



Loving Someone with BPD: A Model of Emotion Regulation Part I

Healing Hearts of Families of BPD Conference
November 10, 2012
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Treatment Implementation Collaborative

Objectives for Workshop

Following this workshop, you will be able to:

- utilize the Five Steps in Responding to Out of Control emotions and behaviors
- balance validation with problem solving for themselves and their loved ones
- recognize six patterns of behavior in BPD and respond to them

Basic Guidelines for Responding to People with BPD

- Don't try to talk her out of feeling the way she does
- Don't remake your world to accommodate her emotional “fragility.”
- Understand the tasks in emotion regulation
 - Re-orienting attention
 - Upregulate/downregulate physiological arousal
 - Stop from doing what emotion or mood tell us to do
 - Have a life with goals that are independent of emotion/mood
- Remember that change is difficult for anyone and will be painful for your loved one



Start with Validation



Validation: Finding **SOME** wisdom/truth

Validation decreases emotional arousal

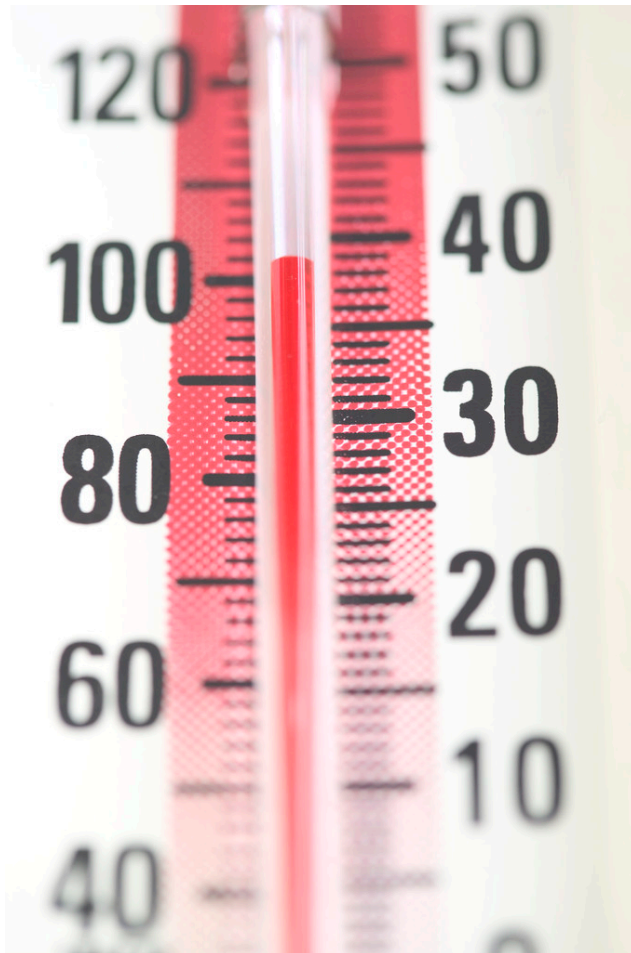
Communicates compassion and understanding

Makes problem solving easier

Use Linehan's Six Levels of Validation

1. stay awake (disengage from judgmental thoughts)
2. Accurate reflection (make sure they know you understand what they are saying/doing)
3. Stating the unarticulated (make sure you are accurate)
4. Personal history or biology
5. Normalizing (when it is)
6. radical genuineness (verbal or manner)

The Validation Thermometer



- Pay attention to your loved one's emotion
- When emotion goes up, increase validation
- When your emotion goes up, increase validation

1. Make a list of loved one' emotions and how he experiences them
2. Make a list of validating statements that you can make

What Not to Do When Validating

- Don't tell your loved one to calm down
- Don't tell your loved one what she is feeling
- Don't tell your loved one to feel differently
- Don't try to solve the problem before you have a clear picture of it and are sure your loved one wants your help



Validation Practice

- One participant tells a story about something that has happened in his/her life recently
- One participant validates
- One participant makes notes of which levels are being used

Regulate Your Own Emotion

- Observe and describe your emotion
- Breathe
- Half-smile
- Avoid the situation (if possible) until you are more regulated
- Validate yourself
- Find compassion for your loved one and yourself



5 Steps to Responding Effectively

1. Regulate your own emotions
2. Validate (do this at every step)
3. Ask/assess
4. Brainstorm/troubleshoot
5. Get information about your role (if any) and what you can plan on hearing about the outcome

Ways to Practice the Five Responses

- Practice regulating your emotions in situations that are less emotional or risky
 - Identify your own prompting events
 - Opposite action and other DBT skills
- Validate yourself/others
- Ask others what they need from you
- Find opportunities in your own life to brainstorm and/or troubleshoot solutions
- With others, practice pinning down your role and getting an idea of when you will hear the outcome



Putting it All Together

Six behavioral patterns and how to
respond to them



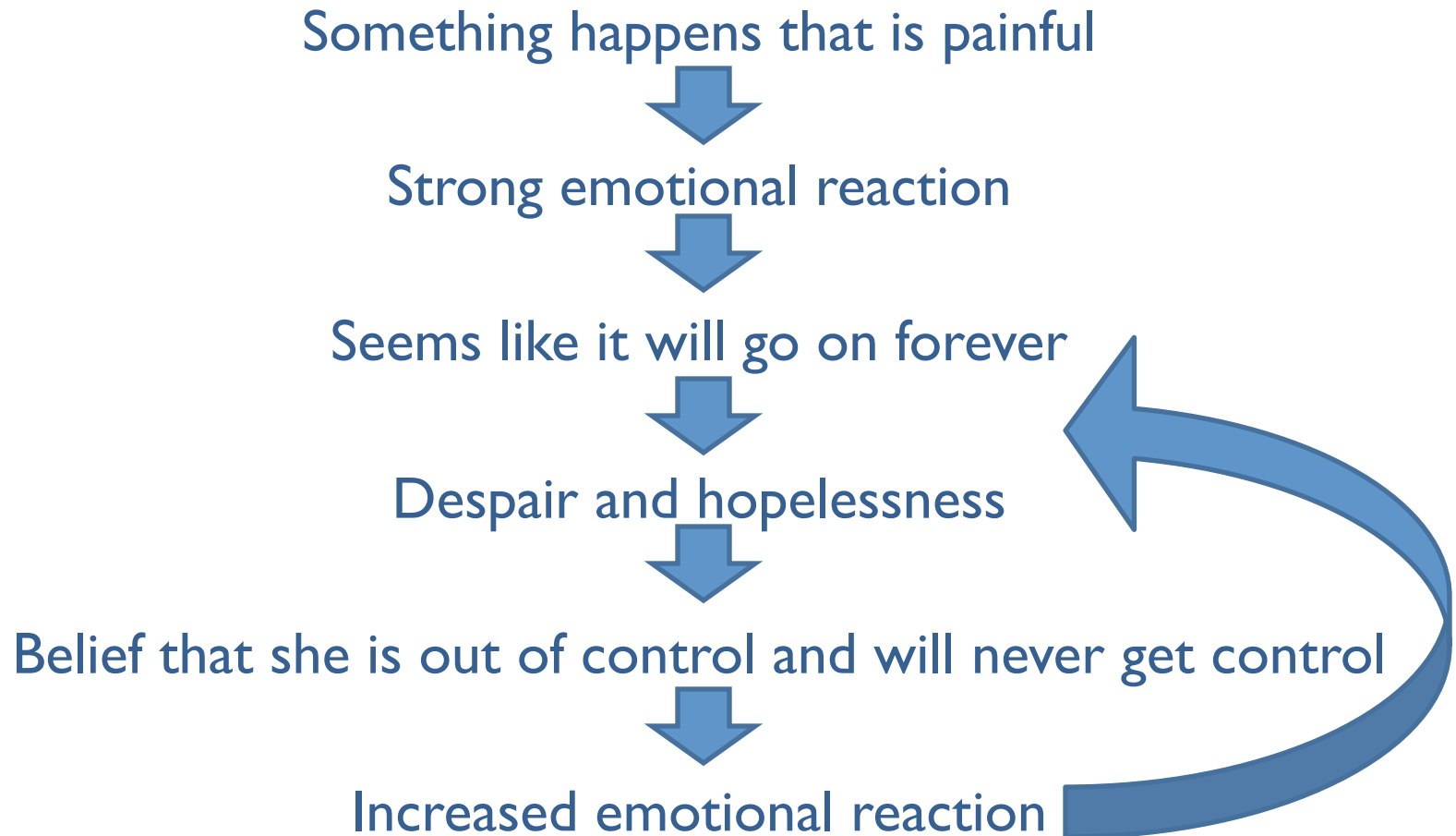
Rationale for Six Behavioral Patterns

- They are easily identifiable
- They are descriptive
- They lend themselves to specific responses

Emotion Vulnerability: “I can’t stand feeling like this.”

- Emotional vulnerability (being vulnerable to being vulnerable)
- An extreme reaction to feeling emotionally out of control
- Don’t know what prompted the emotion AND don’t know how to stop increasing dysregulation
- Thoughts that the emotions will never end and they will feel this way forever
- Leads to despair

The Anatomy of the Emotional Whirlpool



Impulsive Behavior often functions to
end the cycle of emotional
vulnerability

What to do when your loved one is in Emotional Vulnerability

- Know and regulate your own emotions
- Stay away from the “don’ts” that invalidate
 - Don’t say anything before validating
 - Don’t try to ask your loved one to be different
 - Don’t withhold a solution if you have it but don’t try to “fix” things without asking if your help is wanted
- Find something to validate about your loved one’s current emotions
- Validate his sense of being out of control
- Communicate hope and belief
- Ask if he wants help problem solving

Self-Invalidation: “I should be able to change”


- Often appears when emotional vulnerability gets unbearable
- Person with BPD invalidates the experience that led to the vulnerability
- The emotions that were so strong are irrelevant, non-existent or easily changed
- Self-judgmental
- “I should just get over it”
- Invalidation of emotional experiences even when they are justified
- Don’t trust their responses
- Overly perfectionistic problem solving

The Emotional Consequences of Self-Invalidation

- Hopelessness (it's never going to get better)
 - Worthlessness (I can't solve any problems in my life)
 - Anger (I am incompetent)
-
- These emotions can then swing back into emotional vulnerability

What to do when your loved one self-invalidates

- Don't argue with his responses
- Validate his experience in the moment
- Validate his emotions
- Offer to help solve the problem
- When emotion is not escalating, reassure him that his conclusions are not accurate
- Encourage slow change and realistic problem solving
- Don't negate his goals
- Help him break goals into small, achievable steps
- Help him check the facts



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Active-Passivity: “You’ve got to fix this for me.”

A passive problem solving style (lack of capability and/or a belief that problem solving cannot work if she does it)

PLUS

An overwhelming belief that others CAN solve the problem

PLUS

An ineffective interpersonal style

What they do have is unwavering
belief that **YOU** can solve their
problems

Active Passivity and Interpersonal Skills

- Unable to effectively elicit help from others
- Avoids problem solving because of interpersonal fears (“I’ll just make him mad”)
- The effect of lack of interpersonal skills is that they are often avoidant then demanding (then avoidant, then demanding)
- Get anxious about the problem and emotions interfere with interpersonal skills

Active passivity isn't always demanding.

It can be helplessness
that elicits helping behaviors from
others
(reinforced over time).

Responding to Active Passivity: Ask these four questions

- Does your loved one know how to solve the problem?
- Is emotion interfering with either her ability to problem solve or to engage in the behavior to solve the problem
- Does she have an issue with confidence (“I always do the wrong thing)
- Do you have a problem with how she is asking you for help?

If you don't have clear picture, make your help contingent on having information. Remember that everything is grist to help her change her life.

Make sure you Reinforce ANY problem solving efforts

- Do so genuinely
- Don't assume that praise will be the reinforcer
- Make sure your reinforcers are humane
- Watch responses to see if what you used actually reinforced (increased) or punished (decreased) the behavior you wanted to

Apparent Competence: “I’ll be fine.”

- A problem of generalization: she can generate behavior in one context but not another
- Mood Dependence
- Masking Emotion
- Gaining competence with you as the context
- Are you treating her as if she is more competent that she really is?

Questions to ask yourself if you think it's Apparent Competence

- Have I seen the behavior I am expecting in the current context?
- Does the context lead to an increased emotional vulnerability in my loved one?
- Is mood affecting behavior?
- Am I assuming she can engage in a behavior?
- Is her emotional response congruent with the situation?

Responding to Apparent Competence

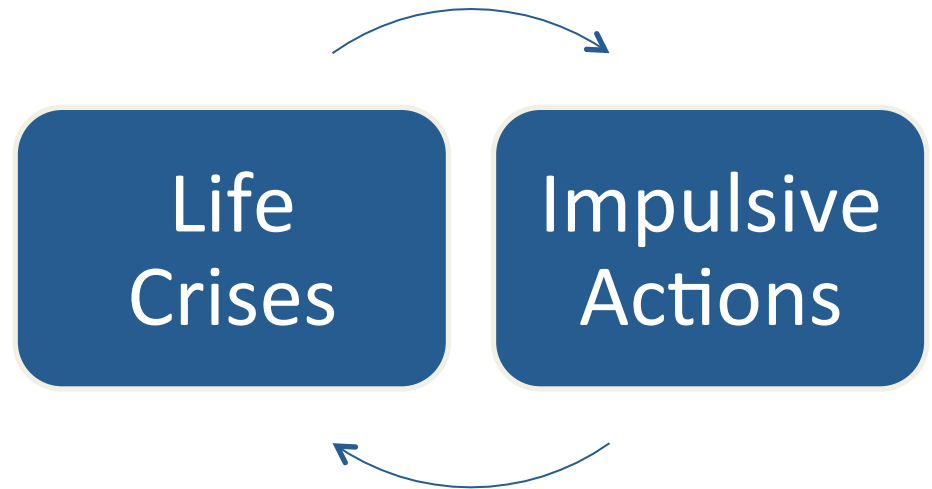
- Use the Five Step Response to effectively:
 1. Regulate your own emotion
 2. Validate (in this case use a lot of mind reading)
 3. Ask/assess: what is going on, what is her emotion, would she like your help? Pay careful attention to congruence
 4. Brainstorm solutions/troubleshoot
 5. Get information on your role (if any) and when you can plan on hearing about the outcome

Responding to Apparent Competence (continued)

- Know her limitations/don't assume competence
- Don't fragilize/balance intervening with coaching
- Remember the effect of mood and emotion on generalization
- ASK,ASK,ASK: "You say you are handling this. Are you really or do you want my help?"
- Genuinely express concern about your response: "I am worried that you think you are letting me down if you tell me how bad it really is."

Unrelenting Crisis: “Everything is out of control”

- Impulsive reactions to life’s problems
- Trying to end crises in ways that create more crises
- Chronic crisis



The end result of poor judgment,
poor problem solving and an
inability to tolerate distress.

Responding to Unrelenting Crisis

- Encourage your loved one to get professional help
- Whenever possible, help him regulate emotion
- Help with problem solving
- Encourage distress tolerance:
 - Distracting
 - Looking at pros and cons before engaging in a behavior
 - Accessing “wise mind”

Inhibited Grieving: “I’m not feeling anything.”

- People with BPD become sensitized to loss
 - Compounding of loss over time
 - Reactive to cues related to new/old loss
 - Reactive to real or imagined loss
- People with BPD stop processing loss. They don’t recover.
- Overwhelming sadness plus avoidance of emotion
- Belief that the emotion will never end or they will be destroyed by it

Recognizing Inhibited Grieving

- Lack of facial expression
- Lack of emotional body language
- Lack of emotional language: “I don’t feel anything”
- Avoidance of external cues for emotion
- Avoidance of internal cues for emotion: “I don’t do sadness”
- Difference between Apparent Competence and Inhibited Grieving:
 - Apparent Competence : she verbally expresses the emotion but doesn’t show it
 - Inhibited Grieving: she doesn’t express or experience the emotion

Responding to Inhibited Grieving

- Validate the emotion that your loved one would be likely to experience
- Validate how hard it is to experience some emotions
- Don't remove cues or reinforce avoidance
- Generate hope that he can survive the emotion that a situation would cue
- Accept your own relief at lack of emotional response (especially after a period of unrelenting crisis)
- Exposure therapy—getting professionals involved

Identifying and Communicating a Limit

- Identify the Limit
 - Observe your experience and define (to yourself)
 - Notice whether the limit is being crossed
 - Decide whether to communicate that the limit is crossed
- Communicate the Limit
 - Tell him/her that you are going to end the conversation if _____ doesn't happen.
 - Give him/her a chance to modify his/her behavior
 - Follow through with the limit
 - Validate and soothe your loved one about the limit
 - Assure your loved one that you will be available at a different time or for a different issue

In Conclusion

When she's emotional...

- Validate

When you're emotional...

- Regulate your own emotion

When hopeless...

- Get support

When impatient...

- Remember incremental change

When helping...

- Don't treat her as fragile AND don't withhold help that you would give anyone else

When in doubt...

- Use the humane response



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supplemental materials contact:

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