



Prism Counselling

Skills require practice

Practice regularly

Create a routine to practice all four of these skills (distraction, off-setting, expression and acceptance) at regular times - maybe once every evening for 5 minutes, or every weekend for 20 minutes. Try your best to be consistent.

Practice at small opportunities

Don't wait for your emotions to be boiling over before you try to remember these skills. Look for moments where you experience a very minor version of an emotion, such as maybe frustration at how long the line is at the grocery store cashier. Then try to apply these skills in this moment.

This will increase the likelihood that, the next time you feel something big, your brain will remember how to manage your emotions.

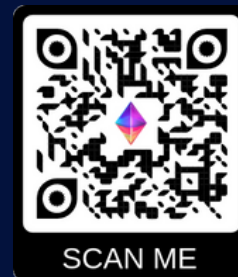


Need more help?

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Psychotherapy can help you manage your emotions more effectively

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Emotional Coping Mechanisms

Skills for regulating emotions

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Short-term coping mechanisms

Distraction

Most people are already quite good at distracting themselves from unpleasant emotions and their associated experiences. Although these can be problematic when we attempt to maintain this pattern in the long term, they are useful tools in two major situations:

- When emotions first show up, they tend to peak in intensity quite rapidly, and shortly afterwards subside into a lower plateau. Distracting ourselves through the peak can make it easier to manage emotions when they're less intense.
- When we need a brief escape to focus on something else important to us.



Offsetting

Imagine offsetting like a sub-type of distraction. When we evoke one emotional experience, it can help to offset the intensity of an existing emotion. Strategies for doing this range from unhealthy extremes (substance use/abuse and self-harm can be examples of unhealthy off-setting behaviour), to healthy practices like physical exercise or breathing strategies.



Long-term coping mechanisms

Expression

In its simplest form, taking an emotion that previously only existed internally, and giving it external representation, constitutes emotional expression. Interpersonal expression, i.e., talking to other people about emotions, can be an incredibly helpful version of this, but it isn't the only form available.

Creative expression like singing, dancing, acting, painting and writing are all great potential ways to express emotions. Just be careful to focus on expressing your emotions effectively rather than getting lost in painting the Mona Lisa.

Acceptance

This is probably the most powerful thing we can learn to do for our emotions, but perhaps the most complex as well.

So many of our efforts to deal with emotions are about fighting them, trying to reduce or eradicate them, or escape them.

Emotional tug-of-war

If you imagine that you are standing to one side, holding a rope, and your unpleasant emotions (e.g., sadness or anxiety) are standing opposite you, holding the other end of the rope. We often find ourselves engaged in a tug-of-war with our emotions, hoping desperately to defeat them, while fearing that they might beat and overwhelm us.

Acceptance demonstrates that there's a third option in this tug-of-war - you can let go of the rope! While this might not allow you to vanquish your emotions, it's unlikely you were able to do that anyway. Now that you have disengaged from the tug-of-war, you can focus your attention on fulfilling parts of your life; this reduces the suffering we typically experience from fixating on our fight against emotions.

