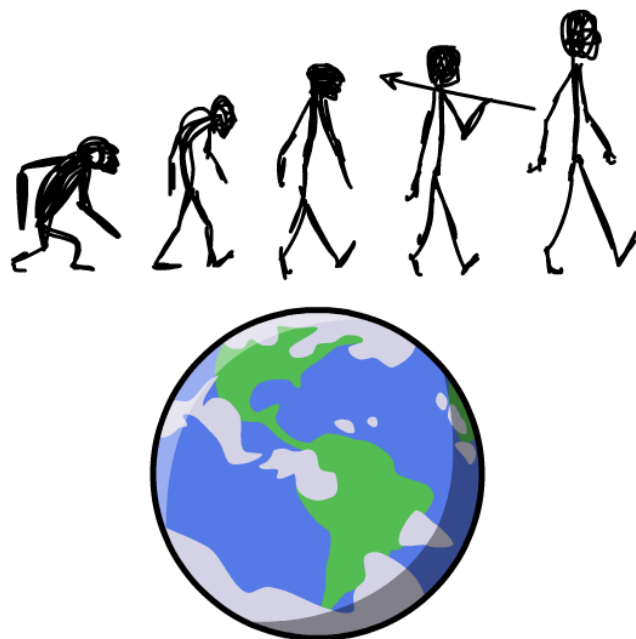

MODULE 1 | INTRODUCTION TO EMOTION REGULATION

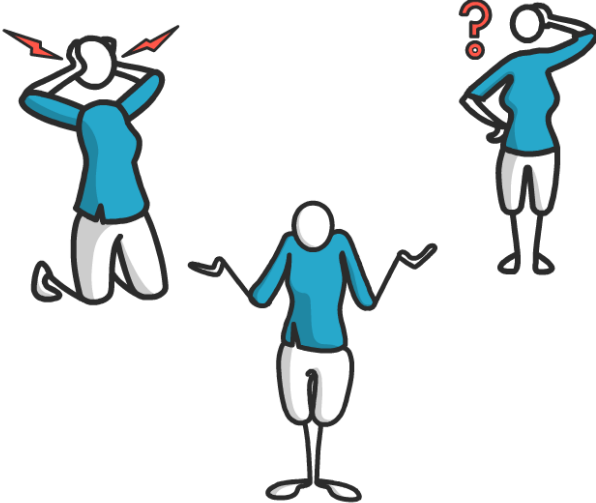
SO... WHAT ARE EMOTIONS?

We all experience emotions as a part of our normal everyday lives. Sometimes they are positive, such as when we feel happy or excited, and sometimes they are negative, such as when we feel angry, anxious or overwhelmed. Emotions are subjective internal states which we often experience through a variety of bodily sensations or symptoms. We can think of our emotions as a collection of in-built responses to a given situation (or “stimulus” in psych terms).

From an evolutionary standpoint, emotions do have a functional or *helpful* purpose. They can help by motivating us to adapt to our surrounding environment and respond in certain helpful ways. For instance, warm fuzzy feelings of love may help to support a parent’s bond with their newborn baby. Feelings of fear or anxiety are intended to help us by warning that there may be danger or threat in our environment, which in turn prepares us to either fight or run away.



At other times however, the emotions we experience can be somewhat *unhelpful*. Sometimes we may feel anxious when there’s nothing really to be worried about. Sometimes we might find ourselves quick-tempered and reactive which may lead us to say or do things we regret later on. Or sometimes we may feel awkwardly jubilant during a sombre occasion, such as a funeral.




EMOTIONS ARE NORMAL

...BOTH THE ONES THAT FEEL GOOD,
AND THE ONES THAT DO NOT

GOALS:

- ✓ TO PROVIDE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF HOW EMOTIONS FUNCTION
- ✓ TO PROVIDE STRATEGIES FOR HOW TO BETTER MANAGE EMOTIONS

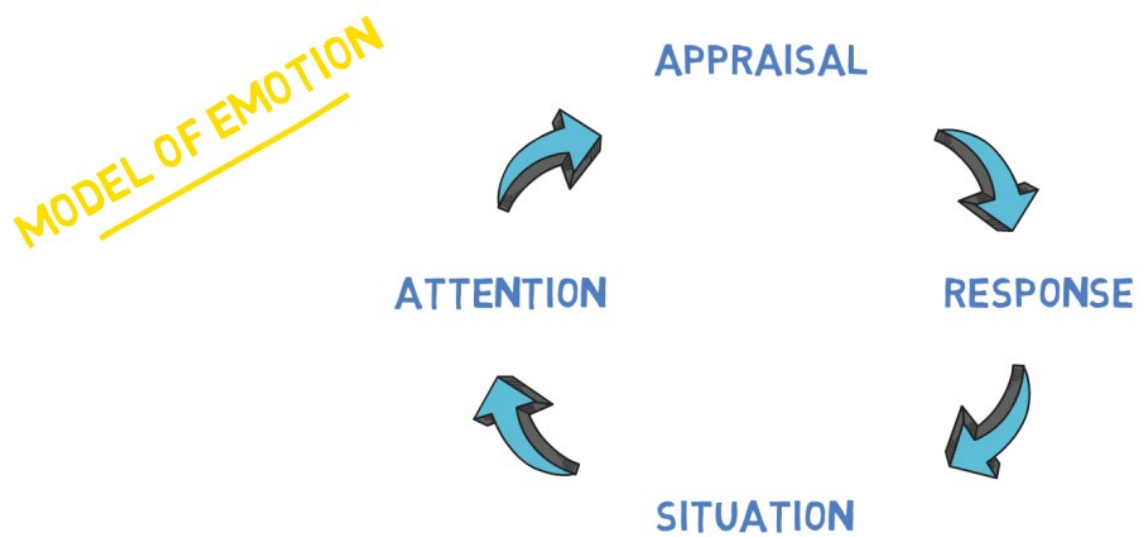


It is important to note that emotions are normal. This includes both the ones that feel good, and the ones that do not. Anger, sadness, fear... they are all normal to experience sometimes. The aim of these modules isn't to simply make you feel happy all the time (...that can have its own downsides). Rather, our goal is to provide you with a better understanding of how emotions function, and to provide you with some strategies for how to better manage your emotions when needed, so they don't get the better of you.

THE COMPONENTS OF EMOTION

Our experience of emotion is actually made up of a number of key components, which include:

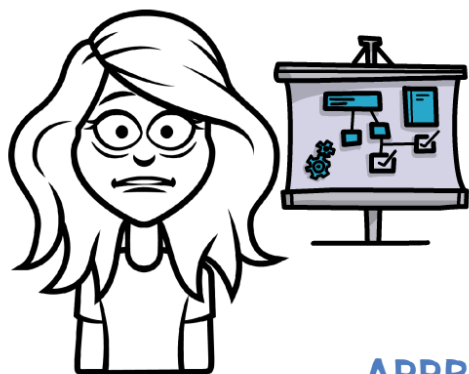
1. The **situation** we are currently in.
2. The focus of our **attention** while in the given situation.
3. Our **appraisals**, which provide an interpretation of the given situation.
4. And our physiological and behavioural **responses** to the given situation.



In order to get a better understanding of how these components of emotion work, let's have a look at this example:

Lauren is giving an important uni presentation. Moments into starting her speech she looks out towards all the people in the room, and notices how everyone is looking at her. She suddenly thinks to herself, "I don't know if what I'm talking about is right... my presentation is a mess." She then notices her hands starting to shake, which she feels is made very obvious by the notes she is holding. She thinks to herself, "oh no, I must look really nervous right now." Her heart races and her face starts to feel flushed. She tries to clasp her hands together to stop them from shaking.

Sounds daunting yeah? Breaking this down, we can think of Lauren's experience as being made up of the following:



SITUATION
PRESENTATION

ATTENTION
FOCUSING TOWARDS OTHER PEOPLE
IN THE ROOM
FOCUSING ON SHAKY HANDS

APPRAISAL
"MY PRESENTATION IS A MESS..."
"I MUST LOOK REALLY NERVOUS RIGHT NOW..."

RESPONSE
SHAKY HANDS, RACING HEART, BLUSHING
CLASPING HANDS TOGETHER

We can generalize this example to think of the experience of emotion as including a situation, which we attend to and apprise in some way, and which evokes certain physiological and behavioural responses. If we want to get a bit more technical, this cycle of situation-attention-appraisal-response is actually something which repeats again and again over time. If we have a closer look at Lauren’s example, we can see how this happens.

At the first instance, we can think of Lauren’s first emotional “cycle” as being the following:

Cycle 1

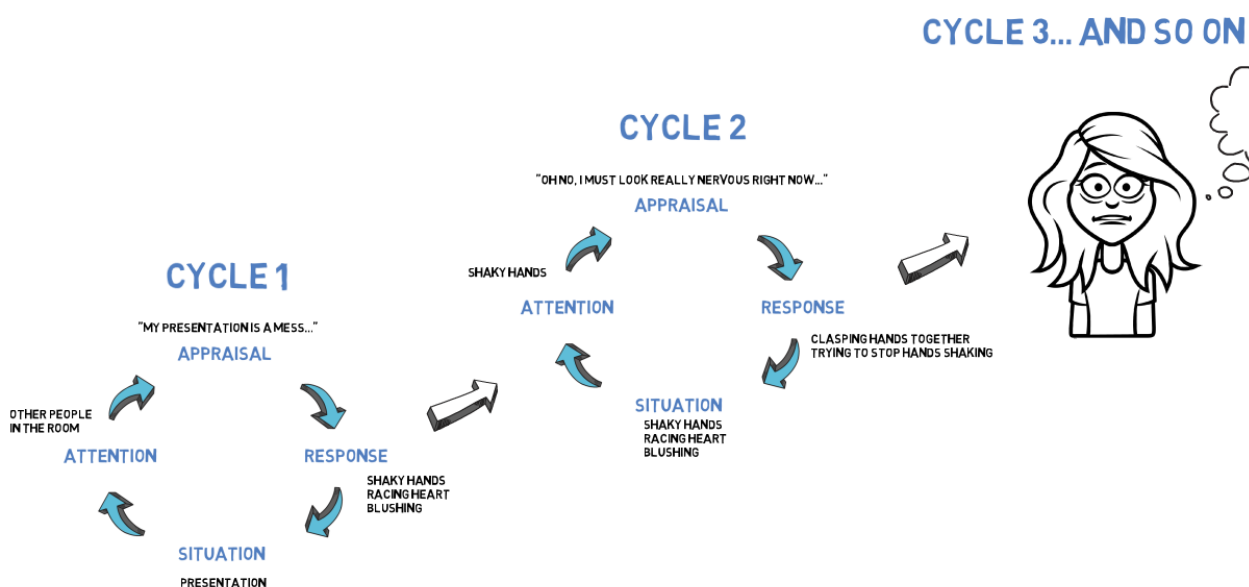
Situation	Giving a uni presentation
Attention	Focusing towards the other people in the room.
Appraisal	Thinking to herself, “I don’t know if what I’m talking about is right... my presentation is a mess.”
Response	Physiological symptoms of anxiety (i.e. shaky hands, racing heart, blushing).

At this point, Lauren has taken notice of her physiological symptoms of anxiety. In effect, these symptoms can now be considered as “the situation” which starts the second emotional cycle, which Lauren subsequently attends to, appraises and responds to, as shown here:

Cycle 2

Situation	Physiological symptoms of anxiety
Attention	Focusing towards her shaky hands
Appraisal	Thinking to herself, “oh no, I must look really nervous right now.”
Response	Clasping her hands together to try to stop them from shaking.

These are just two cycles illustrated, but we can assume that this will continue. For instance, Lauren may then realise that she has been paying so much attention to hiding her shaky hands that she has now forgotten where she is up to in relation to her presentation, which could be the situation which kicks off cycle 3.



HOW CAN WE REGULATE EMOTIONS?

Interestingly, the research suggests that with consistent practice we can actually change or regulate our emotions by considering how we think, attend and act. This is illustrated in the process model of emotion regulation, which has been developed by Stanford psychologist, Professor James Gross, and is summarised here:

EMOTION REGULATION MODEL

(GROSS, 1998; 2015)

FIVE STAGES:

- 1) SITUATION SELECTION
- 2) SITUATION MODIFICATION
- 3) ATTENTION
- 4) APPRAISAL
- 5) RESPONSE MODULATION

EMOTIONS ARE CHANGEABLE



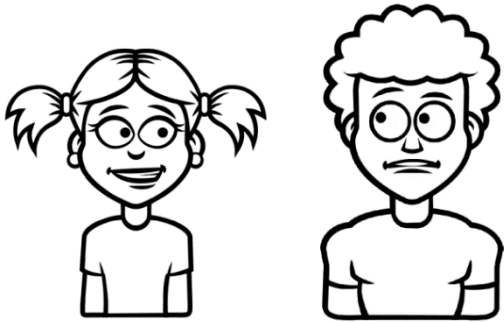
UP-REGULATE

DOWN-REGULATE

The emotion regulation model highlights five stages whereby the experience of emotion may be regulated: situation selection, situation modification, attention, appraisal and response modulation. Importantly, each stage represents an opportunity for emotion to either increase (i.e. upregulate) or decrease (i.e. downregulate), depending on the choices we make at each stage. Over the course of this program, we will be using this model to show the different ways in which we can regulate our emotions, but for now let's have a closer look at situation selection and situation modification.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE SITUATION

The first stage of the emotion regulation model is situation selection. In essence, situation selection refers to how you can regulate your emotions based on choosing the situations you do or do not participate in.



For example, here is our friend Russ. Russ has been invited to a weekend away at a friend’s holiday house. Unfortunately, Russ has very recently broken up with his ex-partner Rachel, who will also be going. Their relationship did not end well and things are quite volatile at the moment. Based on

the principle of situation selection, Russ might choose to save himself some likely drama by simply not going.

Sounds simple, eh? But unfortunately, there are some caveats to this approach. Avoiding a situation entirely may also result in missing out on important positive experiences, such as being able to catch up and have fun with other friends during this weekend away. For many situations in everyday life, it also may

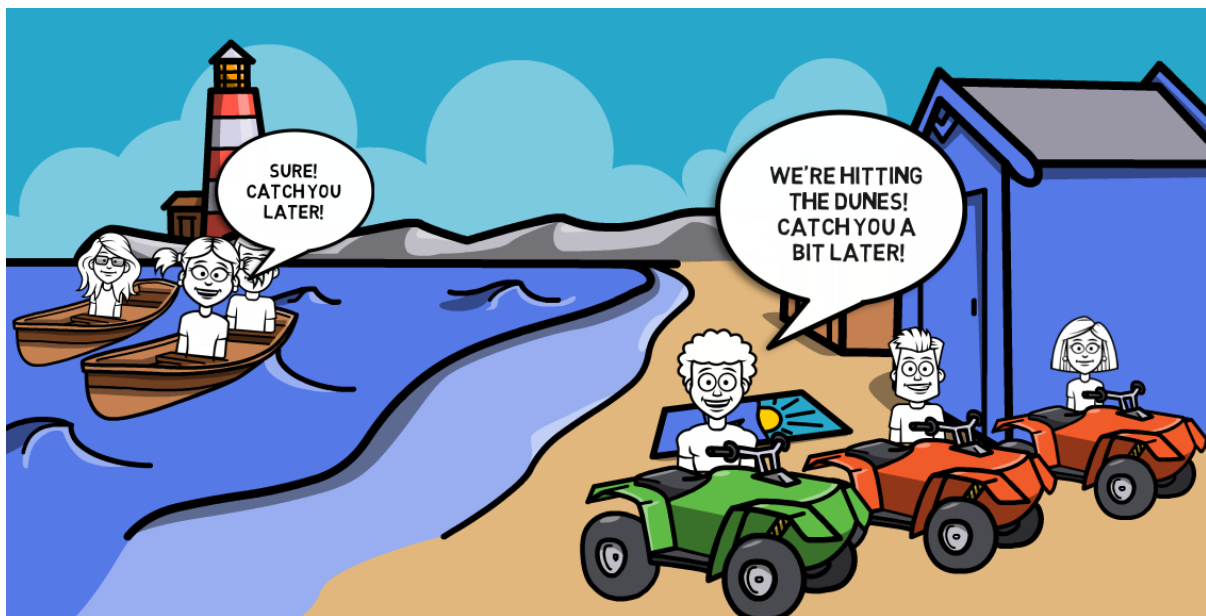


not be possible or realistic to simply avoid these. For example, in the case of Lauren’s stress-inducing presentation, avoiding this entirely probably won’t get her very far university-wise.

In these instances, we can then consider stage 2 of the emotion regulation model – situation modification.

SITUATION MODIFICATION

This stage refers to the ways in which we may be able to interact with and / or modify a given situation to influence our resulting emotional experience. Let's go back to the weekend away example. Let's say Russ decided to go on the weekend away with Rachel and their group of friends. There are often a number of ways in which we can look to modify a situation to increase or decrease the likelihood of undesirable emotional-loaded consequences. For example, Russ could choose to hang around with Rachel a lot, which may likely bring up old arguments. Or, he could choose to hang around with Rachel less – enough to be civil but also sufficiently minimal to avoid potentially sensitive topics.



We can also apply this concept of situation modification to Lauren’s presentation. If you have to give an important stress-inducing presentation, it makes sense to take control over what you can beforehand – adequately learn the material, practice as needed, and try not to plan other important things immediately before or after which may interfere with the task at hand.



KEY MESSAGES

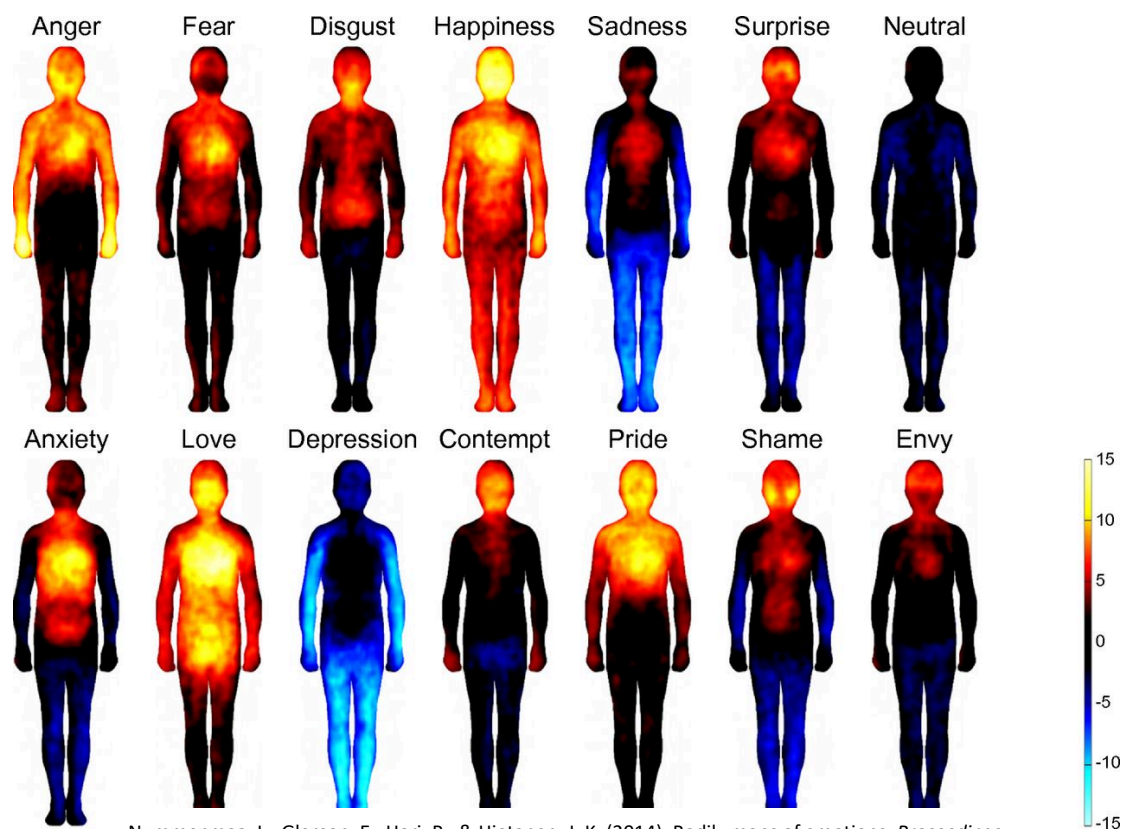
- ✓ We experience emotions based on how we attend, appraise and respond to a given situation
- ✓ The types of emotions we experience can be regulated in five ways: situation selection, situation modification, attention, appraisal and response modulation
- ✓ By considering how we can modify what happens in a situation, we can regulate our emotions

also be combined to create further representations our experience. For example, from this wheel anxiety may be considered to be the combination of anticipation and fear, contempt may be considered to be the combination of disgust and anger, and a feeling of bittersweetness may be considered as the combination of joy and sadness.

EMOTIONS IN THE BODY

We experience emotions via sensations in our body. In turn, these bodily sensations can be thought of as indicators of the emotion that we are experiencing. Let's have a look at a couple of examples:

While people differ in their experience of different emotions, people often report feeling joyful by laughing and smiling, feeling a flutter in your heart, and a comforting sense of warmth across your body and face. In contrast, people often report feeling worried with a racing heart, trembling, sweating and gastrointestinal upset (butterflies in your stomach).



Nummenmaa, L., Glerean, E., Hari, R., & Hietanen, J. K. (2014). Bodily maps of emotions. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111(2), 646. doi:10.1073/pnas.1321664111

Research also suggests that different emotions tend to be felt across varied parts of our body. For instance, individuals often report feelings of depression to be associated with reduced sensation in the arms and legs, while anger is felt via increased sensation through the hands, head and chest, and happiness is felt across the entire body. Taken together, it is possible to identify our emotions based on our bodily sensations.

ATTENDING INTERNALLY

The ability to recognize our emotions based on bodily sensations can be very useful. For instance, let's say you are having a heated disagreement with a colleague which is very quickly turning into an argument. Sometimes we get caught up in the moment. In this case, the argument may escalate very quickly, we become angry, and we may say offensive things or act out aggressively... things we may regret in hindsight. At times like these, it can be helpful to attend to what our body is trying to tell us. Identifying that we are angry early can help us to pause and consider whether we need to cool off before we say or do something we'll regret.

RECOGNISING HOW WE FEEL BY ATTENDING TO OUR BODILY SENSATIONS CAN BE VERY USEFUL





BUT...

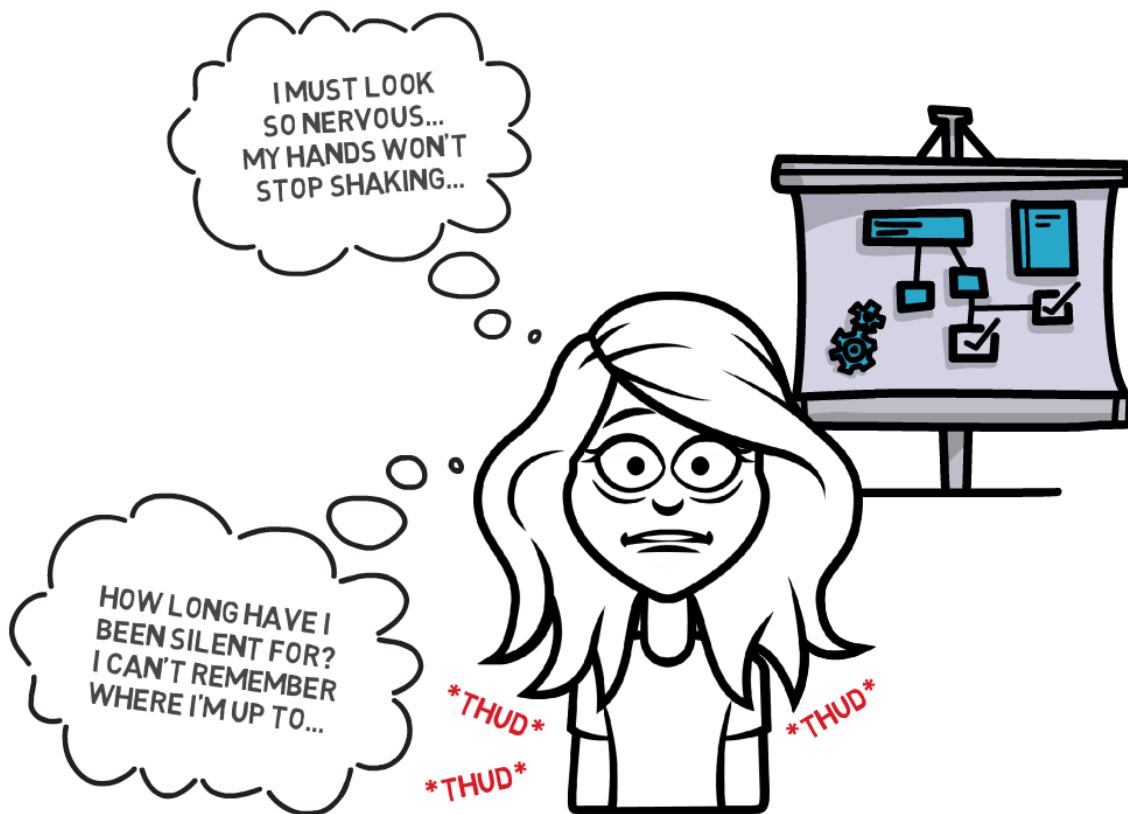


IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE TO ATTEND TOO MUCH TO OUR BODILY SENSATIONS

There is a flipside to this, however. It is also possible to fixate too much to our emotion-related bodily sensations. Let's have a look at Lauren's uni presentation again:

Lauren had noticed that she was feeling anxious. Her hands were shaky, her face felt flushed and her heart was racing. As Lauren focused on these body signals, she thought to herself that she must be appearing really nervous and started trying to hide her shaky hands by clasping them together.

This kind of worked for a moment, but not really. Lauren could still hear the fluttering sound her notes were making despite having her hands clenched together tightly. She then noticed that her heart was racing even faster now. The more she focused on it, the louder each thud of her heart sounded to her. It resonated downward, and throughout her whole body, making her feel weak and shaky and light headed. At this point, Lauren realized that she wasn't sure how long she had been silent for now... nor where she was up to in her presentation.



Lauren has gotten herself stuck a bit of a vicious cycle here. The more she attends to her body's signs of anxiety, the more anxious she gets and the less attention she pays to her actual presentation. In this case, we can think of Lauren as getting caught in an unhelpful attention trap.

INCREASED ATTENTION TO BODY'S SIGNS OF ANXIETY



INCREASED ANXIETY



UNHELPFUL ATTENTION TRAP

We can't stop our attention entirely. However, we can redirect it in more helpful ways, which is often the task at hand or the activity that we are trying to get done. In the context of giving a uni presentation, if you notice you are getting anxious, it's often best to acknowledge while refraining from further self-judgement or blame, and then gently guide your attention back towards your presentation.

Your attention may wander off again, and that's okay. You just have to gently guide it back again. It may be difficult at first, but the more you practice doing this, the better you will become.

ATTENDING TO THE WORLD AROUND YOU

We can also direct our attention externally to the world around us. Oddly enough, attention is a very selective process. We pick and choose what we focus on, but the way in which we do so can influence how we see the world around us, and in turn, how we feel.

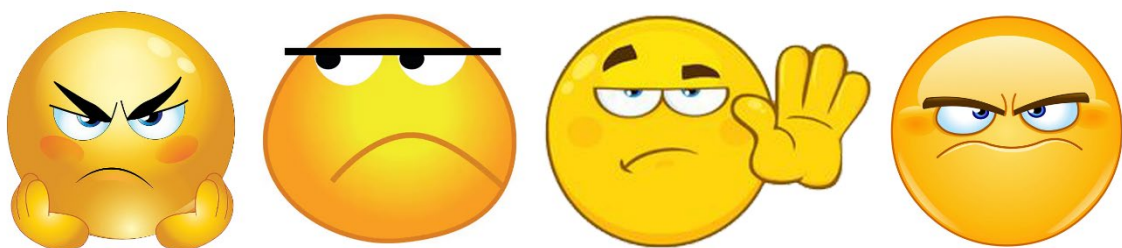
For this exercise, let's give poor Lauren a little break, and instead I want you to image that you are interviewing for a job in front of a panel made up of these three four people:

INTERVIEW PANEL 1:



Sure, you may still feel a bit anxious (as it is a job interview after all), speaking to people who appear friendly and supportive can often help soothe any nerves.

INTERVIEW PANEL 2:



Now imagine these were the people in your panel...

Pretty unnerving, yeah? For many people, a panel like this would make them feel increasing anxious, disheartened or overwhelmed.

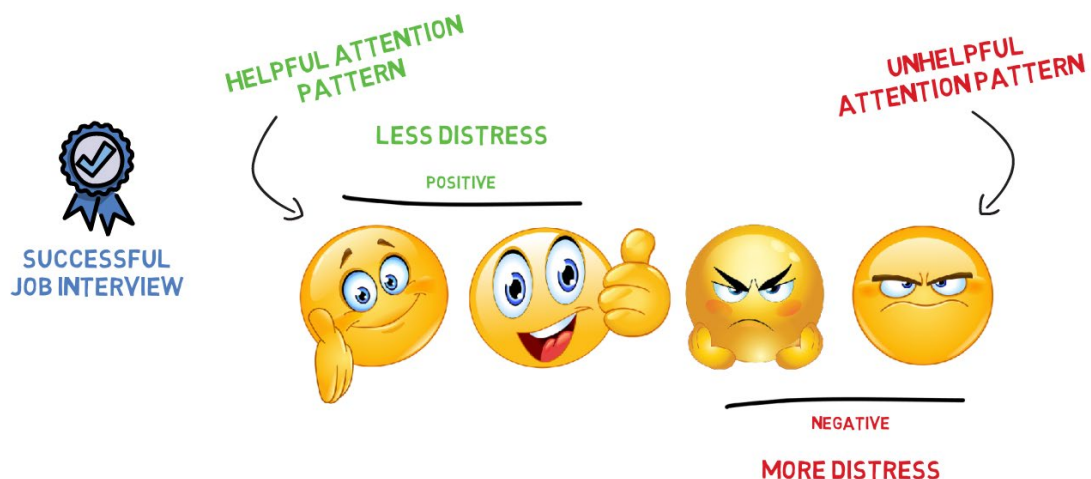
INTERVIEW PANEL 3:



But what if your panel looked like this?

Would you feel distressed? Or supported? The research suggests that it actually depends on where your attention is. If you focus on the negative, then you will likely feel more distressed. But if you redirect your attentional focus to the positive things around you, you will likely feel significantly less distressed.

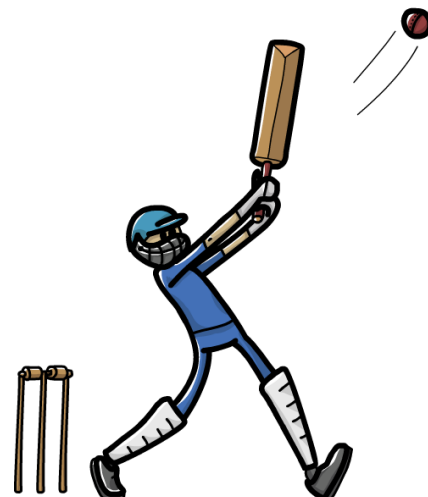
For this example, we can think of the job interview as our goal, and we can think of a positive focus as being a helpful pattern of attention, as it would lead to a more composed emotional state conducive to achieving our goal. In contrast, we can consider dwelling on negative information as being an unhelpful pattern of attention, as it may likely increase negative emotional states which would then make it harder to achieve our goal.



We all have biases in relation to the types of things we like to focus on, whether they be positive or negative, and sometimes these biases can get us a little stuck. Importantly though, we have the ability to change our attentional focus as well. The more we practice this, the better we get.

TAKING A MOMENT TO REFOCUS

So you may have noticed that we've mentioned how changing your attention takes practice. And it does. Changing your attention is like learning a new skill. Think about the last time you tried something new, whether it be a new sport or video game, maybe you signed up to a new dance class or started learning a new language. At first it most likely feels awkward or difficult, but with continued practice over time, it progressively gets easier.



**CHANGING ATTENTION
TAKES PRACTICE!**

One way we can train our attention is through simple relaxation or mindfulness activities. Here's a short four step approach that we often use:

- 1. Find a time a time in the day where you have a spare five minutes. You don't need to block out large chunks of time. A little bit, done often, is usually the most effective approach here. Find a place that is comfortable and free from distraction where you can either sit or lie down.*
- 2. Take a moment to orient yourself to here and now. What are you currently experiencing? What thoughts come to mind? What can you hear around you? Acknowledge these things that come to mind without trying to control or change them. Don't try to reason with your thoughts. Rather, just observe that it is present in your mind, whatever it is, and then gently let it float away. Spend a minute or so doing this.*
- 3. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Here, we want to draw air deep into our belly, without our shoulders and chest rising. This is called diaphragmatic breathing. Breathe into your belly for four seconds (through your nose if*

possible), hold your breath for one second, and then slowly release your breath over four second. Rest for one second and then repeat.

- 4. Now bring the focus of your attention to your breath. Notice the sensations that your breathe creates throughout your body. Don't try to change or control anything, simply observe. If your mind wanders off to other thoughts, simply acknowledge this and gently redirect your focus to your breath again. You can think of breath as your anchor which centres you. Your mind may have a tendency to wander off but that's okay. Simply guide it back to your anchor as you let go of any other thoughts.*

And there you have it. Attention training in four simple steps. Give it a try if you like, and remember, new things can sometimes be awkward at first, but with continued practice over time, it will start to feel natural.



KEY MESSAGES

- ✓ The way we direct our attention affects how we feel.
- ✓ When distressed, gently redirecting your attention to the task at hand can often get you back on track.
- ✓ What we focus on in our surroundings influences how we see the world, and in turn, how we feel.

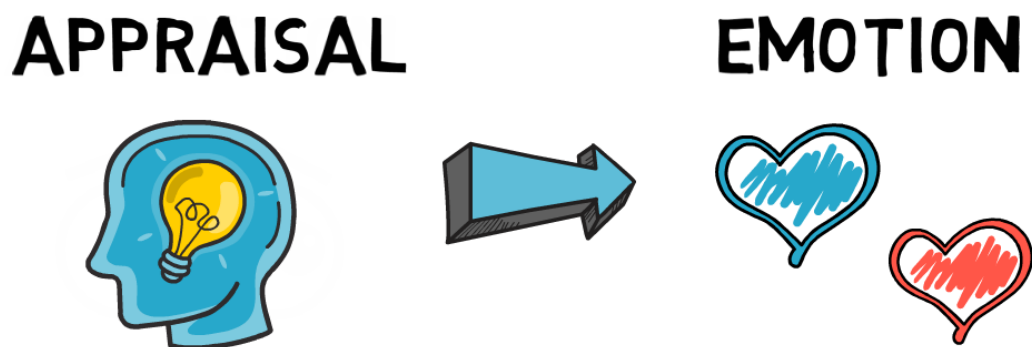
MODULE 3 | HOW WE THINK IS HOW WE FEEL

WELCOME BACK

Welcome back to *Managing Emotion!*

Last session we talked about the relationship between attention and emotion, and specifically how changing the way we attend to things can change the way we feel. We discussed that when we feel distressed, focusing extensively on our bodily symptoms of distress and the negative things around us can often be unhelpful, as it can make our distress worse. For times like these, it can often be more helpful to remind ourselves to refocus our attention to the task at hand or towards the positive things around us.

In this module, we will be having a closer look at thoughts, and how the way in which we appraise a situation can influence our experience of emotion.



A CLOSER LOOK AT THOUGHTS

If we look back to the model of emotion described in Module 1, the experience of emotion can be thought of as a situation or stimulus, which is attended to and appraised, which leads to a response - both in terms of bodily responses and / or other actions we may make as a result. Thoughts, or appraisals, are very much a part of our experience of emotion.

As a simple example, let's say you are walking along an alleyway late at night and out jumps an 1890's criminal with a gun. Your body will no doubt jump into fight or flight mode via a number of bodily responses. However, you may also have a variety of thoughts which come to mind, such as "he's going to take all my money!" or "I'm about to get shot!" or "I don't want to die!" We refer to these as appraisals, as they provide an interpretation of the given situation. In turn, the way we appraise a given situation often affects how we feel.



ONE SITUATION, ALTERNATE EMOTIONS

Interestingly, one given situation can actually evoke multiple different emotions, and it's likely that you may have come across this in day to day life. Let's take annoyed and excited as an example. A single situation could potentially evoke either of these two alternate emotions if you ask enough people.

Say, the thunderous sound of a Harley riding by...



EXCITED



ANNOYED

Or how a certain TV series ended...



EXCITED



ANNOYED

Or putting pineapple on pizza...



EXCITED



ANNOYED

Importantly, it's typically the differences in appraisal styles which determine which of these two alternate emotions we feel. Using these examples, we can think of alternate types of appraisals which will likely lead to either feeling excited or annoyed.

**"OH YEAH!
SO MUCH GRUNT!"**



EXCITED



**"EHH.. SO MUCH
NOISE POLLUTION!"**



ANNOYED

**"EPIC! I DIDN'T
SEE THAT ONE COMING!"**



EXCITED



**"A POORLY DIRECTED AND
UNSATISFYING ENDING!"**



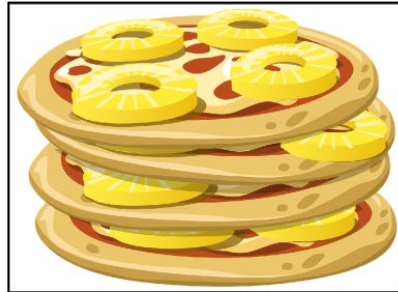
ANNOYED

"I LIKE HOW THE SWEET AND SAVOURY MIX."

"IT'S AN ABOMINATION TO PIZZA..."



EXCITED



ANNOYED

Putting this together, we can see how one situation can give rise to alternate appraisals, and in turn, alternate emotional response:

**HELPFUL
EMOTIONAL
RESPONSE**



**HELPFUL
APPRAISAL**



SITUATION

**UNHELPFUL
EMOTIONAL
RESPONSE**



**UNHELPFUL
APPRAISAL**



**"HELPFUL" APPRAISALS
AND RESPONSES
HELP SUPPORT US TO
ACHIEVE OUR GOALS.**

**"UNHELPFUL" APPRAISALS
AND RESPONSES
HINDER OUR GOALS.**

You may have noticed that we've called one side "helpful" and the other "unhelpful". The reason why we do this is because for many important situations we find ourselves in, there are often "helpful" way of thinking and responding which will help support us in achieving our goals. At the same time, there's often also "unhelpful" ways of thinking and responding which simply won't help us and may even make things worse. This simple concept can be very useful to keep in mind for when you find yourself in an important situation and need to manage your emotions.

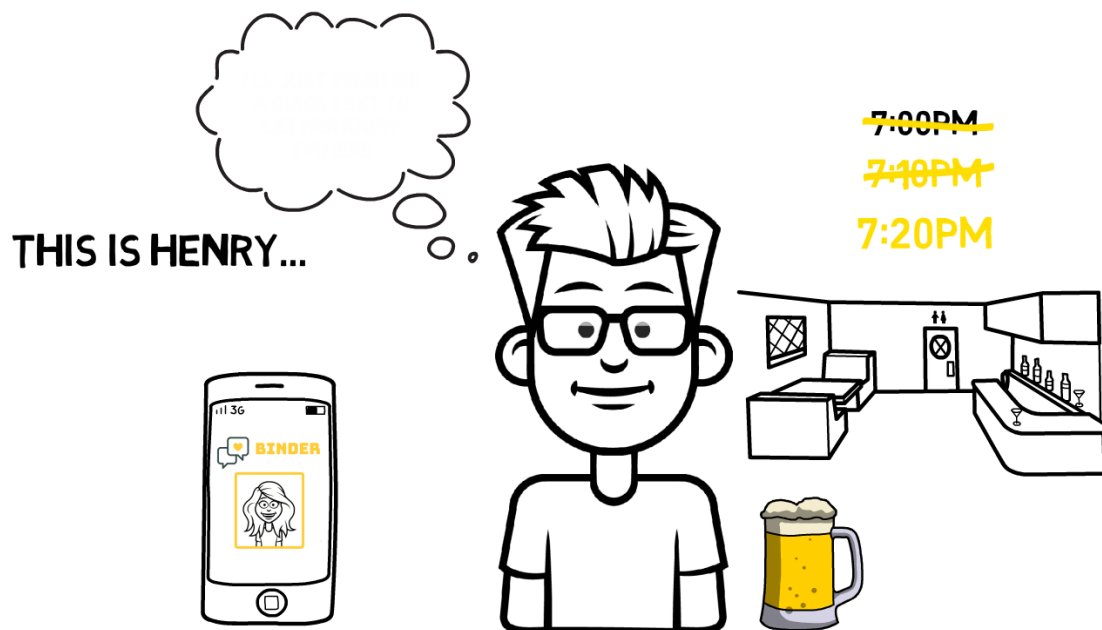
SWIPE LEFT SWIPE RIGHT

Let's consider this example:

This is Henry. Henry is on a first date after matching with someone on a new dating app. Let's call it a Binder date.

It's their first in-person meet-up after a week of fairly solid texting back and forth on the app. Lauren, his match, seems nice. While it's always hard to tell what the other person is going to be like in real life, Henry has high hopes for this one. Lauren seems smart, funny and the two seem to have a whole bunch of stuff in common. They decided to meet up for a drink at one of his favourite small bars. Fancy, but not too fancy. And also the option for small bites and share plates if the night progresses well.

Henry is waiting at the bar. They had arranged to meet at 7pm and it had just ticked over to 7:10pm. Henry thinks, "I'll just send her a quick text to let her know I'm here." He sends this and orders a drink. Minutes pass but no reply. He checks his phone again. It's now 7:20pm.



Take a minute to consider what Henry might be thinking right now...

Now have a look at these appraisals.

1. "Maybe she got into a bad car crash on the way here."
2. "She's ditched me. She must have found something better to do."
3. "She probably never liked me. I'm pretty useless like that."

Now consider what kind of emotional responses may likely accompany these appraisals? Based on these appraisals it's likely that Henry may be feeling angry, rejected or sad. If we think of these responses in terms of how helpful they are, if Henry's goal is to have a successful first date, these appraisals and consequent negative feelings seem rather unhelpful.

Now consider these alternate appraisals:

1. "We've had good chats this whole week. She's mostly likely just running a bit late."
2. "Parking is really difficult around here. She's probably just having trouble finding a park."
3. "Worst case – she doesn't show up. Ah well, I have other mates out tonight I can hang out with instead. It's always good times with them."

In contrast, these appraisals are much more likely to lead to a more composed, collected or unfazed emotional response. In the context of a first date, we can consider these as a more helpful set of appraisals and responses.

COMMON UNHELPFUL APPRAISALS

It's pretty common to experience unhelpful types of thoughts, particularly when we find ourselves in overwhelming or stressful situations. In fact, there are many different types of unhelpful thoughts which can often leave you digging yourself into a deeper hole. Unhelpful appraisals often tend to be unduly negative and may not be very realistic.

Here's a list of common unhelpful appraisal styles and an example of how it may apply to Henry while he is waiting for Lauren on their Binder date. Also summarised are a number of ways in which we can challenge these unhelpful appraisals with more helpful alternatives. Here's how it would apply to Henry:

TEN COMMON UNHELPFUL APPRAISAL STYLES

 **BINDER**



AND HOW
TO
CHALLENGE
THEM!

Unhelpful Appraisal Style	Example	More Helpful Alternatives
<p>1. Mental Filter</p> <p>Only focusing on part of the situation and ignoring the rest. This can often be focusing on the negative parts and ignoring the positive parts.</p>	<p><i>"She's late... she's not coming."</i></p>	<p>Consider the whole picture:</p> <p><i>"Wait, she also readily texted with me over the whole week. She seemed pretty keen to meet."</i></p>
<p>2. Jumping to Conclusions</p> <p>When we assume that we know what someone else is thinking ("mindreading") and jump to conclusions about what might happen next.</p>	<p><i>"She's late... I bet she couldn't care less about me."</i></p>	<p>Ask yourself how you know this:</p> <p><i>"Wait, how do I know this? All I know is that she's a bit late. I don't yet know why she is late."</i></p>
<p>3. Personalisation</p> <p>Blaming yourself for everything that goes wrong.</p>	<p><i>"It's my fault she's not coming. I'm just not an interesting person."</i></p>	<p>Find all the causes:</p> <p><i>"Maybe it has nothing to do with me. Maybe Apple Maps just sent her the wrong way."</i></p>

Unhelpful Appraisal Style	Example	More Helpful Alternatives
<p>4. Catastrophising</p> <p>Blowing negative things out of proportion.</p>	<p><i>"I'm waiting here like an idiot. This is the worst thing ever."</i></p>	<p>Put it in perspective by consider all possible outcomes:</p> <p><i>"Well... it's not ideal but it could be worse."</i></p>
<p>5. Black and White Thinking</p> <p>Only seeing one extreme or the other, while ignoring the shades of grey in between.</p>	<p><i>"Being late is inconsiderate, full stop."</i></p>	<p>Find the shades of grey in between:</p> <p><i>"Ok, maybe being late isn't always because they're inconsiderate. Sometimes you can't help it."</i></p>
<p>6. Shoulding and Musting</p> <p>Putting unreasonable expectations on yourself with "I should..." and "I must..." statements. These statements are not always unhelpful, but they can often create unrealistic expectations.</p>	<p><i>"I should have picked a better bar to meet. I must be more charismatic with women."</i></p>	<p>Be flexible:</p> <p><i>"No one's perfect. I guess I picked a decent place, and she kept replying to my messages so I couldn't be that uncharismatic."</i></p>
<p>7. Overgeneralisation</p> <p>Taking one instance and applying it to all present, past or future situations.</p>	<p><i>"No one wants to date me. I'll always be alone."</i></p>	<p>Be specific:</p> <p><i>"Right now I'm single, waiting for a date. That doesn't mean it will always be like this."</i></p>
<p>8. Labelling</p> <p>Making global statements based on behaviour in specific situations. This can often lead to ignoring things which do not fit with the "label" we have given it.</p>	<p><i>"Only a selfish person would be late like this."</i></p>	<p>Consider the whole picture:</p> <p><i>"Just because you're late doesn't necessarily mean you're selfish. Sometimes it can't be helped."</i></p>

Unhelpful Appraisal Style	Example	More Helpful Alternatives
9. Emotional Reasoning		
Basing your appraisals of a situation on how you feel.	<i>"I felt a bit weird and jittery before leaving the house for this date. I knew this was my body telling me that something bad like this would happen."</i>	Consider the evidence of the situation regardless of how you feel: <i>"It's ok. I felt a bit anxious before, but there was no reason to expect that this date will end badly."</i>
10. Magnification and Minimisation		
Magnifying the positive attributes of other people and minimising your own positive attributes.	<i>"She was so funny and smart when we were talking earlier. I barely had anything interesting to contribute."</i>	Consider your positives: <i>"Sure, I'm no Ryan Gosling eating his cereal, but then, who is? I'm interesting enough to have been messaging her back and forth over the last week. Even made her lol a bunch."</i>

HELPFUL OR UNHELPFUL: IT DEPENDS ON YOUR GOALS

You may have noticed that up until now, we have tended to label positive ways of thinking as being "helpful" and negative ways of thinking as being "unhelpful." Often, this might be the case. However, it's important to remember that ultimately a helpful response is a response which helps you towards your goals, and an unhelpful response is something that hinders your goals.

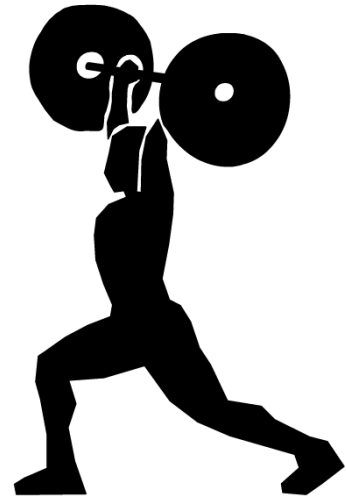


In practice, when we find ourselves in a stressful situation, the helpful ways of thinking are often somewhat positive in nature. However, there are situations where the opposite may apply. For instance, if you are a competitive weightlifter about to hit a max lift, it's likely that the most helpful thoughts will be those which increase anger and put you into fight mode.

The same goes for other situations requiring an intense state of vigilance, such as making a game-saving tackle during a football match, or quite literally preparing to fight.



In these situations, we can think of the helpful appraisals as being the appraisals which upregulate aggression and arousal. In contrast, if we bring back



Henry's Binder date, the helpful appraisals here would be the one which downregulate feelings of anxiety or rejection, and upregulate a sense of composure or calmness.

Taken together, helpful appraisals lead to emotions which support your goals within a given situation, while unhelpful appraisals lead to emotions which hinder your goals.



**HELPFUL APPRAISALS LEAD TO EMOTIONS
WHICH SUPPORT YOUR GOALS**

**UNHELPFUL APPRAISALS LEAD TO EMOTIONS
WHICH HINDER YOUR GOALS**

KEY MESSAGES

- ✓ Emotions are changeable, as the way in which we appraise a given situation impacts how we feel
- ✓ Appraisal can be thought of as being helpful or unhelpful depending on whether they lead to emotions which support or hinder our goals in a given situation.
- ✓ Unhelpful appraisals can be challenged by considering alternate explanations, available evidence, and balancing the positive with the negative.

MODULE 4 | TAKING ACTION AND PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

WELCOME BACK

Welcome back to *Managing Emotion!*

Last session we talked about the relationship between appraisals and emotion, and specifically how changing the way we appraise a given situation can change the way we feel. We discussed how appraisal styles can be thought of as either being helpful or unhelpful depending on how it makes us feel, and how it does or does not support our current goals in a given situation. Most of the time, unhelpful appraisal styles can be challenged by considering the available evidence, alternate explanations and balancing the positive with the negative.

In this module, we will be having a look into our self-efficacy and actions, before reviewing our collection of strategies for managing emotions.

HELPFUL
VS
UNHELPFUL

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN IT ALL GOES BAD?

In the previous module, we spent some time unpacking the difference between helpful and unhelpful appraisal styles, and how we can challenge our unhelpful appraisal styles. While we described a number of different challenging strategies, a lot of it boils down to pausing to reflect on whether we have considered all the available evidence. Often when we do this, we find that our initial appraisal was either not very realistic or unduly negative.

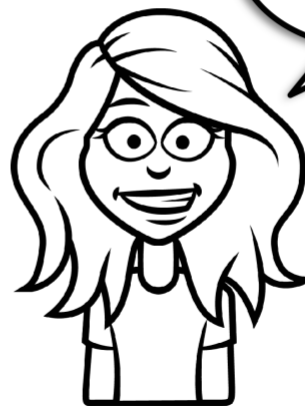
Let's revisit our friend Henry who was waiting for his date. While Henry may have initially had a number of unhelpful thoughts come to mind, such as:

1. "Maybe she got into a bad car crash on the way here."
2. "She's ditched me. She must have found something better to do."
3. "She probably never liked me. I'm pretty useless like that."

After considering the available evidence (e.g. a week's worth of consistent texting, sharing of jokes and good conversation), he concluded that it is also reasonable to expect that Lauren, his date, is probably just running late and will arrive shortly. Maybe not ideal, but definitely not completely disastrous.

"NAH... SHE'S PROBABLY JUST RUNNING LATE."

 **BINDER**



SORRY I'M LATE!
HAD A REALLY BAD
UNI PRESENTATION
JUST NOW!



But what if Lauren didn't show up?

After all, sometimes bad stuff does actually happen. In times like these our appraisals are still very important to consider.

We just need to take a slightly different angle.

APPRAISING YOURSELF: A LOOK INTO SELF-EFFICACY

It's also important to think about the appraisals or beliefs that we hold about ourselves. Self-efficacy is the belief we have in our own abilities to face challenges, to strive for goals, and to take charge over the way we experience the world around us.

High self-efficacy is often a good thing to work towards. People with high self-efficacy are typically more motivated to learn new things, gain new experiences, and to tackle difficult challenges when they arise. In contrast, low self-efficacy is often associated with low motivation to try new things, holding negative self-beliefs, and having fewer positive experiences.

SELF-EFFICACY IS THE BELIEF WE HAVE IN OUR OWN ABILITIES...

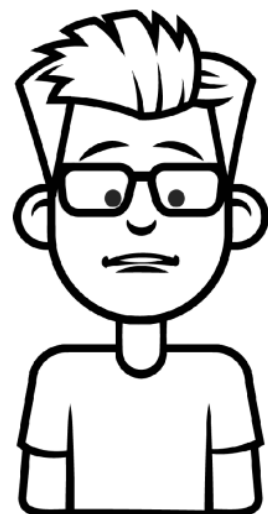
✓ TO FACE CHALLENGES

✓ TO STRIVE FOR GOALS

✓ TO TAKE CHARGE

In the context of Henry being ghosted by his Binder date, if Henry has high self-efficacy, he will likely acknowledge that this was a bad outcome for him, but then move on while retaining a positive, yet realistic, outlook on his ability to connect with new people for future dates. In terms of appraisals, he may say something to himself like *"damn... that hurt, but I'm resilient enough to work through it and move on. Tomorrow is another day."*

On the flip side, if Henry has low self-efficacy, he may likely dwell on how much of a failure he is and then avoid subsequent dating situations... Not really that helpful in the long run if his goal is to find a partner.



BUILDING SELF-EFFICACY: HELPING YOU TO HELP YOURSELF

Here's a few helpful ways in which we can work towards building our self-efficacy over time.

1. UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS AND THE GOAL

We've all heard various motivational clichés such as, “fall down seven times, stand up eight” or “this is what people think success looks like... this is what success actually looks like.” But there is a certain degree of truth to be taken from these types of statements.



Pursuing a meaningful goal is never easy. We can often fall into the unhelpful trap of thinking about the end goal without paying enough attention to the process or “journey” that precedes it. This journey is filled with many ups and downs, successes and failures. When we think of this this way, a goal is actually something which is built upon failure just as much as

it is built upon success... after all, no one's perfect.



Bad luck, struggles and negative events can be very hard. In times like these, it can be useful to acknowledge how struggles are a normal part of human experience, and an inevitable part of pursuing any goal that is meaningful. Treat it as an opportunity to learn, adapt and move forward towards your goals, and over time you will build resilience to it.

2. SMART GOAL SETTING

A common trap that people fall into when they seek out a goal, whatever it may be, is to define the grand goal, without considering how to approach the smaller goals needed to get there. For instance, let's say you have a grand goal of becoming fit enough to compete in a triathlon. If you only think about the grand goal, it means that every time you compare your current status to this goal, you evaluate yourself as having failed or not being good enough. Over time, repeated self-evaluations of failure will likely negatively impact your self-efficacy.

In contrast, it can be useful to clearly define smaller goals, which build upon each other to help you towards your grand goal. As a general rule of thumb, aim to set SMART goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-specific.

Your goals should be defined in a very *specific* and *measurable* way, so you (or anyone else) can objectively determine whether you have or have not reached your goal.

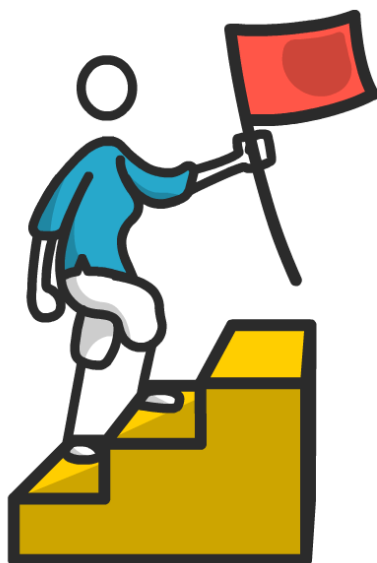
For instance, “I want to run 10km in under an hour” is specific and measurable, whereas “I want to get fit” is not.

Your goals should also be *achievable* and *realistic*. Setting the bar too high is often not helpful. You want your goal to be challenging, but also fairly close to where you are currently at. For instance, if you currently run 3km once a week, your next goal should not be to run 10km five times a week. Set smaller, achievable increments such as 3.5km once a week, which can then be turned into 2km twice a week, and so on. Also keep in mind how feasible a goal is. If you work an exhausting 14-hour shift on Wednesdays, don’t set your running day on Wednesdays. Set it for a day where you can realistically make the time and are willing to commit to it.

Finally, goals should be *time-bound*. Set a realistic time frame for achieving each goal. You can always adjust the specifics later on if needed, but having a time frame can be helpful for providing structure for your goals.

S M A R T

SPECIFIC
MEAURABLE
ACHIEVABLE
REALISTIC
TIME-BOUND



EXAMPLE GOAL:

RUN
10KM
< 60MIN



~~"I WANT TO
GET FIT!"~~

EXAMPLE MINI-GOAL:

3KM, 1X WEEK

3.5KM, 1X WEEK

2KM, 2X WEEK

3. CHALLENGING NEGATIVE BELIEFS

It is common to be critical of yourself, particularly when negative things happen or when you find yourself in a stressful or overwhelming situation. In times like these, we can often become unduly negative in relation to how we see ourselves. Just as we have learnt to challenge unhelpful appraisals about a given situation, we can also challenge unhelpful beliefs about our self. Using the strategies discussed in Module 3, consider what the evidence is for a negative criticism of yourself. Have you ignored your positive qualities? Are you being too black and white?



4. BUILDING POSITIVE QUALITIES

From time to time, we can often forget the positive qualities about our self, which in turn, can make our beliefs about our self unduly negative and hinder our self-efficacy. A helpful technique to remember our positive qualities is to keep a journal of positive things about ourselves. Every day, take note of one or two things you did, and then write down what positive quality this conveys.



If you are stuck for ideas, you can also ask yourself questions such as:

- “What do I like about myself?”
- “What skills or achievements have I accomplished?”
- “What are some challenges I have overcome?”
- “What are some attributes that I like in others, but also have myself?”

Relatedly, it’s also important to celebrate your achievements along the way, even the little ones. This will help acknowledge the positive things you have done, and in turn, help you keep them in mind.



5. TREATING YOURSELF

Finally, part of building self-efficacy is taking the time to care for yourself. Why? Because experiencing enjoyment is an important part of everyday life, which helps us feel good about ourselves. People with low or negative self-beliefs can often fall into the trap of neglecting themselves, which in turn, reinforces the idea that they are somehow unworthy or undeserving. On the flip side, doing nice things for yourself regularly can be a simple and effective way of encouraging self-efficacy through action, as it demonstrates to yourself that you are important and valuable, and therefore worthy of positive day to day experiences.



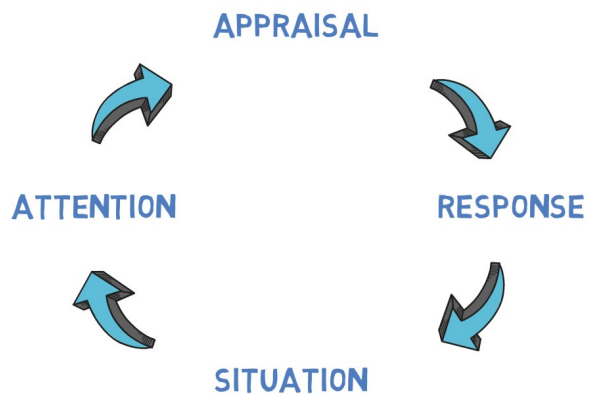
Here's a short list of positive activities to get you started. Feel free to come up with your own!

POSITIVE ACTIVITIES LIST

ONLINE SHOPPING	LISTENING TO MUSIC	HAVING A LAZY DAY
GOING TO THE BEACH	WATCHING A MOVIE	GOING CAMPING
GYM AND EXERCISE	DATE NIGHTS	REARRANGING YOUR HOUSE
HIKING	SEX	LAUGHING
EATING GOOD FOOD	ARTS AND CRAFTS	RECALLING HAPPY MEMORIES
HANGING WITH FRIENDS	READING	PARTYING
NAPPING	WRITING	DRESSING UP

RESPONSE MODULATION

The final way in which we can regulate our emotions is by considering the way in which we respond to situations. If we cast our minds back to the model of emotion from Module 1, our experience of emotion is a constant cycle of situations that we attend to, appraise and respond to in some way. Given this, our responses can be thought of as both the result of experiencing emotion (via the preceding situation, attention and appraisal), and also something which affects subsequent experience of emotion.



For instance, if we return to our friends Russ and Rachel from Module 1, they may be feeling irritable and socially awkward during their group of friends' weekend away due to their recent break-up. It's possible that one (or both) of them may respond to these emotions by drinking heavily, which in turn may induce an unhelpful mix of anger and confidence which then instigates more heated arguments.

We can also think of response modulation in terms of either being helpful or unhelpful, depending on our goals in a given situation. In the case of Russ and Rachel, if their goal was to have a civil weekend away with their mutual friends despite their difficulties with each other, drinking heavily due to feeling irritable and socially awkward probably wasn't a very helpful response.



On the flipside, a more helpful action may be to limit the amount of alcohol consumed. Russ may offer to be the designated driver for their friends, which caps how much he can drink to a modest amount. Rachel may try to open a dialogue with Russ to acknowledge that they both still feel awkward about this weekend away situation, and to come to an agreement over what boundaries (social, physical, conversational or otherwise) they would both be happy enough with to minimize potential arguments escalating in front of the rest of their friends.

BE WARY OF WILDCARD RESPONSES

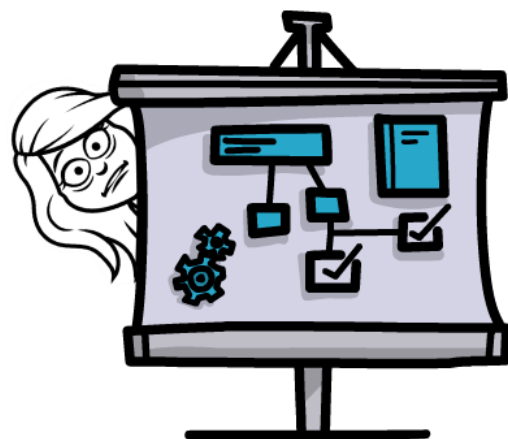
While our responses can be useful for directly regulating our emotions, it's important to be wary of wildcard responses. These are responses that may seem like a good idea at the time, but can quite often get you stuck in the long run.

Let's bring back Russ one more time. Russ was feeling really distressed and awkward due to tensions with Rachel. In the moment, it's perfectly understandable that someone feeling this



way would want to quickly down a few drinks to alleviate these uncomfortable feelings. However, alcohol (or specifically, too much alcohol) can also impair your judgement. Combine this with feeling irritable and this may result in unintentional aggression or other risky behaviours.

Avoidance can also be a bit of a wildcard. Sometimes avoiding a situation to avoid distress can be a good thing, such as choosing not to walk through a dark alley late at night. Other situations however, warrant a bit more consideration. For instance, avoiding social situations such as parties, dates or work presentations because it makes you feel socially awkward is a common one. Sure, immediately speaking, avoiding these scenarios may be a relief, but over time it may also lead you to miss out on important things such as maintaining friendships, building new relationships or striving for that work promotion.



Next time you feel like avoiding a situation, it can be helpful to consider what other things you may be missing out on.

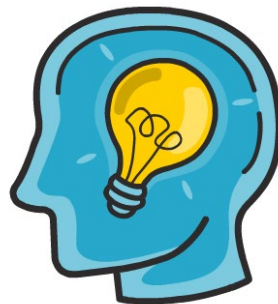
PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

So, by now we've hopefully provided a bit of a crash course into how the emotions we experience in a given situation are changeable depending on how we attend, think and respond. We covered five major ways in which we can seek to either increase (up-regulate) or decrease (down-regulate) our emotional responses: situation selection, situation modification, attention, appraisal and response modulation. When you find yourself distressed or emotionally overwhelmed, it can be handy to consider how you could viably manage your emotions by making helpful changes to one or more of these five stages.

FIVE STAGES:

- 1) SITUATION SELECTION
- 2) SITUATION MODIFICATION
- 3) ATTENTION
- 4) APPRAISAL
- 5) RESPONSE MODULATION

OUR EMOTIONS



ARE CHANGEABLE!

Now that we've reached the end of our final module, attached is a summary guide for what you might consider the next time you find yourself in an emotionally overwhelming situation. Included is a summary of each of the five stages of emotion regulation, as well as considerations and examples at each stage to help guide you towards your goals.

KEY MESSAGES

- ✓ The way in which we appraise ourselves can influence the emotions we experience.
- ✓ It can be helpful to work towards building your own self-efficacy.
- ✓ Self-efficacy can be supported in a number of ways including process-oriented thinking, smart goal setting, challenging negative self-beliefs, remembering your positive qualities, and doing positive activities regularly.
- ✓ The way we respond in a given situation can change the emotions we experience.
- ✓ Be wary of “wildcard responses.” These are responses which may seem like a good idea at the time but may also lead to various negative consequences.



**BE SURE TO CHECK OUT THE SUMMARY
GUIDE FOR MANAGING EMOTIONS!**