



# RESOCIALIZATION AND RECONNECTING IN THE AGE OF ISOLATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

TUSKER UNIVERSITY, FAMILY FOCUS  
6<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL WELLNESS SUMMIT

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NOVEMBER 4<sup>TH</sup>, 2021



# OBJECTIVES OF DISCUSSION

In this talk, we will address:

- The current state of mental health, communication, and tech in youth
- The transition back to pre pandemic living
- Tools for improving communication, connectedness, and psychological health



# MENTAL HEALTH AND MEDIA

## Causes vs. Correlations: Lack of Clarity (Teens)

1

### Overall statistics

Between 13 and 20% of children in the U.S. experience a mental disorder in a given year.

2

### Increase in depression

There was a 33% increase in the number of eighth- to 12th-graders who had high levels of depressive symptoms from 2010–2015.

3

### Suicide Rate

Suicide is the second leading cause of death of people age 15–24.

4

### Some Research Links to Social Media

Teens who spent 5+ hours on devices were 66% more likely to have at least one suicide-related outcome.

5

### On the other hand ...

Other researchers say that data actually shows that social media only explains .36% of depressive symptoms.

6

### So many variables

Because there are so many variables and the connections between causes and outcomes are unclear, we don't have a lot of clear answers.



# MENTAL HEALTH AND MEDIA

## What We Know for Sure



### How much they use matters

Teens who use the most digital media are the most unhappy.



### What they're using it for matters.

Teens who use social media passively or only to get likes and follows have the most negative outcomes.



### Other factors might matter more.

Overall media balance, sleep, general health, and other factors play a huge role in mental health.



# MENTAL HEALTH AND MEDIA

## The Brain

- ✓ Prefrontal cortex helps us think ahead, see consequences, and make decisions.
- ✓ Teens' prefrontal cortex isn't finished developing.
- ✓ They see situations as absolute truths that will last forever.
- ✓ Tweens develop meta-cognitive abilities and awareness of others' opinions of them.



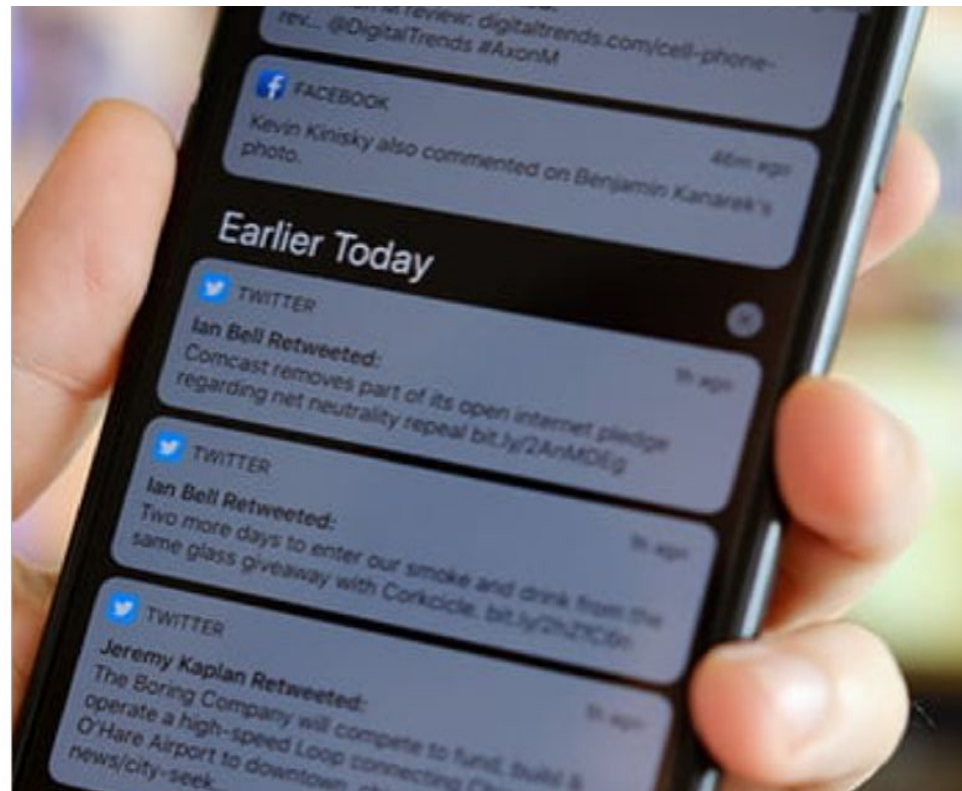
# MENTAL HEALTH AND MEDIA: SOCIAL COMPARISON

- ✓ Altered images
- ✓ Presentation of perfection
- ✓ Focus on the superficial
- ✓ Highly visible sexual images
- ✓ Insta-judgement
- ✓ Social media metrics available 24/7



# MENTAL HEALTH AND MEDIA: PRESSURE TO CONNECT

- ✓ Constant communication
- ✓ FOMO
- ✓ Sneaky tech tricks
- ✓ Superficial social contracts
- ✓ Information overload



# MENTAL HEALTH AND MEDIA: PRESSURE TO CONNECT

## The Multitasking Myth and Mental Health

- Switching between two tasks rapidly is known to decrease performance.
- Teens are usually better at switching between two tasks but it still tires the brain and performance drops.
- Hippocampus impacted (learning and memory) when brain of rats stimulated by multiple screens. Took mice 3x as long to learn a maze, and brain changes remained.
- Balancing screen use for school and home can be hard to manage and can lead to more multitasking.
- If performance decreases, it can cause depression.

Christakis and Ramirez, et al., 2012





# MENTAL HEALTH AND MEDIA: SOCIAL COMPARISON

## More Pressure = Less Sleep

- 60% of adolescents view phones within the hour before bedtime.
- According to a 2015 CDC study, 73% of teens (across 30 states) and 58% of middle schoolers (across nine states) don't get enough sleep.
- Devices (like phones) with blue light can reduce quality of kids' sleep even more than for adults.
- Lack of sleep can significantly impact mental health.



# MENTAL HEALTH AND MEDIA: DRAMA

## Treading Carefully With your Child



**Judge**



**Jump to  
Conclusions**

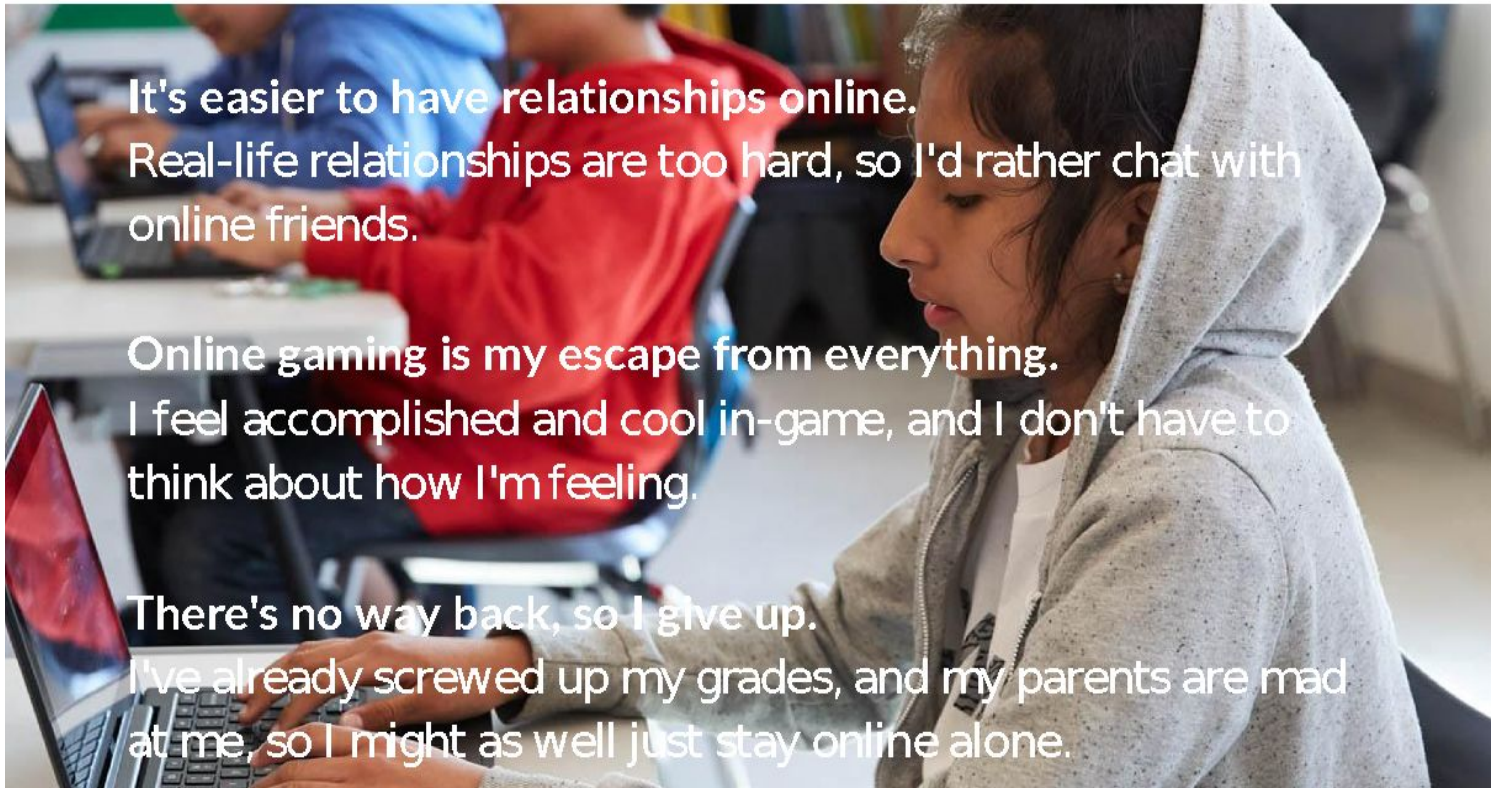


**Jump into  
Action**



# MENTAL HEALTH AND MEDIA: ISOLATION

## Effects of Being Online to Exclusion of Everything Else



It's easier to have relationships online.  
Real-life relationships are too hard, so I'd rather chat with  
online friends.

Online gaming is my escape from everything.  
I feel accomplished and cool in-game, and I don't have to  
think about how I'm feeling.

There's no way back, so I give up.  
I've already screwed up my grades, and my parents are mad  
at me, so I might as well just stay online alone.



# MENTAL HEALTH AND CONNECTEDNESS: THE FACTS

- Humans NEED each other- it is ingrained in our survival
- Power of language and nonverbals/facial expressions
  - Still face experiment
- 10,000 □ 100
- Vulnerability and connectedness crisis?
  - How does tech and pandemic factor in?

## - Key 3 factors for psychological health:

**1. Receptivity and Openness** to new experience and disconfirming feedback in order to learn.

**2. Flexible-control** in order to adapt to changing environmental conditions.

**3. Intimacy and social-connectedness** (with at least one other person) based on premises that species survival required capacities to form long-lasting bonds and work in groups



# MENTAL HEALTH AND THE PANDEMIC

- Acute Stress and Trauma- definitions have evolved
- Frequent Set Shifting
- Shifts in sensory experiencing
- Uncertainty
- Decreases overall in opportunities for social safety, increases in threat and overwhelmed modes
- Lack of preparation on all fronts
- Life goes on- adapting, surviving, and expectations of living= confusion
- Parental self judgment of ability to adapt healthily
  - Yet we struggle too!
- “Post Pandemic” expectations vs reality
  - Wait, is it over?
  - Either way, I’m exhausted and now expected to change gears again
  - Getting used to a transition AGAIN= more parental judgment of coping





SKILL TIME!

# HOW TO HELP: OVERALL PARENTING STYLE

- Be realistic
  - Reality test out loud!
- Be fair
  - Social comparison and its impact
- Be vulnerable/open and honest
  - Context matters here!
  - Coping model of learning
  - Explain why- then and now. Orienting is key.
- Kindness first and foremost
- Modeling is the most powerful tool we have for learning
- Acknowledge threat, overwhelmed modes and activate social safety
  - Out yourself
  - Big 3 plus one: smiling, eyebrows, relaxing muscles, breathing
    - Mirror neurons



# HOW TO HELP: OVERALL PARENTING STYLE

- Connect with your kids and activate safety throughout
  - Find ways to connect with your kids
  - Set aside time
- Learn about yourself- who, what, where, when, why of stress, and proceed accordingly
  - Do I need a break before having this conversation? Do I need to regulate first?
- Cultivate a healthy sense of curiosity about negative emotions, and be aware of harsh judgments
  - Mindfulness!
  - Emotion mind vs reasonable mind
  - Fixed mind vs fatalistic mind
- Challenge yourself and your kids in a kind way to be skeptical of quick answers or stock statements/behaviors (I don't know! Because I said so! You don't understand! Shutting down behaviors)





# MINDFULNESS



Mind Full, or Mindful?



## HOW TO HELP: OVERALL PARENTING STYLE

- Self and other validation modeling- this is hard, change takes time. And I may not understand- but I want to try to understand.
- We are doing the best we can AND we can do better
- Goal is to connect, model flexibility and vulnerability and not be perfect.
- AND to pick realistic, achievable changes to introduce to the family
- Structure vs rigidity, limit setting vs independence
- PRAISE
  - Why is it so important?
  - Empathy cultivation
- Be open to feedback and model to kids
- Discuss values and how to prioritize as a framework for the 'why'



# VALIDATION\*

**VALIDATION** communicates to another person that his or her emotions, thoughts, and actions make sense and are understandable to you in a particular situation.

**SELF-VALIDATION** involves perceiving your own emotions, thoughts, and actions as making sense, accurate, and acceptable in a particular situation.



# VALIDATION IS NOT

Validation  $\neq$  Agreement

Validation  $\neq$  Approval

Validation  $\neq$  Encouragement

Validation  $\neq$  Giving in

# HOW TO HELP: INTERVENING IN CRISIS MOMENTS

When we/our children aren't mindful of the mindfulness skill, or when threat or overwhelm is too high for safety activation to work:

- Target physiology first
  - TIPP Skill
- Distress tolerance- distractions
- Emotion regulation- opposite action
- How much to model for your children?
- Importance of appropriate praise and reflection
- Importance of noticing judgment



# TIPP

## T – Temperature

- Change your body temperature using cold water or ice

## I – Intense Exercise

- Walk quickly, climb stairs. Jump up and down. Run on the spot.

## P - Paced Breathing

- Breathe in for 3-4 long seconds, hold, then breathe out for twice as long. Can be done in conjunction with a distraction.

## P - Paired Muscle Relaxation

- Tense your muscles when breathing in and relax them when breathing out.



# EMOTION REGULATION SKILLS: OPPOSITE ACTION

## **OPPOSITE ACTION WORKS BEST WHEN:**

- The emotion or the intensity or the duration of the emotion is NOT JUSTIFIED
  - An emotion is not justified when:
    - The emotion does not fit the facts of the actual situation ... OR
    - The emotion is NOT effective or adaptive to the situation that prompted the emotion
- It is done **ALL THE WAY**
  - Opposite action
  - Opposite thinking
  - Opposite facial expression and opposite posture
  - Opposite words and opposite voice tone



# WHEN IS EMOTION REGULATION AND DISTRESS TOLERANCE NOT APPROPRIATE?

- When targeting emotional avoidance. What to look out for:
  - Perfectionism
  - Excessive self control
  - Emotions must be regulated
  - Emotions are useless/weak
- When an individual tolerates too much distress already
- When the goal is not to regulate the emotion
  - The size of an emotion matters
  - Context matters!





# HOW TO HELP:TECH

- Remember that they know more than you about tech, and you know more than them about many other things!
- The devices that are 'theirs' are actually yours
  - You CAN set limits around devices
  - Your child WILL thank you for this one day
- Maturity based shaping vs chronological based shaping towards independence
  - Consider what other children are allowed to do as part of (not all of) your decision-making process
  - Observe other behaviors in context of what your child is ready for re: tech
- Removal will solve the problem temporarily- AND it is not a long-term solution
- Not all screen time is created equally
- Humans are natural information seekers!



# HOW TO HELP: TECH

- Remember that expecting large behavior changes is a set up!
  - Small, incremental changes that feel attainable
  - Create cope ahead plan for behavior change
  - IE- weekend morning device cleanse
- Consider that apps that can be accessed on a phone can usually also be accessed on other devices
- Your child will break your rules- but that doesn't mean we shouldn't have rules
- Frame behavior change in the context of child's values. Goal is to help child to build a life that they are proud of, NOT to limit screens just because
- Scare tactics often do not work
- When possible, explain the 'why' of your proposed behavior change, and use the describe skill to clarify



# HOW TO HELP:TECH

Guidelines I like:

1. Learn how to “Friend” your child on various apps
2. Learn their Screen Names and Account Passwords
3. Learn how to cut wifi or service if needed
4. Learn how to use monitoring apps
5. Conduct Weekly Reviews of your child’s screen use
6. Establish household rules for maintaining an appropriate page and get child buy in for rule generation
7. Make dinner screen free
8. Consider having child hand in devices before bed
9. Consider the impact of your own use on your child’s behavior
10. Help your child find alternative activities for screen free time
11. Turning off notifications can help



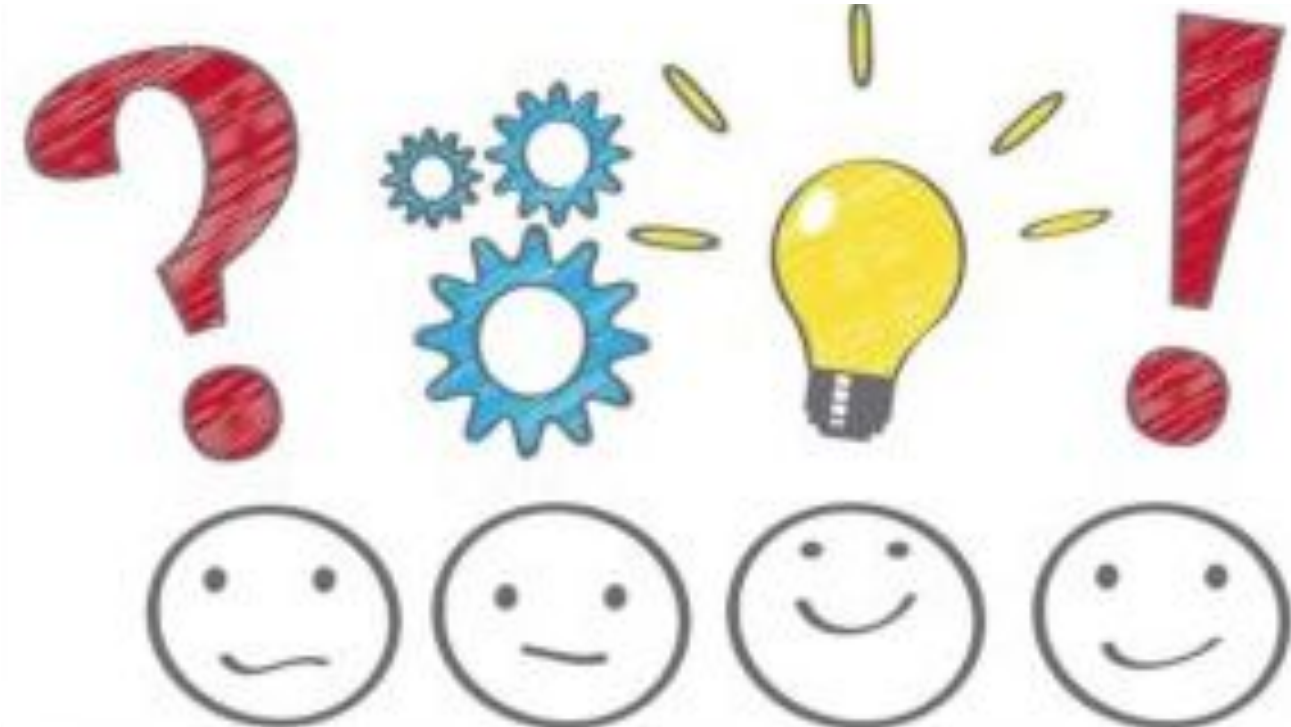
## RESOURCES

For skills that target overcontrolled coping:  
Radically Open Dialectical Behavioral Therapy:  
[Radicallyopen.net](http://Radicallyopen.net)

For skills that target undercontrolled coping:  
Dialectical Behavioral Therapy: [behavioraltech.org](http://behavioraltech.org)



# QUESTIONS





**THANK YOU!**

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# APPENDIX

## More on Opposite Action and Validation...



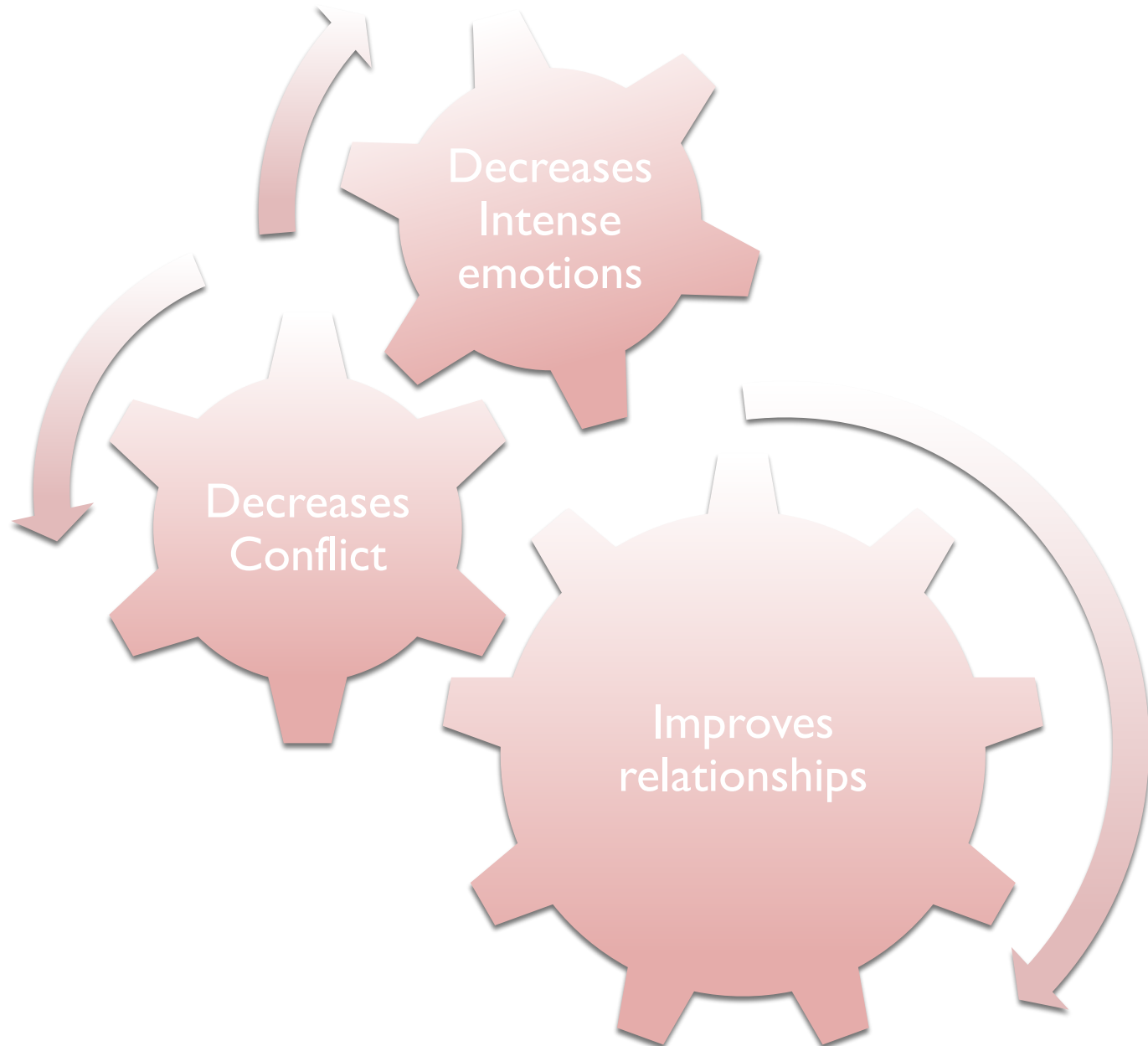
# EMOTION REGULATION: OPPOSITE ACTION TO EMOTION

Emotion	Action Urge	Opposite Action
Fear	Run away, hide	Face what you fear. Take on the challenge. Do things that make you feel more in control.
Anger	Fight, attack, swear, call names	Show understanding. Act in a gentle and kind manner. Walk away.
Depression/Sadness	Shut shown, hang head low, Isolate, remember other sad things	Get active. Exercise. Talk to family/friends/teachers. Play with friends. Do things that make you feel competent.
Guilt/Shame	Hide, avoid, pretend it did not happen.	Talk openly about what happened. Apologize and make repairs.



# EMOTION REGULATION: OPPOSITE THINKING

Emotion	Action Urge	Opposite Action
Fear	Ruminate. Black and white thinking. Catastrophize.	Self-validate. Cheerlead. Remember times when you faced your fears.
Anger	“It’s unfair.” “He did it on purpose” “He deserves to be punished.”	Self-validate. Validate others. Clutter your mind with neutral thoughts (alphabet game).
Depression/Sadness	“I am worthless.” “Nothing is ever going to change or get better.”	Self-validate. Cheerlead. Remember times when you felt happy and that things change.
Guilt/Shame	“I’m a failure. I’m bad.” “I deserve to be punished.” “Everyone will hate me.”	Self-validate. Remember that the most effective way to feel better is to admit making a mistake, correct it right away and move on.



# WHY VALIDATE

**INVALIDATION** communicates (intentionally or not, through words or actions) that another person's emotions, thoughts, and actions in a particular situation make no sense, are "manipulative," "wrong," an "overreaction," or not worthy of your time, interest, or respect.

**INVALIDATION**

# EXAMPLES OF INVALIDATING ENVIRONMENTS AND INVALIDATION

1. Indiscriminately rejects communication of private experiences and self-initiated behaviors
2. Intermittently reinforces escalation of emotional responses and displays
3. Over-simplifies ease of problem solving and meeting goals (“just try harder”)

## Mild/Moderate Examples:

Child says he doesn't like sweets. Adult responds, “Of course you like sweets. Everyone likes sweets!”

Child comes home crying after a fight with a friend/sig. other. Parent responds, “You didn't need them anyway. They were never good to you/nice/etc”

Child is stressed or anxious about an upcoming situation. Parent responds, “There's nothing to worry about. Everything will be fine. You've been through harder things before!”

## Extreme/Severe Examples:

Physical Abuse

Sexual Abuse

Chronic Invalidation

Neglect

Pathologize normative responses

Reject response as attributable to socially unacceptable characteristics (e.g., overly negative emotions, paranoia, naivete, manipulative intent, lack of motivation, negative attitude)

# CONSEQUENCES OF INVALIDATING ENVIRONMENT

## Environment does not teach individual to:

Label private experiences in a manner normative in larger social community

Effectively regulate emotions

Trust experiences as valid responses to events

## Instead, environment teaches individual to:

Actively self-invalidate and search social environment for cues about how to respond

## Environment does not teach individual to:

Accurately express emotions

Communicate pain effectively

## Instead, environment teaches individual to:

Oscillate between emotional inhibition and extreme emotional styles

# HOW TO VALIDATE

## Validate others

1. Actively listen
2. Be mindful of verbal and non-verbal reactions
3. Observe feelings in other person
4. Reflect feelings back without judgment
5. Show tolerance—what makes sense?
6. Respond in a way that shows you take the person seriously

## Validate ourselves

1. Actively listen to self
2. Describe your feelings without judgment
3. Respond in a way that shows you take yourself seriously
4. Acknowledge that your emotion makes sense
5. Use skills for self-respect

# WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF VALIDATION

## Myths about Validation

- Belief that validation will condone behavior
- Belief that validation will make them seem "wrong."
- Belief that validation will be praising unwanted behaviors
- Belief that validation is agreement
- Perfectionism and validation considerations

## Other Obstacles

- Intensity of Emotions
- Lack of Skill
- Confusing "relating" with validation (eager parents say "I had that happen with me too")
- Not getting validation in return
- Validation can increase emotional arousal for some kids
- If validation (V3) is inaccurate, can backfire.