

Managing emotions

Experiencing strong emotions is a normal part of being human. Most people experience intense anger, sadness, anxiety or fear at some point during their life.

Sometimes it's difficult to manage strong feelings and emotions. Although we can't avoid experiencing these feelings, we can develop ways of managing them. Here are some ways to help you manage, rather than react, to strong feelings

IDENTIFY AND NAME WHAT YOU ARE FEELING

This can help you understand your emotions and differentiate between different feeling states.

UNDERSTAND WHY YOU'RE FEELING THE WAY YOU ARE

Think about the purpose of these feelings and emotions. For example, if you're feeling angry, see if you can identify what's driving the anger. Often it can reflect some form of hurt or perceived rejection or disappointment. Paying attention to the following can help you understand why you feel the way you do.

- name the event that prompted the emotion (e.g. my friend looked at me)
- notice how you interpreted the situation (e.g. she looked at me in a funny way, therefore, she must be angry with me)
- notice some of the physical sensations you are experiencing (e.g. tension in shoulders, heart racing, feeling hot, or a burning sensation in the face)
- notice how you behave in response to feeling angry (e.g. speak to my friend rudely or dismissively)
- notice how others respond to you and the after-effects of your emotions (e.g. friend speaks aggressively and then an argument begins, or friend withdraws and distances themselves from me when I am speaking or behaving aggressively)

Remember that some emotions are reactions to events in one's environment (e.g. feeling criticised), while other emotions are primarily due to thoughts or feelings (e.g. anger at feeling criticised).

Looking after yourself can help reduce the impact of strong emotions - eat well, get some sleep, do some exercise and avoid drugs and alcohol.

Rather than beat yourself up about how you're feeling, accept your emotions as part of who you are. Try to avoid judging your feelings as good or bad.

Take some time out. When feeling angry or afraid, it's common to say the first thing that comes into your head. Slow down. Listen to the other person and, where possible, think through what you would like to say before responding. You may need some time on your own before doing this.

It may also help to talk to your doctor or health care professional about how you're feeling.

The Project Air Strategy acknowledges the major support of NSW Health. The Project works with mental health clinicians, consumers and carers to deliver effective treatments, implements research strategies supporting scientific discoveries, and offers high quality training and education. Contact us at info-projectair@uow.edu.au or visit www.projectairstrategy.org