

A Framework for Our Emotions

This communication is an invitation to explore and understand the process and role of emotions.

The first step is to demystify the notion that emotions are "bad." They are not. They can be confusing, they can become big, they can feel cumbersome, and they can become disproportionate to the situation. Which means we need to practice building awareness, understanding, and identify strategies to manage our emotions.

The next step is to step back and understand what the role of our emotions are and the stories or beliefs they are supporting. They are signs. Think of our emotions like a smoke alarm. Their role is to notify us when something is taking place. Good, bad, or indifferent - our emotions provide us with a notice that something is taking place.

Like a smoke alarm, our emotions will "chirp" at us. If we don't pay attention, then the "chirp" will become more frequent. If we ignore our emotions, then eventually the "chirp" turns into something much bigger and noticeable. Therefore, the goal is to attend to our emotions when we hear the "chirp" rather than wait and try to stop our emotions after the alarm has gone off.

As we build an understanding and awareness around our emotions, we will want to develop a system to notice, manage, and regulate ourselves as necessary.

Notice & Name

- **Identifying and labeling your emotions** as you're experiencing them (the more descriptive the better). You can't manage something you're not aware of. Therefore, building a broader vocabulary around how/what you are experiencing is an important skill to emotion regulation.
- **Orient yourself** to WHAT, WHEN, WHO, and HOW your emotions become activated.
- **Understand the underlying WHY** (i.e., stories, scripts, narratives, and beliefs) that interact and give life to the emotions you often experience. Understand that the stories, scripts, narratives, and beliefs are not always accurate. The WHY may need to be updated and edited if the emotions are not congruent with the events.

Manage & Differentiate

- Understanding the difference between **primary emotions** and **secondary emotions** can be empowering.
 - **Primary emotions** are your initial reactions to external events. You FEEL the primary emotions in your body. A chemical reaction occurs. They are natural reactions to things around us. For example, being sad when a loved one dies, or being frustrated in traffic, are natural initial responses.
 - A **secondary emotion** is when you feel something *about the feeling itself*. This is typically where your brain jumps into the situation and adds its opinion on the situation. For example, you may feel anger about being hurt, or shame about your anxiety. Secondary emotions increase the intensity of your reactions and can push you into destructive behaviors.

Regulate & Ride the Waves

- Becoming flexible with your emotions is holding your initial reaction loosely—not taking it too seriously or overly identifying with it, but acknowledging it, labeling it, and then deciding how you want to interpret the experience.
- An important step involves acknowledging **emotions as they flow through**. Being open to and acknowledging that you're experiencing an emotion is key to letting the emotion circulate through and move on, rather than pretending you're not feeling it and then allowing it to develop a knot somewhere.

Practice & Skill Building

- As you navigate emotions, a few crucial skills that you want to practice involve:
 - Allowing the emotion to dilute and discharge itself over time (2-5 minutes is often all you need)
 - Stepping back, away, or remaining neutral to the emotion (Create distance – Practice the "Pause")
 - Address or consider how to act on it. (Review the Game Tape or Get Upstream to be Pro-Active)
 - Ask yourself, is this congruent with how you want to show up? (Your values – The Story)

By understanding emotions, making space to be vulnerable, and practice expressing emotions the outcome will enable you to translate openly and honestly how you are doing and what you need.

The more you practice expressing emotions, the more skilled you will become, and the more confident you may become managing your emotions in a healthy and productive manner.