

CBT Tip of the Week, from Dr. Lee Rosen, Ph.D.

Acceptance of Emotion

When we have a distressing feeling, like fear or sadness, often our immediate impulse is to try to make it go away as quickly as possible. This usually leads to unproductive or avoidant coping. Procrastination ([here](#) is a nice description of procrastination as emotion avoidance), substance use, controlling or snapping at people you care about, or diving into screens, are all ways that we try to avoid or suppress distressing feelings. Practicing acceptance and a stance of curiosity toward feelings is, as it turns out, a little more productive.

This is not an excuse to act out on feelings (like being antagonistic if you're angry). On the contrary. The task is to notice, articulate, allow a feeling to transform on its own – and in the meantime not create other problems (like conflict or sedation or late work). If your difficult feelings don't transform, then you may have a larger task ahead, and you may need to ask others for help.

Long term, rational problem-solving does not make feelings go away instantaneously; rather, it means moving through discomfort and taking the next logical step, and then the next one, and so on. Acceptance of feelings leads us to a steadier-but-not-repressed state of mind.

As always in CBT, practice and repetition are key.