

DBT Emotion Regulation: Opposite Action

Choosing behavior that changes an emotion when the emotion or its intensity does not fit the facts.

Step 1

Name the emotion and the action urge.

Step 2

Check the facts and ask whether the emotion and intensity fit the current situation.

Step 3

If the emotion does not fit the facts, or acting on the urge would be ineffective, identify the opposite behavior.

Examples

- Fear urges avoidance; opposite action may involve approaching a reasonably safe situation.
- Unjustified shame urges hiding; opposite action may involve sharing honestly with a safe person.
- Depression urges withdrawal; opposite action may involve activation and connection.
- Unjustified anger urges attack; opposite action may involve gentle posture, curiosity, or temporarily stepping away.

Important

Opposite action is not for overriding valid danger signals or forcing yourself into unsafe situations.

Try this reflection

What emotion-driven urge has been pulling you away from your longer-term goals?

Using this resource: For education and skill-building only; not diagnosis, medical advice, or crisis care. If you feel overwhelmed, pause and seek appropriate professional support. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support; call 911 for an immediate emergency.