

# Feelings Bootcamp

*Tips & Resources*



*Dear M*

It's clear you have a lot weighing on your shoulders right now. When we face ongoing stressors in important areas of life like work, family relationships, and health, it can really take a toll emotionally and physically. I want you to know that what you're feeling is understandable given the demands you have in your life.

In times like these, an emotion-focused approach to stress management can be a lifesaver.

The mind is like water. When it's turbulent, it is difficult to see. When it's calm, everything becomes clear. - *Pragati Mahesh*

Love, *Hope*

## Emotion-Focused Coping:

*Definition*

Emotion-focused coping aims to manage the emotional turbulence associated with a stressful situation. The goal is not to eliminate the stressors themselves which may be out of your control. Rather, it's learning to relate to these stressors in a different way, so they impact you less negatively.

### About Emotions

It's understandable to feel emotionally overwhelmed when you're under stress.

#### Common emotional signs:

- ♥ Irritability or moodiness, anxiety, sadness, lack of motivation, feeling helpless or hopeless, trouble concentrating, racing thoughts, difficulty relaxing or resting, isolating from others.

#### Physical effects:

- 👤 Muscle tension, headaches, upset stomach, rapid heartbeat, tightness in the chest, fatigue, insomnia, lack of appetite or overeating.

Emotions, when not felt, become embodied. They become literally stuck in your body. This is because they have something called a motor component, which means that the minute they begin - before you can suppress or ignore them - they create a micro-muscular activation. Our bodies respond instantaneously.

*Brianna West*



What's more, emotions exist on a spectrum, so even "positive" ones can become difficult to manage if felt too intensely or for too long. For example, extreme excitement can interfere with your ability to focus, sleep, or process information around decisions or consequences.

Emotion-focused coping doesn't mean resisting your feelings but allowing them to ebb and flow so that they don't drown you. It involves developing emotional awareness, acceptance, and regulation skills.



*You don't have to control your feelings.  
You just have to stop letting them control you.*  
*Gordon R. Dickson*

## Benefits of *Emotion-Focused Coping*

Emotional regulation is beneficial in ways over and above dealing with stress:



### Increased self-awareness

By focusing directly on emotions rather than avoiding them, you become more aware of how certain situations impact your wellbeing.



### Emotional processing

Facing feelings openly allows you to fully process them, making it less likely they will resurface as strongly later.



### Resiliency

With consistent practice, emotion-focused coping improves your ability to tolerate and regulate difficult emotions when they inevitably arise.



### Integrated emotion and logic

Making space for emotion alongside rational thought leads to more balanced decision making and action plans.

## Emotion-Focused *Coping Strategies*

There are various techniques that help build these coping skills. Some may appeal to you more than others, and you may even find that your needs vary according to different circumstances. That is perfectly normal. The key is to do what it takes to find and maintain an emotional equilibrium in times of stress. You decide what is best for you!





### Keep a Mood Journal

Tracking emotions and associated triggers, thought patterns, physical states, and so on over longer periods reveals insightful connections. Pay attention to how feelings influence your thought patterns, behaviour, relationships, health, work performance etc. Tracing their effects helps you recognise and regulate distress early before it snowballs.

Name the emotions you feel beyond generic "good" or "bad" feelings. Being specific with your words, helps catch difficult states sooner and communicate needs to others better during turmoil.

Finally, radical acceptance of the full range of human emotions without judgement is incredibly freeing.



*Feelings are something you have; not something you are.*  
Shannon L. Alder

### Journal

Whether pen and paper or digital, journaling offers structure and freedom to feel, explore, express, and evolve as emotional beings. As both a record of and map for emotional regulation:



- The act of externalising emotions through writing helps you work through inner turmoil more objectively. Putting experiences into words makes them concrete and contained rather than swirling abstractly.
- Seeing emotions tracked, normalised, and evolving into patterns over days, weeks, or years makes them feel more understandable and manageable.
- Simply moving feelings onto a page can provide catharsis and relief.
- Journaling combines different coping mechanisms such as cognitive reframing, gratitude, processing, and letting go.

## Emotion-Focused Coping Strategies

### Meditation

Meditation lets you sit with feelings that arise without judgement, creating space for acceptance, release, and clarity. It supports the expression and safe release of any and all emotions. Meditation trains you to calmly observe your moment-by-moment emotional experience rather than getting wrapped up in why you feel a certain way - calming emotional flooding.

Acknowledging feelings then letting them go teaches you that you don't have to respond to every emotion that arises. By allowing emotions to move through you without spiralling into rumination, you become more responsive and less reactive.

Having a curious attitude during meditation increases your self-understanding. Emotion-focused meditation helps you relate to feelings in a whole new way which builds emotional agility and resilience.



### Move Your Body

Mindful physical activity helps you honour feelings without remaining trapped in them. Incorporating movement into your day is a simple yet powerful emotion-focused coping strategy. Give it a try next time you feel stressed!



- Activities like walking, yoga, and dancing allow you to physically shake off emotional heaviness by releasing feel-good endorphins which boost mood, relieve tension, and calm your nervous system.
- Adding kinetic motion to your routine takes you out of your headspace to clear mental chatter.
- A quick walk, run, or trip to the gym works as decompression from emotionally charged interactions.
- The focus and cadence of gentle movement creates time and space for meditation in motion to soothe painful emotions.

## Emotion-Focused *Coping Strategies*

### Be Creative

Creative activities like music, art, dance, writing, etc. provide pathways of expression for feelings to flow through. The next time you feel emotionally adrift, let your hands lead where the heart follows because:



- Creativity externalises inner feelings by giving form to your emotions.
- Completion of a project, however small, brings a sense of satisfaction and peace.
- The rhythm and ritual of habitual creative practice grounds feelings and gives structure to inner chaos.
- Losing yourself in creative action keeps you present, centred, and immersed in the senses rather than lost in thoughts. This breaks cycles of emotional fixation.
- Artistic expression conveys what words alone cannot.

### Vent

Venting is an emotion-focused coping strategy when used judiciously. Airing feelings provides temporary relief but should be balanced by additional techniques for long-term emotion regulation. Some guidelines for healthy venting include:



- Choose your listener carefully. Vent to a trusted confidant who validates your experience without escalating emotions further.
- Set reasonable time limits. A brief 5 - 10-minute session allows release without fixating on anger, hurt etc.
- While emotions deserve expression, be careful not to vilify or degrade specific people, even if they are the source of frustration. Keep it about your experience.
- Afterwards, take time to reflect on root issues vs surface emotions, solutions, and personal accountability regarding next directions.

*Inner peace begins  
the moment you  
choose not to  
allow  
another person or  
event to control  
your emotions.*

*Unknown*



### Change Your Perspective

Cognitive reframing means consciously shifting your perspective on a situation. With practice, you can build this skill so that emotional agility becomes second nature over time.

1. The first step is noticing your present feelings and the thoughts that preceded them. Ask what specifically triggered these emotions?
2. Next, examine whether your current views and assumptions are completely objective and rational. Often our strongest emotions stem from subjective interpretive thought patterns.
3. With awareness of the thoughts catalysing your emotions, ask yourself how else you could view the situation. Develop 3-4 alternate possible perspectives.
4. Adopt the most balanced, growth-oriented perspective from your alternatives going forward. Actively let go of the rigid initial thought framework.

Reframing perceptions to find the wisdom and opportunities within challenges converts negative emotions into acceptance and hope.



## In the Long Term

Forgiveness is an extremely powerful yet challenging emotion-focused coping mechanism. While simple in concept, it takes great courage and resilience to forgive others, difficult circumstances, and/or yourself.

*Using it as an opportunity to:*

- 🗨️ Acknowledge hurt, anger, and resentment
- 👤 Regain personal power, and
- ❤️ Refresh integrity....

**Forgiveness transforms crisis into growth. It does so by:**

- 👁️ **Recognising all humans inevitably make mistakes** or act thoughtlessly sometimes releases rigid expectations that people "should" behave perfectly.
- 👤 **Liberating yourself from cyclical pain** by making the conscious choice to no longer demand a "debt" from a situation or person that hurt us. We honour emotions but not prolonged suffering.
- 👤+ **Separating action from intrinsic worth** by distinguishing between condemning poor conduct and attacking personhood.
- 👤\* **Setting healthy boundaries.** Forgiving does not necessarily mean ongoing interaction or enabling harmful patterns.



Are you interested in this month's Coaching Masterclass?

📅 **THURSDAY, 14<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2024.**

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WHERE TO GET  
**HELP?**

*If you would like to connect or need someone to talk to, please contact one of the resources below.*

DNA wellness – 0800 333 238 / please call me 071 681 1247

**Your Human Resource Department**

**Your line manager**

South African Anxiety and Depression Group: 0800 456 789 (24 hour helpline) or 011 234 4837

Suicidal Emergency contact us on 0800 567 567

Lifeline National counselling line 0861 322 322

Stop gender violence 0800 150 150



Sponsored Employee Benefit

Please send your emails to [hope@workforcehealthcare.co.za](mailto:hope@workforcehealthcare.co.za) and a counsellor will respond directly to you.

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