Working Towards Wellbeing: Managing Strong Emotions

This video is part of a series designed to help health practitioners learn evidence-based skills which enhance mental wellbeing and resilience.
If you are a health practitioner, why not try these techniques for yourself? We encourage everyone to look after their mental health and emotional wellbeing in ways that we know work.

Video Transcript:
We all experience uncomfortable emotions from time to time. One of the tasks of childhood is learning to tolerate emotional discomfort without acting on it or making it worse.

Unfortunately, some of us don't have the opportunity to learn emotional regulation skills in childhood. We may progress to adulthood behaving impulsively in response to difficult emotions. Angry outbursts, violence, relationship issues and substance abuse may ensue. There are also some people who feel their emotional pain much more strongly than others and are drawn to quick fixes like drugs, alcohol or deliberate self-harm to help them through.

What can we do to help ourselves and others manage these strong emotions that interfere with the quality of our lives?

Maybe it would help us all to learn the STOPPP technique.

1. **S is for Stop!** When you feel a strong emotion coming on just don't do anything at all for a moment!
2. **T is for Take a long, slow breath** – maybe even two or three.
3. **O is for Observe** your thoughts and feelings and take note of what's happening for you.
4. **P is for Pulling back** to get a broader perspective on things. This might even involve leaving the situation you find yourself in.
5. The next **P is for Practice** whatever works to help you gain control, maybe you need to walk away for a while, take some more deep breaths, drink some water or phone a friend. Any number of things might work for you.
6. The final **P is for Proceed** when the moment has passed.

Sometimes just the first two steps are enough to prevent a behaviour we'll regret. You sometimes see that condensed into the **Stop-Breathe-Leave technique.**

One way to learn the STOPPP technique is to walk through the last upsetting situation you were in and think about what that situation might have looked like if you had been able to use those steps. This can be a very useful conversation to have with someone.

To use this technique effectively we probably need some other self-management skills up our sleeves:

- Practising a slow-breathing technique means we can call on that skill when we need to take that breath.
- Practising mindfulness helps us stay in the here and now and observe our thoughts and emotions from a distance without getting too caught up in them.

Learning to spend time in less emotional moments thinking about alternative perspectives teaches us that there is more than one way to look at whatever situation we find ourselves in.

It's hard to do these things in the heat of the moment, but with practice it is possible.
Think about how you manage your own emotions and consider how much of this strategy you consciously or unconsciously use.

Further reading and resources:

- Emotion regulation and anxiety disorders
- Working Towards Wellbeing: Mindfulness
- Square Breathing