

# Practical Skills for Families Supporting a Loved One In Recovery



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# Agenda

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- Discuss & Review Emotional Disorders
- Importance of family involvement
- Emotion-Awareness Training
- Emotion-Coaching
  - Validation
  - Meeting the need

# The importance of Family Therapy



Siegel, D. (2014)

The relationship=The vehicle of change

**Interpersonal Neurobiology:** Good relationships increase well-being and help sustain recovery

- *“Interpersonal neurobiology is rooted in the notion that our biology and physiology are interconnected with our personal relationships and social surroundings”*

# Eating Disorders as Emotional Disorders

## Core Vulnerabilities

- Temperamental propensity to experience negative affect more intensely and frequently;
- Tendency to view emotional experiences as unwanted and intolerable
- Maladaptive emotion regulation behavioral strategies (attempts to avoid or dampen the intensity of uncomfortable emotion)
- **FEAR:** Something bad is going to happen and I won't be able to manage

# Psychoeducation: Maintaining factors of eating disorders



Effects of altered nutrition



Cognitive rigidity/pro-ED beliefs



Relational response to ED bx



Temperament: harm avoidant, perfectionism / poor impulse control & novelty seeking



NEUROTICISM: anxiety about anxiety



SYSTEMS



EXPERIENTIAL AVOIDANCE & EMOTIONAL INTOLERANCE

# Diverse Symptoms Function Similarly

**Unpleasant Internal Experience**



**Emotional Avoidance and Unwillingness**



**Avoidant, Symptomatic Behavior**



**Temporary Relief from Unpleasant Internal Experience**  
**Long Term Consequences**

# Eating Disorders as Emotional Disorders

experience emotions  
more **intensely**

more **frequently**

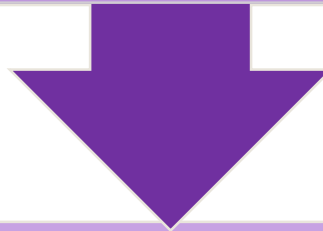
**out of context** or  
unpredictable



# Core Disturbance: Experiential Avoidance

**Key maintaining factor for many psychiatric illnesses:**

**Drive to avoid negative emotional experiences**



**Recovery requires:**

- **Experiential Challenge (doing things that have been habitually avoided)**
- **Reducing Avoidance Strategies**



# Emotional Avoidance Is the Problem

Attempts to **avoid** uncomfortable and painful emotional experiences drives unsafe, threatening and dangerous behavior  
**(symptom use)**



Certain emotions can remind us of a time when we felt unsafe or were unsafe, but **the emotion itself is not unsafe**

Emotions are not actually unsafe, threatening or dangerous

# Practical Considerations for Family Involvement

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**Increasing awareness** of caregiver's own avoidance strategies and how they maintain the avoidance cycle

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It provides structure to supports to learn about their **own emotions**. Use of validation and labeling of emotions with their loved one

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**Helps caregiver's gain perspective and feel supported** to reduce care-giver burnout

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**Lessens confusion**; supports learn what to expect. "What is most detrimental to the mental health of a parent or caregiver is to witness a loved one's suffering, and feel helpless or ineffective in the face of it." (Monin, 2016)

# Common Avoidance Strategies Among Families

- Overt avoidance: ignoring of problems, denial
- Jumping in and fixing it “problem-solving”
- Matching the reaction
- Overworking, not being home
- Smothering with protection, safeguarding every move
- Walking on eggshells



# Find Family Trouble spots

- ❖ Family tolerating their own discomfort around seeing loved one struggle
- ❖ Family burned out on treatment & another modality to learn
- ❖ No buy-in that feeling emotions, while painful, is helpful
- ❖ Family struggles to regulate own emotion
- ❖ Inadvertently undermine treatment due to above

Lafrance, A., Files, N., & Paluzzi, S. (2016)

# Addressing family's fears

- ❖ One of the most critical components of the family therapy work
- ❖ Fears and emotional obstacles will undoubtedly surface for supports
- ❖ If ignored, these fears and obstacles will interfere with your caregiving and ability to be effective in any new roles
- ❖ This is common and to be expected – but it needs to be addressed

Lafrance, A., Files, N., & Paluzzi, S. (2016)



# Emotion Awareness Training



# Function of Emotion



**ALL** Emotions  
have a  
function

- Emotions are good and adaptive
- Even “bad” emotions aren’t always bad
- Emotions are your body’s way of saying “hey, something’s going on here”

Negative reactions  
to emotions and  
avoidance of  
emotions **maintains**  
your symptoms

- Symptoms are ways of avoiding emotions
- Avoiding emotions in the short-term produces problems in the long-term
- Behaviors become “emotionally driven”

# Primary and Secondary Emotional Response

## Primary emotional response

- “first” emotional reactions to a situation or memory
- often functional
- directly related to the cues in the situation or memory

## Secondary emotional response

- “Emotions about emotions”
- tend to be judgmental
- not based upon information from the present moment
- Often result in disordered emotions

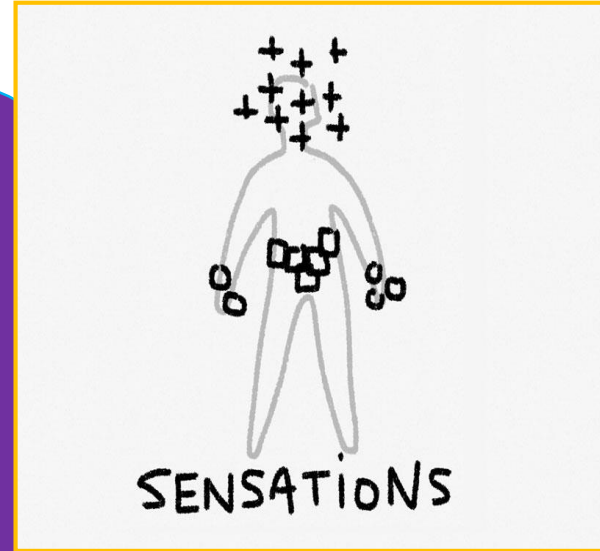
Example:  Anxiety → Anger 



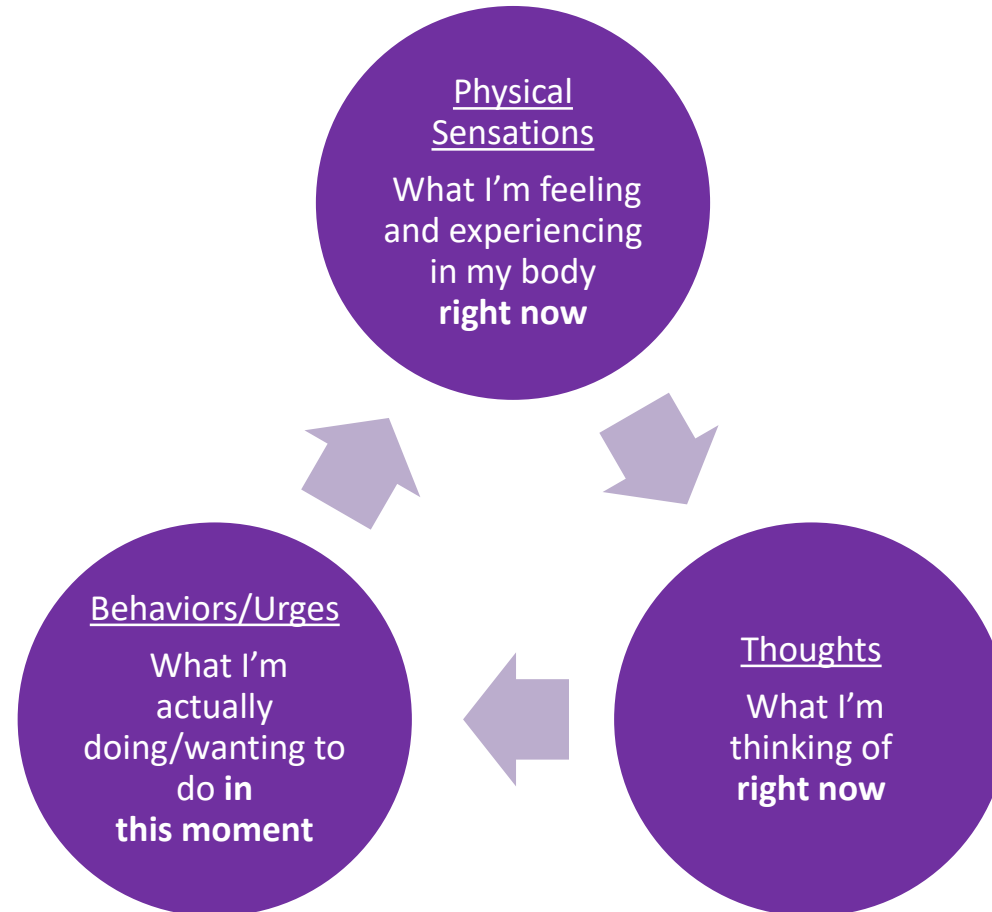
# The skill that is learned



Help patients learn how to break down an emotional experience into its component parts



# 3 Components of an Emotion



# “The ARC” of an Emotional Experience

{Emotion(s) = }

Date/ Time	Situation or Trigger	Physical Sensations	Thoughts	Behaviors/ Urges	What happens next?
	<p><i>Immediate</i></p> <p><b>A</b></p> <p><i>Earlier</i></p>	<p>The diagram illustrates 'The 3-Component Model' with three interconnected components: Physical Sensations, Thoughts, and Behaviors/Urges. Each component is represented by a light blue circle. Green arrows show a clockwise cycle: from Behaviors/Urges to Physical Sensations, from Physical Sensations to Thoughts, and from Thoughts to Behaviors/Urges. A large purple letter 'R' is positioned in the center of this cycle.</p>			<p><i>Short</i></p> <p><b>C</b></p> <p><i>Long</i></p>
<p><b>The 3-Component Model</b></p>					

Helps develop an **understanding** of the antecedents and consequences of common emotional experiences

# Emotion awareness training

Help families and their loved ones cultivate an increased awareness to their emotional experiences intentionally in a non-judgmental way:

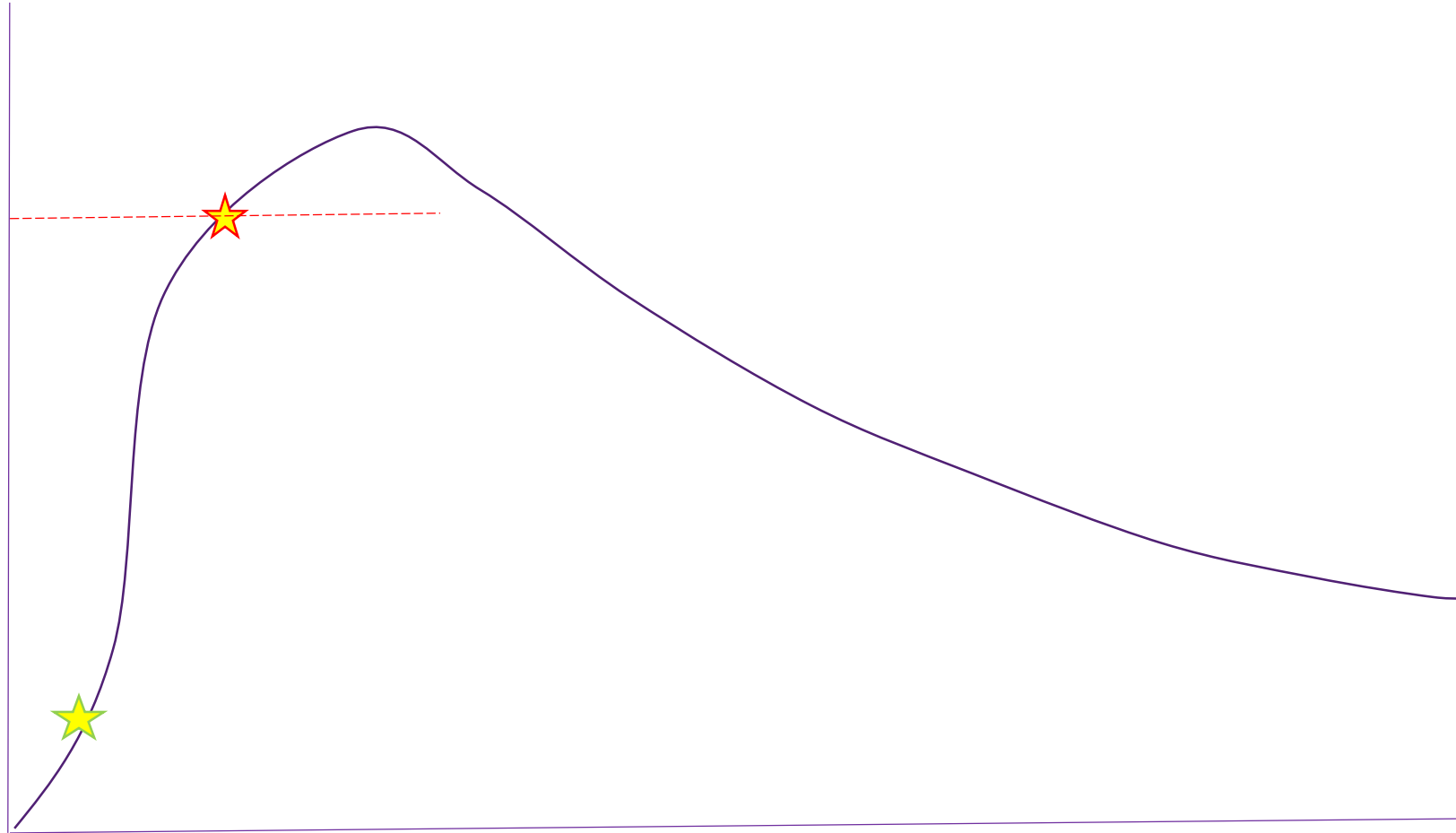
Build awareness of emotional experiences in context, *as they are happening right now*

Reactions often rooted in perceived past failures/future threats and uncertainties

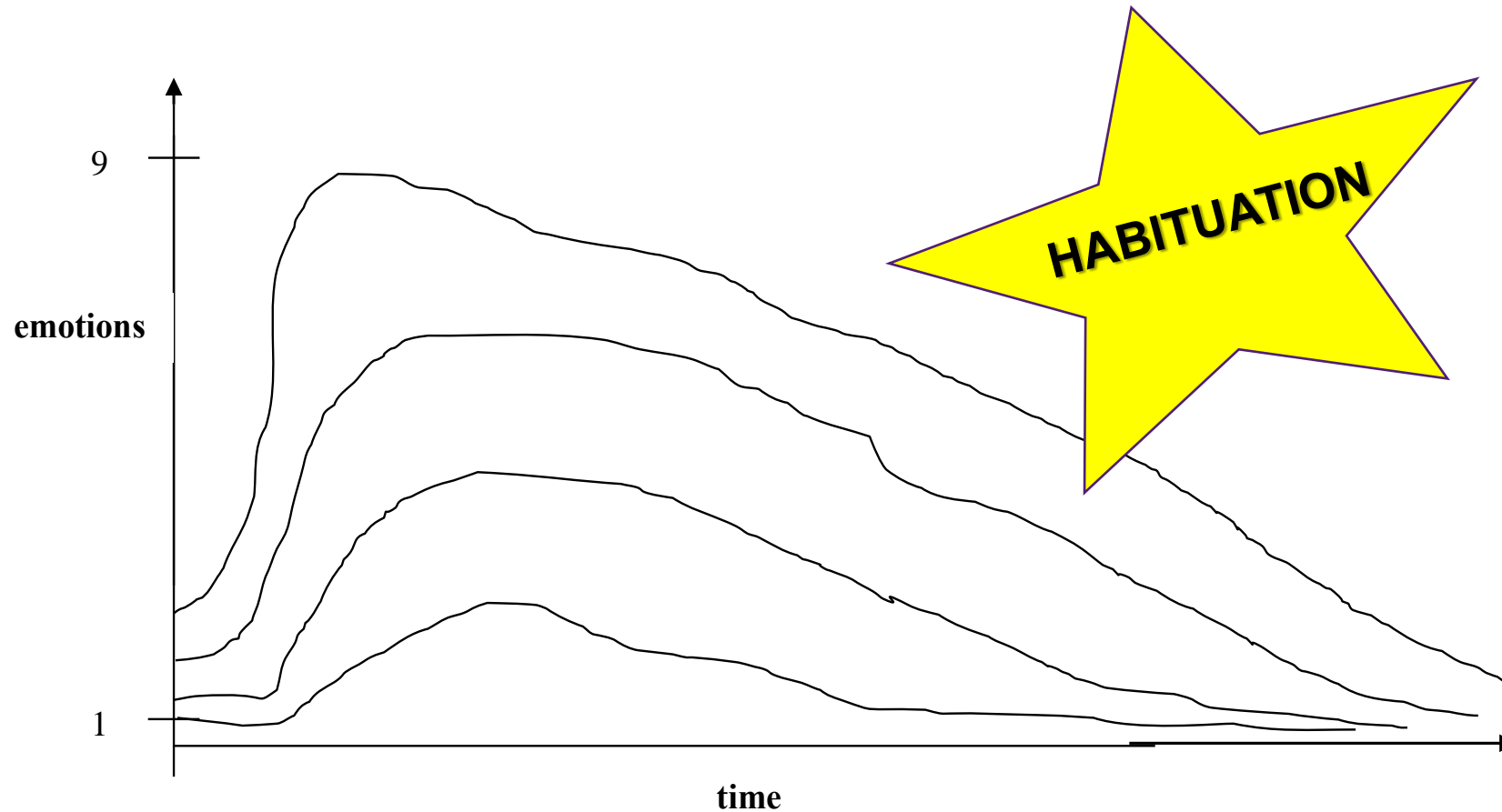
Distinction between **primary** and **secondary** emotional responses  
“Emotions about emotions”

Teach the consequences of judgment-laden attention

# Natural course of emotions, with & without interruption

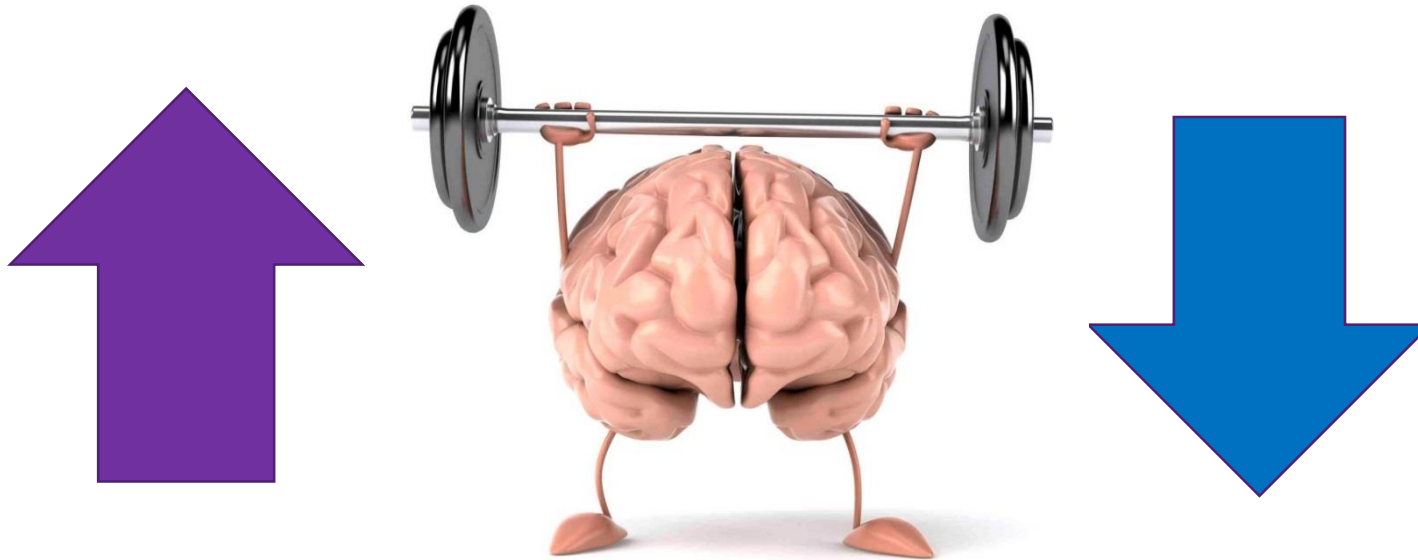


# Decrease in emotional intensity over time with repeated practice



# Symptom Reduction

As **emotional tolerance** and **psychological flexibility** increases



the need for **unhealthy coping behaviors** decreases.

# Emotion-Focused Family Therapy: Emotion Coaching

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Lafrance, A., Files, N., & Paluzzi, S. (2016)

<https://www.mentalhealthfoundations.ca/>



# Key Outcomes

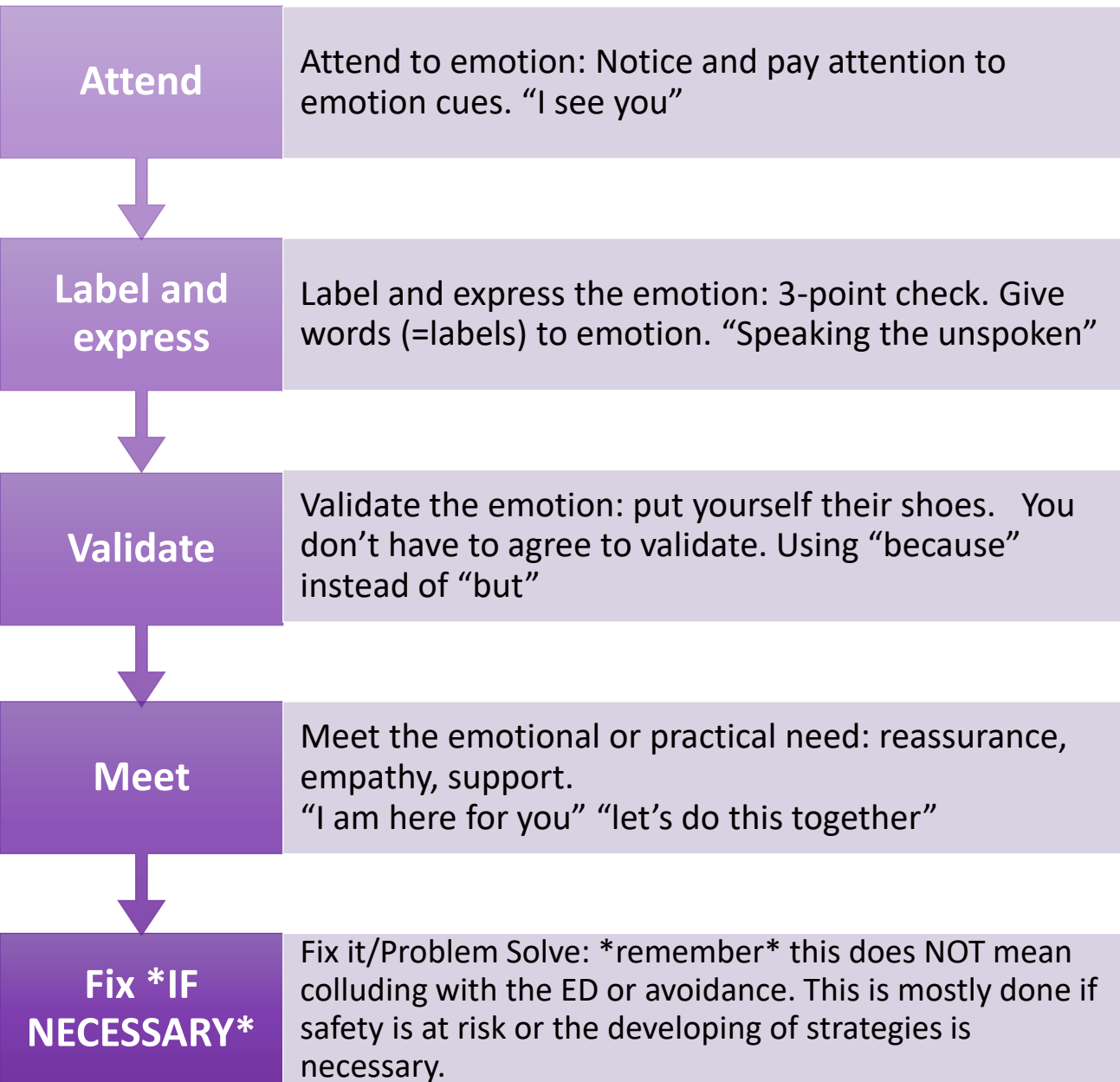
In the moment:

- Avoidance of escalation
- More Cooperation\* (not always)
- De-escalation
- Regulation

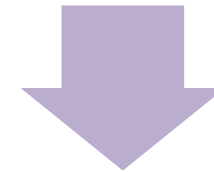
Over time:

- Internalization of self-regulation capacities





Validate



Meet  
(Support)

# Validate It

## *How:*

- Help caregivers put themselves in loved one's shoes
  - show understanding of the experience–
  - Accepted emotions that are different from what you expected or hard for you to understand
- Resist the temptation to:
  - always going for “the bright side”,
  - explaining with logic
  - correcting the reality

# Validate It

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## ***What is it:***

Convey understanding of their experience & prove that you “get it”. Show understanding of the experience—

- accepted emotions that are different from what you expected or hard for you to understand
- Intonation & inflection is important

## ***Resist the temptation to:***

- always going for “the bright side”,
- explaining with logic
- correcting the reality

## ***What it's not:***

- Reassurance
- Problem-solving
- What's your typical go-to?



Tip:  
From  
BUT  
to  
BECAUSE

“I get how you would have felt that way BUT...”  
*is transformed into:*

**“I get how you would have felt that way BECAUSE...” (x3)**

And remember... it won't always “make sense” to you or reflect the “reality” of what happened, and that's ok!

# Validation:

Offers reassurance that their emotions are acceptable/understandable

When emotional experiences are acknowledged, understood and accepted, people will be more willing and able to accept support moving forward.

**Validation does not mean full agreement**

# Support

## A: Meet the Emotional Need

Every emotion has a **specific emotional need**

Ex: If they feel **angry** -

help them to **communicate and explore** what boundary was violated

## B: Meet the Practical Need

When faced with an emotional challenge, most of us want to move right to “fixing it”.

If you skip over the supporting emotional needs, you are likely going to experience resistance to your efforts to solve the emotional “problem”



# Why is emotion coaching important?

- We want success in our efforts of supporting
- It can help intrapersonally and interpersonally to foster greater connection
- It increases likelihood that your loved one will reach out to you in the future
- It builds emotional tolerance and acceptance on both sides
- To try different, and therefore more effective strategies
- Increasing the quality of relating to others, to supporting, and not the quantity

**Families are a valuable resource for recovery**



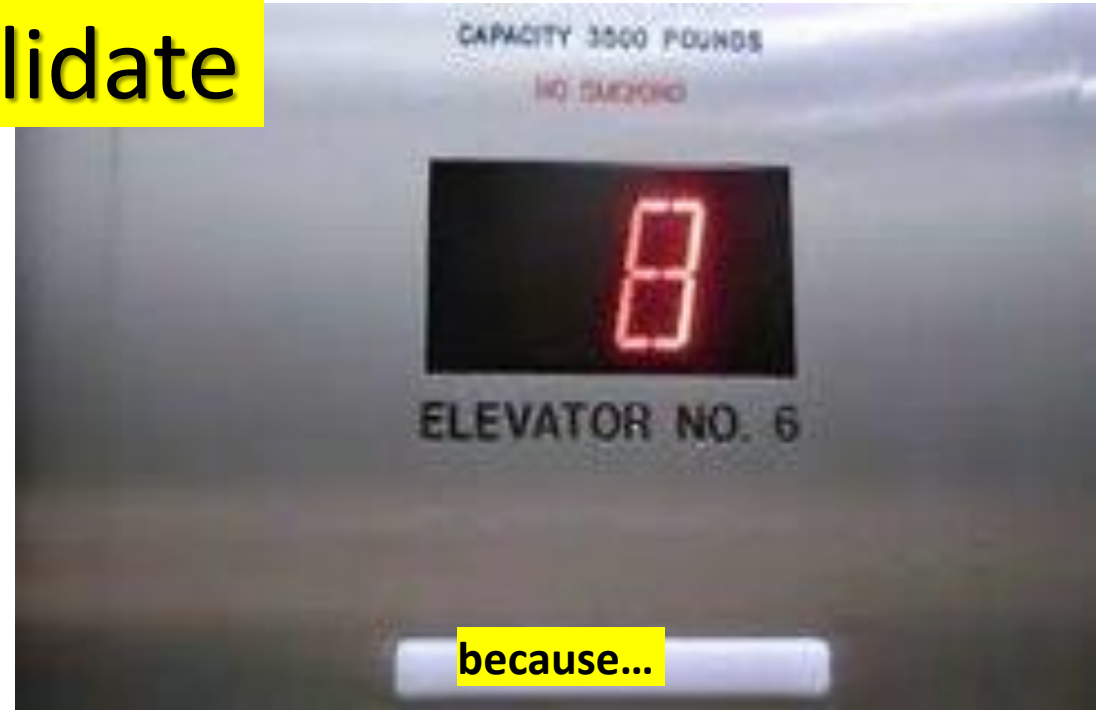
# Emotions and Needs

Emotional Experience (label)	Body Felt Sense	Need	Action Tendency
Sadness	Pressure behind eyes Heaviness in limbs Slowness	Comfort and soothing	Hug, comfort, closeness, connection
Fear/anxiety	Heart racing Sweaty Palms Slowed Digestion	Safety (from threat/to approach)	Run, hide, etc.
Anger	Heart racing Feeling hot/flushed Sweaty, tense jaw Tension in the body	Space, boundaries, feeling heard	Defend the boundary
Shame	Stomach drop	Reassurance of the self	Reconciliation, correct behavior

# Step 1: Validate



I can Imagine you might feel \_\_\_\_\_



because...



because...



because...

A modern, minimalist wardrobe with sliding doors. The interior features a hanging rod, shelves, and a light fixture. The text "Step 2. Support" is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**Step 2. Support**

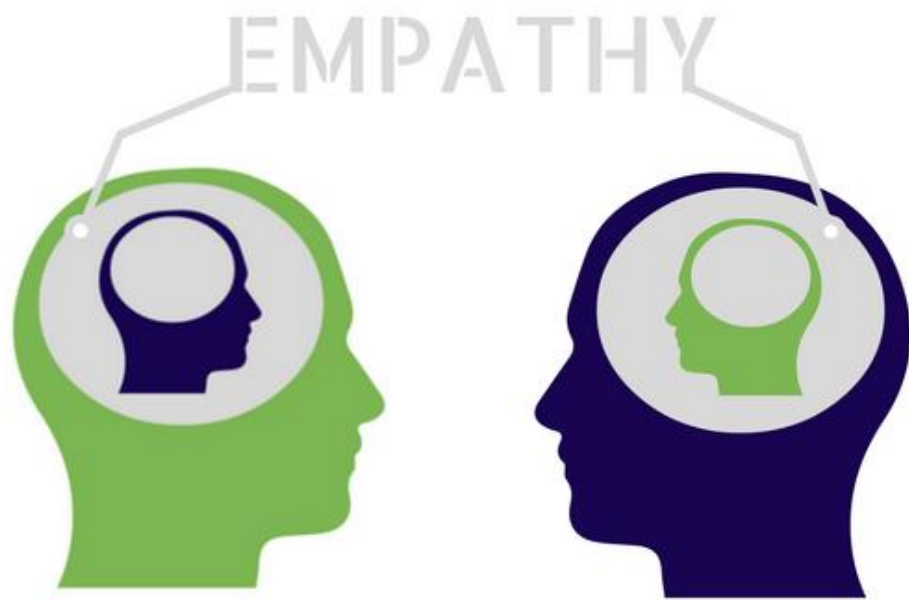
# Supports as Recovery Coaches Becoming “Advanced Caregivers”



Families are key in the recovery process and being recovery coaches is important

Family involvement increases success rates astronomically.

Family members can help loved one's get back on track with food and interrupt symptoms





# Resources

- Ehrenreich-May, J., Kennedy, S.M., Sherman, J.A., Bilek, E.L., Buzzella, B.A., Bennett, S.M., & Barlow, D.H. (2018). *Unified protocols for transdiagnostic treatment of emotional disorders in children and adolescents: Therapist guide*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Lafrance, A., Files, N., & Paluzzi, S. (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhealthfoundations.ca/>.
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- Siegel, D. (2014) About Interpersonal Neurobiology. Retrieved from: [http://www.drdansiegel.com/about/interpersonal\\_neurobiology/](http://www.drdansiegel.com/about/interpersonal_neurobiology/)



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