

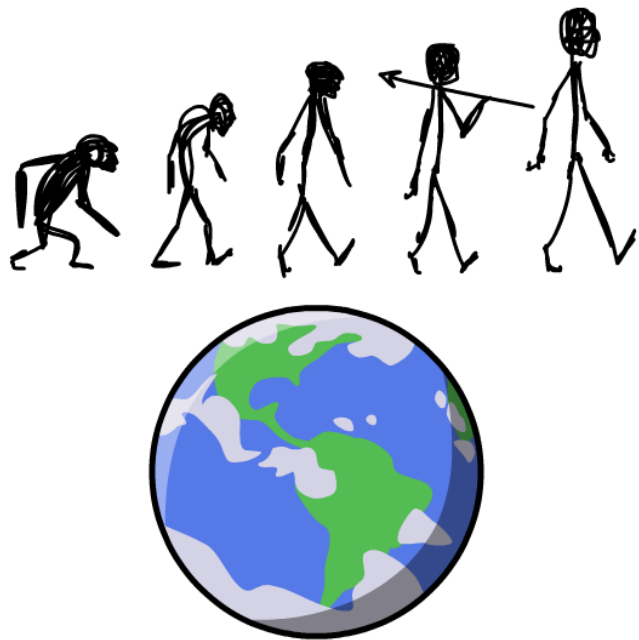


MODULE 1 | INTRODUCTION TO EMOTION REGULATION

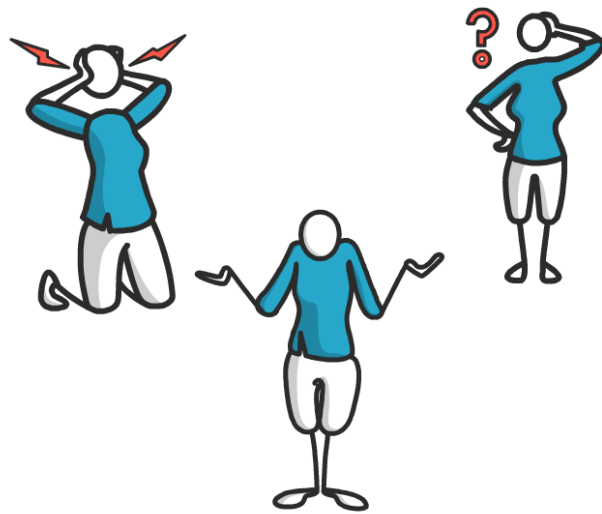
SO... WHAT ARE EMOTIONS?

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

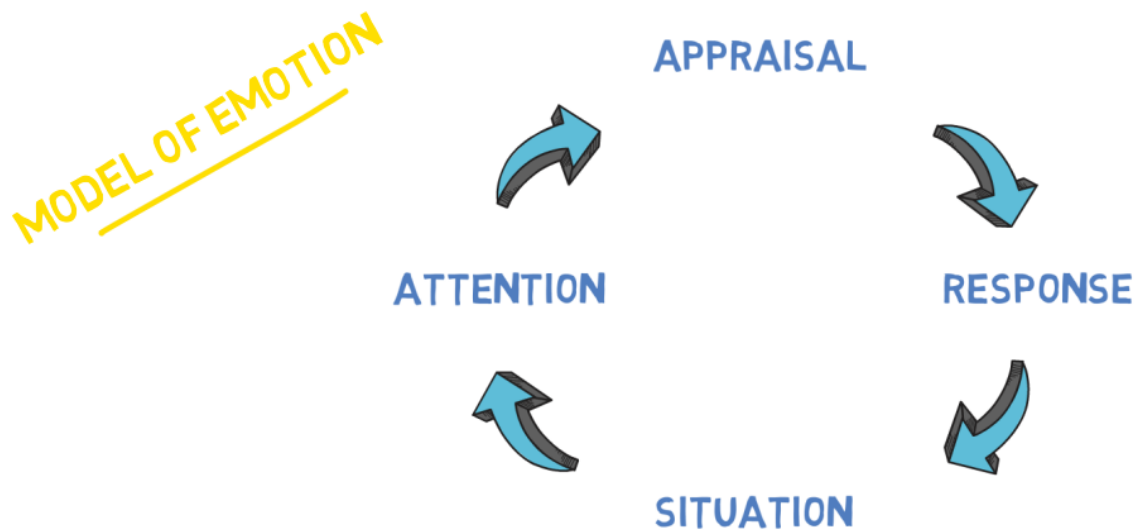


It is important to note that emotions are normal. This includes both the ones that feel good, and the ones that do not. Anger, sadness, fear... they are all normal to experience sometimes. The aim of these modules isn't to simply make you feel happy all the time (...that can have its own downsides). 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:

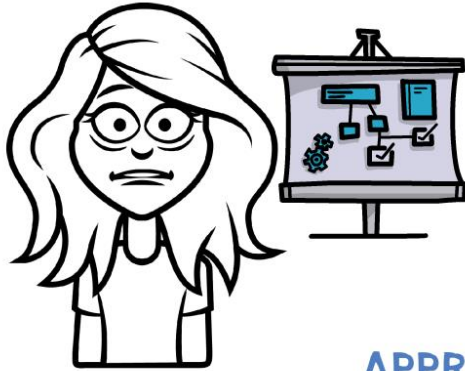
1. The **situation** we are currently in.
2. The focus of our **attention** while in the given situation.
3. Our **appraisals**, which provide an interpretation of the given situation.
4. And our physiological and behavioural **responses** to the given situation.



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 appraise 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).

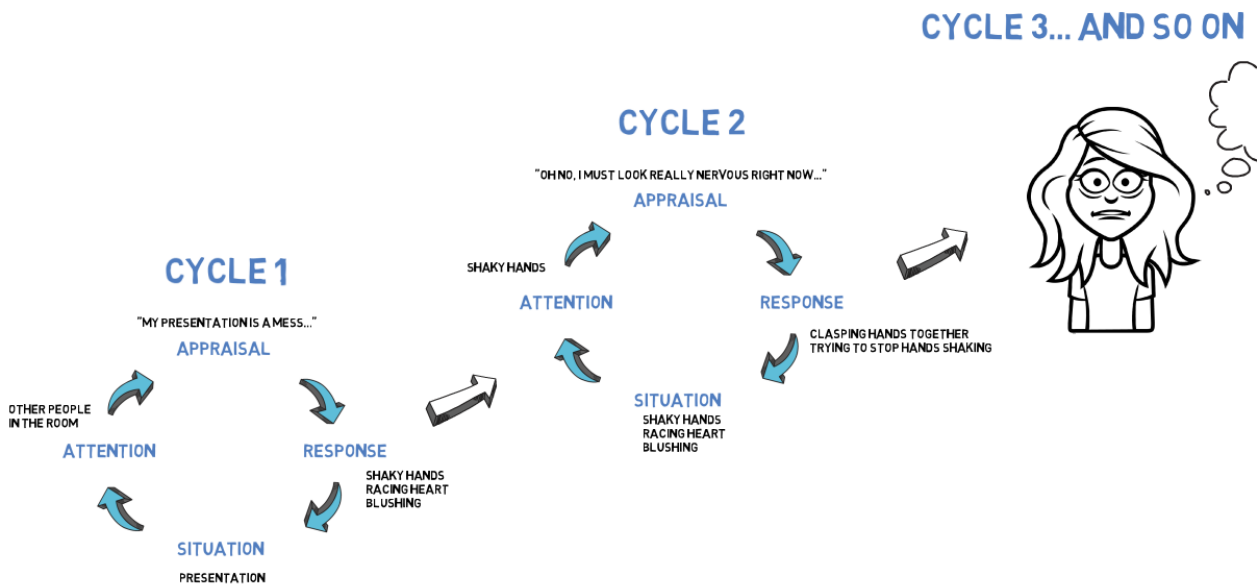


At this point, Lauren has taken notice of her physiological symptoms of anxiety. In effect, these symptoms can now be considered as “the situation” which starts the second emotional cycle, which Lauren subsequently attends to, appraises and responds to, as shown here:

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

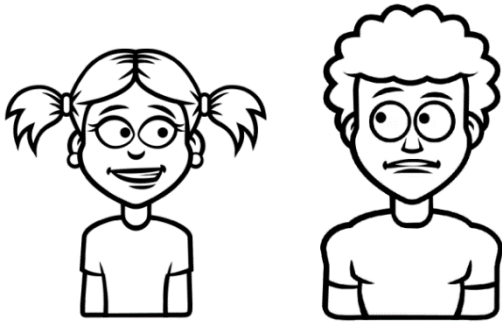
DOWN-REGULATE

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



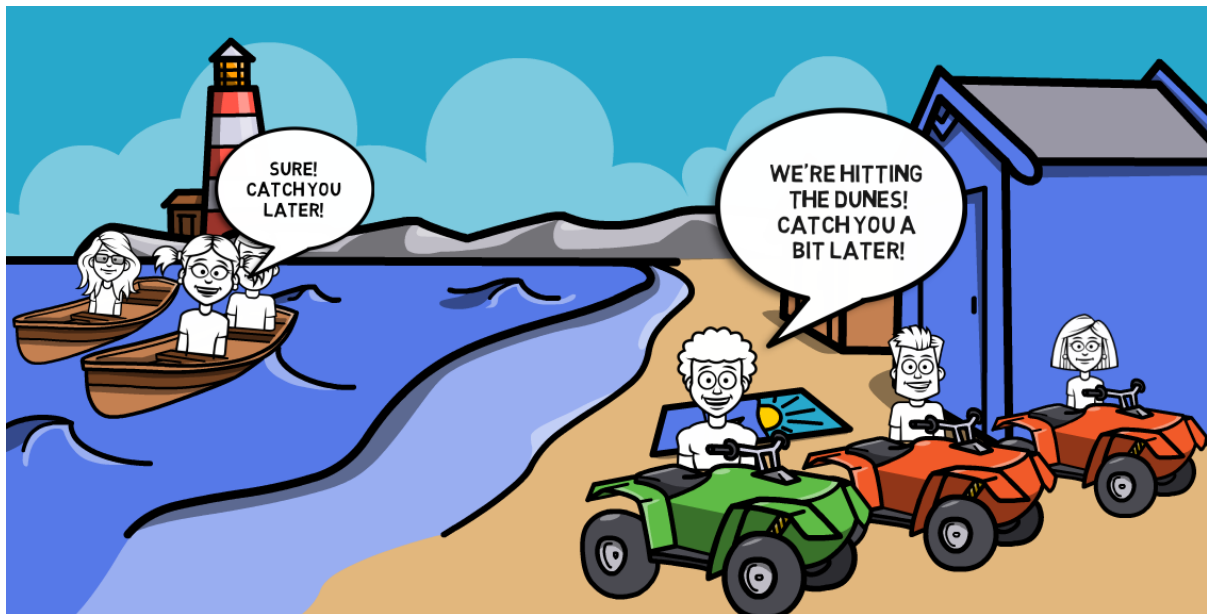
not be possible or realistic to simply avoid these. For example, in the case of Lauren's stress-inducing presentation, avoiding this entirely probably won't get her very far university-wise.

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