

Emotion regulation

Ten original resources for More Than Therapy. Choose a page that fits the client's priorities and review the clinical notes before use. The materials support professional care and are not validated assessments.

EMO01 Naming a Feeling and a Need

Worksheet | 10 to 15 minutes

EMO02 Pausing Before a Difficult Reply

Worksheet | 10 to 15 minutes

EMO03 Checking Emotion and Evidence

Worksheet | 10 to 15 minutes

EMO04 Caring for the Conditions Around Emotion

Worksheet | 10 to 15 minutes

EMO05 Choosing an Alternative to an Urge

Worksheet | 10 to 15 minutes

EMO06 Repairing After a Strong Emotion

Worksheet | 10 to 15 minutes

EMO07 Understanding Emotions as Information

Handout | 10 to 15 minutes

EMO08 Meeting Intense Feelings With Choice

Clinician script | 5 to 10 minutes

EMO09 Practicing a Deliberate Pause

Session guide | 50 minutes

EMO10 Listening to an Emotion With Curiosity

Journal prompts | 10 to 15 minutes

Fillable responses work in compatible PDF readers. Save each completed worksheet separately in an approved record system.

Clinical notes

Emotion regulation

EMO01 Naming a Feeling and a Need

Do not require precise emotion vocabulary or assume a single meaning for an emotion. Use pictures, body descriptions, or culturally familiar words. Check context before interpreting a need or selecting an action.

EMO02 Pausing Before a Difficult Reply

Adapt the pause to communication access and sensory needs. In coercive or unsafe relationships, focus on individualized safety rather than requiring a return conversation. Do not frame all silence as avoidance.

EMO03 Checking Emotion and Evidence

Validate experience before reviewing interpretations. Avoid using evidence checking to minimize discrimination, abuse, or other real threats. Acknowledge that some situations remain ambiguous and focus on workable choices.

EMO04 Caring for the Conditions Around Emotion

Include material hardship, discrimination, disability, and workload in the discussion. Avoid attributing distress solely to lifestyle. Refer medical concerns appropriately and use specific substance safety assessment when indicated.

EMO05 Choosing an Alternative to an Urge

Use with ordinary emotional urges and individualized judgment. For self harm, suicide, aggression, or dangerous substance use urges, complete appropriate risk assessment and planning rather than relying on this page.

EMO06 Repairing After a Strong Emotion

Do not use mutual repair language to equalize responsibility for abuse or coercion. Assess safety and consent to contact. Support accountability without pressuring forgiveness, reconciliation, or disclosure.

EMO07 Understanding Emotions as Information

Avoid assigning universal meanings to emotions or presenting regulation as compliance. Include cultural expression, neurodivergence, systemic stressors, and the person's own interpretation when selecting skills.

EMO08 Meeting Intense Feelings With Choice

Use observation and curiosity rather than labeling activation. Check the clinician's contribution to distress. Do not make calmness a condition of being heard; accommodate communication differences and reassess safety when necessary.

EMO09 Practicing a Deliberate Pause

Practice should support agency rather than polished performance. Attend to culture, sensory access, and communication preferences. Use an individualized risk response if the discussion reveals self harm, violence, or other urgent concerns.

EMO10 Listening to an Emotion With Curiosity

Do not assume every emotion hides one unmet need or a clear message. Invite uncertainty and multiple interpretations. Keep writing brief if it becomes rumination, self criticism, or escalating distress.

Naming a Feeling and a Need

Emotion regulation | Adults and teens 13+ | 10 to 15 minutes

Separate an event, emotion, interpretation, and need to support a deliberate response.

Choose a recent emotion that feels manageable to explore. You can name more than one feeling, use your own words, or describe sensations instead. The aim is to understand your experience and choose a response that fits the situation.

Describe before explaining

Start with observable events. Then notice feelings, thoughts, and urges. For example, "My friend canceled" may bring disappointment, a thought that you do not matter, and an urge to stop replying. These parts are related, but they are not identical.

Ask what needs attention

An emotion may point toward a need, concern, value, or boundary. It does not automatically tell you what happened or what to do. Consider a response that addresses the need while respecting your safety and the other person's dignity.

What happened in words a camera could observe?

The feelings, thoughts, and urges I noticed

A need, value, or boundary that may need attention

One response I can choose and what I hope it will do

Pausing Before a Difficult Reply

Emotion regulation | Adults and teens 13+ | 10 to 15 minutes

Prepare a brief pause and a clear plan for a difficult reply.

When a message or conversation activates a strong feeling, a brief pause may create room to choose your response. Use this page with a recent example or before a conversation. A pause works best when you have a plan to return.

Notice your early cue

Look for a sign you can recognize before responding, such as typing faster, clenching your jaw, interrupting, or going quiet. Choose a pause that fits the setting: place the phone down, take a sip of water, look around, or ask for a short break.

Return with a purpose

Decide what you want your reply to accomplish. You might clarify, express a need, set a limit, or postpone until a specific time. For example, "I want to answer carefully. Can we return to this after dinner?" Follow through when it is safe and appropriate.

The situation and my earliest sign of activation

A pause I can actually use in this setting

What I want my response to accomplish

The words I will use and my plan for returning

Checking Emotion and Evidence

Emotion regulation | Adults and teens 13+ | 10 to 15 minutes

Review the interpretation attached to an emotion and choose a fitting response.

A strong feeling deserves attention, and the first explanation for it may need another look. Choose a situation that feels safe enough to examine. You can respect the emotion while checking what is known, assumed, or still unclear.

Separate observation from interpretation

Write the event first, then the meaning you gave it. "My coworker did not greet me" is an observation; "They are angry with me" is an interpretation. List other plausible explanations without insisting that the most comforting explanation is true.

Choose the fitting response

If the concern is supported, choose practical problem solving, a boundary, or support. If information is missing, decide whether clarification is useful. If the urge is likely to worsen things, choose an alternative that fits your goals. You do not need to prove the feeling wrong.

The event, my emotion, and my first interpretation

What I know and what I am assuming

Other plausible explanations or information I need

A response that fits the evidence and my goal

Caring for the Conditions Around Emotion

Emotion regulation | Adults and teens 13+ | 10 to 15 minutes

Identify one contextual or physical need that could support emotional coping.

Strong emotions do not happen in isolation. Look at the conditions surrounding a recent difficult day, including basic needs, health, demands, and available support. You are looking for one practical adjustment rather than trying to control every feeling.

Notice the load

Consider sleep, food, water, pain, medication routines as prescribed, substance use, sensory demands, caregiving, work, and social stress. Describe what was happening without blaming yourself. Many conditions are outside one person's immediate control.

Choose a supportable change

Pick one need you can influence or ask someone to help address. Examples include bringing a snack, requesting a quieter space, taking a planned break, or discussing symptoms with a health professional. Do not change medication or substance withdrawal plans using this worksheet.

The situation and the emotional load I was carrying

Needs or conditions that may have made the day harder

One realistic adjustment and any help needed

When I will try it and what I will notice

Choosing an Alternative to an Urge

Emotion regulation | Adults and teens 13+ | 10 to 15 minutes

Evaluate an emotional urge and rehearse a safe alternative action.

An urge is a signal to act, and you can sometimes choose what happens next. Select a manageable urge such as sending an angry message, withdrawing from a safe person, or giving up on a routine task.

Understand the urge

Name the emotion, what the urge promises, and what might happen if you follow it. Ask whether the action fits the facts, your safety, and your longer term goal. Some urges protect you from real harm and should not be challenged automatically.

Try a small alternative

If the urge would make the situation worse, choose a different action for the next few minutes. You might draft without sending, request a break, make a brief supportive contact, or begin one task step. Review the result; changing an action does not require pretending the feeling disappeared.

My emotion, the urge, and what the urge promises

Likely short term and later effects of following it

A safe alternative that fits my goal

What happened when I tried it and what I learned

Repairing After a Strong Emotion

Emotion regulation | Adults and teens 13+ | 10 to 15 minutes

Prepare an accountable and respectful response after an emotional interaction.

If a strong emotion affected another person, you can acknowledge the impact and decide what to do next. Repair does not require denying your own needs. Use this page only when contact is safe and a conversation is appropriate.

Name the behavior and impact

Describe what you did without global labels or excuses. For example, "I interrupted and raised my voice" is more useful than "I am awful" or "You made me angry." Acknowledge what you know about the impact and leave room to hear the other person's experience.

Offer a specific change

Choose an apology or acknowledgment that does not demand forgiveness. Name what you will do differently and how you will practice. You can also make a respectful request about your own needs. The other person may need time or choose not to engage.

The behavior I want to take responsibility for

The impact I understand and what I still need to hear

Words I could use to acknowledge or apologize

A specific change and how I will follow through

Understanding Emotions as Information

Emotion regulation | Adults and teens 13+ | 10 to 15 minutes

Explain emotional awareness and flexible response choices.

Emotions are part of how people respond to events, needs, relationships, memories, and expectations. They can help direct attention, but they do not provide a complete account of a situation. There is room to feel and choose.

More than one part

An emotional moment may involve a feeling, a body sensation, an interpretation, and an urge. These parts can arrive quickly and influence one another. Naming them separately can help you identify what needs care, clarification, protection, or action.

Regulation can look different

Sometimes a helpful response is expressing a feeling. Sometimes it is taking a pause, getting support, solving a problem, or setting a boundary. The aim is not constant calm or the removal of uncomfortable emotions. A useful response fits the situation and your values.

Practice with manageable moments

Start with everyday examples before trying a skill in a high intensity situation. Try one change, notice what happened, and adapt. If emotions repeatedly lead to unsafe behavior, serious relationship harm, or impaired functioning, ask a qualified clinician for a fuller assessment and tailored care.

A feeling I want to understand and a response I want to practice

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Meeting Intense Feelings With Choice

Emotion regulation | Clinicians | 5 to 10 minutes

Offer validation and collaborative choices during an emotionally intense moment.

Use this dialogue when a client becomes upset during a manageable discussion and remains able to participate. Slow the interaction, validate what is present, and offer choices. Shift to assessment or crisis procedures when the situation requires them.

Name without deciding for them

Clinician: "I notice your voice changed and you have gone quiet. What are you noticing?"

Client: "I am angry." Clinician: "Something here matters a lot. Do you want me to listen, help us slow down, or ask a question?" Avoid assuming the emotion from appearance alone.

Validate and explore the need

If the client says, "You are not hearing me," respond: "I may have missed something. What would you want me to understand?" Reflect their meaning. Then ask, "What feels most needed right now: clarification, a boundary, a break, or something else?"

Choose the next action together

Clinician: "Would it help to try one small pause and then decide what comes next?" If they decline: "We can stay with talking or stop the exercise." If they agree, offer an external anchor or quiet moment. Afterwards ask, "Did that help, make things harder, or do neither?"

What the client needed and what we changed in response

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Practicing a Deliberate Pause

Emotion regulation | Clinicians | 50 minutes

Guide a session that turns emotional awareness into a practiced response.

Outcome: the client identifies an early cue, chooses a pause, and rehearses a response that fits their goal. Begin with a manageable example. The client can decline role play, use writing instead, or stop at any point.

Minutes 0 to 15

0 to 5: check current distress and immediate safety needs. 5 to 10: choose a recent everyday interaction and a goal for the session. 10 to 15: use EMO01 to separate the event, feeling, interpretation, urge, and possible need.

Minutes 15 to 40

15 to 25: use EMO03 when an interpretation needs review, or discuss a practical boundary when the concern is clear. 25 to 35: use EMO02 to select an early cue, a pause, and words for returning. 35 to 40: rehearse once or write the response, then invite feedback.

Minutes 40 to 50

40 to 45: adjust the practice to the client's real setting and identify support. 45 to 50: choose one opportunity to try it, decide what to observe, and close with a check in. If the example involves coercion or danger, replace joint communication practice with individualized safety and support planning.

My cue, pause, chosen words, and practice opportunity

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Listening to an Emotion With Curiosity

Emotion regulation | Adults and teens 13+ | 10 to 15 minutes

Explore a feeling while preserving choice about the next action.

Choose a feeling that is present or recently passed. You may write briefly, draw, or speak your answers. You do not have to explain the feeling perfectly. Focus on what the experience might be asking you to notice.

Make room without handing over control

Describe the feeling in your own language. Notice the story attached to it and the action it invites. You can acknowledge both while deciding whether that action fits your situation. Mixed feelings are welcome here.

Close with care and choice

Consider whether you need comfort, practical help, a boundary, information, or rest. End with one realistic response. If exploring the emotion increases distress, return to the room, stop writing, and choose support instead of pushing for insight.

The feeling or mix of feelings I notice and the situation around them

The story my mind tells and the action I feel pulled toward

What need, value, or limit might deserve attention?

A response I choose and support that could help me carry it out

Clinical foundations

These sources inform the general clinical concepts. The original resources in this collection are not validated instruments or publisher-endorsed protocols. Links checked October 26, 2026.

S01 Psychotherapies

National Institute of Mental Health | n.d.

General psychotherapy principles, collaborative goals, skills practice, and choosing care.

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/psychotherapies>

S04 Doing What Matters in Times of Stress An Illustrated Guide

World Health Organization | 2020

Stress coping, present moment awareness, values, and kindness. Original exercises in this library are separate from the WHO guide.

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240003927>

S05 TIP 57 Trauma Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration | 2014

Trauma informed principles, cultural context, choice, collaboration, and prevention of retraumatization.

<https://library.samhsa.gov/product/tip-57-trauma-informed-care-behavioral-health-services/sma14-4816>