



MODULE 4 | TAKING ACTION AND PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

WELCOME BACK

Welcome back to *Managing Emotion*!

Last session we talked about the relationship between appraisals and emotion, and specifically how changing the way we appraise a given situation can change the way we feel. We discussed how appraisal styles can be thought of as either being helpful or unhelpful depending on how it makes us feel, and how it does or does not support our current goals in a given situation. Most of the time, unhelpful appraisal styles can be challenged by considering the available evidence, alternate explanations and balancing the positive with the negative.

In this module, we will be having a look into our self-efficacy and actions, before reviewing our collection of strategies for managing emotions.

HELPFUL
VS
UNHELPFUL

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN IT ALL GOES BAD?

In the previous module, we spent some time unpacking the difference between helpful and unhelpful appraisal styles, and how we can challenge our unhelpful appraisal styles. While we described a number of different challenging strategies, a lot of it boils down to pausing to reflect on whether we have considered all the available evidence. Often when we do this, we find that our initial appraisal was either not very realistic or unduly negative.

Let's revisit our friend Henry who was waiting for his date. While Henry may have initially had a number of unhelpful thoughts come to mind, such as:



1. "Maybe she got into a bad car crash on the way here."
2. "She's ditched me. She must have found something better to do."
3. "She probably never liked me. I'm pretty useless like that."

After considering the available evidence (e.g. a week's worth of consistent texting, sharing of jokes and good conversation), he concluded that it is also reasonable to expect that Lauren, his date, is probably just running late and will arrive shortly. Maybe not ideal, but definitely not completely disastrous.

"NAH... SHE'S PROBABLY JUST RUNNING LATE."



But what if Lauren didn't show up?

After all, sometimes bad stuff does actually happen. In times like these our appraisals are still very important to consider. We just need to take a slightly different angle.






APPRAISING YOURSELF: A LOOK INTO SELF-EFFICACY

It's also important to think about the appraisals or beliefs that we hold about ourselves. Self-efficacy is the belief we have in our own abilities to face challenges, to strive for goals, and to take charge over the way we experience the world around us.

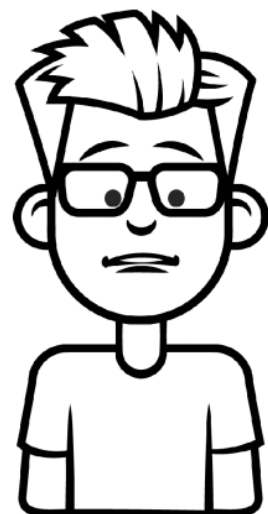
High self-efficacy is often a good thing to work towards. People with high self-efficacy are typically more motivated to learn new things, gain new experiences, and to tackle difficult challenges when they arise. In contrast, low self-efficacy is often associated with low motivation to try new things, holding negative self-beliefs, and having fewer positive experiences.

SELF-EFFICACY IS THE BELIEF WE HAVE IN OUR OWN ABILITIES...

-  TO FACE CHALLENGES
-  TO STRIVE FOR GOALS
-  TO TAKE CHARGE

In the context of Henry being ghosted by his Binder date, if Henry has high self-efficacy, he will likely acknowledge that this was a bad outcome for him, but then move on while retaining a positive, yet realistic, outlook on his ability to connect with new people for future dates. In terms of appraisals, he may say something to himself like *“damn... that hurt, but I’m resilient enough to work through it and move on. Tomorrow is another day.”*

On the flip side, if Henry has low self-efficacy, he may likely dwell on how much of a failure he is and then avoid subsequent dating situations... Not really that helpful in the long run if his goal is to find a partner.



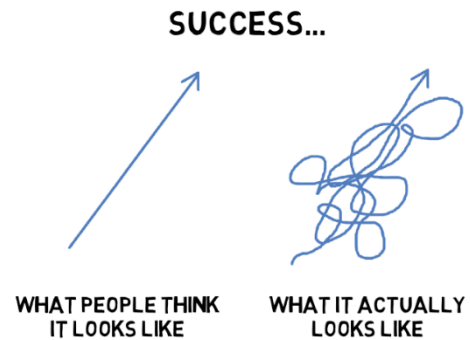


BUILDING SELF-EFFICACY: HELPING YOU TO HELP YOURSELF

Here's a few helpful ways in which we can work towards building our self-efficacy over time.

1. UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS AND THE GOAL

We've all heard various motivational clichés such as, “fall down seven times, stand up eight” or “this is what people think success looks like... this is what success actually looks like.” But there is a certain degree of truth to be taken from these types of statements.



Pursuing a meaningful goal is never easy. We can often fall into the unhelpful trap of thinking about the end goal without paying enough attention to the process or “journey” that precedes it. This journey is filled with many ups and downs, successes and failures. When we think of this this way, a goal is actually something which is built upon failure just as much as

it is built upon success... after all, no one's perfect.



Bad luck, struggles and negative events can be very hard. In times like these, it can be useful to acknowledge how struggles are a normal part of human experience, and an inevitable part of pursuing any goal that is meaningful. Treat it as an opportunity to learn, adapt and move forward towards your goals, and over time you will build resilience to it.

2. SMART GOAL SETTING

A common trap that people fall into when they seek out a goal, whatever it may be, is to define the grand goal, without considering how to approach the smaller goals needed to get there. For instance, let's say you have a grand goal of becoming fit enough to compete in a triathlon. If you only think about the grand goal, it means that every time you compare your current status to this goal, you evaluate yourself as having failed or not being good enough. Over time, repeated self-evaluations of failure will likely negatively impact your self-efficacy.



In contrast, it can be useful to clearly define smaller goals, which build upon each other to help you towards your grand goal. As a general rule of thumb, aim to set SMART goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-specific.

Your goals should be defined in a very *specific* and *measurable* way, so you (or anyone else) can objectively determine whether you have or have not reached your goal.

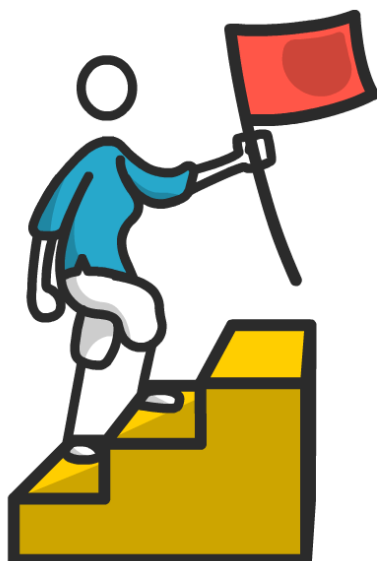
For instance, “I want to run 10km in under an hour” is specific and measurable, whereas “I want to get fit” is not.

Your goals should also be *achievable* and *realistic*. Setting the bar too high is often not helpful. You want your goal to be challenging, but also fairly close to where you are currently at. For instance, if you currently run 3km once a week, your next goal should not be to run 10km five times a week. Set smaller, achievable increments such as 3.5km once a week, which can then be turned into 2km twice a week, and so on. Also keep in mind how feasible a goal is. If you work an exhausting 14-hour shift on Wednesdays, don’t set your running day on Wednesdays. Set it for a day where you can realistically make the time and are willing to commit to it.

Finally, goals should be *time-bound*. Set a realistic time frame for achieving each goal. You can always adjust the specifics later on if needed, but having a time frame can be helpful for providing structure for your goals.

S M A R T

SPECIFIC
MEAURABLE
ACHIEVABLE
REALISTIC
TIME-BOUND



EXAMPLE GOAL:

RUN
10KM
< 60MIN



~~"I WANT TO
GET FIT!"~~

EXAMPLE MINI-GOAL:

3KM, 1X WEEK

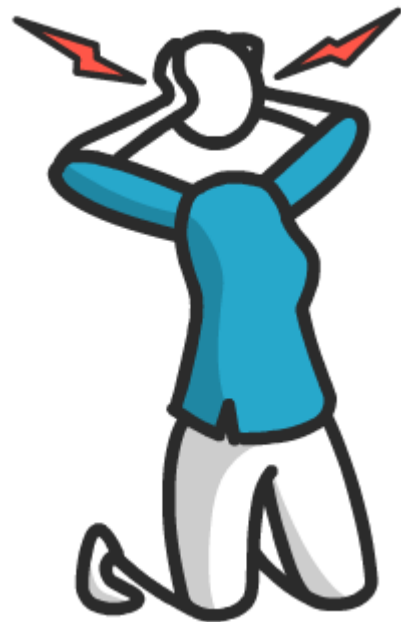
3.5KM, 1X WEEK

2KM, 2X WEEK



3. CHALLENGING NEGATIVE BELIEFS

It is common to be critical of yourself, particularly when negative things happen or when you find yourself in a stressful or overwhelming situation. In times like these, we can often become unduly negative in relation to how we see ourselves. Just as we have learnt to challenge unhelpful appraisals about a given situation, we can also challenge unhelpful beliefs about our self. Using the strategies discussed in Module 3, consider what the evidence is for a negative criticism of yourself. Have you ignored your positive qualities? Are you being too black and white?



4. BUILDING POSITIVE QUALITIES

From time to time, we can often forget the positive qualities about our self, which in turn, can make our beliefs about our self unduly negative and hinder our self-efficacy. A helpful technique to remember our positive qualities is to keep a journal of positive things about ourselves. Every day, take note of one or two things you did, and then write down what positive quality this conveys.



If you are stuck for ideas, you can also ask yourself questions such as:

- “What do I like about myself?”
- “What skills or achievements have I accomplished?”
- “What are some challenges I have overcome?”
- “What are some attributes that I like in others, but also have myself?”

Relatedly, it’s also important to celebrate your achievements along the way, even the little ones. This will help acknowledge the positive things you have done, and in turn, help you keep them in mind.





5. TREATING YOURSELF

Finally, part of building self-efficacy is taking the time to care for yourself. Why? Because experiencing enjoyment is an important part of everyday life, which helps us feel good about ourselves. People with low or negative self-beliefs can often fall into the trap of neglecting themselves, which in turn, reinforces the idea that they are somehow unworthy or undeserving. On the flip side, doing nice things for yourself regularly can be a simple and effective way of encouraging self-efficacy through action, as it demonstrates to yourself that you are important and valuable, and therefore worthy of positive day to day experiences.



Here's a short list of positive activities to get you started. Feel free to come up with your own!

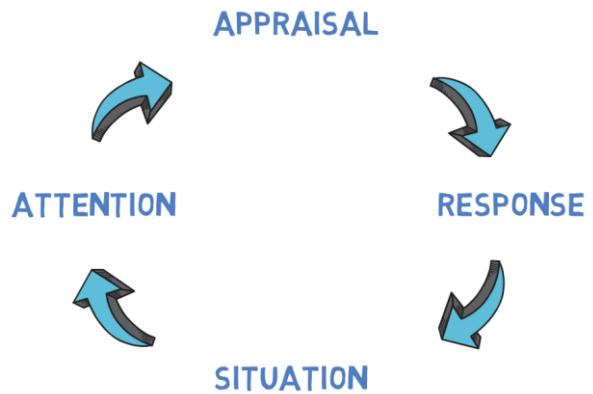
POSITIVE ACTIVITIES LIST

ONLINE SHOPPING	LISTENING TO MUSIC	HAVING A LAZY DAY
GOING TO THE BEACH	WATCHING A MOVIE	GOING CAMPING
GYM AND EXERCISE	DATE NIGHTS	REARRANGING YOUR HOUSE
HIKING	SEX	LAUGHING
EATING GOOD FOOD	ARTS AND CRAFTS	RECALLING HAPPY MEMORIES
HANGING WITH FRIENDS	READING	PARTYING
NAPPING	WRITING	DRESSING UP
SPENDING TIME WITH PETS	CATCHING UP WITH FAMILY	CONNECTING TO A PLACE OF PERSONAL SIGNIFICANCE



RESPONSE MODULATION

The final way in which we can regulate our emotions is by considering the way in which we respond to situations. If we cast our minds back to the model of emotion from Module 1, our experience of emotion is a constant cycle of situations that we attend to, appraise and respond to in some way. Given this, our responses can be thought of as both the result of experiencing emotion (via the preceding situation, attention and appraisal), and also something which affects subsequent experience of emotion.



For instance, if we return to our friends Russ and Rachel from Module 1, they may be feeling irritable and socially awkward during their group of friends' weekend away due to their recent break-up. It's possible that one (or both) of them may respond to these emotions by drinking heavily, which in turn may induce an unhelpful mix of anger and confidence which then instigates more heated arguments.

We can also think of response modulation in terms of either being helpful or unhelpful, depending on our goals in a given situation. In the case of Russ and Rachel, if their goal was to have a civil weekend away with their mutual friends despite their difficulties with each other, drinking heavily due to feeling irritable and socially awkward probably wasn't a very helpful response.





On the flipside, a more helpful action may be to limit the amount of alcohol consumed. Russ may offer to be the designated driver for their friends, which caps how much he can drink to a modest amount. Rachel may try to open a dialogue with Russ to acknowledge that they both still feel awkward about this weekend away situation, and to come to an agreement over what boundaries (social, physical, conversational or otherwise) they would both be happy enough with to minimize potential arguments escalating in front of the rest of their friends.

BE WARY OF WILDCARD RESPONSES

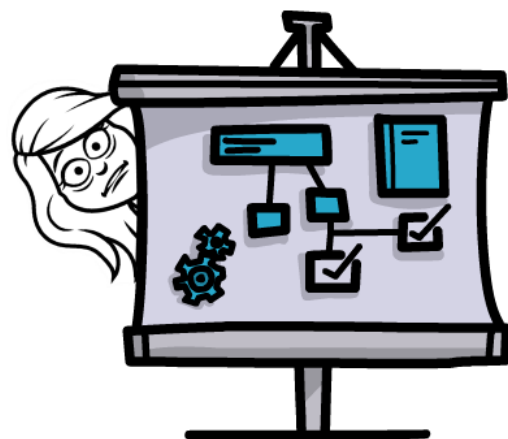
While our responses can be useful for directly regulating our emotions, it's important to be wary of wildcard responses. These are responses that may seem like a good idea at the time, but can quite often get you stuck in the long run.

Let's bring back Russ one more time. Russ was feeling really distressed and awkward due to tensions with Rachel. In the moment, it's perfectly understandable that someone feeling this



way would want to quickly down a few drinks to alleviate these uncomfortable feelings. However, alcohol (or specifically, too much alcohol) can also impair your judgement. Combine this with feeling irritable and this may result in unintentional aggression or other risky behaviours.

Avoidance can also be a bit of a wildcard. Sometimes avoiding a situation to avoid distress can be a good thing, such as choosing not to walk through a dark alley late at night. Other situations however, warrant a bit more consideration. For instance, avoiding social situations such as parties, dates or work presentations because it makes you feel socially awkward is a common one. Sure, immediately speaking, avoiding these scenarios may be a relief, but over time it may also lead you to miss out on important things such maintaining friendships, building new relationships or striving for that work promotion.





Next time you feel like avoiding a situation, it can be helpful to consider what other things you may be missing out on.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

So, by now we've hopefully provided a bit of a crash course into how the emotions we experience in a given situation are changeable depending on how we attend, think and respond. We covered five major ways in which we can seek to either increase (up-regulate) or decrease (down-regulate) our emotional responses: situation selection, situation modification, attention, appraisal and response modulation. When you find yourself distressed or emotionally overwhelmed, it can be handy to consider how you could viably manage your emotions by making helpful changes to one or more of these five stages.

FIVE STAGES:

- 1) SITUATION SELECTION
- 2) SITUATION MODIFICATION
- 3) ATTENTION
- 4) APPRAISAL
- 5) RESPONSE MODULATION

OUR EMOTIONS



ARE CHANGEABLE!

Now that we've reached the end of our final module, attached is a summary guide for what you might consider the next time you find yourself in an emotionally overwhelming situation. Included is a summary of each of the five stages of emotion regulation, as well as considerations and examples at each stage to help guide you towards your goals.



KEY MESSAGES

- ✓ The way in which we appraise ourselves can influence the emotions we experience.
- ✓ It can be helpful to work towards building your own self-efficacy.
- ✓ Self-efficacy can be supported in a number of ways including process-oriented thinking, smart goal setting, challenging negative self-beliefs, remembering your positive qualities, and doing positive activities regularly.
- ✓ The way we respond in a given situation can change the emotions we experience.
- ✓ Be wary of “wildcard responses.” These are responses which may seem like a good idea at the time but may also lead to various negative consequences.



**BE SURE TO CHECK OUT THE SUMMARY
GUIDE FOR MANAGING EMOTIONS!**