

# The Importance of Emotional Regulation Skills in Anxiety and OCD Treatment



Emotions are very complex experiences, and they are closely connected to our thoughts, our body sensations, and the actions we choose to take. Our emotions are vital to our survival as they facilitate effective intrapersonal (occurring within the self) and interpersonal (between people) communications. Emotions also help us to make sense of our environments and other people within those environments. We are motivated by our emotions to take action in order to get our needs met. While our emotions have great utility, they may also lead us to experience undesirable consequences. For example, in the case of anxiety disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorders, the intensity of anxious emotions may create avoidance patterns, which sidestep the anxiety, but are also restrictive to the person's quality of life. To learn more about the cycle of anxiety, please see our previous blog – [Understanding the Cycle of Anxiety](#). In clinical practice, we know that anxious avoidance is, in fact, a maintenance factor for anxiety disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorders. Continuous efforts to avoid stressful triggers preserves anxiety and prevents us from learning how to overcome our fears. Thus, while people may possess a desire to conquer their anxiety, the intensity of

their fears might preclude them from approaching and working through challenging situations. In such instances, anxiety and OCD experts can help by therapeutically guiding the person through a treatment called Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP). For more information about ERP, please see our previous blog [Exposure and Response Prevention \(ERP\)](#). In order to achieve the maximum benefit from ERP treatment, psychotherapy must also include the development of skills and strategies for effective coping and emotional regulation.

Emotional regulation skills are intended to assist people with being able to manage challenging emotions more effectively. The objective of emotional regulation is to become better at regulating emotions, rather than trying to eliminate emotions. In other words, emotional regulation skills are intended to help decrease the intensity and/or duration of challenging emotions, by helping people cope in more constructive and healthy ways. Experiencing a variety of emotions is important for our overall health and goal attainment. Attempts to eliminate uncomfortable emotions generally backfire, as doing so may cause more immediate distress (since these efforts tend to be futile), or lead to an accumulation of stress, which compounds over time. Chronically suppressing emotions can lead people to feel blindsided by an emotional avalanche that occurs once the final straw tips the scales.



While there are many emotional regulation skills that mental health professionals can teach their patients, the successful use of every technique begins with acknowledging, labeling, and accepting (which does not require that you approve or like) the emotion. If we are too busy trying to flee from, ignore, or deny our emotions, we will be unable to effectively address them. Think of your emotions as ways to understand your current internal climate. Remember, your emotions are valuable in communicating important information to yourself and others. Refusing to attend to and address your emotions will only create problems. On the other hand, being able to identify and label your emotions will help orient and aid you in selecting the appropriate strategy that will be helpful in a given situation. Consider this comparison: if we never took our temperature, it would sometimes be difficult for us to determine whether we are running a fever and what proper intervention should follow. Should we lay down and rest? Take an over-the-counter pain reliever? See a doctor? Our body temperature is one of our vital signs, which helps to detect and monitor illness, guide the administration of proper interventions, and assess overall health. Similarly, our emotions can be considered as vital signs of our overall mental health. Learning how to best support and respond to our emotions is crucial to our mental well-being and has an influence on how well we are able to function within a variety of important life areas.

In the mental health field, there is a saying: “What we resist persists and what we feel, we can heal.” In other words, suppressing, concealing, and/or constricting emotions will likely increase unhelpful thoughts, feelings of physical activation, and overall emotional dysregulation. Conversely, recognizing our emotions, understanding their signals, and using strategies to help ourselves navigate through various situations will help us to feel more comfortable and confident in our abilities to effectively care for and support ourselves across important life settings. For many people, feeling their emotions is overwhelming and they may be intimidated by the intensity of their turbulent emotions. We have all felt this way from time to time. However, some people feel this way much of the time. In such instances, it may seem easier to avoid the emotions as long as possible. Unfortunately, by avoiding emotions, healing is also delayed or avoided altogether. Please know that it does not have to be this way! You are capable of learning skills that are significantly more effective than avoidance strategies! Participating in psychotherapy will help you to acquire important insights and understanding of your emotions as well as how to effectively tend to your emotions. Better emotional identification and responsivity will markedly improve your overall health, your relationships (with yourself and others), and your ability to be successful in a variety of situations and settings. In upcoming blogs, various emotional regulation strategies will be identified, outlined, and explained. Please stay tuned!



## Need Help or Support?

If you or a loved one are struggling with an anxiety disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, or any other mental health concerns, know that you are not alone. If you are a parent or a caregiver and are seeking additional information about how you can best support your child, our office provides parent training with the SPACE program. Please see our [November 2021 Newsletter](#) for more information on SPACE.

For these or any other mental health concerns, please contact The OCD & Anxiety Center at (630) 686-7886 or [info@theoecdandanxietycenter.com](mailto:info@theoecdandanxietycenter.com). We have offices located in Oak Brook and Orland Park, Illinois and in Marietta, Georgia. Our clinicians specialize in helping individuals overcome anxiety disorders, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorders, and other co-occurring mental health conditions. We provide telehealth services that are available in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Florida, and Georgia.

At The OCD & Anxiety Center, we can provide treatment both in the office and at off-site locations (your home, mall, school, work etc.). We will work closely with you to create an individualized treatment plan and discuss the appropriate frequency of appointments (once a week or more, if needed). We look forward to working with you and facilitating your therapeutic journey!

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