

Emotional Self-Regulation or “Getting a Grip”

By Amy G. Martin

So what do you do when you feel so out of sorts that you lose all sense of balance and coping ability? Do you just go to sleep and hope it will pass? Do you ignore it entirely, thinking it will go away if you get busy doing something else?

The lucky thing is sometimes our moods do just improve with time and sleep, but other times the feelings persist, bringing to our attention whatever pain or challenge we need to face.

During these times, and we all have them, we need a way to bring ourselves back to center, back to a feeling of steadiness and well being. We need tools that will enable us to feel a sense of self control regarding our state of mind. This is what is called “Emotional Self Regulation.”

There are set steps to take when you want to “get a grip” on what you are feeling, and recalibrate, so to speak, your busy mind and downwardly spiraling emotions. Working with people for many years, and being a pretty introspective person myself, has given me an understanding of the workings of the mind and heart.

Here are the steps that I have found helpful for emotional self-regulation:

1. Identify the emotion
2. Find the negative “faulty thought” about yourself
3. Correct your thinking
4. Anchor physically
5. Create a potent powerful affirmation

Identifying the emotions we feel may be harder than it seems. If you’re ever just upset and don’t know why, you understand that it may take some digging just to name the primary feeling you are having. It takes practice to become fluent in the language of emotions. Are you sad, fearful, worried, anxious or angry? Do you feel a sense of worthlessness, vulnerability, isolation, insecurity or self-doubt?

Finding the faulty thought will always explain why you feel the way you do. Thoughts always precede emotions, but it takes honestly looking at what you tell yourself about yourself, to become free of persistent negative thinking. Do you sometimes think you’re not worth it, that you are bad in some way, guilty, unlovable or just unable to trust?

Correcting your thinking is equivalent to changing the channel on the TV, but you just can’t allow yourself to return to the previous program unless you want to suffer some more. Moving from despising to loving oneself is not a one step process; it takes rational thought, which is a scarce commodity when we are in emotional pain. Paper and pen work well, making lists of the positive things about your self and your life is a good start.

Being very clear about what you hope to be feeling, gives a direction for your left brain, rational mind, to follow. Write it out, “I want to feel better about...”

Physical anchoring of the new healthy thought is very helpful when a person is in distress. Simply standing up, stretching, breathing deeply, moving into a different room, washing your face or having some ice water can be enough of a shift to help balance the emotions. Allowing yourself space to feel better can lift you out of a bad mood.

Creating an affirmation that is potent, powerful, present tense and believable is the icing on the cake! Don't think if you hate your life, you can just say, “Oh I really love my life”, and believe it. Work your way into it by saying something like, “I know when I am more positive, I see the good in my life” or “I know there is good around me, and I'm willing to see it.” Whatever the affirmation, make it short, sweet and authentic, making sure it rings true deep inside of you. Your sentence becomes your mantra and mandala, which which you focus on, read and repeat as many times as possible until it becomes your truth.

This set of conscious steps has helped many people lift out of their despair and find power in their ability to transform themselves. Once you feel you have suffered enough, rather than stewing and brooding alone, or whining and commiserating with others, why not try these tools, either solo or with help, (from friends or family), to get a grip on your feelings and learn emotional self-regulation. Once you've done it and see its effectiveness, it will become easier and more natural for you to catch yourself before you ever get that far from center again.

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