help you

decrease or limit your secondary emotions, I am confident you will begin to feel tremendous emotional relief.

- It is important to differentiate between primary and secondary emotional responses because the ways of responding adaptively to these different types of emotions differ

Now, it can sometimes be hard to identify secondary emotions. This is because primary and secondary emotions can be the same emotions. Any emotion can be either a primary or a secondary emotion. [Write out basic emotions and emotions relevant to group members on the board]. The thing that distinguishes between them is simply when they occur, and in response to what. However, any particular emotion, for example, sadness, anger, fear, etc., can be either a primary or a secondary emotion.

For example, if I experience anxious and begin to beat myself about being anxious, I may begin to feel anger or shame as a result, all of which would be secondary emotions in this example, with anxiety being the primary emotion. However, anxiety could also be a secondary emotion at another time. For example, a person may experience anxiety as a result of having anxiety because they may feel as though this anxiety is a sign that something bad is about to happen. In this case, anxiety is both a primary and a secondary emotion, with the primary emotion of anxiety providing information about a perceived threat of sorts, and the secondary emotion of anxiety simply providing information that we are fearful of feeling anxious! Someone could also experience anxiety in response to the primary emotional experience of anger. For example, if they feel angry and then begin to think that they are going to lose control, they could experience anxiety as a result. Therefore, it is simply when an emotion occurs along the chain and in response to what that determines whether it is a primary or secondary emotion.

Now, the reason it is important to distinguish between primary and secondary emotional responses is because the ways of responding adaptively to these different types of emotions differ. They need to be managed differently.

- For primary emotional responses: notice and observe the feelings and their associated action tendencies

When it comes to responding to primary emotions, these are what we have been talking about since the beginning of the group. the best way to respond to these is to notice them, describe them or put a label on them, figure out what information they are providing you, and try to act on that information in a healthy way. These are the emotions that are functional, so it is best if we attend to them, and use them to guide our behavior.

- For secondary emotional responses: identify the thoughts associated with these emotions and then focus on changing one's relationship to these thoughts (e.g., promoting cognitive defusion and deliteralization, observing these thoughts as just thoughts, decreasing attachment to these negative beliefs, identifying alternative perspectives/approaches, etc.)

Secondary emotions need to be responded to in a different way. As we discussed previously, secondary emotions are not helpful, and do not provide any information beyond the fact that we are good at beating ourselves up and don't like our primary emotions. Therefore, these emotions do not need to be attended to or acted upon. Instead, when it comes to secondary emotions, it is best to identify the judgments, negative beliefs, and thoughts that led to these emotions and then focus on modifying your relationship to

these beliefs and thoughts. Basically, the goal is to begin to “take a step back” from these judgments, evaluations, and thoughts – to see them as thoughts or beliefs that you have learned, and that will continue to come up, but that are not working for you right now. If you can take a step back from these thoughts and evaluations, you may be less prone to secondary emotional responses.

The goal is to help you find ways of connecting with and expressing your primary emotional experiences and, at the same time, to begin to reduce the extent to which you fall into thinking patterns that contribute to the development of secondary emotional responses. I want you to begin to be more aware of how your judgments and negative beliefs about emotions contribute to secondary emotions and increase your emotional suffering.

III. Conduct in-group exercise focused on identifying secondary emotional responses:

- Complete the “Identifying and Challenging Secondary Emotional Responses” worksheet in group
 - Identify secondary emotional responses to different emotions (sadness, anger, fear/anxiety, joy)
 - Identify the thoughts that contribute to the experience of secondary emotional responses.

The bottom line is that the way to help reduce secondary emotions is to change our way of relating to and responding to our primary emotions, beginning with approaching our primary emotions without judgment and with self-compassion. Basically, I want you to begin to approach your emotions in a new way. When you find yourself judging your emotions or beating yourself up for feeling a certain way, take a step back and question your evaluations and thoughts. Challenge them. View them as simply habits that don’t really convey truth but only occur because they have occurred in the past.

Then, try to come up with other ways of approaching your emotions – other ways of responding to them – that would work better for you. Think about ways of approaching your primary emotions that would lead to less emotional suffering. One way to do this is to look at the thoughts you put down in the initial column and then, when thinking of alternative thoughts, think about what you would say to your children or to other people in this group. Would you say those things to people you care about, or would you have a different interpretation of the meaning of these primary emotions? Thinking about how you would respond to someone else is a useful place to start, as you will likely be more compassionate to others than to yourself. So, start to use that as a way to increase your self-compassion with regard to experiencing emotions.

Homework

- Change ways of relating/responding to the negative beliefs about emotions that are associated with the presence of secondary emotional responses; focus on increasing cognitive defusion and deliteralization and observing these thoughts as just thoughts, rather than buying into them; identify alternative perspectives
- Monitor primary and secondary responses to different situations (1x per day); collect data on the level of distress associated with each type of emotion **[The hope is that clients will learn that secondary emotional responses are not functional – they serve only to increase distress and interfere with the functionality of the primary emotional response]**
- Continue to monitor urges to self-harm and the feelings associated with (i.e., preceding) these urges; continue to assess the negative beliefs about emotions that precede urges to self-harm

Primary vs. Secondary Emotional Responses

Primary emotional responses are our initial emotional responses to a situation

- Functional
- Adaptive
- Motivate behavior (through associated action tendencies)
- Pass rather quickly – come and go

Secondary emotional responses are our emotional reactions to our primary emotions

- Are often mediated by judgments, negative beliefs about emotions, etc.
- Make our emotions cloudier; make our primary emotional responses less clear
- Interfere with functionality of primary emotions
- Increase distress and emotional suffering

These different emotional responses are best responded to in different ways:

- Primary emotional responses
 - Notice and observe the feelings
 - Observe action tendencies associated with the emotion
 - Identify effective ways to act on and express the emotion
- Secondary emotional responses
 - Identify thoughts that precede this emotional response
 - Identify alternative perspectives and different ways of responding to these negative beliefs about primary emotions

Identifying and Challenging Secondary Emotional Responses

Emotion	What do you usually say to yourself after you have this emotion? What beliefs do you have about yourself for having had this emotion? What thoughts run through your head about having had this emotion?	When you say these things to yourself, do you start to feel a certain way? Do you have another emotional reaction in response to the initial one (e.g., do you feel angry, ashamed, scared)?
	What are alternative perspectives to these thoughts and beliefs? How might you respond differently to these negative beliefs?	

Primary and Secondary Emotional Response Monitoring Form (*Please complete at least once per day*)

Situation	Primary emotional response: What was your immediate emotional response to the situation? What feelings did you initially experience in response to the situation?	Distress level: Rate your distress on a scale of 0 to 100	Reactions to your reactions: What did you say to yourself about your initial emotional response? Did you criticize yourself for feeling that way? Did you judge the primary emotional response?	Secondary emotional response: Did you experience another emotional reaction in response to the initial one? (e.g., did you start to feel bad about yourself for having the primary emotion, or angry, scared, or ashamed?)	Distress level: Rate your distress on a scale of 0 to 100

Week 5: Homework monitoring form

Self-Harm Monitoring Form II

	Urges to self-harm (0-100)	If no urges, what factors contributed to this? What were the protective factors?	If urges were present, what feelings preceded the urge(s)?	What negative beliefs about emotions were present at the time? (list beliefs)	Did you engage in self-harm? (circle one)	If no, what did you do instead?	If yes, what did you do?	Consequences of your decision (+ and -)
Monday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Tuesday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Wednesday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Thursday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Friday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Saturday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Sunday ____ / ____					Yes No			

Week 6: Clear vs. Cloudy Emotional Responses

Outline

I. Alert people of the upcoming mid-treatment assessment. This needs to be completed during week 7. People should schedule this then for the following week, or should expect a phone call from the project manager to set something up.

II. Review homework from Week 5

- Assist clients in distinguishing between primary and secondary emotional responses
- Have clients share their experiences of the different levels of distress associated with primary vs. secondary emotions

Now, before moving into the information for this week, I would like to touch base about last week's homework, and, in particular, to see what folks noticed with regard to primary and secondary emotions. What was this process like for you, as you began to become more aware of your primary and secondary emotions. For example, what secondary emotions did you notice? Did your distress level increase when you had them? Were there any particular primary emotions that tended to result in strong secondary emotional responses? What kind of thoughts did you notice that brought up secondary emotions? Were there times when you didn't have secondary emotional responses? Also, and most importantly, when you found that you were having responses to your primary emotions, did you find ways to take a step back and approach your primary emotions in a different way? Were you able to change your responses to your emotions to reduce the likelihood, strength, or frequency of your secondary emotions?

- Go over the homework for each client in the group
 - Depending on what themes emerge during the homework review and the different points that come up, it may be important to comment on the fact that primary emotions will not necessarily go away in a minute or so. This is a common point that is often brought up.

Now, some people may notice that primary emotions don't seem very short-lived. If an emotion is sticking around for a long period of time, it is possible that there is something that is keeping the emotion there. That is, there may be something that is causing the emotion to refire (e.g., particular thoughts, not being able to get out of a situation that is stressful, etc.). In these cases, the primary emotion will last longer. It won't last as long or be as distressing as secondary emotions would be, but it won't necessarily pass right away either. And this does not mean that it is not a primary emotional response. It simply means that the primary response is occurring repeatedly.

III. Provide psychoeducation on the differences between clear and cloudy emotional responses

- Highlight that this is a somewhat different distinction than primary vs. secondary emotions

Today we are going to continue to talk about the complexity of our emotions. As much as emotions can be very helpful in guiding our behavior, they are also quite complex, and it is important to be able to distinguish between different types of emotions. As we discussed last week, the type of emotion we are experiencing may determine how exactly we respond to our emotions. So, today we are going to discuss the differences between two additional types of emotions, clear emotions and cloudy emotions. This is different from primary and secondary emotions, but is another way of thinking about the complexity of

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our emotions. And knowing the difference between clear and cloudy emotions can help us figure out how best to respond to our emotions.

- Discuss the “Clear vs. Cloudy Emotional Responses” handout
 - Clear emotional responses are emotions directly related to, and in response to, a particular stimulus (i.e., they are proportionate and are tied directly to the immediate situation/stimulus)
 - Clear emotions provide information about the immediate situation/stimulus (e.g., feeling profoundly sad when a friend moves away)
 - Clear emotions can be very intense/strong (i.e., strong intensity does not imply the presence of a cloudy emotional response – clear emotions can also be intense)
 - Clear emotions are the responses that can inform our behavior
 - The associated action urges of clear emotions can be useful in informing how we respond
 - Clear emotions provide us with immediate information about our environment

Clear emotions are emotions that are directly tied to a particular situation. A clear emotion is an emotion that is only about what just happened, or only the direct result of that situation and nothing else. And, because it is directly tied to what just happened, it is proportionate. For instance, someone cuts me off in traffic and I get angry. This makes sense and seems reasonable. On the other hand, if I were to become absolutely enraged and to feel that way for a very long time, this may not be a clear emotion. In this case, the response would seem greater than what might be expected or called for in that situation. Within our own individual levels of emotional intensity, different situations call for different intensities of emotions, and clear emotions are proportionate to the situation at hand. And this doesn't mean that a clear emotion cannot be intense. It definitely can be. Basically, the level of intensity of a clear emotion will vary depending on the intensity of the stressor. Therefore, if you have an incredibly stressful or traumatic experience, an intense clear emotion would be highly likely and directly proportionate to the situation.

Now, because it is tied directly to a particular situation, this clear emotion is the emotion that we can use to determine how to respond or act in any given situation. It is the emotion that provides us with direct and clear information about a situation. It is not influenced by anything else – it is directly linked to what just happened. Therefore, this is the emotion that we can use to determine how best to respond to that situation. This is the type of emotion we have been talking about as functional and as providing important information. And this is the emotion we can use to inform our behavior.

Cloudy emotions, on the other hand, are not directly related to what just happened, and they are not just a response to the immediate situation. Cloudy emotions are emotions that are influenced by or “clouded by” other emotional responses.

- Cloudy emotional responses are emotional responses that are not (completely) directly related to or in response to the immediate stimulus; they are emotional responses that are clouded by other emotional responses or aspects of emotional responses:
The following factors may make emotions cloudy:
 - Failures in self-care (not eating, not sleeping): this can make us more reactive; our emotions may be more intense than if we were rested, etc.; in this case, we may not want to take as extreme a behavioral reaction as our emotional response suggests

- Focusing on the future (worry, etc.): this takes us out of the present moment, and means that our emotional responses may be more or less intense (and therefore cloudy); for example, not being in the present may interfere with the experience of the emotion and reduce the intensity because we are not attending to it – this may set us up to stay in dangerous situations; conversely, not being in the present may intensify our reaction: we may respond not to the situation but to our fears about what it means for the future
- Unprocessed emotions
- Unacknowledged other emotions

So, for example, the other day I woke up late after not sleeping well that night and I was running around rushing to get out of the house in the morning, and I walked out of the door and to my car and right when I got there I spilled my cup of coffee. Now, what might have been a clear response to that situation? Maybe frustrated, irritated, sad at the loss of that lovely caffeine? Sure, any of those would have been completely reasonable and very proportionate to the situation. Nothing too intense, but definitely a negative emotional reaction to something that was less than ideal. My response, however, was to burst into tears. Now, the situation was irritating, frustrating, unpleasant, etc.; however, it did not call for that intense of a response. As sad as it is to lose coffee, the clear response in that situation would not have been as intense as the one I had. Therefore, there was something else coming into play here – something else that was influencing my emotional response and amplifying it. There was definitely a clear emotion somewhere in that response (e.g., irritation and frustration); however, there were definitely some other things that came in and clouded my emotions.

Now, it is important to note that it is not possible to be human and NOT have cloudy emotions. We all have them. They are simply part of being human and a very expected and normal occurrence. More often than not, the emotions we experience are clouded to some extent by other factors. However, even though we are all going to experience cloudy emotions a lot of the time, we need to work to become more aware of the parts of our emotions that are cloudy (and the factors that are clouding our emotions), as well as the parts of our emotions that are clear and directly tied to what just happened. It is only by distinguishing our clear emotions from our cloudy emotions and by picking out the clear response to each situation that we can figure out what our emotions are telling us and know how best to respond. So, although we expect that you will continue to experience cloudy emotions, what we are hoping is that you can be more aware of them when they occur, and can tease them apart from the clear emotional response that will always be there as well. Once you identify the clear emotional response, you can figure out how to act in a way that is appropriate to the situation.

So, what types of things can cloud our emotions? Anything that influences our emotional responses or their intensity. One such thing is how well we are taking care of our bodies and our physical health. Because emotions are hard-wired and have a physiological or bodily component, how we are taking care of ourselves physically can influence our emotions. If you are not taking care of yourself, your emotions will be affected. So, not sleeping well or not sleeping enough, not eating well, being sick or hung-over, being stressed out, etc. can all influence our emotions and make them more intense (or even blunted and less intense than the situation would call for). For example, if you don't eat, you are going to be more on edge and more reactive. If you are not sleeping, you are going to have cloudy emotions. Oftentimes, when you don't get enough sleep, you may find that

your emotions are more intense and you are more sensitive to what is happening around you. Other times, not sleeping well may mean that you do not have the energy for an emotion, in which case you may actually experience a blunting of your emotions. Now, in the example I gave above, these things definitely clouded my emotional response to spilling my coffee. Had I been well-rested and not stressed out, I would likely have experienced irritation or frustration and then moved on. However, because I was stressed and tired, my reaction was amplified. Another factor that influences our emotions is related to what we ingest (e.g., alcohol, drugs, etc.). These types of things can definitely influence our emotions and contribute to more cloudy emotions than we would experience otherwise.

Another thing that can cause cloudy emotions is “baggage.” We all have past experiences that cloud our current emotional experience. So, let’s say that your partner says something nasty to you. It would make perfect sense that you would feel angry, sad, hurt, or irritated in response to this remark. However, let’s say that you start to think about the fact that your ex used to say that to you or that your parents used to say that to you and your friend once said that to you. So, now you are getting upset about not just your partner’s comment, but your memory of all of the other times other people have made a similar comment to you. And now when you respond to your partner, you are not just responding to this one comment in this one moment, but to all of the times you have heard that comment from everyone in your life. And that will probably make your response much more intense. Now, because these things have happened to you in the past and have been upsetting, your response makes a ton of sense. It is 100% reasonable that you would feel more intensely about this particular comment than if you had not heard it before. However, when it comes to acting on the information being provided by your emotion in this particular instance, it is probably best and most effective to simply act on the clear emotional response – the emotion that is about your partner’s comment and not everyone else’s comments in the past. Otherwise, your poor partner is going to have to take the brunt of everyone else’s behavior – which is probably going to be a bit confusing and not really fair. Interpersonally, you will respond more effectively if you don’t act on the emotions tied to all of these past experiences, but instead act only on the clear piece of the emotion connected to this particular experience.

Another thing that may lead to cloudy emotions is a non-mindfulness of the present moment. Sometimes, not being fully grounded in the present moment means that we can actually be disconnected from our emotions. When we are not being mindful (e.g., when we are focused on the past or future, or are dissociating, etc.), something may happen that would call for a moderate emotional response, and we can be so disconnected that we don’t feel any emotion. This means that we miss out on the information our emotions are trying to give us (e.g., anxiety and fear), and, as a result, we may put ourselves in danger. In addition, worries about the future may cause us to react not to what is happening in the moment but to what we think is going to happen in the future, which may increase the intensity of our emotions and give us inaccurate information about our environment.

Another thing that can happen is that when we don’t process our emotions or listen to our emotions, they can build and build and build and we can have more intense emotions to a situation than called for. Basically, if you push away your emotions, they don’t really go away; they tend to just fester inside looking for a way out. And when something happens that is upsetting, it may be the small crack in the dam that causes all the other emotions to rush out, clouding our emotions to the present situation.

- You can know how to respond to the emotion by identifying what the clear emotional response is

So, to review, when we are talking about clear emotions, we are talking about the emotional response you are having that is directly about your present experience and what just happened, separate from your past experiences or other things that are going on in your life. These are the emotions that provide useful information and can be used to guide our behavior. However, as much as it is the clear emotions that are most functional, part of being human is having cloudy emotions. We do not expect that you are going to stop having cloudy emotions. That is not the goal here, and we don't think it is possible. All of us have cloudy emotional responses. On the contrary, the goal is simply to become more aware of when you are having a cloudy emotional response, and to separate this part of your emotional response from the clear emotion you are experiencing. So, it is not that we expect you not to have cloudy emotions; we simply hope that you will become more aware of your cloudy emotions and better able to find the clear emotion within your emotional response.

In addition, we hope that you will begin to be more aware of the types of factors that contribute to cloudy emotions for you – the types of things that make you more likely to have a cloudy emotion. And once you know the types of things that cloud your emotions, we hope you can take steps to begin to limit these factors or decrease your exposure to them. So, for example, if you learn that sleeping less than 7 hours a night makes you more reactive and clouds your emotions, it would probably be a good idea to get at least 7 hours of sleep each night. If not eating three meals a day makes your emotions more intense, make sure to eat three meals a day. Basically, if you know the things that make your emotions cloudier, you can take steps to limit these factors. And this will help make your emotions clearer when you have them.

Now, that said, there are going to be times when the factors that cloud your emotions simply cannot be avoided. There are going to be times when you are stressed out, or not sleeping well, or even physically ill. Try as we might, this is just going to happen sometimes. We can't avoid it. However, we can be aware of times when we might be at greater risk for having cloudy emotions, and this awareness can help us figure out how cloudy emotions may be affecting our emotional responses.

[Note: Throughout this discussion it is extremely important to emphasize that cloudy emotions are normal, natural, and to be expected. The goal is not to get rid of cloudy emotions (which would be impossible), but to work toward distinguishing the clear emotional response from the cloudy aspects of an emotional response before one acts on those responses. The process of identifying the clear emotional response to any situation is thought to occur gradually, and to be facilitated by awareness and mindfulness of one's emotions as they occur. Initially, some of this sorting through of an emotional response will occur in retrospect – even several hours or days later – which is perfectly fine and still tremendously helpful. Gradually, as one continues to increase awareness and mindfulness of emotional responses as they occur, this process can begin to take place in the moment, and to inform how one chooses to act on one's emotions.]

IV. Conduct in-group exercise

The best way to begin to identify cloudy emotional responses is to look to past situations where you had very strong emotional responses and see if there were other factors that were influencing or feeding into those emotions. This way you can also begin to identify the factors that contribute to cloudy emotions for

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you. Some of the things we discussed are going to affect your emotions, whereas others will not. All of the factors we talked about are things that can influence emotions and contribute to cloudy emotions, but they don't necessarily affect us all in the same way. So it is important to begin to identify the factors that place you specifically at risk for cloudy emotions.

So, can anyone think of a time when you might have had a cloudy emotional response?

- Have clients reflect on a recent experience and identify what the clear emotional response was, what clouded the response, and how one might adaptively respond to/act on the clear emotion
[Talk to each group member and have them come up with a time when they experienced a cloudy emotional response. Have them identify what factors were clouding that emotion, as well as what the clear emotion was.]

Homework

- Complete the “Emotional Awareness Monitoring Form II – Identifying Clear and Cloudy Emotions” homework sheet 1x per day, with an emphasis on identifying the clear emotional response, ways of responding to this emotion that are effective/adaptive, and what has clouded the emotional response
- Continue to monitor urges to self-harm and the feelings associated with (i.e., preceding) these urges; continue to assess the negative beliefs about emotions associated with urges to self-harm

Clear vs. Cloudy Emotional Responses

Clear emotional responses are directly related to, and in response to, some stimulus

- Proportionate
- Tied directly to the immediate stimulus/situation
- Adaptive
 - Provide us with important information about the situation/stimulus
 - May be useful in informing our behavior
- May be intense/strong reactions

Emotional responses are often clouded by other factors

- May be influenced by, or colored by, other factors
- Are not directly in response to the immediate environment

Cloudy emotional responses may result from:

- Failures in self-care
 - e.g., not eating, not sleeping, too much caffeine, drugs, etc.
 - may make us more reactive: emotions may be more intense than usual
 - * consequence: we may not want to take as extreme an action as our emotional response would suggest
- Non-mindfulness of the present moment (e.g., focusing on the future, worry, etc.)
 - may make our emotions less intense because we are not attending to them
 - may make our emotions more intense because we respond not to the present situation but to our fears of what it means for the future
- Unprocessed emotions
 - e.g., fight with partner may influence how we respond to interaction with boss
- Unacknowledged other emotions
- Secondary emotional responses

You can know how to respond to a situation by identifying the clear emotion

Emotional Awareness Monitoring Form II – Clear vs. Cloudy Emotions (*Please complete at least once per day*)

Situation	Emotion	Is there anything that may be clouding this emotional response? If so, what?	What is the clear emotional response? <i>(identify the emotion and level of intensity)</i>	What information is the clear emotion providing me about my environment?	How can I act on this information in a way that is adaptive?	What are healthy ways of expressing the clear emotion ?

Week 6: Homework monitoring form

Self-Harm Monitoring Form II

	Urges to self-harm (0-100)	If no urges, what factors contributed to this? What were the protective factors?	If urges were present, what feelings preceded the urge(s)?	What negative beliefs about emotions were present at the time? (list beliefs)	Did you engage in self-harm? (circle one)	If no, what did you do instead?	If yes, what did you do?	Consequences of your decision (+ and -)
Monday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Tuesday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Wednesday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Thursday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Friday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Saturday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Sunday ____ / ____					Yes No			

Weeks 7-8:

Emotional Avoidance/Unwillingness versus Emotional Acceptance/Willingness

Outline for Week 7

I. Review homework from Week 6

- Assist clients in identifying their clear emotional responses in different situations and the factors that clouded these responses (if applicable)
- Continue to emphasize that cloudy emotional responses are natural, and should not be judged
- Continue to assist clients in identifying adaptive/healthy ways of acting on the information provided by their clear emotional responses

Let's start today by reviewing last week's monitoring. Were you able to notice times when your emotions were cloudy? Did you begin to identify specific factors that made your emotions cloudy?

[Note: In identifying the factors that tend to cloud clients' emotions, try to get a sense of the precise way in which these factors cloud their emotions, and how exactly their emotions become clouded (e.g., more reactive, decreased awareness, more anxiety, etc.). Discuss how awareness of the types of factors that tend to cloud emotions may help clients be more aware of the need to take a step back from their initial emotional response and identify the clear emotion within that response. Discuss the importance of continuing to identify the impact these "clouding factors" have on their emotions.]

As we discussed last week, there are definitely going to be times when we respond from a cloudy emotion. That is normal, and part of being human. The goal, though, is to decrease the number of times we respond from a cloudy emotion, and to become more aware of our clear emotions before we act on or respond to our emotions.

The more aware we are of the types of things that cloud our emotions, the more aware we will be of times when we might be at greater risk for having cloudy emotions. And, the more aware we are of times when we are at risk for cloudy emotions, the more aware we will be of the need to take a step back from our initial response BEFORE responding, in order to first identify the clear emotional response. Knowing that we often have cloudy emotions can clue us into the need to observe our emotions and figure out how cloudy emotions may be affecting our emotional responses. It can also alert us to the fact that we need to identify the clear emotion before acting on or responding to our emotions. And this will make our responses a lot more adaptive and functional.

II. Have patients reflect on their experiences trying to directly control/avoid their emotions, with a particular emphasis on the consequences of attempts to directly control/avoid emotions.

[Note: This group should not be approached as a didactic group; rather, this group should be led as an experientially-based group emphasizing the emotional consequences clients themselves have experienced as a result of unwillingness or attempts at emotional avoidance/control]

- Have clients identify consequences (cognitive, emotional, behavioral) of past attempts to directly control/avoid emotions
 - Have clients think of a time they tried to avoid or directly control their feelings and ask them the following:
 - What did you do to control your feelings?
 - Did this really work?

- Did it work in the short-term?
- Did it work in the long-term?
- Does it work when you feel really bad?
- What were the consequences of attempting to control or avoid your feelings?
- What thoughts did you have?
- Did any other feelings arise as a result of these attempts?
- Do you feel more or less prepared to manage these feelings in the future?

- Complete the “Emotional Unwillingness: Think of a time you were unwilling to have, or tried to avoid, your feelings” worksheet in the group, encouraging group discussion of these consequences

This week, we are going to be discussing something that I believe all of you will be able to relate to. I want everyone to think of a recent time when you tried to completely avoid or control something you were feeling. Do you all have some picture in your mind of when this happened?

So, I want to get a sense of what this looks like for you. What do you do exactly to try to avoid or control your emotions? How does this work for you?

[Create a column on the board that says “What Do You Do to Avoid Your Feelings?” and write out what people say. Try to get each person to give a couple of examples of the ways in which they usually try to avoid or control their emotions (e.g., denying, procrastination, pushing away thoughts and feelings, drinking, self-harm, etc.).]

When people get really good at pushing away their emotions, it can become a quick, internal process that occurs almost automatically. It can become so automatic that you may not even be aware that you are doing it in the moment. In cases like this, the things you do to avoid your emotions may be more subtle, like pushing them away, focusing your attention elsewhere, or “checking out” mentally. When you do it enough, it may not always take a lot of attention or effort to push them away whenever you start to experience them.

In other cases, however, I am assuming that there are more obvious behaviors you engage in to avoid your emotions, or things that you do specifically to try to get rid of your feelings. In these cases, the things you do to avoid your emotions will probably be much more obvious and noticeable, such as bingeing or over-eating, self-harming, or drinking.

So, now that we know the types of things you do to avoid your emotions, the question is “Do they work?” Do they actually get rid of the emotions and help you feel better?

[Create another column on the board that says “Does it Work?” and divide that column into two additional columns that say “Short Term” and “Long Term.” For each behavior, have clients identify whether it works in the short-term and long-term, writing yes or no in each of these columns. For the most part, the short-term column should have “yes” and the long-term column should have “no” in them.]

[In another column, write “When Does it Work?”]

We have talked before about how the short-term and long-term consequences of behaviors can differ, and this is a lot like that. Just like with self-harm, lots of things we do to avoid emotions may work initially, in the short-term; however, they generally do not work in the long-term, when we end up feeling worse than when we started.

However, when it comes to avoiding your emotions, it is even more complex than this. And there are other things that go into these efforts being successful or not. In theory, there may very well be times when it does work to distract ourselves from our emotions – when something we do to control our emotions actually works and the emotion does not come back. There might be things we do to distract ourselves from our emotions that do not hurt us in the long-term. So, let's think about this. Do you have a sense of when distracting yourself from an emotion or trying to put it aside may actually work? [Answers generally include when the stressor or experience is not very important, when the event is minor, when the emotions are low in intensity, etc.] What about times when trying to not feel something or to push it away do not work for you? [Answers include: when the emotion is intense; when it really matter; when the sressor or experience is important, etc.]

Now, what happens when your attempts to control your feelings don't work? When you try to avoid feeling a certain way and you still feel it, or it comes back later? What happens when you notice that whatever you are doing to try to avoid your feelings isn't working? Do you experience certain thoughts and feelings in response? Do you beat yourself up, or think that you are a failure, or think that you must not have tried hard enough, or think that this is yet another thing you can't do well? Do you feel ashamed of yourself, or angry with yourself, or hopeless? If so, then my guess is that you end up feeling even worse than you did before you tried to avoid your emotions. Not only did whatever you did to try to get rid of your feelings not work, but now you are stuck feeling like a failure and experiencing all kinds of additional negative emotions beyond the ones you initially hoped to not feel. So, you end up feeling even worse than when you started.

In addition, the next time you experience negative emotions, do you feel more or less able to cope with these emotions? Generally, now that it looks like the things you did to try to control your feelings didn't work, you are going to feel less able to cope with your emotions, and more scared or them or overwhelmed by them in the future? Basically, seeing that the things you tried to do to avoid or control your emotions didn't work is going to reinforce your belief that you can't cope with your emotions and that there is nothing you can do to manage them. And this is probably going to make you want to avoid them even more!

So, it seems as if this cycle is fairly clear, and that it is pretty common. So, if we know that our attempts to avoid our emotions often don't work, and tend to backfire in the long-run, why do we still try? Why do we continue to do this?

II. Provide psychoeducation on the paradoxical consequences of attempts to directly control/avoid emotions

- Review the first page of the “Emotional Unwillingness versus Willingness” handout
 - Distraction (focusing on something else, drinking, etc) can work in the short-term
 - Because this seems to work – at least somewhat – our natural response is to keep trying harder and using distraction more frequently
 - BUT: Control strategies don't seem to work in a long term sustaining way and they don't seem to work when you really need them to

Why do we try to control, avoid, or escape our emotions, especially when we know it doesn't usually work? Well, it seems like this is a reasonable goal, for a couple of reasons.

First, being “in control of our emotions” is often equated with positive qualities such as competence, balance, achievement etc. This is how society tells us we should be. This is what people in our lives tell us we should be doing.

Second, attempts at emotional control sometimes seem to work. When something we do is followed by a positive outcome (or something that we want), we learn that it works, and we keep doing it. And, if it seems to stop working, or if there are times when it doesn’t seem to work, then our natural response is to try harder. Having had the experience that whatever we did worked in the moment, we believe that we simply need to do it more or try harder for it to continue to work.

Third, another reason why we keep trying to control our feelings is that it often seems like other people can. Because we can’t see inside other people’s experience, it may seem as if the people around us can control their thoughts and feelings, while we privately struggle. Oftentimes as children we are given the message that we should control our emotions by our parents. Most young children express their emotions quite strongly – crying when they are sad or angry, clutching for help when they are afraid. In contrast, most grown-ups keep the expression of their emotional experiences private. So, kids can feel as if it is desirable and grown-up to feel things less strongly.

In addition, some children get a direct message from their parents that they should control their feelings. Constant messages like “Don’t be sad” or “There is nothing to be afraid of” can teach a child that her or his emotional reactions are wrong and should be controlled. When children receive these messages, they learn that people can control their feelings, and that this is something they should try to achieve. So what children begin to learn is to control the expression of their emotions, but the feelings themselves don’t go away.

Also, even as adults, it often seems like other people can and do control their feelings, and that other people do not get upset or experience negative emotions. Most adults don’t walk around telling others exactly how they feel, and it is quite common in our society to mask our feelings and keep our emotions private. Therefore, it can seem as if most people do not get upset, because they do not share this or express those feelings when they have them. In fact, it is quite common for people to “put on a happy face” and go out of there way to smile or laugh when, deep down, they are feeling upset. I bet many of you have done that before yourselves! Told someone you were doing fine or not told someone that you were having a hard time? Well, that is quite common. However, what this means is that when we compare our “insides” to what is displayed outwardly by other people, we can feel as if we are the only ones you struggle, or the only ones who feel bad. We can start to feel as if this is something wrong with us and that no one experiences negative emotions like we do.

Finally, another especially important reason why I think we continue to try and control our feelings is that control works so well in other aspects of our life. Think of some accomplishment that you have achieved in your life... educational, career, physical, etc. (such as running a marathon, improving your backhand in tennis, getting your degree, passing a class). How did you achieve these goals? Likely through diligent discipline, training, and control. We actually have a significant amount of control over many things in our life, particularly the actions we take. In our external world, control pays off, and the more effort we put into things, the better off we are.

But, is it actually possible to control our internal experiences? Have you ever told yourself to stop thinking something? Does that work? Research would tell us that it does not work, and that we cannot actually control our thoughts in the same way that we can control our behaviors or the

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things we do. In fact, there have been a lot of studies that have examined whether it is possible to directly control our thoughts and not think certain things. One of the classic studies in this area is the White Bear study. Have any of you heard about this?

Let's try it right now. Starting right now, what I want is for you to NOT think about a White Bear. Whatever you do, do NOT think about a White Bear. Don't think about those cute little white polar bears in the coca-cola commercials that slide down those snow hills...Just make sure you do not think about a White Bear at all.....Did this work? Are all of you now not thinking about White Bears? [Get responses from clients]. No, of course not. In fact, I am sure you are all thinking about White Bears much more than you were before I told you not to think about them. The problem with trying to control our thoughts in this way is that you cannot help but to think about the White Bear because you have to constantly monitor your thoughts to see if you are thinking of a White Bear, in order to make sure you don't think about the White Bear. Does that make sense? Basically, in order to make sure you don't think about a White Bear, you need to constantly check in with yourself to make sure you are not thinking of a White Bear – and that pretty much ensures that you will have to think of a White Bear. When we try to not think something, we can't. By having the rule that we cannot think something, we set ourselves up to think about it more, to be constantly in contact with that very internal experience.

➤ Additional example: Warm jelly donuts

Let's do another exercise that might demonstrate what I am talking about. Suppose I tell you right now, I don't want you to think about something. I'm going to tell you real soon. And when I do, I want you to really stop your mind from thinking about it. Here it comes. Remember, don't think of it...Warm jelly donuts! You know when they first come out of the oven. The taste of the jelly when you first bite into the donut. As the jelly squishes out the opposite side into your lap through the wax paper...The white flaky frosting on the top of the round soft shape. Ok, I want you to try very hard to not think about it.

The same thing applies to feelings. Have you ever told yourself to stop feeling something, or tried to will yourself to feel something different? How successful have your attempts been?

[Note: If the client feels control efforts were successful, gently question about whether they actually changed internal experience or did something behaviorally, also ask about long-lasting and meaningful change as a result of control efforts]

➤ Examples:

➤ Million bucks to fall in love

Let's do a couple of exercises that might demonstrate what I am talking about.

Let's start with attempts to control positive emotions. It seems like it may be impossible to control positive emotions by willing yourself to have them. Suppose I brought a stranger into the room and said to you, "See that person? If you fall in love with that person in 2 days I will give you \$10 million dollars." Could you do it? You could probably behave as if you were in love, regardless of how you felt, but could you really will yourself to feel love? What if I came back in 2 days and said "sorry I was kidding. I don't have 10 million dollars." Would you say "that's ok now I really love that person" or would you be very angry with me? Would you stay involved with that person? [Get response to exercise.]

➤ Fear factor metaphor (take-off on ACT polygraph metaphor):

Now let me give you an example in which you would have the ultimate motivation to control your negative emotions, in this case, anxiety, but still it might be an

impossible task. Imagine that I had you hooked up to the best polygraph machine that has ever been built. This is a perfect machine, the most sensitive ever made. When you are all wired up to it, there is no way that you can be the slightest bit anxious without the machine knowing. So I tell you that your job in this situation is to stay relaxed. If you get the least bit anxious, however, I will know it. I know you want to try hard, but I want to give you extra incentive to ensure that your motivation is as high as it can be. So what if I told you that, in order to really motivate you, I am going to stand here with this thing that you fear the most in the world (e.g., snake, rat, spider, etc.), and, if you show even the slightest twinge of anxiety, I'm going to make you confront it. What would happen? How would you feel? Of course, in this example, you would feel anxious. Despite your strong motivation to control your feelings, it would be close to impossible to follow these instructions. So maybe it is the case that feelings are not internally controllable.

What this might tell us is that even when we have the most motivation possible, it may not be possible to directly control our feelings. Maybe our feelings are just not controllable in this way. So, it is not the case that you aren't trying hard enough. It can't be done, and by trying to do it, you are probably making yourself have them more. And, this is consistent with research that has been going on for the past couple of decades.

In fact, research suggests it is not possible to gain complete control over our feelings.

- Attempts to control feelings are not effective in the long-term
- Attempts to control feelings often backfire
 - Increase the likelihood of these feelings
 - Make us more bothered by them when we have them
 - Set us up for failure by making us hypersensitive to emotions

Although we may, in the short-term, be able to keep ourselves from thinking or feeling something (e.g., by distracting ourselves), research tells us that this does not work in the long-term. For example, in those White Bear studies we talked about earlier, the researchers actually found that even when people were able to keep themselves from thinking about White Bears in the moment, they experienced a rebound later on. A bit later, all they could think about was those White Bears – they couldn't get them out of their mind, whereas people who were not told to try to not think about White Bears really weren't thinking about them later. So, the attempts to not think about these things actually caused people to think about them more later on.

The same thing can happen with emotions. When we try to not feel something, that same emotion tends to come back with a force, much more intense and stronger than it was before.

In addition, when the goal is to control emotions, even the slightest twinge of an emotion feels bad and threatening, or makes us think that we have failed, so then we try even harder to control them, but we are stressed out and worked up, and that makes them stronger, and thus harder to control etc. It is a vicious cycle...

In fact, our attempts to control emotions may actually be making us feel worse

- Increases physiological arousal
- Interferes with distress tolerance
- Failures at control (which are inevitable) will increase distress

Trying to control our emotions may actually make our emotions more intense. When they come back, as they almost inevitably do, they are probably going to be even stronger than they were before.

In addition, constantly trying to not feel something, constantly shutting down and avoiding certain emotions, makes us less able to tolerate them when they come up. If we experience the full range of emotional intensity, we generally find that we are able and willing to tolerate emotions that are low in intensity – it is those emotions that are high in intensity that are harder to tolerate. However, when we constantly shut down an emotion whenever we have it, we can actually lose our tolerance for that emotion. Over time, what might once have felt like a tolerable amount of an emotion starts to feel more and more intense and overwhelming, because we don't have more intense emotions to compare it to, and this low level of intensity is now the most intense thing we allow ourselves to feel. It's like we lose our tolerance for emotions, just like we can lose our tolerance for caffeine. If we haven't had caffeine in a long time, then just a little caffeine affects us more and feels like a lot. The same is true for emotions. If we haven't allowed ourselves to feel intense emotions in a long time, then any level of emotional intensity feels like a lot and affects us more.

In addition, when our efforts to control or avoid our emotions don't work and we tell ourselves that we should be able to do this, we are setting ourselves up for failure. We can't control things at a drop of a hat, and yet, we believe that we can. This makes us feel as though there is something wrong with us. Think about it: What does it mean if we put a ton of energy into trying to directly control something that maybe we can't actually control? And, if we think we can control them and we really cannot, repeatedly trying to control these thoughts and feelings may actually be making them occur more frequently and affect us more strongly than they would otherwise.

So what does this mean? Do we have to give up? Must we resign ourselves to not doing the things in life that we want to do? NO! We don't need to control our feelings in order to do the things in life we want to do. Next week, we will discuss what we can do instead....

For homework this week, however, all I want is for you to monitor what it is you normally do in response to your emotions, and the ways in which you try to control or avoid your emotions, as well as the consequences of these actions. I don't want you to change anything right now – just monitor what you do to try to control or avoid emotions, and whether those efforts work. I want you to try to see if any of the stuff we have been talking about today comes up for you this week. I want to see if this is consistent with your experience. I don't want you to change a thing. Just do what you do and fill out this form.....

Homework for Week 7

- Monitor the consequences (cognitive, behavioral, and emotional) of emotional unwillingness/avoidance over the course of the week by completing the “Emotional Willingness Monitoring Form” 1x per day, and focusing on the upper half of the form
- Continue to monitor urges to self-harm and the feelings associated with (i.e., preceding) these urges; monitor willingness to experience these emotions, as well as attempts to avoid them

(Begin here at Week 8)

Outline for Week 8

I. Review homework from Week 7

- Have clients share their experiences with emotional unwillingness since the last session, focusing in particular on the consequences they noticed as a result of unwillingness
- Emphasize the paradoxical emotional consequences of unwillingness
 - Review the “Emotional Willingness Monitoring Form” homework

Let's start by going over what you noticed last week. Were there times last week when you were not willing to have a negative emotion? When you tried to avoid your emotions? If so, did your efforts to avoid your emotions work? In the long-term? What were some of the consequences you noticed of trying to avoid your emotions.

In particular, I am interested in whether the things folks do in response to their initial distress help or hurt that level of distress.

Unwillingness may not always make the distress worse, but it may cause it to stick around longer than it needs to, or the distress may move from a specific circumstance to a more broad generalization of what one's world is about (e.g., everything is hopeless. I am completely helpless, etc.).

Did anyone find that there were times when they did not try to avoid their emotions last week? What were the consequences of that? [Help clients identify if being willing to have an emotional experience resulted in positive or non-negative long-term consequences (e.g., reduction in distress, etc.).]

[Note: In going through this discussion, make sure you validate the fact that it makes sense that people may not be willing to experience emotional distress; however, it does have long-term negative consequences.]

II. Introduce willingness/acceptance as an alternative to unwillingness/avoidance

It seems like what you noticed this week is that fighting your emotions just doesn't work. When we fight our emotions, they tend to get worse, become more intense, or just stick around much longer than we would like. Trying to avoid your emotions just doesn't seem to work in the long-run.

Therefore, I wonder if trying to manage your emotions by making them go away or by avoiding them entirely is the best idea. From what we have discussed, this just doesn't seem to work. And, my guess is that if avoiding or controlling emotions was going to work for someone, then it would work for folks in this room. You are all very good at avoiding your emotions, and, I am guessing, spend a ton of time and effort trying to do so; therefore, if it was simply a matter of effort, or trying hard enough, I have no doubt that you could do it. However, I am wondering if perhaps this will never work, and we need to find some other way for you to respond to your emotions.

Last week we discussed that there may be an alternative to trying to avoid your emotions that may work better. And, this alternative does not involve giving up, resigning yourself to a life of misery, or feeling terrible for the rest of your lives. Instead, we may simply need to change our focus. Think about it this way [Use Tug of War with Monster metaphor here]: It's like you are in this massive tug of war with a monster (your anxiety, fear, sadness, anger, etc). In between you and the monster is a pit and so far as

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you can see it is bottomless. If you lose and fall into this pit you will be destroyed. So you pull and pull, but the harder you pull the harder the monster pulls, and it seems like you edge closer and closer to the pit. The hardest thing to see is that our job here is not to win the tug of war – our job is simply to drop the rope.

[Get reactions from clients about this metaphor; allow time for them to take it in and then share their reactions.]

My sense is that trying to fight our emotions, trying to avoid and control them, is a battle we cannot win. If I thought there was any way you could win this battle, I would tell you how. I just don't think it is possible. When we fight (or pull on that rope), we get pulled back even harder and get closer to the edge of this pit. So, in my mind, the answer is to drop that rope. Stop the fight. By doing that, the monster is still going to be there, but we are not going to fall into that pit. In addition, by dropping the rope, the monster will still be there, but he can't affect us in the way he was before when we held onto the rope. When we are holding onto the rope, we have to focus all our attention and energy on that battle. It takes a lot of energy and time, and prevents us from moving away from that pit and living our life. By dropping the rope, we can take part in other activities and begin to live our lives. In addition, in the end, as much as that monster may still come around to bother us at times, we will probably have less contact with him and see him less often than when all of our attention was spent trying to fight him and pull him into the pit.

So, what exactly does it mean to drop this rope? How else might we respond to our emotions? Well, I would suggest that the alternative to trying to avoid your emotions, and the way to get around all of the problems that come with trying to avoid your emotions and not being able to do so, is to be willing to have your emotions. Now, when I say that, what do you think about? What comes to mind? [Get some thoughts and reactions from clients about what willingness is and what this would mean – e.g., won't work, we are crazy to suggest it, they will be miserable forever, they are giving up, etc.]. That is often what we hear from folks when we ask them what they think about the idea of being willing to have their emotions. People often say that we are suggesting that we want folks to give up and resign themselves to a lifetime of misery. Given how long you have been fighting your emotions, it makes perfect sense that the idea of experiencing them would be completely counterintuitive and also very scary and unpleasant. However, my idea of what it means to be willing to have your emotions is quite different from yours, and not at all like what you described.

- Discuss the “Emotional Unwillingness versus Willingness (continued)” handout in group
 - Distinguish emotional willingness from resignation
 - Willingness is active and present-moment focused
 - Resignation is passive and future-focused

Willingness refers to how open you are to experiencing your own experience as it happens – without trying to manipulate it, avoid it, escape it, or change it. People often think that willingness means giving up or resignation.

However, willingness is not about giving up, and it is not about resigning yourself to living with unbearable emotional pain. Instead, willingness is an active choice. It is pretty much the opposite of giving up, as it requires us to make an active choice and choose something that is very difficult in the moment. think about it – wouldn't choosing to experience your emotions and not fight them take more courage and strength than trying to avoid them and get rid of them? I would imagine so, so there is nothing about willingness that involves resignation or giving up.

In addition, it's important to note that because willingness is an active stance and a choice, it is all about the present moment. It is a moment to moment choice. Every time we have an emotion, every time we experience distress, we have a choice in that moment to be willing or not. And, to be honest, sometimes, we are going to choose to be unwilling. However, the nice thing about being able to choose willingness in any moment is that if we choose not to be willing in one moment, we can choose to be willing in the next. Or, we can choose unwillingness for several moments, and then choose willingness in the next. We never lose out on an opportunity to choose willingness, and even if we choose unwillingness over and over again, we can always, in the next moment, make the choice to be willing.

And because willingness is an active choice, rather than a feeling, we can make the choice to be willing even when we don't feel willing, or when we don't want to be willing.

➤ Distinguish willingness from wanting

Willingness is not about wanting. I am not asking you to want to feel bad, or to relish your negative feelings. And I am certainly not trying to suggest that there is something noble or worthwhile about being overwhelmed by negative feelings. Or that feeling bad will somehow make you a better person. If I knew a way for you to get the things you want in life and to have the life you want without experiencing pain, anxiety, sadness, etc., I would definitely tell you. If I had a magical pill that would take away all of your negative feelings and leave you happy forever, I would give it to you. In fact, I would take it myself! There is nothing valuable about feeling pain for no purpose. Taking a stance of willingness suggests that you will accept and move forward with whatever feelings and thoughts appear as you make your way through life. You may not want to feel negative emotions, and you may not enjoy it at all, but you can still choose to be willing to experience them.

Basically, I am simply asking you to be willing to have the emotions you have. You don't have to generate negative emotions, and you certainly do not need to wallow in them. You just need to be willing to have them when they are there. That is what willingness is all about – being willing to have what you have when you have it.

Think about it this way – you basically have two choices. You are already having the emotions, so your two choices are to fight your emotions (which we know doesn't actually work) or to allow yourself to have them since they are there anyhow. And, when you think about it that way, the choice seems pretty clear...If you are having an emotion, and it will not work to fight it, then it seems like the only other choice is to be willing to have it – to accept it as it is.

So that is what willingness is. When you are having an emotion, when it is there already, are you willing to have it? You don't have to like it. You don't have to prolong it. You just have to be open to having it.

It's like this metaphor [Annoying Joe metaphor]: Imagine that you have a new house and you invited all your neighbors over to a housewarming party. Everyone in the whole neighborhood is invited – you even put up a sign at the corner store. So everyone shows up and the party is going great and Joe, your annoying neighbor, shows up. Joe is always talking about himself incessantly, how great he is, his great job, his new car, everything is about him. He also complains about everything, the weather, the food, the other neighbors...his clothes are tacky, his voice is whiny and you think "oh no, why did he show up" but you did say

everyone in the neighborhood was invited. Can you see that it is possible to allow him to be at the party even though you don't think well of him? You don't have to like him, his clothes, or his lifestyle. You may be embarrassed about his comments about the food and his loud voice. Your opinion of him, your evaluation of him, is absolutely distinct from your willingness to have him as a guest in your home. You could decide that even though you said everyone was welcome, he is really not welcome. But as soon as you decide that, the whole party changes. Now you have to be at the front of the house, guarding the door to make sure he doesn't come back. Or if you say he is welcome, but you don't really mean it, if you only mean he is welcome if he stays in the kitchen and doesn't mingle with the other guests, then you are going to have to be constantly making him do that and your whole party will be about that. Meanwhile, life is going on, the party is going on, and you're off guarding against Joe. It's just not life enhancing. It's not much of a party. It's a lot of work.

[Note: You can make a distinction between willingness and wanting or wallowing using this metaphor. Allowing Joe to be at the party doesn't mean you have to hang out with him the whole time he's there. It doesn't mean you can't bring your attention to the people at the party whose company you enjoy more. It just means that you will also have Joe there, and Joe will make himself known at times and if you want to be at the party, you're going to have to be willing to have him there too.]

- Willingness does not mean you will feel constantly overwhelmed.
 - Willingness may actually help you feel less overwhelmed, and decrease suffering
- Remember:** Being unwilling to have our feelings, attempting to control and/or avoid them, was making us feel worse and increasing our distress

I am not suggesting that willingness means that you will feel constantly overwhelmed, or that the answer to your difficulties is just to brace yourself to feel the full and overwhelming tide of negative emotions. In fact, willingness may actually help you feel less overwhelmed, and decrease your suffering. You can think about it this way [Use Two

Scales metaphor]: Imagine that there are two scales. The scale right in front of you is the one you have been focused on – the negative emotion scale. This scale has been set on high and you have spent a great deal of time and energy attempting to turn this scale down without great success. Now, there is also this other scale. It has been hidden and hard to see. This other scale can also move from low to high. This scale is marked as willingness and it refers to how open you are to experiencing your emotions as they happen. When this scale (negative emotions) is set on high and you are trying to get rid of those feelings, this scale (willingness) is on low. But that is a tricky combination. Sometimes what happens is that when willingness is set on low, negative emotions gets locked in at high and we get stuck. When willingness is set on high, however, this scale (negative emotions) is free to move, and may vary, sometimes being on high, sometimes on low, etc.

As we have discussed throughout this group, negative emotions are part of being human, and cannot be avoided. They are also not something that we can directly control, so it may not be possible to change the settings on the negative emotions scale. Willingness, on the other hand, is a stance, and we think it is possible that you can make a choice as to whether or not you want to set that scale on high or low. Often when people come in to therapy, their negative emotions are high, and willingness is set on low, and the goal is to move their negative emotions to low without moving willingness to high. Now, it makes perfect sense that willingness would be set on low because many people believe that control, not willingness, is what is needed. Also, after years of trying to avoid them, our

negative emotions can feel so intense that the idea of being willing to have these experiences seems impossible. And yet, we strongly believe that the answer to emotional suffering, the way to change your life, is to begin to move willingness to high. Of course, moving willingness to high and being willing to have your emotions does not mean that your negative emotions will necessarily drop to low. Being willing to experience your emotions means that sometimes you will feel anxious and sometimes you will not. Sometimes you will feel joy, other times sadness. Putting willingness to high can open you up to experiencing the full range of emotions to all the kinds of experiences you may have in your life. And this will mean having negative emotions at times. However, what increasing willingness will also do is unlock your negative emotions scale so that it is not always stuck on high.

That said, practicing willingness (being willing to have your emotions) is an incredibly difficult choice. In fact, a former client of this group described it the best. Are any of you swimmers? Do any of you know what to do when you are caught in a riptide? Well, when you are caught in a riptide, the way to save yourself is to swim parallel to the shore. People drown because they get caught in the riptide and the thing that seems to make the most sense – the thing that seems like the best option – is to swim toward the shore, to get safely back to dry land as soon as possible. And that makes a lot of sense. Of course, trying to get to shore as quickly as possible seems like the best option when you are getting tired and feel like you may drown. It seems perfectly reasonable. However, despite how reasonable it seems, that is actually not the way to survive. instead, the way to survive a riptide and save your life is to go against what every bone in your body is telling you to do, go against all of your natural urges and instincts, and swim away from the shore, to get around the riptide. Doing this thing that feels like it is so wrong and cannot possibly help – going against your urges and what your mind is telling you will work – is the only way to save your life. And that is what willingness is.

In the end, as distressing as it might sound now, I truly believe that choosing willingness, being willing to experience your emotions, will actually help your emotions feel less overwhelming. It may feel like it is going against every instinct you have; however, trust me that it will help in the end.

III. Have clients reflect on the consequences of willingness, as compared to unwillingness; ask them to reflect on their own experiences of each

Now, you don't have to believe me. Don't just take my word for it. Instead, look to your own experiences. Have you had times when you were willing to have your emotions, and to experience them as they arose? What was this like? What were the consequences of this? Were the consequences different than when you fight your emotions? [Get responses from clients. Emphasize the positive long-term consequences of willingness.]

Now, one think that I want to note is that it is not possible to be willing all the time. Instead, the goal is to practice willingness more than you used to – to choose to be willing more often than you did in the past. We do not expect you to choose to be willing all the time; we just hope that you will be willing to experience your negative emotions more than you were in the past – that you will make this particular choice more often than you did before. Just doing that will help tremendously.

So, for homework, I don't think you need to do this every single moment, but I would like you to try and do it more than you did it last week. If the opportunity presents itself, I want you to be willing to have your emotions. Monitor what happens. It doesn't have to be 100% of the time, just try to increase the

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amount of time you are willing to have your emotions by 10 to 20%. See what happens. It is going to take a leap of faith, but if the other way was working, you all wouldn't be here. So try this and see what happens.

Homework for Week 8

- Monitor the consequences (cognitive, behavioral, emotional) of emotional unwillingness vs. willingness over the course of the week by completing the “Emotional Willingness Monitoring Form” 1x per day; encourage clients to practice emotional willingness this week
- Continue to monitor urges to self-harm and the feelings preceding these urges; continue to monitor willingness to experience these emotions, as well as attempts to avoid them

Emotional Unwillingness versus Willingness

We often attempt to control our emotions

- Seems like a reasonable goal
- Being “in control of our emotions” is often equated with positive qualities such as competence, balance, achievement etc.
- Sometimes emotional control seems to work
 - Distraction (focusing on something else, drinking, etc.) can work in the short-term
 - Because this seems to work – at least somewhat – our natural response is to keep trying harder and using distraction more frequently
- It seems like other people can control their feelings
 - Children are given the message to control their emotions (“Don’t be sad” or “There is nothing to be afraid of”)
 - Many adults keep the expression of their emotional experiences private
- Control works so well in other aspects of our life
 - Other accomplishments (educational, career, physical) have likely been achieved through diligent discipline, training and control

Research suggests it is not possible to gain complete control over feelings

- Attempts to control/avoid feelings are not effective in the long-term
- Attempts to control/avoid feelings don’t seem to work when you really need them to
- Attempts to control/avoid feelings often backfire
 - Increase the likelihood of these feelings
 - Make us more bothered by them when we have them
 - Set us up for failure by making us hypersensitive to emotions

In fact, attempts to avoid or control emotions may actually make us feel worse

- Increases physiological arousal
- Interferes with distress tolerance
- Failures at control/avoidance (which are inevitable) will increase distress

Emotional Unwillingness versus Willingness (continued)

So what do we do?

- We don't need to control our feelings in order to do the things in life we want to do
- We need to change our focus

Answer: Willingness

- Willingness refers to how open you are to experiencing your own experience as it happens – without trying to manipulate it, avoid it, escape it, or change it
- Willingness is not about giving up
- Willingness is not about resigning yourself to living with unbearable emotional pain
- Willingness does not mean you will feel constantly overwhelmed
 - Willingness will ultimately help you feel less overwhelmed
 - **Remember:** Being unwilling to have our feelings – attempting to control them – makes us feel worse and more distressed

Emotional Unwillingness: Think of a time you were unwilling to have, or tried to avoid, your feelings

What did you do to try to avoid your feelings? What behavior(s) did you engage in?	Were these attempts to avoid your emotions successful?	What thoughts did you experience as a result of trying to avoid your emotions?	Did any other feelings (i.e., secondary emotions, cloudy emotions) arise as a result of trying to avoid your emotion? (e.g., fear, anxiety, etc.)	Other (longer-term) consequences of attempts to avoid emotions? (e.g., are you more or less prepared to manage these feelings in the future?)	When is emotional avoidance least effective? (i.e., what factors make it less likely to work?)
	<p>In the short-term?</p> <p>In the long-term?</p>				

Emotional Willingness Monitoring Form: (Please complete at least once per day)

Situation	Emotion	Initial distress level (0-100)	Willingness: Were you willing to have your emotions?	As a result of this choice, did you engage in any unhealthy behaviors? If yes, what did you do?	As a result of this choice, did you experience any other feelings (i.e., cloudy emotions, secondary emotions)? (e.g., fear, etc.)	As a result of this choice, did you experience any thoughts?	Subsequent distress level (0-100)
			NO, Unwilling: Attempted to avoid and get rid of feelings				
			YES, Willing: Allowed myself to experience feelings				

Self-Harm Monitoring Form III

	Urge to self-harm (0-100)	If no urges, what were the protective factors?	If urges were present, what feelings preceded the urge(s)?	Willingness to experience these feelings (0-100)	Did you attempt to avoid these feelings?	Did you engage in self-harm? (circle one)	If no, what did you do instead?	If yes, what did you do?	Consequences of your decision (+ and -)
Monday ____ / ____						Yes No			
Tuesday ____ / ____						Yes No			
Wednesday ____ / ____						Yes No			
Thursday ____ / ____						Yes No			
Friday ____ / ____						Yes No			
Saturday ____ / ____						Yes No			
Sunday ____ / ____						Yes No			

Week 9:**Identifying Non-Emotionally Avoidant Emotion Regulation Strategies
(Identifying Strategies that Serve the Same Function as Self-Harm)****Outline****I. Review homework from Week 8**

- Have clients share their experiences with emotional willingness, focusing in particular on the consequences they noticed as a result of practicing willingness (versus unwillingness)
 - Review the “Emotional Willingness Monitoring Form” homework

Let's start by going over what you noticed last week. Were there times last week when you were willing to have a negative emotion? When you allowed yourself to experience your emotions? If so, how did this work? What were some of the consequences you noticed of being willing to have your emotions? In particular, how did this influence your level of distress in the long-term?
[Reinforce the positive and non-negative long-term consequences of willingness (e.g., reduction in distress, no later shame, etc.).]

[Note: In going through this discussion, make sure you validate the fact that willingness is very difficult, and that it is not possible to choose willingness all the time. However, even if clients chose willingness once or twice during the week, it is probably more than they have done so in the past, and that is progress. The goal, then, is to continue to make this choice in the upcoming weeks. However, we do not in any way expect folks to make this choice all the time. No one does, and that is okay.]

II. Discuss “Emotion Regulation Strategies: Effective Ways to Modulate Emotions” handout

- Introduce emotion modulation as an important skill
 - It is important to be able to modulate emotions
 - It is useful to know that there are things we can do to take the edge off our emotions so that they don't overwhelm us
 - It is useful to know that there are things we can do so that feelings of sadness do not turn into long-lasting depression and feelings of anger do not become ruminative or turn into rage

Today we are going to switch gears a bit. Up until now, we have been talking about the importance of getting in touch with our emotions, and experiencing our emotions. We have also discussed how beneficial it can be to allow ourselves to experience our emotions, and to practice willingness to have our emotions. And all of that is definitely important.

However, it is also the case that it is really important to know that there are things we can do – healthy strategies we can use – to modulate our emotions. It's good for us to know that there are things we can do to take the edge off of our emotions, to lessen their intensity, so that they are less overwhelming. I am not talking about trying to get rid of them, or avoid them, just things we can do to take the edge off of them so they are a bit less intense. And, in the end, it is also good to know that there are things we can do to help our emotions pass, so that sadness does not turn into depression and anger does not grow into a seething rage.

So, today we are going to be talking about things you can do to modulate your emotional arousal, and take the edge off your emotions when this would be helpful.

- Reinforce past discussion of the paradoxical, negative consequences of emotional avoidance
 - We often try to modulate our emotions by avoiding.
 - Although this may seem to work in the short-term, it is not ultimately effective because it actually increases the intensity and duration of these emotions.
 - Also, attempts to avoid emotions may take the form of unhealthy/impulsive behaviors (e.g., alcohol, sex, self-harm, gambling)

Now, my guess is that, in the past, most of you tried to modulate your emotions by avoiding them entirely. That you took more of an all or nothing type of approach. Is that correct? Oftentimes, many people try to regulate or modulate their emotions by just getting rid of them entirely, or by avoiding them. And, as we have discussed many times throughout this group, although trying to avoid your emotions may work in the short-term and provide some temporary relief, it does not work in the long-term. In the long-term, trying to avoid our emotions actually makes them more intense and makes them last longer.

In addition, when you try to modulate your emotions by avoiding them entirely, this often takes the form of more unhealthy or impulsive behaviors. For example, many people find that they are best able to avoid their emotions by doing something like drinking, bingeing, purging, or self-harm. Healthier strategies – ones that don't come with so many downsides – tend to not work quite so well at getting rid of emotions completely. So, trying to avoid your emotions is probably putting you at greater risk for some of these unhealthy behaviors you are struggling with and trying to stop.

Therefore, what we want to do today is to teach you different ways of modulating your emotions – healthy ways that will work better in the long-run, and that don't have the same downsides as avoidant behaviors like self-harm, drinking, drug use, and over-eating.

- Teach more adaptive emotion regulation strategies

Strategies for regulating emotions can be seen as falling into one of three categories on a continuum: approach, distraction, and avoidance. On the one end of the continuum is the avoidance of emotions – strategies that are meant to cut-off all contact with our emotions and to shut them down completely. These are the strategies that don't seem to work in the long-run and that have a lot of downsides. However, these are also the strategies that many people have, in the past, relied on the most.

- Approach and distraction strategies can be healthy/adaptive
- Approach: journal, talk, art work

Distraction: put it aside **for awhile** by focusing attention on something else, but come back to it (i.e., distract until intensity lessens some, until it is safe to experience the emotion, until you have the resources to respond to it effectively, until the situation/context is more supportive of approach strategies, etc.)

Now, on the other end of the continuum lay our emotional approach strategies. These strategies are just what they sound like – they are all about getting in touch with our emotions, allowing ourselves to experience our emotions, and processing our emotions. Emotional willingness, allowing yourself to experience your emotions, is an approach strategy. In fact, most of this group so far has focused on approach strategies, as getting in touch with your emotions, paying attention to the information being provided by your

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emotions, and allowing yourself to experience your emotions are all approach strategies. As we have discussed before, and as you have noticed in the past few weeks, getting in touch with your emotions and allowing yourself to experience your emotions, does help modulate them. This allows them to pass more quickly, and generally helps limit our secondary emotional responses.

Now, in the middle of the continuum, between the avoidance and approach of emotions, is distraction. And distraction can sometimes be a bit confusing because it can look a bit like avoidance. However, distraction and avoidance are actually quite different. Unlike avoidance, which is all about trying to get away from the feeling and never wanting it to return, distraction is about redirecting your attention toward something else for a short period of time, and implies a willingness to come into contact with that emotion in the near future. Basically, the idea behind distraction is that you put the emotion aside for awhile by focusing your attention on something else, but come back to it eventually. If you use it in this way, then distraction can be a useful strategy for taking the edge off of your emotions.

Now, the reason distraction can be helpful is that it can help you manage your emotions and control your behaviors at times when approach skills may not be possible, or may be less effective. So, if you experience something distressing right before a big meeting at work, it may not be possible to approach the emotions you experience prior to the meeting. You may not have the time or resources to process your emotions in that moment, or it may not be the best time to do so. Therefore, in that moment, you will need to do something else to modulate your emotions and take the edge off of them so that you are able to function in your meeting. And distraction strategies would be an excellent option. Distracting yourself from your negative emotions can be really helpful, and very effective, at times when it is not safe to experience the emotion, when you don't have the resources to respond to your emotions effectively, and when the situation/context is not supportive of approach strategies. In these cases, distraction will be the better option, initially, until it is safe to experience the emotion, and you have the time and energy to do so.

Distraction can also be an excellent first-line strategy for taking the edge off of your emotions. When emotions are incredibly intense, distraction can help take the edge off your emotions, so that they lessen in intensity a bit – not completely, just enough so that they are less overwhelming and you can think a bit more clearly.

Finally, the other thing to note about distraction, and another way in which distraction is different from avoidance, is that distraction does not involve unhealthy or impulsive behaviors – anything unhealthy cannot, by definition, be distraction. So, if you do something unhealthy, like drinking, using drugs, or harming yourself, that is avoidance. Even if you later come back to the emotion and try to get in touch with it, the use of strategies like these – strategies that are unhealthy – is avoidance, not distraction.

[Note: Make sure to emphasize that distraction involves redirecting attention toward something else for a short period of time, not forever, and implies a willingness to come into contact with that emotion in the near future. Also, draw a distinction between distracting *away from* the emotion and distracting *toward* something else (e.g., a desired activity), as these types of distraction will likely have different consequences (with the former resembling avoidance and the latter likely being more effective).]

- Provide psychoeducation on the contextually-dependent nature of adaptive emotion regulation
 - Importance of context when deciding whether to use distraction or approach strategies

Now, when it comes to figuring out the best strategy to use in any given moment, it is important to consider what you are trying to accomplish, and what situation you are in. What makes a distraction or approach strategy helpful versus not is whether this strategy helps you cope the best in this particular situation -- whether it helps you get your needs met and meet the demands of your situation. When it comes to distraction and approach strategies, none of these is inherently better or worse than others. All of them can be helpful, and what determines whether they are helpful (or how helpful they are) is what you are trying to get out of the situation and the context you are in.

So, if you are at work and need to meet with your boss, distraction might be the best strategy for managing a fight with your partner, as you need to focus your attention on your meeting and it would probably not be effective to be crying about the fight when you meet with your boss. However, if you had a fight with your boss and are finding that you can't stop thinking about it once you get home, approach strategies may be the most effective, as you could get in touch with the emotions and figure out the information they are providing you. So, both distraction and avoidance strategies can be effective – but what determines when it is best to use one versus the other is the situation or context you are in.

Likewise, although it may make a lot of sense to use approach strategies early in the evening, as you are thinking about your day, it may not be as effective to use them late at night, when you are trying to get to sleep. In that moment, distraction might work best.

Finally, it can be particularly helpful in many situations to use distraction and approach strategies together, in sequence. For example, if you are in a situation where approach is not possible or will not be effective, you can use distraction to start. This will help take the edge off of your emotions and provide you with a strategy until you are in a situation that supports the use of approach strategies, or until you have the resources available to approach your emotions. Then, at that point, you can turn to approach strategies to process the emotion or figure out what information it was providing. Basically, you can use distraction and approach strategies together to modulate emotions most effectively.

III. Conduct in-group discussion of different adaptive emotion regulation strategies that clients have used in the past (or think might be helpful to use in the future), and identify the contexts best suited for each strategy (on an individual basis for each client)

- Have clients complete the “Healthy Ways to Regulate Emotions” worksheet

[Have clients identify a variety of approach and distraction strategies they can use in different contexts and at different times. Have them brainstorm as many strategies in each domain as possible, and make sure that they are identifying strategies they can use during the day and in the middle of the night, when alone and with others, and when at work versus at home. Continue to emphasize the importance of having as many strategies available as possible, as it is all about flexibility.]

- Possible approach strategies include: journaling, talking, doing art work, listening to or playing music, mindfulness, meditation, grounding, observing emotions, etc.....

- Possible distraction strategies include: watching TV, doing chores, exercising, running, listening to music, watching a movie, talking to a friend (about things in general, or about them, rather than about what one's emotions), reading a book, etc.....

IV. Have clients complete the “Unhealthy Ways to Regulate Emotions” worksheet

- Identify healthy emotion regulation strategies that serve the same function as avoidant emotion regulation strategies and could be used instead (i.e., substituted for the unhealthy strategies)

Now that you have identified a number of different healthy emotion regulation strategies you can use at different times, I want us to think about how we can replace some of the unhealthy strategies you have used in the past with these new, healthy strategies. So, I want you to begin by identifying the primary ways in which you have tried to avoid your emotions in the past, and the things you have done to get rid of your emotions. Come up with your top five avoidance strategies – the ones you use the most or that interfere with your life the most.

[Have clients identify the avoidant regulation strategies they use most often. Write these on the board.]

Now, for each of these unhealthy avoidant strategies, think about whether there was a particular time, place, or situation when you were most likely to use this strategy, or most at risk for this behavior. For example, do you tend to self-harm only when alone, or only at night? Do you drink when out with other people or by yourself? Is there one of these strategies you were more likely to use at work, or when out with your friends? Just think about the times, situations, and settings in which you were most likely to use each of these avoidant strategies and write this down.

[Have clients identify the contexts, situations, and times at which they were more likely to use these avoidant strategies. Write these on the board.]

Now, use the “Healthy Ways to Regulate Emotions” worksheet we completed to identify healthy strategies you could use instead of each of these avoidant ones. Focus in particular on finding strategies that will work in these specific situations and contexts. Identify several different distraction or approach strategies you could use instead of these avoidant ones.

[Help clients brainstorm healthy strategies to replace each avoidant strategy. Facilitate a group discussion of this.]

Give clients the Approach Strategies and Distraction Strategies Supplementary Handouts. Have them refer to these handouts while doing their homework this week, in order to supplement the in-group discussion.

Homework

- Practice different (adaptive) emotion regulation strategies and monitor the consequences of these different strategies by completing the “Emotion Regulation Strategy Practice: Monitoring Form” 1x per day
- At the end of the week, identify the typical emotion regulation strategies used on a regular basis, as well as the contexts in which different strategies are more or less effective
- Continue to monitor urges to self-harm and the feelings associated with these urges; continue to monitor willingness to experience these emotions; monitor the emotion regulation strategies used instead of self-harm, and the consequences of this behavioral choice

Emotion Regulation Strategies: Effective Ways to Modulate Emotions

Being able to modulate emotional arousal is an important skill

- It is useful to know that there are things we can do to take the edge off our emotions
- It is useful to know that there are things we can do so that we are not flooded by intense emotions for a very long time

Strategies for regulating emotions (i.e., modulating emotional arousal) can be seen as falling into one of three categories on a continuum

- **Avoidance**
 - We often try to modulate our emotions by actively avoiding them
 - Although this may work in the short-term, it is not effective in the long-term (increases the intensity and duration of these emotions)
 - Attempts to avoid emotions may take the form of unhealthy/impulsive behaviors (e.g., alcohol, sex, self-harm, gambling)
- **Distraction**
 - Put the emotion aside for *awhile* (not forever), and come back to it
 - Distract until the intensity of the emotion lessens somewhat
 - Distract until it is safe to experience the emotion
 - Distract until you have the resources to manage the emotion
 - Distract until the situation is more supportive of approach strategies
- **Approach**
 - Label the emotion
 - Experience the emotion so that it runs its course and lessens in intensity
 - Identify the information it is providing
 - Process the emotion

One important dimension of emotion regulation is the flexible use of situationally-appropriate, non-avoidant emotion regulation strategies

- The more strategies we have available, the more flexibility we have
- The effectiveness of any emotion regulation strategy is context-dependent
- Distraction and approach strategies can be used together to modulate emotional arousal across a wide range of contexts

Healthy Ways to Regulate Emotions:

Approach	Context (i.e., times, situations) when this works best
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.
Distract	Context (i.e., times, situations) when this works best
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.

Unhealthy Ways to Regulate Emotions:

What have you done in the past to try to avoid feeling a certain way (i.e., how have you tried to avoid your emotions in the past)?	Is there a particular context (e.g., a certain type of situation or time of day) in which you are more likely to use these strategies?	What healthy emotion regulation strategies could you substitute in the future that would serve a similar function?
1.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.
2.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.
3.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.
4.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.
5.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.
6.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.

Emotion Regulation Strategy Practice: Monitoring Form (*Please complete at least once per day*)

Situation: Include a description of contextual factors (time, situation, etc.)	Emotional response: What emotions did you experience in response to the situation?	Emotional intensity: Intensity of the emotion (0 to 100)	Emotion regulation strategy: What emotion regulation strategy did you use?	Effectiveness of strategy: Was this strategy effective in modulating your emotion? Why or why not?	Emotional intensity: Intensity of the emotion (0 to 100)

Emotion Regulation Strategy Practice Review

Which emotion regulation strategies did you practice this week?

In what contexts do distraction strategies tend to be the most effective? Which distraction strategies seem to work the best for you?

In what contexts do approach strategies tend to be the most effective? Which approach strategies seem to work the best for you?

Do you have a tendency to rely on distraction or approach strategies, to the exclusion of the other? If you repeatedly use one type as opposed to the other, how might you increase your access to the other type of strategy? What might you do to increase your flexibility with regard to the use of emotion regulation strategies?

Week 9: Homework monitoring form

Self-Harm Monitoring Form IV

	Urge to self-harm (0-100)	If no urges, what factors contributed to this? What were the protective factors?	If urges were present, what feelings preceded the urge(s)?	Willingness to experience these feelings (0-100)	Did you engage in self-harm? (circle one)	If no, what emotion regulation strategies did you use instead?	If yes, what did you do?	Consequences of the behavior (+ and -)
Monday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Tuesday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Wednesday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Thursday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Friday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Saturday ____ / ____					Yes No			
Sunday ____ / ____					Yes No			

Week 10:

Impulse Control

Outline

I. Review homework from Week 9

- Have clients share their experiences of using different emotion regulation strategies, identifying those that worked best for each client
 - Discuss ways to increase flexibility in the use of emotion regulation strategies

Today we are going to move onto something that is quite different than what we have been doing. The material today is something completely new. However, before we move onto these new skills, let's begin by reviewing your homework from last week.

Basically, you were asked to try a number of emotion regulation strategies (e.g., approach, distraction) with the hope of modulating or lessening the intensity and arousal of your emotions so that they are easier to manage and feel less overwhelming. So, what did you all try? What worked? What didn't work for you?

[Note: Make sure to emphasize the point that whether or not a certain emotion regulation strategy is effective really depends on the context someone is in.]

II. Discuss the “Impulsive Behaviors” handout

- Define impulsive behaviors

So, today we are going to be talking about skills for controlling impulsive behaviors – the types of behaviors we have discussed at other times in this group, particularly when thinking about the things people do to avoid their emotions (and unhealthy strategies for regulating emotions). Basically, we are going to talk about things you can do to keep yourself from acting on your impulses or behaving impulsively.

Now, when I mention the term impulsive behaviors, what do you think of? What do you think makes something an impulsive behavior? What exactly is an impulse? [Write clients' responses on the board...make sure to highlight the fact that impulsive behaviors are done without thinking, urgently, and have negative consequences in the long-term.]

[Participants may ask about the difference between compulsive and impulsive behaviors.] Well, the short answer is that impulsive behaviors can become compulsive over time. Impulsive behaviors are very quick and may even feel automatic. They are something that we can do almost without realizing that we are doing them. Oftentimes, people engage in impulsive behaviors without even being aware of the fact that they are doing so (until they have already started them). Sometimes, these behaviors happen so quickly that folks don't even realize they are doing them until they are done. Compulsive behaviors, on the other hand, are less spontaneous and quick than impulsive behaviors. They are usually more planful and involve a strong desire to engage in the behavior. Because the desire is so strong, though, people are usually aware of the fact that they are about to engage in the behavior, and are also aware of their choice to do this behavior. It may feel as though it is almost impossible to resist their urges, but they are aware of them and the choices that they make. Impulsive behaviors, on the other hand, can occur so quickly and with such immediacy that folks aren't even able to notice the moment between the urge or impulse and the actual behavior. It may feel as if the urge and the behavior are the exact same thing, and occur at the same time, with no possible way of inhibiting or stopping the behavior because it happens so quickly.

Now, the same behavior may be impulsive or not. For example, self-harm can be an impulsive behavior. It may occur very quickly, almost instantaneously and without planning, right after the experience of an emotion, particularly a very intense or strong emotion. However, there are other times when self-harm may not be as impulsive, when it might be done with some foresight. For example, folks might plan to engage in the behavior to cope with upcoming stressors, or they may make the decision to self-harm in order to avoid their emotions because they are just not willing to experience them any more. In these cases, the self-harm would not be considered impulsive. So, in general, many maladaptive behaviors we have discussed in the past can be more or less impulsive depending on the moment. For the purposes of this particular group module, though, we are focusing mostly on the times when it is hard to use other skills because the urges to engage in impulsive behaviors are so strong and immediate.

Also, there is a sense of immediacy when we have an impulse – a compelling urge to do something, right then. This sense of immediacy can make it even harder not to act on the impulse, and is often experienced as a sense of urgency. This can be one of the things that makes resisting impulses so uncomfortable.

In addition, another key component of impulsive behaviors is that they tend to have tremendous positive benefits in the short-term, but significant downsides in the long-term. This is exactly what we talked about last week (and the couple of weeks before that) when we discussed how unhealthy regulation strategies and efforts to avoid emotions work in the moment but backfire in the long-term. Therefore, if there are some behaviors we do almost without thinking and that occur out of the blue but do not have any negative consequences, then these behaviors do not count as impulsive behaviors for the purposes of this group. Here, we are only talking about impulsive behaviors that have negative consequences for you in the long-term. If a behavior does not have any negative consequences for you, then feel free to keep doing it.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that although impulses are very strong, they are also short-lived. Urges or impulses are, by definition, very quick. Therefore, if we can resist the urge long enough, it will go down. It will lessen in intensity (fairly quickly in fact). And this is incredibly good to know, because it means that we don't have to resist these urges for too long before they begin to dissipate.

So, when it comes to resisting urges, there are four different things that we can do to help us not act impulsively.

III. Discuss the “Impulse Control Strategies: Techniques for Resisting Urges” handout

- Teach and/or review the basic impulse control techniques
 - Distraction

As I mentioned before, impulses are, by nature, fairly short-lived. If you resist an impulse, and ride it out, it will likely lessen in intensity. Because impulses pass fairly quickly, one thing we can do to control impulsive behaviors is to distract ourselves from the urge by engaging in other behaviors for awhile. Basically, we just need to find something we can do for a short period of time, to get us through the time when the urge is most intense. You can think of this as keeping yourself busy or occupied long enough for the urge to lessen in intensity. If you can find something to do, someplace else to focus your attention, you may be able to delay responding long enough for the urge to lessen in intensity.

Now, an off-shoot of this skill of distraction is to simply delay responding. In fact, this is why we think distraction works. It keeps you from responding long enough for the urge to lessen. Therefore, you can also think about this skill as simply delaying responding. If you are having urges to do some impulsive behavior, give yourself 15 minutes before you act. By the time that 15 minutes has passed, the urge to engage in the behavior may be less

strong. You can literally set a timer and just wait a certain amount of time before acting. This can be particularly useful for managing urges to binge or overeat. If you tell yourself that you can eat this extra food or this unhealthy food in 30 minutes if you still want to, you may not have as strong a craving or urge for the food at the end of that period of time.

Alternatively, another way to make this even more effective is to do something in advance of the urge, before you have it, to ensure that you will have a delay built in. So, if you spend money impulsively, on the internet or on television, you can freeze your credit card in a big block of ice in the freezer. This is not as extreme as cutting up your credit cards, and allows you access to them when you need them, but it helps ensure that you cannot use it impulsively, on the spur of the moment. Instead, you would have to wait for the ice to melt, and by the time it does, the urge to spend may have passed or lessened. You can also do things like not keeping unhealthy food in the house, so that you have to take the time to go out and buy it in order to eat it, or you can have someone hide your cigarettes so that a delay is built in as you look for them. All of these things may buy you the time you need to delay acting long enough for the urges to lessen.

Distraction and delay are very simple strategies that can be very effective. However, it is unlikely that any one strategy is going to do the trick. Instead, you will probably have to try a couple of different strategies. And, like with the emotion regulation strategies we discussed last week, which strategy works best will probably change depending on the moment and the context.

- Replacing impulsive behavior with more adaptive behavior that serves the same function

This next strategy is a little more complicated: behavioral substitution. As we have talked about before, impulsive behaviors tend to serve a very important function in the moment. When we are having impulses to engage in a certain behavior, it generally means that this behavior serves an important function for us, and meets some important needs. Therefore, it is ridiculous to think that we could just stop this behavior without replacing it with something else, or getting these needs met in another way. On the contrary, one way to decrease our urges to engage in an impulsive behavior is to find other ways of getting those needs met, or other behaviors that will serve the same function as the impulsive behavior. That way, stopping the impulsive behavior does not mean that we will need to neglect or ignore important needs we have. Instead, we can still get these needs met (albeit in a healthier way, without the same downsides), which should make it easier to resist engaging in the impulsive behavior.

So, for this strategy, what you need to do is try to identify the function of your impulsive behavior, and the purpose it serves. Does this behavior provide you with comfort or self-soothing? Does it help with your anxiety? Does it release anger? Does it express emotions that are difficult to verbalize? Does it do all kinds of things? Figure out what it does for you. Then, the next step is to figure out how to get those needs met in other, healthier ways. Now, this is never going to feel like a perfect substitution. There are no healthy strategies we can use that will ever work as quickly as an impulsive behavior, and there is certainly nothing healthy we can do that will ever provide as complete and immediate relief from emotional distress (in the short-term). However, these substitute behaviors can help you get your needs met and serve a similar function as your impulsive behaviors, and they will do so without all of the negative consequences in the long-term. So, in the end, although the relief these healthy substitute behaviors provide may not be as intense or immediate as

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the relief provided by impulsive behaviors, the substitute behaviors will be more effective in the long-run and will not come with all of the downsides of impulsive behaviors.

[On the board, help clients identify the functions of several impulsive behaviors, and then help them identify other behaviors that will serve the same functions.]

- Identify short- and long-term consequences of the behavior

One factor that increases the likelihood of impulsive behaviors is our tendency to focus on, and be aware of, the short-term consequences of our behaviors, rather than their long-term consequences. Like all animals, human beings are motivated and controlled by the short-term consequences of our behaviors. These have a lot more influence on how we act and what we do than the long-term consequences of our behaviors. We just tend to focus more on the consequences that immediately follow our behaviors – in part, because they are just more salient for us and seem more directly connected to our behavior. And, for this reason, it is the short-term consequences of our behaviors – those that are most closely linked to our behaviors in time and that follow our behaviors most immediately – that shape our behaviors and make us more or less likely to do something in the future.

Therefore, when something happens after a behavior that we want (e.g., relief), we come to associate that behavior with that consequence – in our minds, that behavior becomes linked to the provision of relief. And, as a result, we are more likely to do that behavior in the future. The long-term consequences of that behavior, even if they are negative, just don't seem as connected to that behavior in our experience. They are too far removed from it. They happen too long after it. Therefore, we tend to discount them or ignore them and, instead, to focus on the good things that happen immediately after the behavior.

Therefore, one way to control impulsive behaviors is to bring our attention to the negative consequences of these behaviors, and increase the connection between these behaviors and their negative long-term consequences. We want to begin to associate the behavior and its negative consequences more closely in our minds.

One way to do this is to focus on the negative consequences of the behavior whenever you have an urge to engage in the behavior. Basically, we want to find some way to make those negative consequences crystal clear in your mind. One way to do this (and something that has been shown to work) is to write out every possible negative consequence you can think of and put copies of this list everywhere you tend to engage in the behavior. Keep this list with you at all times. Post copies of this list all around your house. Keep them in your car, and your purse. Basically, carry this list of negative consequences with you at all times, and focus your attention on it whenever you have urges to do the impulsive behavior. This will help increase your awareness of the downsides of this behavior in the moment, when you would normally be focused only on the positive short-term consequences of the behavior.

- Consequence modification
 - Impulsive behaviors become habitual because they are associated with short-term relief, and resisting them is often painful and distressing in the short-term. One way to change this, and disrupt the pattern, is to change the consequences; i.e., modify the consequences so that resisting the urge results in positive, reinforcing experiences,

whereas acting on the impulse results in needing to get in touch with and come into contact with the very feelings or experiences being avoided by the impulsive behavior

- Good examples include immediately engaging in chain analysis of internal events preceding the impulsive behavior, journaling about one's feelings immediately preceding the impulsive behavior (or leaving a message to this effect on one's therapist's answering machine), immediately returning a purchased item (if shopping was the impulsive behavior), etc.

This final strategy is one of the best (one of my favorites), and it is also probably the one of all of these that you have not heard of before. Here's the gist of this strategy: One of the primary reasons we engage in impulsive behaviors is because they provide us with powerful relief in the short-term, and this reinforces the behavior, or makes it more likely to occur again. If every time you do some behavior, you get something positive in return, that behavior is going to become more frequent. You are going to do it more often.

On the contrary, when you try to resist an impulsive behavior, this is not reinforcing in the moment. In fact, you will probably, in that moment (temporarily), feel absolutely awful. Resisting our urges is a very uncomfortable feeling – it can lead to tension, and distress, and it pretty much the opposite of relief. It just doesn't feel good. And these feelings, this experience, is not reinforcing at all. And that means that we will be less likely to try to resist them in the future. And that is why it is so hard to change impulsive behaviors.

So, what that means is that we need to try to make the impulsive behavior not rewarding anymore, at the same time that we make resisting the impulsive behavior more rewarding.

So, how does this work exactly? Well, it is a two-step strategy. First, I want you to begin to reward yourselves every time you resist an impulse. However, the key to this is that the reward needs to be immediate. We want resisting an impulse to be connected to some sort of positive consequence right away, in the moment. So, although you will experience some distress from resisting the impulse, you will also have an immediate benefit, a reward that you provide yourself in the moment. And, in this way, resisting an impulse will now start to be associated with positive effects.

Now, when we are talking about the rewards, we are talking about things that are small, immediate, and not too expensive – we don't want to replace one impulsive behavior with impulsive spending! So, think of rewards that you can provide yourself that are inexpensive and can be done immediately, like allowing yourself to have an eggnog latte from Starbucks, or buying yourself fresh flowers at the store, or letting yourself watch your favorite movie or TV show, or splurging on your favorite food. Anything small you can do to reward yourself for resisting an impulse.

Now, the other step in this strategy, and the other thing we need to do to make this strategy work, is to take away the rewards that normally go along with behaving impulsively. Basically, we want to make the impulsive behavior less rewarding – we want to strip it of its positive short-term consequences. If we do this, it will be less rewarding, less reinforcing, and we won't want to do it as much. So, we need to make the impulsive behavior feel less rewarding in the moment.

Now, this is hard to do, and it is particularly challenging because this is not supposed to turn into punishment [See note below], which is how it can go if you don't watch yourself. The goal is to do something else that takes away the benefit of the behavior without making

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yourself feel worse than you did, or punishing yourself. Basically, you want to bring yourself back to where you were when you engaged in the impulsive behavior. You want to remove the positive consequences and rewards of the impulsive behavior.

So, let's say that you cut yourself to avoid feeling a certain way. One way to remove the positive consequences of the cutting and get back to where you were before you did the behavior is to immediately put yourself back in contact with the emotions you were trying to avoid. Get back in touch with them right after you self-harm – don't allow the relief to be there. One the best strategies I have heard of for this came from someone in one of our earlier groups. When she cut herself, in order to remove the positive consequences of the cutting, she would immediately call her therapist and leave a message that described why she engaged in the behavior, what was going on with her beforehand, what she was feeling and thinking, etc. She would basically do a chain analysis of what led up to the self-harm. And doing this got her back in touch with the very emotions she was trying to avoid to begin with – which means that it took away the benefits of cutting. As a result of this strategy, she couldn't avoid why she engaged in the behavior in the first place, and she brought herself back to that emotional state again.

Then, once she was back to that state, she had the option of doing something healthy to try to modulate her emotions. And that is key – once you take away the benefits of the impulsive behavior and get back to where you were before you did it, you then have the option of trying to get that need met in another, healthier way. You don't have to sit there feeling miserable. Once you are back there, try another, healthier behavior to get that need met. Do a substitute behavior that serves a same function as the impulsive behavior. It is fine to do something else once you take away the rewards of the impulsive behavior. We just want to make sure that the impulsive behavior stops being associated with all of those positive, short-term consequences.

Other examples:

- If the impulsive behavior is shopping, you can take away the benefit by returning the item immediately.
- If a mother yells at her children because they are making too much noise and she just wants some silence, she can turn up the radio or do something to introduce some noxious sound into the environment until the same level of noise and agitation is there as before she yelled. Then, once she has taken away the benefits of yelling, she can do something else to try to get some quiet (e.g., asking her children to please play elsewhere or keep their voices down).

[Note: It is extremely important to draw a distinction between removing the positive consequences associated with an impulsive behavior (usually emotional escape) and punishing oneself for engaging in an impulsive behavior. The goal is not to make oneself feel worse than before engaging in the impulsive behavior, but to return to the emotional state that was present immediately prior to the impulsive behavior – no worse or better. Then, upon returning to this state, one can make use of healthy, non-avoidant emotion regulation strategies to respond to distress in a more adaptive way.]

Homework

- Early in the week, complete the “Consequence Modification” worksheet, identifying ways to change contingencies associated with impulsive behaviors

- Early in the week, complete the “Consequences of Impulsive Behavior” worksheet, focusing on increasing awareness of long-term, negative consequences of impulsive behaviors
- Practice using the different impulse control strategies rather than self-harm or other impulsive/avoidant behaviors
- Continue to monitor urges to self-harm and the feelings associated with these urges; continue to monitor willingness to experience these emotions
 - Focus specifically on the impulse control strategies used to resist urges to self-harm

Impulsive Behaviors

Impulsive behaviors are behaviors that occur:

- Without control, inhibition, restraint
- Without thinking, reflection, or consideration
- Without foresight, adequate planning, or regard for the consequences
- With a sense of immediacy and spontaneity

Impulsive behaviors tend to be associated with:

- Positive short-term consequences
- Negative long-term consequences

While they may be strong, impulses are (by their very nature) short-lived

Strategies for managing impulsive behaviors and resisting urges include:

- Distraction
- Substitution
- Pros and Cons
- Consequence modification

(see next sheet for complete descriptions of each strategy)

Impulse Control Strategies: Techniques for Resisting Urges

Distraction/Delay

- Distracting from an impulse may help you “ride it out” until it lessens in intensity
- **Intervention: Distraction** [Engage in any healthy activity that distracts you from the impulse]

Substituting another behavior that serves the same function as the impulsive behavior

- Impulsive behaviors serve important functions and meet important needs
- Finding alternative ways to get these needs met may decrease the need for the impulsive behavior
- **Intervention: Substitution** [Identify alternative behaviors that serve the same function and engage in these instead]

Becoming more aware and mindful of the long-term consequences of the behavior

- Short-term consequences exert more influence over our behaviors than long-term consequences (i.e., they are more salient, appear more directly tied to our behaviors)
- Increasing awareness of long-term consequences can help us control impulses
- **Intervention: Pros and Cons** [Identify short- and long-term, positive and negative consequences of acting impulsively; focus in particular on long-term consequences]

Consequence modification

- Impulsive behaviors are maintained by their positive short-term consequences (e.g., the relief they provide)
- One way to reduce the likelihood of an impulsive behavior is to change the consequences
- **Intervention: Consequence Modification** [Reward yourself for resisting an urge to engage in an impulsive behavior (*make the reward immediate & enjoyable*); Remove the positive consequences typically associated with the impulsive behavior (*e.g., by immediately placing yourself into contact with the internal experience you were trying to avoid*)]

Consequence Modification

When you do not act impulsively: How can you reward yourself when you resist the urge to engage in an impulsive behavior?

When you do act impulsively: How can you remove some of the positive consequences you gain from engaging in the impulsive behavior?

Consequences of Impulsive Behavior

	Positive	Negative
Short-term consequences		
Long-term consequences		

Week 10: Homework monitoring form

Self-Harm Monitoring Form V

	Urges to self-harm (0-100)	If no urges, what were the protective factors?	If urges were present, what feelings preceded the urge(s)?	Willingness to experience these feelings (0-100)	Did you engage in self-harm? (circle one)	If no, what impulse control strategies did you use to resist your urges?	If yes, what did you do? Then, what did you do to modify the consequences?	Consequences of the behavior (+ and -)
Monday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Tuesday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Wednesday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Thursday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Friday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Saturday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Sunday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		

Weeks 11-12

Valued Directions

Outline for Week 11

I. Review homework from week 10

- Have clients share their experiences of using different impulse control strategies
- Focus particular attention on the use of consequence modification strategies, clarifying questions that arose during the week and problem-solving ways of using these strategies more effectively

Let's start today by reviewing last week's homework. Which of the impulse control strategies did you practice? Which seemed to work particularly well for you? Did you run into any barriers?

As you are continuing to practice these strategies over the next few weeks, remember that even though impulsive behaviors may occur quite quickly, as long as there is a split second between the impulse and the action, between the urge and the behavior, we have a chance to intervene. All we need in one second between the urge and behavior, a split second before we act on the urge, in order to intervene. In that moment, we can implement some kind of strategy to prevent an impulsive behavior.

II. Provide psychoeducation on the importance of identifying valued directions in life

- It is important to know what we are moving toward (rather than away from), and to have something to guide our choices in life
- Focusing on where we are going, and what we want in life, is a useful complement to focusing on the behaviors we are trying to decrease and those patterns we are trying to move away from

Today we are going to shift our attention to something quite different from what we have been doing so far. And this is actually what we are going to be talking about the rest of the group.

My sense is that oftentimes in therapy in general, and even in this group so far, we focus attention on the things we want to stop, the behaviors we want to get rid of. So, for example, in this group, we have been focusing on helping you stop self-harm. And in therapy in general we often focus on the behaviors we want to stop or move away from. And in many ways, this makes a lot of sense, because these behaviors often have a number of negative consequences. The problem, though, is that by focusing on all of the things we want to stop, or reduce, or move away from, folks are often left with the question of "now what?" "I know what I am not going to do, but what am I going to do?" "I know what I am moving away from but what am I moving toward?" If we just reduce or stop the things we don't want to do, where does that leave us? [Elicit a discussion about this point. Ask clients if they have had this experience in treatment before.]

Therefore, we think it's important to also pay attention to where we want to go, and what we want to do. This gives us something to focus on so that we can move forward in our lives as opposed to moving away from something that we don't want to do anymore.

III. Provide psychoeducation on valued directions (aka. "values")

- Discuss "Valued Directions" handout
- Define value directions (what they are and what they are not)
 - Values are different from goals
 - A goal is an outcome (get your degree, get married, get a particular job)
 - Although goals are helpful, they have some downsides:
 - Goals keep us focused on the future and suggest that where we are in this moment is not good enough

- While feeling this way has the possibility of motivating us and pushing us to act, it also means that we cannot be satisfied and content in this moment

Now, when most people talk about this, it is often under the guise of “Goals.” That’s great, and in many ways, goals are very important things. However, my experience is that goals also have some serious downsides, and that these downsides can make folks hesitant to think about setting goals. So what comes to mind when you hear the word “goals.” [Write down what people say, and pull for things such as: Failure, Make you feel worse, Make you feel as though you have to do them and if you don’t you are a horrible person, Overwhelming, Rigid, Where I am is not good enough – I need to be somewhere else]. Exactly. Often people say that having goals makes them feel as if they are not good enough right now. And this makes a lot of sense in some ways, as it is definitely the case that having a goal – being focused on something that we need to achieve or accomplish in the future – does imply that where we are in the moment is not good enough. And, even once that goal has been reached, it is often replaced with another goal, so once again we are not quite good enough where we are. Basically, because goals are future-focused, a downside is that we are never okay with where we are in the moment.

In addition, because they are focused on one particular outcome (e.g., getting a degree, becoming an aesthetician), goals tend to be quite rigid and inflexible. You either achieve a goal or you don’t. You are either a success or a failure. Because goals are focused on a particular outcome, then if we don’t reach that outcome, or that one particular endpoint, then we have failed to reach that goal. And that just doesn’t allow for a lot of flexibility! What if we change in the pursuit of the goal? What if that particular endpoint is no longer what we want? What if that just doesn’t seem like the right endpoint anymore? Because goals are so inflexible, we can sometimes feel as if we have failed if we decide to change our goal. Or we can feel as if the effort we put into that goal previously was a waste of time.

Now, this is not to say that goals are bad, or that they can’t be quite helpful. Goals can definitely be useful. However, they can also set us up to feel more distressed by making us feel as if where we are now is never good enough. Just as importantly, goals pull us out of the present moment and keep us focused on the future. However, our lives are lived in the present moment and if we are not focusing our attention on the present, we may miss out on our lives as they are occurring. Therefore, what we are going to talk about today (and for the rest of the group) is how to move forward in our life without these downsides. This is something we call “Valued Directions” or “Values” for short. Now, this term can have a number of meanings – so when I say, Values, what do you think of? [Write this down. People often mention morals, ethics, etc.]. That’s often what we hear from folks, but we actually mean something a bit different from this. So, let me tell you what we mean when we talk about valued directions or values.

- A value is a process (learning, being supportive, being loving toward others)
- Values are the glue between goals
- We can act in accordance with values all the time, in every moment, starting now!
- It can be more fulfilling to live for the process, rather than the outcome
(Example: Skiing downhill metaphor)
- Living for the process rather than the outcome (i.e., living a life consistent with valued directions) means that we cannot monitor progress along that direction on a moment by moment basis, or in a linear manner
(Example: Path up mountain metaphor)

Values are different from goals in a couple of really important ways. First, values are a direction or a process rather than an outcome or endpoint. Therefore, in contrast to goals, which are future focused, values are all about the present moment, and the actions we can take right now, in this moment.

So, what does this mean exactly? Well, because values are a process, they cannot be achieved. You don't reach a point where the work in that area is finished. Consider the valued direction of being intimate in your relationships or taking care of your physical well being. You never reach a point where those things are done – where you can eat or drink whatever you want, go without sleep for days, etc., and not see any negative consequences. You'll never reach a point where a relationship does not need work or effort. These values just keep going and going and going, kind of like the energizer bunny. The work in these areas is never done, unlike goals which can be met.

In addition, values are something that you can do at any given moment at any point in time, starting this instant. With goals, the problem we run into is that you haven't reached them until you've reached them. There isn't a lot of room to acknowledge progress or movement forward. With values, however, the focus on process and the present-moment means that you can begin moving forward in valued directions now, and that this movement is what matters, regardless of outcome. So, consider again the value of taking care of your physical well being, versus the goal of losing 10 pounds. You can eat a healthy meal and exercise everyday whereas weight loss takes time.

And, you don't have to wait until you have accomplished other goals or reached other milestones to begin moving forward in valued directions. You don't have to wait until you are dating someone to begin connecting intimately with the people in your life. You can do that now. You would have to be dating someone before you can think about marriage, however (most of the time, at least!).

This idea of focusing on process as opposed to outcome is different from how most of us live our lives. We are trained in this society about achieving things, about outcome. A nice thing about living for the process is that it shifts our attention to the present moment – which is where our lives are lived.

[Ski metaphor here]: Suppose you go skiing. You take a lift to the top of a hill, and you are just about to ski down the hill when a man comes along and asks where you are going. "I'm going to the lodge at the bottom," you reply. He says, "I can help you with that," and promptly grabs you, throws you into a helicopter, flies you to the lodge, and then disappears. So you look around kind of dazed, take a lift to the top of the hill, and you are just about to ski down it when that same man grabs you, throws you into a helicopter, and flies you to the lodge. You'd be upset, no? Skiing is not just the goal of getting to the lodge, because any number of activities can accomplish that for us. Skiing is how we are going to get there. What is important is the process of getting there, not the outcome of getting to the bottom.

Values are about the process of going down the mountain as opposed to the outcome of getting to the bottom. They are the process of living our lives in the moment.

You can think of values as the glue that holds goals together. As an example, if the goal is to find a committed relationship, you need to meet people, begin dating, find the right person, have them agree you are the right person, etc. and this may not happen right away, and may, to some extent, be outside of our control. However, if the value beneath the goal of being in a committed relationship – the glue that holds goals like this together – is to be an open, relating person, you

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can call a family member or friend on the phone to talk today, you can stop by your co-worker's office and spend 5 minutes mindfully connecting with that person, etc. Values can never be permanently satisfied, achieved, or held like an object. We never reach being a loving person, like we reach Los Angeles. Goals can eventually be met through values, for example, you can eventually enter a committed relationship, but the outcome is not the same as the value itself (e.g., you can have an empty relationship).

Another nice thing about focusing on the process rather than the endpoint is that progress is no longer linear. Oftentimes when we have goals, we can look at these and say, "I am not doing well with this," or "I am not accomplishing this." The nice thing about values is that you cannot assess progress in this way. Think about it this way. Do any of you hike? Do any of you like hiking?

[Mountain metaphor here]: Let's say that we are all going on a hike together. The goal of the hike would be to get to the top of the mountain. Now, if you just focus on that goal, one thing we could do is have a helicopter come and airlift us up to the top. Just like the example of skiing, however, for people who enjoy or value hiking, this option would defeat the purpose – it is not about the endpoint of being at the top of the mountain as much as it is about the process of getting up the mountain. In fact, for many hikers, the process and experience would be just as positive if they never reached the top – if they hiked all day and then simply turned around and came down.

Another thing to consider here with regard to the measurement of progress though, is that if we approached hiking to the top of the mountain with our eye on linear progress toward the endpoint, one thing we may do is try to scale up the side of the mountain. We might think "Hey! The quickest and best way to reach the top is just to go straight up the side!" However, for those of you who have hiked, you probably know that this isn't the way it works. When you hike, you usually end up making your way up a mountain on paths that wind and bend all over. **[Draw this out on the board – illustrate a winding path up the side of a mountain.]** What this means, though, is that depending on where you are on the path, where you are in this process, you may not be able to see that you are heading in the right direction and that you are making progress. If we were to stop you at this point in the trail **[Make an X on the trail at a place where it appears to be heading back down the mountain; where the person would be facing downward or making downward progress.]** and ask how you are doing in getting up the mountain, you may believe that you are not doing well. You may think that you are not making progress because you seem, at that moment, to be headed downhill. However, that assessment is based on a linear understanding of progress, rather than an understanding focused on the bigger picture. From here, we can actually see that although it looks like you are heading downhill, you are actually continuing to make progress and move forward on this path up the mountain. We can see that you are doing exactly what you need to do at that moment to get where you want to go. You have to go back to go forward (although it may not always "feel" like you are moving in the right direction). **[Bring in the two mountain metaphor here – we are on our own mountains and someone on another mountain can give you a perspective that you don't have].**

What this also means is that because values are a direction or process, they are incredibly flexible and open up a multitude of possibilities. With values, there are an unlimited number of things you can do that are consistent with that value at any given point in time. There are endless possibilities and innumerable options. And this means that you don't have to put all your eggs in one basket – because it is a direction, you can take a number of different actions that move you in that general direction, rather than being stuck with one specific goal that needs to be done no matter what. And this is one reason why you can constantly be doing something in the moment to live a life consistent with your values.

Now, there are a couple of other things that I want us to keep in mind when we are thinking about valued directions.

➤ Values are constant

- Values are not chosen in the moment on the basis of reasons, or pros and cons
- Behaviors can be reasonable and still be ineffective

- Values can remain even if reasons change, or pros and cons change

[Gardening Metaphor]: *Imagine that you selected a spot to plant a garden. You worked the soil, planted the seeds, and waited for them to sprout. Meanwhile, you started noticing a spot just across the road, which also looked like a good spot—maybe even a better spot. So, you pulled up your vegetables and went across the street and planted another garden there. Then you noticed another spot that looked even better. Values are like a spot where you plant a garden. You can't find out how things work in gardens when you have to pull up stakes again and again. Of course, if you stay in the same spot, you'll start to notice its imperfections. Maybe the ground isn't quite as level as it looked when you started, or perhaps the water has to be carried for quite a distance. Some things you plant may seem to take forever to come up. It is at times like this that your mind will tell you, "You should have planted elsewhere," "This will probably never work," "It was stupid of you to think you could grow anything here," and so on. The choice to garden here allows you to water and weed and hoe, even when these thoughts and feelings show up. In fact, you can grow some things in gardens very quickly, but others require time and dedication. The question is, "Do you want to live on lettuce, or do you want to live on something more substantial—potatoes, beets, and the like?"*

- Values can remain even if reasons no longer remain

- Values help us choose among options, choose the direction of our lives

- Every action we take leads us in a certain direction

[Examples: Ripples in pond metaphor, metaphor of traveling back in time and stepping on one small leaf in the forest – everything from that moment in time changes completely and the world is completely different (see also, recent movie “Butterfly effect”)]

First, values are important because they can guide our choices, and provide a direction for our lives and actions. Values are the things that matter to us – personally – and, as such, they are the things we can use to guide the choices we make each moment of the day. When we act in accordance with our values, we are much more likely to move forward in our lives in ways that are meaningful to us, rather than being at the whim of our impulses, moods, or desire to avoid emotions. Many people make choices in their lives based on the desire to avoid emotional pain, and although that is perfectly understandable and human, this can mean that they aren't really moving forward in their lives in any meaningful or coherent way. It's like this saying on your handout “If we don't decide where we are going, we're bound to end up where we are headed.” Values give us a direction and guide our choices so we are no longer pinballs in our lives, reacting to things, rather than acting in ways that matter to us that move us forward. Therefore, we can think of values as something that can guide our choices in each moment and move us forward in a direction that matters to us.

That said, because values are the things that matter to us, they are, ultimately, a personal choice. First, this means that values are your own. They don't belong to anyone else, and they are not about anyone else. They are about what you want to do with your life and what is meaningful to you, rather than what other people think you should be doing. And this means that values are not right or wrong – they are simply personal choices each of us makes about the directions we want to take in our lives. Second, this means that values are different from and bigger than something like pros and cons or “reasons”. They are not something we decide in the moment on the basis of a logical assessment of pros and cons. Behaviors can be rational or logical and still not be effective. What makes something effective is that it is consistent with our values and what matters to us. And this can mean that sometimes we will do things that are not “logical” or “rational” because they are consistent with our values and, therefore, are the most effective choice for us in that moment. Values often provide a better guide for how to act or the choices to make than simple lists of pros and cons.

For example, have you ever written out a list of pros and cons and then chosen the side with fewer pros, just because it seemed like the “right” choice for you? This may have been a time when you made a choice consistent with a valued direction. Sometimes values tell us internally that this something we need to do (despite the number of cons we come up with). The same thing goes for “reasons.” We may have 100 reasons not to do something and only one reason to do it, and still make the choice to do it because it is consistent with our values. Take coming to group for instance. When the alarm goes off in the morning and you are tired or cold or feel sick, there are probably a ton of reasons not to come to group. Today, though, for you here in this room, the reason (and perhaps the sole “pro”) that this group is helpful to your recovery or consistent with a valued direction of taking care of yourself mentally, was enough to get you to choose to come to group. [Another example: there may be a long list of reasons to engage in an impulsive behavior and only a few reasons not to engage in this behavior... however, these reasons are not weighted the same, and even 1 reason vs. 1000 can be enough to choose not to do something impulsive.] In the end, just the one or two pros for this decision outweighed the numerous cons of coming here because values are bigger than simple reasons present in the moment.

And, the nice thing about this is that it means that values have a constancy and stability – which is something that reasons do not have. Reasons can change moment to moment; they can be there in one moment and gone in the next. And this means that if we used reasons to guide our behaviors, then our behaviors would also have to change moment to moment. We would basically find ourselves bouncing around all over the place in our lives. If something is going to guide our actions – if we are going to use something to guide our choices – wouldn't it make sense to choose something that is relatively stable and constant? Something that doesn't disappear just because the reasons for something disappear, or no longer remain in this moment? For example, let's consider the choice to take a challenging class. What are the reasons someone might give for taking this class? Because the material is interesting? Because it makes you feel good about yourself to be in this class? Because it is enjoyable, and a good break from the rest of your life, and provides the chance to interact with people you like? Okay, all very good reasons. However, what happens at those times when all of those reasons disappear? When they are no longer true? Times when you are stressed, overwhelmed, bored, miserable, and the person you like the most has dropped out of the class? In those times, when those reasons aren't there, does that mean that you should drop the class? Of course not. There are going to be times all of those reasons for being in the class are not there, and yet the most effective behavior is to remain in the class. To continue to pursue it. And that is because it is not about reasons, it is about values – values of seeking new knowledge, challenging oneself, expanding one's mind, learning new skills, etc. And

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that is what we can use to guide our choice in that moment. We can continue to move forward even if the reasons change or disappear. Otherwise, we are like pinballs bouncing around in our lives at the whim of reasons that – face it – can be very fickle!

As another example, think about all of the reasons you stay in a relationship with your partner, or your best friend. Think of every reason you can. I am sure you can come up with quite a few. This person loves me, and is good to me, and makes me happy, and takes care of me, and listens to me, and is fun to be around, and encourages me, and makes my life better. The problem, though, is that relationships are never perfect. It doesn't matter how good the relationship is, or how wonderful the person is for you, relationships are challenging and they all can have problems. And this means that there are definitely moments when those reasons are not true. At certain times, when that person is being a pain, or in a bad mood, or says something to upset you – in those moments, all of those reasons you gave will fly out the window. However, does that mean that we should therefore end the relationship on the spot? The reasons aren't there anymore, so let me just get out of this relationship? Of course not. Simply because there are moments when things are difficult does not mean that the right choice, or the effective choice, is to end the relationship immediately. And that means that basing our behaviors solely on reasons can leave us without a solid, consistent, stable guide. It can leave us at the whim of these reasons and may interfere with moving forward in a meaningful way in our lives.

Values, on the other hand, can serve as a constant guide for our behaviors even when reasons have changed or disappeared. I can continue to act in a certain way even if the reasons I gave do not exist in this moment. I can continue to be caring and fair even if the reasons shift or disappear. There is a constancy in values that can be quite grounding.

- Values are defined by actions, not feelings
 - You don't have to always feel like you want to do something in order to do it
 - You can feel like you don't want to go to the dentist, and still go
 - You can feel annoyed with your partner and act lovingly

Now, other important thing to note about values – especially in the context of emotion regulation – is that values are defined by actions, rather than feelings. We don't have to feel a certain way in order to act in a way that is consistent with our values. For example, we can feel annoyed with our children, and still act in a loving way. We can feel like you we don't want to go to the dentist or come to group, and still go anyhow. Basically, values can provide a more consistent, stable guide for our behaviors and choices in any given moment than our emotions in that moment. Our emotions are valid, they provide information, but as we discussed in some of the earlier groups, it is not always effective to express the full extent of those emotions, or to react to them or act on them without thinking it through. So even though the emotions we have in any given situation are always valid and certainly provide us with important information, acting on these emotions (particularly those that are cloudy) will not always be the most effective choice. Therefore, we can use valued directions to guide our behaviors, rather than simply acting on or reacting to any strong emotion we have. The goal is to balance what information our emotions are providing with the behaviors consistent with our values. So, even when we are annoyed with our children, which could be providing information that they are getting in the way of us doing something we want or need to do, or that we need some time for ourselves, what we can do in that moment is balance acting on the information being provided by the emotion (e.g., going to another room; asking your children to keep their voices down; taking a break from the situation to get some quiet) with acting in a way consistent with our values (e.g., not screaming at them to settle down or reacting angrily toward them or taking our frustration out on them, but instead asking them kindly and lovingly to

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keep their voices down or kissing them on the head as you leave the room to get some peace and quiet). In general, we will always be most effective if we choose how to act on the information being provided by our emotions in a way that is consistent with our values.

- Values are important
 - Values give our lives meaning
 - Values give us a direction in our lives; they give us something to move toward (rather than away from)

Finally, I think it is particularly important in the context of this group to touch upon the fact that emotional suffering – chronic persistent suffering – can be a sign that we are not living our lives in a way consistent with our values. When we are not moving forward in our lives in ways that are meaningful to us, we can definitely start to experience persistent depression, dysphoria, loneliness, or even anger. So, beginning to act in ways consistent with our values can actually help us feel better and can definitely reduce our emotional suffering. In addition, living a life that is meaningful can help us tolerate the times when there is emotional pain in our lives. It can help us be more accepting of negative emotions, because it puts us in contact with positive emotions as well.

[Note: Throughout this discussion, be sure to emphasize process rather than outcome, as well as the role of choice...Also, introduce the concept of “valuing valuing,” noting that clients are not expected to know or identify their values immediately, but to work toward discovering these.]

Homework for Week 11

So, as we have discussed, values are a process. And my guess is that thinking about values in this way and focusing on the process, etc., is quite different from things you have thought about or focused on in the past. My guess is this is quite new to you, and a very different way of thinking about this stuff. So, just as values are a process, getting in touch with them is also a process. It is not something you are supposed to get right away, and it is certainly not something you are supposed to be aware of right now or able to list off the top of your head. Getting in touch with and identifying your valued directions is a process in and of itself. Therefore, this week, I want you to begin the process of discovering what some of your valued directions might be.

- Begin to identify valued directions in different domains
 - Complete “Values Assignment 1” homework sheet

Remember that consistent with our focus on values as a process, rather than an outcome, success is defined as whether you have lived your life according to your values in this domain, whether you have been moving toward the values in this domain, whether you are taking steps related to your values within this domain, rather than whether you have achieved particular outcomes. So, someone whose value in the domain of work is teaching others could get a high success score in the domain of work even if they do not have a job right now because they are going out and doing things related to teaching such as tutoring kids, volunteering with Big Brothers/Big Sisters, or teaching their child how to do math, whereas someone who was a CEO of a company may get a low score for success because even though they have achieved a lofty outcome, that outcome is not consistent with their values. Make sense?

- Complete “Values Assignment 2” homework sheet

For this assignment, make sure to do it in the next couple of days, as this can be a useful way to begin to identify your valued directions. It is a free writing exercise, so there really is no right or wrong way to do it. The only requirement is to make sure you keep writing for at least 20 minutes, even if during the first several minutes you are simply writing “I am not sure why I am doing this. This is strange. I don’t know what to write. etc.” If you continue to persist, folks generally find that they are able to get some thoughts out on paper and gain some insight. So, focus on one or more of those bullets and just give yourself 20 minutes to write.

- Complete “Values Assignment 3” homework sheet

- Continue to monitor urges to self-harm and the feelings associated with these urges; continue to monitor willingness to experience these emotions; continue to focus on the impulse control strategies used to resist urges to engage in self-harm or other impulsive behaviors

Outline for Week 12

I. Review homework from Week 11

- Have clients discuss the process of beginning to identify their values, what values they discovered, etc. Guide them in a discussion of what it is like to shift from a focus on goals to a focus on values.
- Focus group discussion on clarifying valued directions
 - Distinguish between values and goals
 - Continue to clarify and refine identified valued directions

Let's start today by discussing what the process of focusing on values was like for you this week. What was it like to think about your valued directions? What came up for you in the writing assignment? What values did you begin to identify? [Go around the room and write out each client's identified valued directions on the board. Make sure to identify two-three solid values for each group member. As you are writing these on the board, make sure to distinguish between values and goals].

II. Introduce the concept of valued action, and provide examples of ways to translate valued directions into specific, doable actions.

- Emphasize the importance of every action taken throughout the day, every choice made over the course of the day

Okay, now that we have some idea of your valued directions, let's move on to the next step. At this point, I'd like each of you to choose two values from your list. Pick the ones that are most meaningful right now and seem most central to you. Let me know when you have two in your mind. Great. Now that you have figured out the two values you are going to focus on today, the next step is figuring out the multitude of ways in which you can act on these values – the number of different things you can do to move forward in these valued directions. As we discussed last week, one benefit of values is that they are not focused on one particular endpoint or goal. And that means that there are millions of different ways we can act consistent with each valued direction. As I mentioned last week, valued directions are just that – a direction – and this means that you can move in that general direction by doing a number of different things. And this provides a lot more flexibility than goals, where you can only succeed by doing the one thing you set out to do.

With value directions, there are a number of different things you can do that are consistent with these directions, and you can start doing them this second. You don't have to wait for other things to fall in place or change in your life.

So, what I want us to do right now is brainstorm all kinds of different ways of acting consistent with these values at any given second in our life. I want us to think of as many different actions as we can. And I really want us to focus on things we can do right now, in the moment. Actions that could be taken at any time, in any moment, that are consistent with these values.

Now, one thing to keep an eye out for during this discussion is the tendency we can have to downplay or minimize small actions. Lots of times, people try to come up with large goals (goals that take multiple steps), and they tend to minimize or discredit small actions that can be taken in the moment. However, this is a sign that we are falling back into a focus on goals, and it is generally related to perfectionism (the idea that this isn't good enough). Remember – small things count. Anything and everything we can do in the moment counts. Remember that every action we take heads us down a particular path, and the small things we do really add up over time. [For each person, identify behaviors they can engage in that are consistent with their values.]

[Note: Make sure to remain vigilant for and actively target any signs of a perfectionistic, judgmental, or goal-oriented stance. Clients may be initially inclined to ignore, minimize, or belittle valued actions that are judged too small or simple. Throughout the discussion, emphasize the importance of *all* actions, and continually bring clients' attention back to the importance of moment to moment actions and present-moment choices (as our lives are lived in the present-moment). Focus on process, rather than outcome, and continually reference and reinforce the metaphors of "ripples in the pond" and "the butterfly effect."]

This week, I want you to start being more mindful of your values and how you can act in a way consistent with them at any given moment. Be open to the process of acting in these ways.

Homework for Week 12

- Choose doable actions consistent with valued directions (complete "Values Assignment 4" homework sheet)
- Monitor efforts to engage in valued actions on a daily basis, as well as barriers to valued actions encountered during the week (complete "Values Assignment 5" homework sheet)
- Continue to monitor urges to self-harm and the feelings associated with these urges; continue to monitor willingness to experience these emotions; continue to focus on the impulse control strategies used to resist urges to engage in self-harm or other impulsive behaviors

The goal for this week then is to begin to do this on a daily basis. This is not about stressing yourself out. Valued actions can be small! And, you can do it at any given point in time. Incorporate these actions into your life.

[Note: Remember to validate the fact that values represent intent and that we are never 100% compliant. Valued living is a process similar to mindfulness.]

For Group Leader: Points to keep in mind when discussing Values assignments from Week 11:

- Are clients considering both sides of interpersonal issues (how they want others to be and how they want to be)? Gently discuss the interactive nature of relationships. When they talk about the difficulties related to a friend, co-worker, etc., ask about how they would like to relate to that person given these difficulties – look for areas where choices may be overlooked.
- Are clients expecting perfection from themselves or others? Validate the desire for perfection. (*Of course, you want to be able to be there for your husband whenever he needs you*). Relate this to how difficult it is to be human – to have limits – to have emotional reactions.
- See if you can begin to differentiate values and goals in your discussion of this homework. Don't disregard goals, but see if you can attach each goal to a value. Also be aware of the fact that clients often confuse values and goals (e.g., I want to get my PhD). Work with the client to get at the value beneath each of these goals (e.g., I want to study things that I am interested in and care about such as clinical psychology).
- If the client couldn't address what they really wanted in any or all the domains, discuss what got in the way, assist the client in identifying at least two valued directions, and reassess the rest of the assignment for the following week. For instance, some clients may suggest that they don't have control in these domains and thus they can't even imagine wanting something different. Make room for this hopelessness (i.e., validate it and don't rush to challenge it) AND yet see if

they are willing to let go of the rope a bit and try to imagine a possibility that they don't feel or believe. Let them know that you realize that asking them to do so seems invalidating (as if you don't understand how stuck they are), and yet you are hoping they may be WILLING to take this leap of faith.

- If the client puts forth values that you believe are driven by avoidance, gently make room for that possibility. For instance, a client may state that they would like to be somewhat private in relationships to save themselves from getting hurt or to keep the other person from knowing the real person inside. See if the client can expand some from that position if anxiety, self-doubt, sadness etc could be magically removed. In other words, if they didn't feel compelled to avoid internal experiences (and external experiences guaranteed to bring up difficult internal experiences) would their values shift? Try and get a sense of their values separate from their value to avoid suffering. Don't invalidate that value; just see at this point if you can add to it.
- If the client values attaining certain emotional experiences (happiness, calmness) or internal states (confidence, self-esteem), validate that desire. Make room for that as a human desire and relate it to willingness and unwillingness. See if the client can talk about how they might behave if they achieved that internal state, and then use that to help identify valued directions.
- Sometimes it can be helpful to talk a bit about what self-confidence is and isn't. Self-confidence is often thought of as a state in which the individual has no self-doubt, fear, or negative self-evaluations. However, it is probably more accurate to think of self-confidence as trusting or having faith in oneself, even in the face of fear. So we can feel uncertain, doubtful, frightened, and still act in ways that demonstrate self-confidence or faith. This is similar to courage, which entails acting while one is scared, not acting without fear.
- It is important to remember that it is challenging (and actually impossible) to take actions that are consistent with all of one's values. You may introduce the notion of balance here – we cannot be acting consistently with our values in each domain at each moment; we will often choose one value over another (e.g., I am going to play with my children although I have work to do and value sticking to my work commitments) in a moment. However, we can stay mindful of all domains and be sure that over a period of time, all of our values are attended to. (For clients who do yoga, you might use the metaphor of balance postures – you can't work both sides of your body at the same time, and often feel a bit out of balance when you've worked one and not the other. However, you can focus all of your attention on one side, and then subsequently focus all of your attention on the other side, and you will then have achieved balance.) Often our desire to balance multiple demands and values leaves us feeling unable to act in any direction, when, in fact, we can act fully in one direction and then subsequently in another direction and this is more likely to be satisfying than staying still.

VALUED DIRECTIONS

“If we don’t decide where we are going, we’re bound to end up where we are headed.”
Chinese Saying

What are values?

Values are different from goals

- A goal is an outcome (get your degree, get into a committed relationship)
 - Although goals are helpful, they keep us focused on the future and suggest that where we are in this moment is not good enough
- A value is a process (learning, being supportive, being loving toward others)
 - Values are the glue between goals
 - We can act in accordance with values all the time, in every moment

Values are constant

- Values are not chosen in the moment on the basis of reasons, or pros and cons
 - Behaviors can be “reasonable” and still be ineffective
 - Have you ever made a choice in opposition to a list containing pros and cons?
- Values can remain even if reasons change, or disappear entirely in a moment
- Values help us choose among options, choose the direction of our lives
 - Every choice we make and action we take leads us in a certain direction

Values are defined by actions, not feelings

- You don’t have to feel like you want to do something in order to do it
 - You can feel like you don’t want to go to the dentist, and still go
 - You can feel annoyed with your partner and act lovingly

Why are values important?

- Values give our lives meaning
- Values give us a direction in our lives; they give us something to move toward (rather than away from)
- Chosen values provide a more solid compass reading

Values Assignment 1

Below are nine areas of life that people often consider important and want to be successful in. Please rate each area on the following scales:

- Rate their importance on a scale of 1 – 10, with 1 being high importance and 10 being low importance
- Rate them again in terms of how successfully you have lived this value over the last month, with 1 being very successfully and 10 being not at all successfully

Domain	Importance	Success
Couples/ Intimate Relations		
Family Relations		
Social Relations		
Employment		
Education/ training		
Spirituality		
Health/Physical Well-being		
Recreation		
Citizenship		

Values Assignment 2

Please set aside 20 minutes during which you can privately and comfortably do this writing assignment. In your writing, please let yourself go, and really explore your deepest emotions and thoughts about the topics listed below. As you write, try to allow yourself to experience your thoughts and feelings as completely as you are able. This work is based on evidence that pushing these disturbing thoughts away can actually make them worse; so try to really let yourself go.

Please write about any or all of the following topics. If you choose to write on only one of the topics for 20 minutes, that is fine. You may write about them in any order you wish. If you cannot think about what to write next, just write the same thing over and over until something new comes to you. Be sure to write for the entire 20 minutes. Please do not spend any time worrying about spelling, punctuation, or grammar – this writing is intended to be “stream of consciousness” (i.e., you may write whatever comes to mind).

- If you could let go of all the obstacles that are in your life right now (e.g., being too busy, being anxious, depressed, or stressed out, feeling unmotivated, etc.) what kinds of things would you want to spend your time doing?

For instance, would you work on developing or deepening relationships? Do you have career, educational, or volunteerism goals you want to focus on? Are there some leisure activities that you want to develop? Do you want to pursue some spiritual goals?

Try to pick one or two things that really matter to you – **not** things that your parents, friends, or therapist might want you to pick.

- Express your thoughts and feelings about why those things are so important to you.
- Write about what you think is getting in the way of you doing the things that are most important to you.
- Write about how it feels to not be working on the things that matter most to you in your life.

Values Assignment 3

This assignment is a first step toward identifying the valued directions you would like to take in your life. Values are not necessarily the same as goals. Often, goals reflect an endpoint (I want to be married) whereas values (having an intimate trusting relationship) cannot be fully satisfied, permanently achieved, or held like an object. Instead, values direct an ongoing process (e.g., you take actions toward developing and maintaining intimate relationships before, during, and after getting married). Thus, values are not static achievements; they must be continually sought on a day by day basis. In a way, values are road maps that may create a sense of meaning and direction in one's life.

Often, people who are in a great deal of distress become "out of contact" with their values. When this occurs, even thinking about what your values are can be a difficult and painful process. However, it seems to be the case that every day we live, whether we think about our valued directions or not, we make a series of habitual choices that move us in some direction. The goal of this exercise is to help you to become aware of the choices that you are currently making and how they fit with your valued directions in life.

On this worksheet you will find some areas of life that are valued by some people. Not everyone has the same values and this worksheet is not a test to see if you have the "correct" values. Describe your values as if no one will ever read this worksheet. You may not have valued directions in certain areas, so feel free to skip these. It is also important that you write down what you would value if there was nothing in your way. We are not asking what you could realistically get, or what you or others think you deserve. We want to know what you care about, what you would want to work toward in the best of all situations. While completing this worksheet, imagine that anything is possible.

1. *Marriage/couples/intimate relations.* Write down a description of the person that you would like to be in an intimate relationship. Write down the type of relationship you would want to have. Try to focus on your role in that relationship.
2. *Family relations.* In this section, describe the type of sibling/child/parent you want to be. Describe how you would treat your family members if you were the "ideal you" in these various relationships.
3. *Friendship/ social relations.* In this section, write down what it means to you to be a good friend. If you were able to be the best friend possible, how would you behave toward your friends? Try to describe your role in an ideal relationship.
4. *Career/ Employment.* Describe the type of work you would like to do. This can be very specific or general. Remember this is in the context of an ideal world. After writing about the type of work you would like to do, write about why it appeals to you. Next discuss what kind of worker you would like to be with respect to your boss and co-workers.
5. *Education/ personal growth and development.* If you would like to pursue education, formally or informally, or pursue some specialized training, write about that.
6. *Spirituality.* We are not necessarily referring to organized religion in this section. What we mean by spirituality is what that means to you. This may be as simple as communing with nature, or as formal as participating in an organized religion. If this is an important part of your life, write about what you would want it to consist of. As with the other sections, if it is not important, skip it.

7. *Health/ Physical well being/ Emotional well being.* In this section, include your values related to maintaining your physical and emotional well-being. Write about your health related issues such as sleep, diet, exercise, smoking, and so on, as well as mental health related issues such as therapy.
8. *Recreation/Leisure.* Describe the kind of recreational life you would like to have, including hobbies, sports, leisure activities, and fun.
9. *Citizenship.* For some people, participating in community affairs is an important part of life. For instance, some people believe it is important to volunteer with the homeless or elderly, to lobby governmental policymakers at the state, federal, or local levels, to participate in a group that is committed to conserving wildlife, or to participate in the service structure of a self-help group like AA. If community activities are important to you, write about the direction you would like to take in this area. Write about what appeals to you in this area.

Keep in mind that the valued directions you initially identify may be heavily influenced by others – society, your culture, and your parents. You will likely think about the reaction of your therapist to your identified values. That is a very human response! However, do your best to identify what you truly would like your life to stand for, separate from others' expectations of you.

Domain **Value**

Couples/ Intimate Relations	
Family Relations	
Friendship/ Social Relations	
Career/ Employment	
Education/ Training	
Spirituality	
Health/ Physical Well-being/ Emotional Well-being	
Recreation	
Citizenship	

Week 11: Homework monitoring form

Self-Harm Monitoring Form V

	Urge to self-harm (0-100)	If no urges, what were the protective factors?	If urges were present, what feelings preceded the urge(s)?	Willingness to experience these feelings (0-100)	Did you engage in self-harm? (circle one)	If no, what impulse control strategies did you use to resist your urges?	If yes, what did you do? Then, what did you do to modify the consequences?	Consequences of the behavior (+ and -)
Monday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Tuesday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Wednesday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Thursday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Friday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Saturday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Sunday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		

Values Assignment 4

Moving in Valued Directions

Please choose two values to focus on for the next week:

Value 1: _____

Value 2: _____

Next, develop some “doable” actions that you can engage in this week that are consistent with these valued directions in life. Please list at least 5 actions per value.

Value:	Actions
	1) 2) 3) 4) 5)

Value:	Actions
	1) 2) 3) 4) 5)

Values Assignment 5

(Please refer to Values Assignment 4 to help you structure this assignment.) Please indicate one of the values you have chosen to focus on this week. Next, reflect on the steps you took during the day that were consistent with this value by completing the following monitoring form.

On this form, please indicate what you did (if anything) that was consistent with this valued direction.

- If you did act in a way consistent with this value, please indicate whether you experienced any emotions in response to engaging in this action. For instance, some people find that acting in a way consistent with a valued direction may be associated with some anxiety (one of the reasons why we may sometimes not act in valued ways). On the other hand, moving in a valued direction may also result in feelings of pride, joy, or excitement.
 - If you did not act in a way consistent with this value, please reflect on what stopped you from doing so. In particular, did some type of emotional response interfere with your acting in a way consistent with this valued direction? For instance, did anxiety about engaging in the behavior cause you to avoid it?

*** Chosen value:**

Week 12: Homework monitoring form

Self-Harm Monitoring Form V

	Urge to self-harm (0-100)	If no urges, what were the protective factors?	If urges were present, what feelings preceded the urge(s)?	Willingness to experience these feelings (0-100)	Did you engage in self-harm? (circle one)	If no, what impulse control strategies did you use to resist your urges?	If yes, what did you do? Then, what did you do to modify the consequences?	Consequences of the behavior (+ and -)
Monday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Tuesday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Wednesday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Thursday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Friday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Saturday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Sunday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		

Weeks 13-14:

Barriers to Valued Actions and Commitment to Valued Actions

Outline for Week 13

I. Review “Values Assignment 4” and “Values Assignment 5” homework sheets

- Have clients share their chosen valued directions and the doable actions they identified that are consistent with these values
- Continue to assist clients in identifying doable actions, focusing on examples of simple, small actions that can be taken in a moment
- Review efforts to engage in valued actions during the past week
- Identify barriers to valued actions that clients encountered during the week

Over the past couple of weeks, we have been focusing on identifying valued directions – the things in life that matter to you, the directions you want to be heading in, the things you want to be moving toward. And this past week we focused on translating those valued directions into doable actions – things we can do at any moment, every single day. So, the homework for this week was just that.

How did folks do incorporating these doable valued actions into your everyday lives? Did you find that you were able to engage in these valued actions? If so, how did it go? What were the consequences of engaging in these actions? If not, what got in the way? Did you encounter barriers to engaging in these valued actions? Oftentimes, we find that folks notice both of these things as they go about their week – i.e., there are times when they do engage in valued actions and notice positive consequences as a result, and there are other times when barriers get in the way and interfere with these actions. And that makes sense – there are definitely going to be barriers. If there weren’t, then you would probably all be engaging in these valued actions already! Barriers are an unavoidable part of doing this work.

That said, the times you did engage in valued actions, how did it go? [Go through each client’s homework. Make sure to ask about the consequences of engaging in valued actions, as well as the barriers to valued actions noted the past week.]

Discussion point: One thing you may have noticed when doing the homework this week is that emotions play a big role in valued actions. First, as we begin to engage in valued actions, we may experience some emotions that are uncomfortable, such as anxiety because often the things that matter to us in life can be anxiety-provoking (in part because they matter so much), or frustration or shame because we didn’t start this process earlier and haven’t been engaging in our valued actions already (e.g., “I can’t believe I haven’t done this earlier!”). And, in fact, it is these kinds of emotions as we approach a valued action that often get in the way of our doing these actions. If it was always easy and fun to engage in valued actions, you would all probably be doing them already and not need this group! That said, as much as we may encounter some negative emotions as we approach our valued actions, when we actually engage in valued actions, we usually experience some positive emotions as a result. So, when we talk about what this process was like for you, consider all of the emotions you experienced before the action and afterward, both positive and negative.

[Note: Make sure to discuss and validate the fact that engaging in valued actions can (and likely will) result in heightened distress because they matter. It is important to recognize this because if you give people a choice, they are wired to choose the easiest, least stressful path; however, this often takes us farther away from our values.]

[Note: Throughout this discussion, remember to validate the fact that values represent intent and that we are never 100% compliant. Valued living is a process similar to mindfulness.]

II. Discuss “Barriers to Valued Actions” handout

- Discuss possible barriers to valued actions, distinguishing between external and internal
- Identify solutions to barriers, emphasizing that the solution will differ depending on the type of barrier experienced (i.e., external vs. internal)
- Focus the discussion most directly on ways of managing internal barriers
 - Reintroduce the concept of willingness, and emphasize the necessity of willingness for valued action
 - Emphasize again the fact that willingness is not about pain for pain sake; rather, it is about pursuing those things in life that matter to us and not allowing internal experiences (or attempts to avoid internal experiences) to interfere with these valued actions
 - Introduce the concept of commitment

Now, as we discussed before, there are times when things do get in the way of valued actions. This is common and can be expected. So, what were some barriers that you encountered this week? What were the sorts of things that seemed to get in the way of engaging in valued actions? [Write these out on the board.] These are exactly the types of barriers that I would have expected to see, which brings us to what we are going to be talking about today.

As we've said many times throughout this group, if this stuff was easy, you would be doing it already. You wouldn't need this group! As you know, though, this stuff is not easy at all. As much as they are important and as much as they matter, engaging in valued actions is not an easy thing. Instead, we often encounter barriers to valued actions, which can feel incredibly overwhelming.

Now, in general, we can think about barriers falling into one of two categories, and the things you mentioned that you encountered this week fit well within this framework. First, we have external barriers. These are the barriers that exist outside of us. They are situational, interpersonal, environmental – basically, something in our outside life. We can have all kinds of plans for how we are going to move forward in a valued way; however, things come up in life that may get in the way (e.g., money, transportation, other people, time, etc.). Life happens sometimes, and even the best intentions and strongest commitment to engage in valued actions can be thwarted. Things in life can just get in the way. For example, let's say that you planned to engage in a valued action related to having a close connection with others, and so made dinner plans with your friend. And, at the last minute, your friend called to say her child was sick and so she could not make it. That is an external barrier – something outside of your control that just happened. Or, let's say you plan to engage in actions related to a valued direction of taking care of yourself physically by joining a gym. However, when you look into it, you realize that it is far more expensive than you can afford. These are all external barriers. And, when it comes to external barriers, the goal is to problem solve ways of overcoming these barriers and getting beyond them. Basically, when you run into an external barrier, the best way to proceed is to break it down into smaller steps until you can get around it.

For example, one of the first clients in this group was working toward the valued direction of taking care of herself physically, and one valued action consistent with that valued direction was to eat healthier food. Now, one action she planned to take consistent with that value was to go to Whole Foods (kind of like Fresh Market) and buy all kinds of healthy food. So, she went to the store, was feeling really proud of herself for doing so, was excited that she was doing this, and then suddenly realized that the food there was ridiculously expensive. And this expense was a huge external barrier. She was ready to do this action, but she just couldn't afford it. So, since this was an external barrier, she problem-solved, and brainstormed, and broke it down into smaller steps. For example, she explored other options for finding healthy food at a more reasonable price, by going to health foods section of the local chain grocery store

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(which is cheaper than a place like Whole Foods) or buying in bulk, and she problem-solved ways of modifying some of her healthy recipes to omit the more exotic and expensive ingredients. In addition, she broke down the barrier into smaller steps by deciding to take on an additional babysitting shift. Now, this is something she was already doing, but she decided that by taking an additional shift one night a week, she could earn some extra money to put toward buying healthier food. So, in this case, the action of babysitting was not about babysitting per se, but was in the service of her valued action of eating healthy. For barriers, you take what is in the way, and try to approach it in a different way or a way to overcome it.

[Choose one of the external barriers that clients identified earlier, and discuss ways of addressing and problem-solving that barrier. Emphasize brainstorming and problem-solving. Also make sure to emphasize that even actions that do not appear, on the surface, to be consistent with a valued direction, make in fact be in the service of this value if these actions address a barrier.]

Now, the other type of barrier is an internal barrier. And, these are the ones that are most common. External barriers may or may not be present, but internal barriers often are. Internal barriers are just that – internal experiences like thoughts, emotions, etc. – that get in the way of engaging in valued actions. These may be negative emotions like anxiety, shame, fear, doubt, or hopelessness, or negative thoughts like “This won’t work,” “I can’t do this,” or “Things will never change.” These internal barriers are incredibly important because they can feel so big and overwhelming that they seem insurmountable. And these are often the barriers that keep us from moving forward in valued ways and doing the things we want to do.

So, how do you manage those internal barriers? I would argue that the way to manage them is through emotional willingness. As we have discussed in the past, we can’t directly change or get rid of our internal experiences; when we are having these thoughts or emotions, we are having them. And, as I mentioned at the start of this group, negative emotions are often a sign that we are doing things that are meaningful to us. So, given that we can’t directly (or immediately) change these internal barriers, and yet they pose a barrier to doing the things in life that matter to us, the question is this: Do we allow these emotions and thoughts to get in the way and keep us from doing the things that are important to us, or do we decide that we are going to do these actions WITH whatever internal experiences we have? We don’t have to wait until these internal barriers are not there in order to do the things that matter to us. Instead, we can carry these emotions and thoughts with us as we engage in our valued actions. We can have these emotions and thoughts AND still do the behavior. One saying from the treatment ACT that I have always liked and found to be useful (and descriptive) is “put the emotions and thoughts in your pocket and take them with you.” Basically, can you have these emotions and thoughts and simply move forward with them? You don’t have to get rid of them in order to move forward; you can simply put them in your pocket and move forward with them. And, as silly as this may sound, if you are struggling with this, it can actually be helpful to write out the emotions and thoughts that are getting in the way and then put that piece of paper in your pocket.

Bottom line is that it is possible to do the things in life that matter to us without changing our emotions first. [Discuss experiences clients have had doing this. For example, going to the doctor despite anxiety, giving a speech in class despite fear or discomfort. You can also use of the examples that came up during the homework review (where someone did something despite anxiety or another negative emotion)]. And this brings us back to something that we talked about a few weeks ago: willingness. Willingness is the key to moving forward in our lives WITH our emotions, and it is one the things that makes valued actions possible.

[Bubble in the road metaphor here]: *Imagine that you are a soap bubble. Have you ever seen how a big soap bubble can touch smaller ones and the little ones are simply absorbed into the bigger one? Well, imagine that you are a soap bubble like that and you are moving along a path you have chosen. Suddenly, another bubble appears in front of you and says, "Stop!" You float there for a few moments. When you move to get around, over, or under that bubble, it moves just as quickly to block your path. Now you have only two choices. You can stop moving in your valued direction, or you can touch the other soap bubble and continue on with it inside you. The second move is what we mean by "willingness." Your barriers are largely feelings, thoughts, memories, and the like. They are really inside you, but they seem to be outside. Willingness is not a feeling or a thought—it is an action that answers the question the barrier asks: "Will you have me inside you by choice, or will you not?" In order for you to take a valued direction and stick to it, you must answer yes, but only you can choose that answer.*

Now, if you remember from when we first talked about willingness, willingness is not about wanting to feel bad, or wallowing in negative feelings, or pain for pain's sake. Instead, willingness is about accepting and moving forward with whatever feelings and thoughts appear as you make your way through life. And it is precisely because these painful thoughts and feelings often appear when we are doing things that matter to us, or moving forward in valued directions, that willingness and valued directions are so closely tied.

It is precisely because being unwilling to have negative emotions (or actively avoiding certain emotions) can interfere with our lives and get in the way of valued actions that willingness is so important. We are not asking you to seek out pain for pain's sake or to want to feel negative emotions – we are asking you to be willing to have them so that you can do the things that matter to you in your life and move forward in valued directions.

[Swamp metaphor here]: *It's as if we are standing on the bank of a nasty foul swamp filled with leeches, and bugs, with really dark, murky, foul-smelling water. However, on the other side of that swamp are all the things that matter most to us in our lives – the place we most want to get to in our lives. And, this swamp goes on forever from side to side, so there is no way to drive around it to get to the other side. However, as much as it is foul and disgusting, the swamp is actually not that deep – it only goes up to about our chins – and there is nothing in it that can actually harm us. It is gross and disgusting, but we can walk through it if we need to. Now, would I suggest that we go walk through this swamp just for the heck of it? That we go play in this swamp just because we can? Of course not. If there was nothing on the other side that mattered to us, it would be kind of foolish to get into the swamp. However, given that all of the things that matter to us are on the other side of the swamp, then it does make sense to walk through the swamp. It may be unpleasant, but it will certainly not kill us, and it will definitely be worth it in the end to get to the other side. If the things that matter to you are on the other side, why not walk through the swamp? It seems to me like it is worth it to get what you want out of life. And this is willingness.*

Of course, the nice thing is that if you do put those internal barriers in your pocket and engage in the valued action WITH whatever emotions are there – if you are willing to have those emotions in order to move forward in your life – then simply by engaging in the valued action and doing the things that matter to you, you will often find that those negative emotions do go away or lessen in intensity. They may be there initially, but if you take them with you, they often lessen in intensity and they certainly become far less painful. And, the more you continue to engage in valued actions, the less these internal barriers will feel like barriers. Remember that valued actions are incredibly reinforcing! Engaging in these actions can help us feel better overall because we are doing the things that matter to us. Moving forward in these ways changes our life so that it is more consistent with the life we want to live. The negative emotions will never go away but our distress about those emotions will lessen because they are not getting in the way of our lives any more.

Homework for Week 13

- Choose doable valued actions for the week, problem-solving ways of managing potential external barriers and practicing willingness to experience potential internal barriers (complete “Values Assignment 6” homework sheet)
- Continue to monitor efforts to engage in valued actions on a daily basis, as well as barriers to valued actions encountered during the week (complete “Values Assignment 7” homework sheet)
- Continue to monitor urges to self-harm and the feelings associated with these urges; continue to monitor willingness to experience these emotions; continue to focus on the impulse control strategies used to resist urges to engage in self-harm or other impulsive behaviors

Barriers to Valued Actions

What kinds of things interfere with living a valued life?

External barriers

- Situational or interpersonal factors that interfere with us following through with valued actions
- **Solution:** Transform these barriers into additional goals; break down the valued action into smaller steps

Internal barriers

- Negative emotions (e.g., fear, anxiety, shame)
- Unwanted or negative thoughts (e.g., “I can’t do this”)
- **Solution:** Willingness
 - Can we act **with** these feelings and thoughts?
 - Can we carry them with us on our journey? (e.g., bubble in road metaphor)
 - Have you ever done this? (e.g., visited the dentist even though you were scared; approached something even though you had negative thoughts about the consequences of doing so)
 - Choose to act no matter what you are feeling.

Values Assignment 6: Overcoming Barriers

Please choose a valued direction to focus on for the next week:

Value: _____

Next, choose some “doable” actions that you could take in your life today, this moment, that would be consistent with this valued direction. First, come up with several (at least 5) “doable” actions. Remember to think about “small, meaningful steps,” rather than large goals. For each action, list all of the obstacles or barriers that you believe stand between you and this valued action. Include external (e.g., money) and internal (e.g., fear) barriers.

Actions	External barriers	Internal barriers
1)		
2)		
3)		
4)		
5)		

- Next, see if you can translate the external barriers into new actions, and rate your willingness to experience the internal barriers.
- Then, make a choice to engage in the modified actions, *with whatever feelings you have*

Modified actions	Internal barriers	Willingness 0-100

Values Assignment 7

(Please refer to Values Assignment 6 to help you structure this assignment.) Please indicate one of the values you have chosen to focus on this week. Next, reflect on the steps you took during the day that were consistent with this value by completing the following monitoring form.

On this form, please indicate what you did (if anything) that was consistent with this valued direction.

- If you did act in a way consistent with this value, please indicate whether you experienced any emotions in response to engaging in this action. For instance, some people find that acting in a way consistent with a valued direction may be associated with some anxiety (one of the reasons why we may sometimes not act in valued ways). On the other hand, moving in a valued direction may also result in feelings of pride, joy, or excitement.
 - If you did not act in a way consistent with this value, please reflect on what stopped you from doing so. In particular, did some type of emotional response interfere with your acting in a way consistent with this valued direction? For instance, did anxiety about engaging in the behavior cause you to avoid it?

*** Chosen value:**

Week 13: Homework monitoring form

Self-Harm Monitoring Form V

	Urge to self-harm (0-100)	If no urges, what were the protective factors?	If urges were present, what feelings preceded the urge(s)?	Willingness to experience these feelings (0-100)	Did you engage in self-harm? (circle one)	If no, what impulse control strategies did you use to resist your urges?	If yes, what did you do? Then, what did you do to modify the consequences?	Consequences of the behavior (+ and -)
Monday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Tuesday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Wednesday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Thursday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Friday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Saturday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Sunday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		

Outline for Week 14

I. Review “Values Assignment 6” and “Values Assignment 7” homework sheets

- Have clients share their chosen valued directions and the doable actions they identified that are consistent with these values
- Continue to highlight valued actions taken by clients during the week that they may have overlooked, dismissed, or minimized
- Identify barriers to valued actions that clients encountered during the week
 - Reinforce clients’ efforts to manage/overcome/solve these barriers
 - Problem-solve ways of managing these barriers more effectively in the future

First, I wanted to give everyone the heads up that it is time for another assessment again. Therefore, xxxx is going to be calling you today to try and get something scheduled for the next week. Alternatively, feel free to schedule it through me at the end of the group today. If you let me know times that work for you over the next few days, we can schedule you right now.

So, let’s begin by talking about this past week. How did things go for you? What valued actions did you engage in? What barriers came up? Did you find that you were able to overcome some of these barriers? Was willingness helpful in this regard? Let’s have everyone check in about how this process went for you this week and what you noticed. Please begin by reminding us what valued directions you chose to focus on this week. [Go through each client’s homework. Write down barriers (external and internal) that came up as people engaged in valued actions. For each barrier, ask the client how it was addressed or what got in the way. For barriers that did not get addressed, ask group members to help problem-solve ways to overcome this barrier in the future. Focus particular attention on times when the client was able to overcome internal barriers, and the usefulness of willingness in this regard.]

Now, even when we are aware of barriers and have some ideas of ways to address them, this is clearly not an easy process. Knowing what we need to do to overcome these barriers is easier said than done. If willingness was easy and knowing how this stuff works made everything fall into place, engaging in valued actions would not be hard. And, we know that this is a difficult process. So, how do we continue to use willingness to address these internal barriers? How do we give ourselves that extra push to continue to move forward in valued directions when those barriers seem overwhelming and willingness is difficult? Well, the answer is commitment.

II. Discuss “Commitment” handout

- Have clients define what the term “commitment” means to them; have clients identify their emotional reactions to the term “commitment”
- Provide psychoeducation on commitment
 - Commitment is important because it helps us act in valued ways, and facilitates progress in treatment and movement forward in life
 - Commitment promotes: acting *with* whatever feelings arise, choosing willingness, and following through with valued actions in the presence of unwanted internal experiences
 - Commitment must be all or nothing, 100%, and is not linked to how we are feeling in the moment
 - Commitment implies and requires willingness
 - Commitment is about process, not outcome (i.e., we commit to the process of moving forward in a valued direction; we do not commit to any particular outcome)

Now, I realize that commitment may be a scary word. So, let me start by asking you what the word commitment means to you? [Write down answers on the board, such as “promise,” “stuck,” “don’t

know what you are getting into,” “I have to do this,” “trapped”]. And, what are your reactions to this term? How does it make you feel? [Write down answers on the board as well.]

These are exactly the kinds of responses we tend to get from folks. To many people, commitment feels like an overwhelming, inflexible promise; like you are signing away your life; like you are stuck, and have to go through with this thing no matter what. And that can make the idea of commitment incredibly overwhelming. When commitment means all of these things, it can scare folks off, and make them hesitant to commit.

Now, if what we meant by commitment was promising to meet one specific goal in the future, or guaranteeing to achieve one specific outcome at some point down the line, I don’t think that would be terribly useful. If commitment meant committing to specific outcomes or endpoints, then I think we could find ourselves dealing with the same downsides that we discussed with regard to having goals. This kind of promise or guarantee is not flexible and does not allow for the possibility that some of our specific goals in life may change as we grow, or that external barriers to these goals may come up along the way. So, if this is what commitment meant to us, I am not sure how helpful it would be.

However, we actually mean something quite different by commitment when we talk about it in this group. What we mean by commitment is that we want you to commit to the process, rather than the outcome. The concerns folks generally have about commitment, the downsides we have been talking about, the things you brought up earlier, are all about committing to an outcome. And, we don’t want you to commit to any outcome. We simply want you to commit to the process.

We are talking about commitment in the context of valued directions. Committing to the process of moving forward in valued ways, and to valuing the process of valuing. In many ways, I am asking you to do what you have already been doing, and simply continue to move forward in ways consistent with your valued directions, incorporating valued actions into your life and using your valued directions to help guide your choices. I am asking that you commit to this process, and move forward even when it is difficult or you come up against internal barriers.

The commitment we are asking you to make is not to any one outcome or any endpoint, but to the process of moving forward in these valued directions and making choices consistent with these values whenever you can. And, by committing to the process rather than the outcome, this means that you have a lot more flexibility than if you try to commit to do one particular thing.

Basically, we are talking about committing to an intention rather than a particular action. We know that many things can get in the way of carrying out any one action, but we can maintain a commitment to a certain course regardless of how we actually act in any given moment.

And this also means that you can continue to move forward even when you encounter barriers in a particular moment. If you run into a barrier that gets in the way of a valued action in one moment, you can engage in that action in the next moment. Or, you can engage in another action that is still consistent with the valued direction. This kind of commitment is a lot more flexible. So, for example, if you plan to walk up the stairs instead of taking the elevator in order to take care of yourself physically, then even if you don’t do that specific action in that particular moment, the commitment to this process means that you could drink some water instead of soda during dinner, or you could walk down the stairs later, or you could go to bed at a reasonable time to get some rest. You are committing to moving forward in these ways whenever you can throughout the day. But the commitment is not focused on one particular action, and even if you don’t do one you were planning on, I can promise you that you will have a multitude of chances to do other things consistent with your values throughout the day. The nice thing about

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commitment is that it keeps us moving forward even when we don't do something consistent with our values in this moment or the next moment or even the next moment. Commitment means that we can still choose to do something consistent with our values in the moment after that (or the moment after that!).

When we commit to an outcome, if we don't engage in an action that leads to that particular outcome, we have failed. However, when we commit to the process, not doing one action simply means that we missed out on ONE opportunity. There will be others that will present themselves throughout the day. All is not lost.

Now, as much as making a commitment to this process is incredibly useful and can help us move forward, it is not easy. It can definitely be a challenge. However, there are things you can do to facilitate commitments. Practical strategies you can use to facilitate commitments.

- Discuss strategies for facilitating commitments
 - Have clients identify the particular strategies they think might be helpful to use in the future (i.e., those strategies they think might be most useful/effective for themselves)

The last half of this handout lists the strategies we have found to be useful to folks in making and keeping commitments. Each of these can be useful to keep in mind when making a commitment to this process. That said, as much as all of these strategies can be helpful, not all of them are going to work for you. Some are going to work better for you than others, and the trick is to try them out and see which work the best for you. You certainly don't have to use all of these, but if you can find a couple that will work for you, this process will go more smoothly.

Here are some things to keep in mind as you think about these various strategies:

- *One of the most important things when making a commitment is to commit to something that is important to you, rather than something that is important to someone else. Of course, something may be important to you AND someone else, but it is important first and foremost to focus on the things that are important to you. This process is about building the life you want to live – not the life you think you should live or someone else thinks you should live. This stuff is hard enough as it is, so it is imperative to make this process about the things that matter to you.*
- *Commitments become more overwhelming when they are big and all-encompassing. If you keep it simple and commit to small doable actions, it will be less overwhelming.*
- *Make sure to continue to focus on the present moment, and the actions you can take that moment. It doesn't matter if you did not act in a way consistent with your values for the past four hours. In the present moment, there is yet another opportunity to do so. So, focus on that moment and use your commitment to make a choice consistent with your valued directions that moment, or the next one, or the one after that. In every moment, there is a new opportunity to act in a way consistent with this commitment.*
- *If you are making a commitment to a valued direction, write down this commitment and place copies of it all over your house or anywhere else you go. If you are making a commitment to take care of your physical health, place a copy of this commitment any place where seeing it could remind you of your commitment. Put a copy on your refrigerator (or inside your refrigerator). Put a copy in your office to remind you to do small things at work to care for yourself. Put a copy inside your wallet to remind you to make purchases consistent with this value. The more copies the better. Seeing this commitment written out throughout your day can increase your awareness of this commitment and make it harder to ignore.*

- *Have other people help you in this process. Tell them about your commitment and how it matters to you. Ask them to help you stick to it. Ideally, you can find someone who has a similar commitment – someone who is also making a commitment to a general direction. In that case, you two can help each other stay on track. If you don't know anyone who has a similar commitment, then just tell the people in your life about your commitment and ask for their support in moving forward. This can help us stay on track. Also, simply telling other people about our commitment – saying it aloud – can make us more likely to follow-through with it ourselves, as it holds us accountable. So, tell people about this commitment!*
- *Another thing that can be helpful is to reward yourself for following through with a commitment. This is a challenging process and it can be really hard to engage in valued actions when we encounter barriers. So, if you are following through with your commitments, reward yourself! Do something nice for yourself, or allow yourself to splurge on something that you wouldn't normally do. You deserve it!*
- *Finally, keep in mind that one of the most important things we can do to keep a commitment is to find meaning in it – to know that there is meaning in what we are doing, and a larger purpose we are working toward. Otherwise, why would we do this? Why would we go through the swamp? We go through the swamp in order to get to the things that matter to us on the other side. The reason we practice willingness is to build the life we want to live. So, one strategy that can help us follow-through with commitments even when it is difficult is to focus on why you are doing this and why it matters to you.*

Homework for Week 14

- Before the group ends, have each client commit (aloud to the group) to using 2 of the commitment strategies during the upcoming week
- Commit to doable valued actions for the week, problem-solving ways of managing potential external barriers and practicing willingness to experience potential internal barriers (complete “Values Assignment 8” homework sheet)
- Continue to monitor efforts to engage in valued actions on a daily basis, as well as barriers to valued actions encountered during the week (complete “Values Assignment 9” homework sheet)
- Continue to monitor urges to self-harm and the feelings associated with these urges; continue to monitor willingness to experience these emotions; continue to focus on the impulse control strategies used to resist urges to engage in self-harm or other impulsive behaviors

Commitment

Commitment helps us act in valued directions

Commit to act no matter what you are feeling

- Commitment is about moving in a valued direction, acting in a valued way, *with* whatever feelings you have
- Willingness is a necessary component
 - We can *feel* unwilling to do something and still *be willing* to move in a valued direction

Commitment is 100%, all or nothing

- A commitment cannot be conditional or partial
 - e.g., someone cannot be 50% pregnant

Commitment is a process, not an outcome

- We commit 100% to moving in a valued direction – we do not commit to the outcome of that process

Strategies for facilitating commitments

- Commit to actions that are of value to you, not someone else
- Make the actions “doable” – stay concrete, simple, and realistic
- Remember to focus on the present moment, and actions you can take now
 - if you wake up late, start then; if you’re behind, begin anyway
- Write down the commitment and put copies everywhere (e.g., car, kitchen, etc.)
- Get someone to help you – have a commitment “buddy”
- Commit to someone else, not just yourself (tells others about your commitment)
- Plan a reward for yourself after you follow through on your commitment
- Find meaning in the action (e.g., repeat over and over again why you are committing to this, why it matters, etc.)

Values Assignment 8: Making a Commitment

Please choose a valued direction to focus on for the next week:

Value: _____

Next, make a commitment to some “doable” actions that you could take in your life today, this moment, that would be consistent with this valued direction. First, come up with several (at least 5) “doable” actions. Remember to think about “small, meaningful steps,” rather than large goals. For each action, list all of the obstacles or barriers that you believe stand between you and this valued action. Include external (e.g., money) and internal (e.g., fear) barriers.

Actions	External barriers	Internal barriers
1)		
2)		
3)		
4)		
5)		

- Next, see if you can translate the external barriers into new actions, and rate your willingness to experience the internal barriers.
- Then, make a commitment to engage in the modified actions, ***with whatever feelings you have***

Modified actions	Internal barriers	Willingness 0-100

Values Assignment 9

(Please refer to Values Assignment 8 to help you structure this assignment.) Please indicate one of the values you have chosen to focus on this week. Next, reflect on the steps you took during the day that were consistent with this value by completing the following monitoring form.

On this form, please indicate what you did (if anything) that was consistent with this valued direction.

- If you did act in a way consistent with this value, please indicate whether you experienced any emotions in response to engaging in this action. For instance, some people find that acting in a way consistent with a valued direction may be associated with some anxiety (one of the reasons why we may sometimes not act in valued ways). On the other hand, moving in a valued direction may also result in feelings of pride, joy, or excitement.
 - If you did not act in a way consistent with this value, please reflect on what stopped you from doing so. In particular, did some type of emotional response interfere with your acting in a way consistent with this valued direction? For instance, did anxiety about engaging in the behavior cause you to avoid it?

*** Chosen value:**

Week 14: Homework monitoring form

Self-Harm Monitoring Form V

	Urge to self-harm (0-100)	If no urges, what were the protective factors?	If urges were present, what feelings preceded the urge(s)?	Willingness to experience these feelings (0-100)	Did you engage in self-harm? (circle one)	If no, what impulse control strategies did you use to resist your urges?	If yes, what did you do? Then, what did you do to modify the consequences?	Consequences of the behavior (+ and -)
Monday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Tuesday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Wednesday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Thursday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Friday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Saturday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Sunday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		

Outline for Week 15:**I. Review “Values Assignment 8” and “Values Assignment 9” homework sheets**

- Have clients share their chosen valued directions and the doable actions they identified that are consistent with these values
- Continue to assist clients in identifying doable actions, focusing on examples of simple, small actions that can be taken in a moment
- Review efforts to engage in valued actions during the past week
- Identify barriers to valued actions that clients encountered during the week
 - Reinforce clients’ efforts to manage/overcome/solve these barriers
 - Problem-solve ways of managing these barriers more effectively in the future
- Highlight the role of willingness and commitment in valued actions

So, once again, let’s begin this week by touching base about this process of engaging in valued actions. Did you notice any differences this week related to the use of commitment strategies? In particular, did you find that committing to this process facilitated movement forward in these directions even when the barriers seemed overwhelming? Let’s discuss what this process was like this week, and also what it was like to commit to willingness and valued actions. [Go through each client’s homework. Write down barriers that were encountered during this process, as well as how each barrier was addressed or resolved. For barriers that seemed insurmountable, have group members brainstorm ways to overcome this barrier in the future. Focus particular attention on times when the client was able to overcome internal barriers by practicing willingness, and the ways in which commitment facilitated willingness and valued actions.]

II. Continue to discuss valued directions as a process

As we continue to focus on valued directions in this group, I want to make sure you are focusing on the process, not the outcome. The outcome really does not matter. Instead, what matters is that you are using your valued directions to guide your choices, and, as a result, you are making the choices and taking the actions that will move your lives forward. You are paying more attention to valued direction and are making choices that are consistent with your values. And what this means is that if you do these things and the outcome is not what you wanted, that is okay – you have still made a ton of progress and you are still moving forward in your life. The important thing is not what the outcome was but the fact that you made a choice consistent with your values and used these values to guide your behaviors. Right there, regardless of the outcome, you have succeeded.

Basically, I want you to continue to keep in mind that what determines success in this process is whether or not you are doing things that are consistent with your values. If you are, then regardless of the outcome, you are being successful in this process. As we have talked about before, when we focus on the outcome, it takes us out of the present moment. And not being in the present moment can make things more overwhelming. When we focus on the present moment, it allows us to get in touch with the fact that our emotional distress does pass and that as much as one moment may be incredibly painful and distressing, the next may be positive. And this can help us tolerate distress.

In addition, remembering that valued actions can be done in any and every moment can make this process less overwhelming and can help combat perfectionism. If you can keep in mind that every single moment provides an opportunity to engage in an action consistent with your values, then there is less of a chance that missing some moments will feel like a catastrophe. Knowing that we can always – in every moment – choose to engage in a valued action means that we can never lose the opportunity to do so. So, even if we don’t make a choice consistent with our values in this moment, or the next one, or the one after that, we can always choose to engage in a valued action in the moment after that. Keeping in mind that we never

Gratz (2009) Emotion Regulation Group Therapy Manual
miss out on the chance to move forward in ways consistent with our values can help alleviate that all-or-nothing kind of thinking that can cause us to feel ashamed and stuck simply because we are not perfect!

It can also be important to bring mindfulness and a present-moment focus to all of the things we do during the day. By doing this, we may become more aware of the different moments in our day when we do engage in valued actions. Even though some of our behaviors may not change, if we become more aware of the things we do—the things we have always done—that are consistent with our values, this may bring about a greater sense of accomplishment and improve our mood. If there are things that you do habitually that are consistent with your values, I want you to be aware of that. And, even if it is not in the moment, I want you to bring attention to it at some point in your day. This can help you see that there are many things you do that are consistent with your values (that you may often discredit or not be aware of). When every action we take and every choice we make matters, as with values, then being aware of all of the small steps we take consistent with our values throughout the day can give us a sense of self-efficacy and control over our lives. This may also help with self-compassion in that we can see that, even at our most distressed, we still do things that matter to us.

[Note: It is not uncommon for clients to begin to question their values as they commit to taking action. Clients may struggle with which value is most important to them, or which action best represents their value. There is no easy answer to this struggle. For instance, in the case of a client who has fears related to taking a management position at work, the client may learn that she values a management career and should move forward (which really could be a way of avoiding social and family values) or she may learn that she values family and social relations and should take a less demanding job (which could be avoidance of fears of work failure). Group leaders should be aware of the potentially avoidant function of any activity in a valued area and should keep this in mind during the group sessions. However, the best way for clients to determine what is a valued activity and what is avoidance is to take action and reflect on their experience (do they feel fulfilled, satisfied, etc). As different values emerge, these are attended to in similar ways – identified actions that can be taken, potential barriers, and ways of responding to those barriers.]

[Note: Continue to emphasize the importance of balance. Clients do not have to value one domain above another in order to choose action. Clients should be encouraged to think generally about different domains and their specific values within each domain, and to work toward tending to each domain at some point in the course of living. It may be that for a given time period, one domain is given precedence. For instance, someone who is really far from living according to her values in terms of relationships, but has been living a valued life professionally, may want to achieve balance by focusing much more on relationships for awhile. Or a particularly challenging time at work or in school may necessitate some sacrifices in other domains. The main goal is for no domain to go completely unattended. Choice means being aware when one is attending to one domain at the cost of another. Again, engaging in action and remaining mindful of the consequences will help clients make the necessary adjustments in order to increase satisfaction.]

III. Identify and problem-solve ways of overcoming key expected barriers over the next two weeks

So, in continuing to think about the barriers to valued actions, what are the biggest barriers you have noticed over the past couple of weeks? [Write down the biggest barriers encountered.] The reason I asked is that one way to manage barriers is to be prepared for them. It's like the Boy Scout motto – Be Prepared. That applies to barriers too. If we can predict ahead and know the types of barriers we are most likely to encounter, as well as the ones that tend to seem most insurmountable, we can plan ahead for how to overcome them. So, in thinking about the next couple of weeks, what barriers do you expect to encounter? What do you think is most likely to get in the way of valued actions in different domains?

[Write the expected barriers on the board, and then problem-solve ways of addressing/overcoming these barriers. Come up with a plan to address at least one expected barrier for every client in the room.]

IV. Discuss mood-congruent behavior as a potential barrier to valued actions

In addition to all of these barriers, I wanted to talk about another barrier that many people come up against when focusing on values. This barrier is something we call mood-congruent behavior, which is exactly what it sounds like. Basically, the idea is that we as human beings tend to do things that are congruent with our mood – things that “fit” how we are feeling in the moment. And as much as this is understandable, it can have some pretty serious downsides and lead to a lot of problems (e.g., isolating when depressed). Now, the reason this can be a barrier to valued action is that when we are experiencing depression or intense anxiety, we may be at risk for avoiding valued actions. For example, when we are depressed, we may want to curl up in bed instead of doing something that matters to us. This is one reason why valued actions are going to be difficult when we are experiencing intense unpleasant moods. And we need to be aware of these moods as presenting possible internal barriers.

Now, the good news is that there are ways to overcome this potential obstacle. One way to combat this is to focus on those small, doable, in-the-moment behaviors that are consistent with our values. When we are depressed, it is going to be easier to engage in valued actions that are quick and don’t require a tremendous amount of effort. Yet, even these small doable actions can have a snowball effect, leading us down the path of valued action and increasing our motivation the more we do them. And this, in turn, can actually help improve our mood!

Homework for Week 15

- Before the group ends, have each client commit (aloud to the group) to using 2 of the commitment strategies during the upcoming week
- Commit to doable valued actions for the week, problem-solving ways of managing potential external barriers and practicing willingness to experience potential internal barriers (complete “Values Assignment 8” homework sheet)
- Continue to monitor efforts to engage in valued actions on a daily basis, as well as barriers to valued actions encountered during the week (complete “Values Assignment 9” homework sheet)
- Continue to monitor urges to self-harm and the feelings associated with these urges; continue to monitor willingness to experience these emotions; continue to focus on the impulse control strategies used to resist urges to engage in self-harm or other impulsive behaviors

Values Assignment 8: Making a Commitment

Please choose a valued direction to focus on for the next week:

Value: _____

Next, make a commitment to some “doable” actions that you could take in your life today, this moment, that would be consistent with this valued direction. First, come up with several (at least 5) “doable” actions. Remember to think about “small, meaningful steps,” rather than large goals. For each action, list all of the obstacles or barriers that you believe stand between you and this valued action. Include external (e.g., money) and internal (e.g., fear) barriers.

Actions	External barriers	Internal barriers
1)		
2)		
3)		
4)		
5)		

- Next, see if you can translate the external barriers into new actions, and rate your willingness to experience the internal barriers.
- Then, make a commitment to engage in the modified actions, ***with whatever feelings you have***

Modified actions	Internal barriers	Willingness 0-100

Values Assignment 9

(Please refer to Values Assignment 8 to help you structure this assignment.) Please indicate one of the values you have chosen to focus on this week. Next, reflect on the steps you took during the day that were consistent with this value by completing the following monitoring form.

On this form, please indicate what you did (if anything) that was consistent with this valued direction.

- If you did act in a way consistent with this value, please indicate whether you experienced any emotions in response to engaging in this action. For instance, some people find that acting in a way consistent with a valued direction may be associated with some anxiety (one of the reasons why we may sometimes not act in valued ways). On the other hand, moving in a valued direction may also result in feelings of pride, joy, or excitement.
 - If you did not act in a way consistent with this value, please reflect on what stopped you from doing so. In particular, did some type of emotional response interfere with your acting in a way consistent with this valued direction? For instance, did anxiety about engaging in the behavior cause you to avoid it?

*** Chosen value:**

Week 15: Homework monitoring form

Self-Harm Monitoring Form V

	Urge to self-harm (0-100)	If no urges, what were the protective factors?	If urges were present, what feelings preceded the urge(s)?	Willingness to experience these feelings (0-100)	Did you engage in self-harm? (circle one)	If no, what impulse control strategies did you use to resist your urges?	If yes, what did you do? Then, what did you do to modify the consequences?	Consequences of the behavior (+ and -)
Monday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Tuesday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Wednesday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Thursday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Friday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Saturday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Sunday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		

Outline for Week 16

I. Review “Values Assignment 8” and “Values Assignment 9” homework sheets

- Review efforts to engage in valued actions during the past week
- Identify barriers to valued actions that clients encountered during the week
 - Reinforce clients’ efforts to manage/overcome/solve these barriers
 - Problem-solve ways of managing these barriers more effectively in the future
- Highlight the role of willingness and commitment in valued actions

Okay, for this week, let's start by reviewing the homework. Last week, we talked about the importance of bringing our attention back to the process and the moment-to-moment actions we can take that are consistent with our values. What did you notice this week? [Review valued actions with clients. Identify internal and external behaviors, as well as how they overcame or addressed these barriers. Continue to emphasize the importance of a present-moment and process-oriented focus, as well as commitment and willingness.]

[Note: Make sure to continue to remain vigilant for and actively target any signs of a judgmental, perfectionistic, or goal-oriented stance. Clients may continue to ignore, minimize, or belittle valued actions that are judged too small or simple. Throughout the discussion, emphasize the importance of *all* actions, and continually bring clients' attention back to the importance of moment to moment actions and present-moment choices (as our lives are lived in the present-moment). Focus on process, rather than outcome, and continually reference and reinforce the metaphors of “ripples in the pond” and “the butterfly effect.”]

II. Focus on relapse prevention

- Introduce the concept of “rule violation effects” and its relevance for managing self-harm and approaching emotional willingness
- Introduce/review concept of lapse vs. relapse as it pertains to self-harm behavior

The main thing I want to talk about today falls under the category of relapse prevention. There are a few things that are really important to keep an eye out for as you move forward in this process. And, since this is our last group, I want us to focus our attention today on how you can continue to maintain the changes and improvements you have already made in your lives, as well as move forward in building the life that you want – the life that is important to you. So, there are a couple of things to keep in mind. First, has anyone heard of the rule violation effect (RVE)?

The RVE is something that can come up when making any kind of behavior change. And it basically has to do with the fact that it is quite common for people who are trying to change their behavior to come up with hard and fast rules for themselves – things that they believe they should and should not do. For example, I should go to church every Sunday, I should not ever eat again, I should stick to 2000 calories per day, etc. Now, the reason people set these rules is that they believe they will provide guidance and help them make the right choices. Or they may think of these rules as standards for themselves or goal to work toward. However, the problem with this is that any kind of 100% hard and fast rule is not that helpful. Even though people generally make these types of rules believing that they will help them stay on track, we have learned that these types of rules are actually paradoxical; i.e., they tend to backfire and make it even harder to stick to the rule. And the reason for this is the RVE.

Basically, the RVE has to do with what happens when people break (or violate) the hard and fast rules they set for themselves. And, unfortunately, what generally happens is that people think that since they have failed already and the rule is already broken, then it really doesn't matter if they continue to break it. It basically sets up a standard of perfection and when we don't live up to that standard (which would

be impossible), it seems like it isn't even worth it to try anymore. If we have already failed, then why even bother? If the rule is that you will not harm yourself ever again and then you have a slip and scratch yourself a couple of times, why even try to stop since you have already screwed up? A slip is a slip, so once you start harming yourself, you might as well run with it, right? If you have failed, then there really isn't any difference between one time and 100 times, right?

This is actually something that people see a lot in dieting. Basically, they set rules about the number of calories they can eat or the foods that are or aren't okay, and then if they have a lapse one night and eat a cookie, they think to themselves "Screw it! I messed up already so I might as well keep eating! I am not on track anymore anyhow!" And then instead of just eating that one cookie, they eat the entire box of cookies, as well as a pint of ice cream. Can you relate to that? Have you had those experiences? One of the clients in this group referred to this as the Screw-it Factor (F-it Factor). Once you have slipped, you might as well keep on going....

So, given that this is such a common experience and can have such paradoxical consequences, I would suggest that the way to address this is simply to refrain from setting these rules. I am 100% in support of you committing to the process of engaging in valued actions or stopping self-harm (and in fact I hope you will commit to those things), but I can promise you that if you set the rule "I will never self-harm," you will fail...In fact, you will probably be more at risk for harming yourself than if you simply did not set that rule for yourself! Now, does this mean that you have nothing to guide you in your journey or nothing to help you move forward? No! Definitely not. You have actually learned something more powerful and more promising to help you continue to move forward: valued actions and commitment. One of the primary differences between these and more rigid rules is that these are focused on the present moment and the all of the things you can do moment-to-moment. So, even if you engage in a behavior that is inconsistent with a valued action or a commitment in one moment, in the next moment you can catch yourself and recommit to valued action. So, just focus on those and they will be much more helpful as you continue on your journey toward recovery.

Now, something related to the RVE is the difference between a lapse and a relapse. Although people often don't distinguish between these two things, they are actually very different from one another in very important ways. Therefore, we think it is important to distinguish between them. A lapse is a momentary thing. It is a slip or a mistake. A relapse, on the other hand, is a full-blown back-slide into an old pattern of behavior. We are going to slip. We are going to make mistakes – it is not possible to be perfect. What matters is how we respond to this slip. What we do when we have one. And, the helpful response when we have a slip is to view it as a momentary lapse or one-time mistake, and then recommit to valued action. Viewing it in this way will prevent a full-blown relapse. In fact, this is why, when we started this group, we didn't tell you that you could never self-harm again. We knew that folks were invested in stopping their self-harm, and we expected that your self-harm would stop over the course of this group; however, we didn't want to set a hard-and-fast rule like this because we thought that doing so would actually make you more likely to self-harm! If we told you that you could never do it again, I am willing to bet that it would have been a lot harder to stop. So, as you move forward, remember that lapses are going to happen, and what matters when they do is how we respond to these lapses. This will determine whether they are simply a momentary slip that we can learn from, or something that turns into a full-blown a relapse. So, if and when you do have a lapse, notice this, take action to learn from it, recommit to valued directions, and move on.

Another key piece in all of this is how we respond to a lapse emotionally. It can be easy to fall into a pattern of beating ourselves up or judging ourselves for a lapse. The problem with this, though, in addition to the fact that it makes us feel worse about ourselves, is that this also makes it harder to recover from that lapse and prevent a full-blown relapse. As we have talked about a lot in this group, feelings of

shame and self-directed anger and just general intense distress can increase our urges to engage in a variety of unhealthy impulsive behaviors to escape this distress. So, although it may seem a bit counterintuitive, judging yourself harshly for a lapse will not help you stay on track. Instead, the best thing to do when you have a lapse is to practice self-compassion and be kind to yourself. This is the key to making sure that a lapse does not turn into a relapse.

- Emphasize the importance of noticing progress and increasing awareness of choices involving willingness/overcoming internal barriers

Now, another important thing as you move forward with this is to make sure to notice and be aware of the choices you make that are NOT mood-congruent, and that involve overcoming internal barriers. All of you have done and will continue to do things that are not mood-congruent – things that require you to practice willingness and overcome internal barriers (e.g., doing something that makes you anxious because it is important to you, or engaging in a valued action despite fears, concerns, or worries). I can guarantee it. Because this can be so difficult, though, and because these internal barriers can seem so insurmountable, it can be incredibly helpful when faced with a difficult choice to think about and be aware of the times when we have made this choice in the past. In the moment, if we can be more aware of the times when we have practiced willingness and engaged in a valued action WITH our emotions, it can make it easier to make that choice again. We can connect a bit more to the fact that this is possible and will be okay. In many ways, I think that all of you practice willingness and overcome internal barriers on a much more regular basis than you give yourselves credit for, and the consequences of this are probably not nearly as negative or aversive as you might expect them to be. So, as you move forward, I want you to focus on those times when you overcame internal barriers, when you practiced willingness even though it is difficult, and really think about the reasons you engaged in a valued action anyhow. Remembering this can give you more motivation to keep making this choice. So, as you go forward, in addition to challenging yourself to do things that are harder at times, notice when you do something that overcomes one of your internal barriers. Put a star next to it. Jot down a little note of what you did. Notice it and be mindful of it. Also, notice whether the outcome was what you expected it would be, or if it was not nearly as bad as you had feared. Also notice if, as we might expect, the more you practice this – the more you do it – the easier it becomes over time.

- Re-introduce the concept of valuing the process of valuing
- Emphasize the importance of committing to the process, and focusing on process not outcome

Finally, continue to remember that identifying our valued directions – figuring out the things that matter to us – is a lifelong process in and of itself. Although, unlike goals, your values will not change, you may uncover new values – things you hadn't even realized were important to you. And, you most certainly will continue to uncover new ways of acting on the values you have. This entire process of identifying and moving in valued directions is a process in and of itself, and there is value in this process. And, this means that as long as you are focusing on this process and seeking to live your life in accordance with your values, you cannot go wrong. If you are continuing to think about and focus on your valued directions, if you are striving to identify the things in life that matter to you, and if you are continuing to use these valued directions to guide your choices and inform your behaviors, that is all that matters. It is about the process (not the outcome), which means that you can't make a wrong choice. There is no right or wrong in this if you are focused on the process. Even if you make a choice consistent with a value and later believe that another choice may have been better for you, the first choice was not wrong. If you are making a choice consistent with your values, that choice cannot be wrong. You may learn from it. You may decide that in the future you will make another choice, or choose a different behavior consistent with that value, or, in a similar situation, make a choice consistent with a different value. That is part of the process of living our lives consistent with our values – we continue to learn and grow. However, the

original choice was still not wrong. What is important is that you continue to make choices consistent with your values and then reflect on that experience. Assess if it was fulfilling, or satisfying. Think about what it was like for you, and then use this information to continue to move forward. Engaging in valued actions and remaining mindful of the consequences will help you make the necessary adjustments in order to increase your satisfaction and keep moving forward in your life. Just remember: identifying and moving in valued directions in a process in and of itself, and as long as you are continuing to focus on that process, and value that process, you are doing well. You are living your life. And isn't that what this is all about? So, what we hope is that you will value the process of valuing – continuing to strive to identify and act in ways consistent with your values and focusing on the process rather than the outcome.

Ultimately, the goal of this group is to help folks live a value-driven life. We want you to start living your lives aware of the choices you are making in each situation, and considering whether these choices are in line with what matters to you. We want you to continue to focus on living your life in a way that is meaningful throughout your daily life. We want you to commit to the process of living a valued, consciously chosen life, and to continue to return to this as a process over and over again as you move forward.

[Note: Continue to emphasize the importance of balance. Clients do not have to value one domain above another in order to choose action. Clients should be encouraged to think generally about different domains and their specific values within each domain, and to work toward tending to each domain at some point in the course of living. It may be that for a given time period, one domain is given precedence. For instance, someone who is really far from living according to her values in terms of relationships, but has been living a valued life professionally, may want to achieve balance by focusing much more on relationships for awhile. Or a particularly challenging time at work or in school may necessitate some sacrifices in other domains. The main goal is for no domain to go completely unattended. Choice means being aware when one is attending to one domain at the cost of another. Again, engaging in action and remaining mindful of the consequences will help clients make the necessary adjustments in order to increase satisfaction.]

Keep this sheet handy and try some of the suggestions below when you notice you are avoiding certain emotions or valued actions, or having urges to self-harm.

These suggestions can help you increase your willingness to take valued action and resist urges to self-harm.

- Spend some time thinking about why the valued direction you have chosen matters to you. Find a quiet, comfortable place, close your eyes, and imagine yourself acting in ways that are consistent with this value.
- Think about the times that you have tried to avoid activities or limit your life in order to avoid certain thoughts and feelings. Think about what it has cost you when you have chosen avoidance.
- Think about the times you have tried to avoid or control your emotions in the past. Consider whether or not that approach has been helpful.
- Read over your handouts from group and think about the concepts that we have discussed such as acceptance, willingness, values, and commitment.
- Choose one emotion regulation strategy or impulse control strategy to practice each week. Practice it when you are feeling overwhelmed or having urges to do something that is not healthy for you. Pick a new one every week to keep things fresh.
- Focus on times you have overcome internal barriers and practiced willingness in the service of engaging in a valued action. Think about what this experience was like, and the positive consequences you experienced as a result.
- Practice observing your emotions and noticing the information they are providing. Think of ways to act on this information in ways consistent with your values.
- Practice self-compassion. Be kind to yourself and focus on all of the progress you have made and all of the steps you have taken that are consistent with your values.

Related Reading Materials

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- Hayes, S. C. (2005). *Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life. The New Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
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- Watts, A. W. (1951). *The Wisdom of Insecurity*. New York: Pantheon books/Random House.

Values Assignment 8: Making a Commitment

Please choose a valued direction to focus on for the next week:

Value: _____

Next, make a commitment to some “doable” actions that you could take in your life today, this moment, that would be consistent with this valued direction. First, come up with several (at least 5) “doable” actions. Remember to think about “small, meaningful steps,” rather than large goals. For each action, list all of the obstacles or barriers that you believe stand between you and this valued action. Include external (e.g., money) and internal (e.g., fear) barriers.

Actions	External barriers	Internal barriers
1)		
2)		
3)		
4)		
5)		

- Next, see if you can translate the external barriers into new actions, and rate your willingness to experience the internal barriers.
- Then, make a commitment to engage in the modified actions, ***with whatever feelings you have***

Modified actions	Internal barriers	Willingness 0-100

Values Assignment 9

(Please refer to Values Assignment 8 to help you structure this assignment.) Please indicate one of the values you have chosen to focus on this week. Next, reflect on the steps you took during the day that were consistent with this value by completing the following monitoring form.

On this form, please indicate what you did (if anything) that was consistent with this valued direction.

- If you did act in a way consistent with this value, please indicate whether you experienced any emotions in response to engaging in this action. For instance, some people find that acting in a way consistent with a valued direction may be associated with some anxiety (one of the reasons why we may sometimes not act in valued ways). On the other hand, moving in a valued direction may also result in feelings of pride, joy, or excitement.
 - If you did not act in a way consistent with this value, please reflect on what stopped you from doing so. In particular, did some type of emotional response interfere with your acting in a way consistent with this valued direction? For instance, did anxiety about engaging in the behavior cause you to avoid it?

*** Chosen value:**

Week 16: Homework monitoring form

Self-Harm Monitoring Form V

	Urge to self-harm (0-100)	If no urges, what were the protective factors?	If urges were present, what feelings preceded the urge(s)?	Willingness to experience these feelings (0-100)	Did you engage in self-harm? (circle one)	If no, what impulse control strategies did you use to resist your urges?	If yes, what did you do? Then, what did you do to modify the consequences?	Consequences of the behavior (+ and -)
Monday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Tuesday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Wednesday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Thursday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Friday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Saturday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Sunday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		

Making a Commitment

Please choose a valued direction to focus on for the next week:

Value: _____

Next, make a commitment to some “doable” actions that you could take in your life today, this moment, that would be consistent with this valued direction. First, come up with several (at least 5) “doable” actions. Remember to think about “small, meaningful steps,” rather than large goals. For each action, list all of the obstacles or barriers that you believe stand between you and this valued action. Include external (e.g., money) and internal (e.g., fear) barriers.

Actions	External barriers	Internal barriers
1)		
2)		
3)		
4)		
5)		

- Next, see if you can translate the external barriers into new actions, and rate your willingness to experience the internal barriers.
- Then, make a commitment to engage in the modified actions, ***with whatever feelings you have***

Modified actions	Internal barriers	Willingness 0-100

Monitoring Valued Actions

Please indicate one of the values you have chosen to focus on this week. Next, reflect on the steps you took during the day that were consistent with this value by completing the following monitoring form.

On this form, please indicate what you did (if anything) that was consistent with this valued direction.

- If you did act in a way consistent with this value, please indicate whether you experienced any emotions in response to engaging in this action. For instance, some people find that acting in a way consistent with a valued direction may be associated with some anxiety (one of the reasons why we may sometimes not act in valued ways). On the other hand, moving in a valued direction may also result in feelings of pride, joy, or excitement.
 - If you did not act in a way consistent with this value, please reflect on what stopped you from doing so. In particular, did some type of emotional response interfere with your acting in a way consistent with this valued direction? For instance, did anxiety about engaging in the behavior cause you to avoid it?

* Chosen value: _____

Self-Harm Monitoring Form

	Urge to self-harm (0-100)	If no urges, what were the protective factors?	If urges were present, what feelings preceded the urge(s)?	Willingness to experience these feelings (0-100)	Did you engage in self-harm? (circle one)	If no, what impulse control strategies did you use to resist your urges?	If yes, what did you do? Then, what did you do to modify the consequences?	Consequences of the behavior (+ and -)
Monday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Tuesday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Wednesday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Thursday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Friday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Saturday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		
Sunday ____ / ____					Yes No	Distraction _____ Substitution _____ Pros and cons _____ Consequence modification _____		

