What are emotions?

Emotions are feelings that include physical sensations in your body and behaviours (e.g., smiling, crying). They generally don't last very long, but can be intense! We usually feel emotions in response to something that happens around us.

Remember: Emotions are important for communication, motivation, and action, but sometimes they are not based on accurate information! There is a strong relationship between our emotions, thoughts, and actions.

Emotions, Thoughts, Action Urges, & Opposite Actions

Emotion	Thought	Action Urge	Opposite Action
Fear	Danger	Run away, avoid	Approach, don't avoid
Anger	Unfairness	Attack	Gently avoid, be a little nice, try to understand their perspective
Sadness	Loss	Withdraw, isolate	Get active

Mindfulness

Paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally. Noticing what we are thinking, feeling, and doing in the present moment. Try out the Three-minute Breathing Space – a quick exercise that helps you step out of "automatic pilot" and into the present moment:

1. **Awareness** – Close your eyes. Try to notice what you are experiencing right now. What thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations are you feeling? Acknowledge that experience, even if it is unwanted.
2. **Gathering** – Gently redirect your attention to your breath. Follow it in and out. Your breath can serve as an anchor to keep you in the present.
3. **Expanding** – Expand your field of awareness from your breathing out into your body, your posture, and facial expression.

Self-Soothing

A way to remember these skills is to think of soothing each of your FIVE SENSES

Vision

☐ Look at the stars ☐ Look at nature around you ☐ Look at pictures you like in a book from the library
☐Be mindful of each thing that passes in front of you ☐ Watch a sunrise or sunset

Hearing

☐ Sing to your favourite songs ☐ Turn on the radio ☐ Learn to plan an instrument ☐ Go to a concert
☐ Make a playlist of songs that will get you through hard times

Smell

☐ Light a scented candle ☐ Open the windows and smell the air ☐ Smell some flowers
☐ Put scented handcream on your hands ☐ Make cookies, brownies, or popcorn

Taste

☐ Chew a flavourful piece of gum ☐Treat yourself to your favourite dessert ☐Sample flavours at a tea shop
☐Drink a soothing drink, like a smoothie, hot chocolate, or tea

Touch

☐ Pet your dog or cat ☐Have a massage or a bath ☐Hug someone ☐Wrap up in a blanket ☐Sink into a couch
☐Put a cold press on your pressure points

STOP Skill

Give yourself a chance to *act* instead of *react*!

- **S** – STOP everything! Your movement, reactions, etc.
- **T** – Take a step back! Physically and mentally
- **O** – Observe: Nonjudgmentally, inside and outside
- **P** – Proceed mindfully: Evaluate your goals – what choice will make this situation better/worse?

Paced Breathing

Slow down the pace of your inhaling and exhaling by holding in between the in and out breath. Remember to breathe deeply from your abdomen. Try this quick video to get the hang of paced breathing: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QWJtWfSSTi4 (Mindful Gnats: Paced Breathing)

Check the Facts

1. Identify the emotion you want to change
2. Describe the event that triggered your emotional response
3. Look for any assumptions and interpretations you may have made
4. Are you assuming a threat?
5. Are there other possible explanations?
6. Does your emotion fit the facts? Do you need more information?

Resources

Online Mindfulness

- https://thiswayup.org.au/how-we-can-help/courses/intro-to-mindfulness/
- http://youth.anxietybc.com/mindfulness-exercises
- https://www.headspace.com/

Books

- *Thoughts and feelings: Taking control of your moods and your life* by Matthew McKay, Martha Davis, and Patrick Fanning.
- *The feeling good handbook, revised edition* by David Burns
- *The relaxation and stress reduction workbook* by Martha Davis, Elizabeth Eshelman, and Matthew McKay
- *The unofficial guide to beating stress* by Pat Goudey
- *Mind over mood: Change how you feel by changing the way you think* by Dennis Greenburger and Christine Padesky
- *The borderline personality disorder survival guide: Everything you need to know about living with BPD* by Alexander Chapman and Kim L. Gratz

For information about mental health and addictions services provided by St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton, please visit https://www.stjoes.ca/