

Have you ever had someone tell you to calm down?

How effective was that?

Anyone ever say, "Good point - I'll calm down right now!" or did the "calm down" advice further inflame you?

Maybe you've been told you're too emotional, to relax, or that you're taking things too personally?

Of course, you're hopping mad when given this nugget of "wisdom!" \*insert eyeroll here\*

That's like stabbing someone and telling them to stop bleeding!

Telling someone to calm down is about as effective as baptizing a cat - it's not recommended!

What we don't need is someone (usually the person who caused the emotional response) telling us to calm down. What we do need is a way to manage our feelings and emotions.

Remember, emotions are bodily reactions activated by your brain.

Feelings are the EXPERIENCE of emotions.

We can know a feeling (and experience it), while we can experience an emotion (for years even) and not be able to express what it is - no feelings attached, just a vague something's not right, anxiety, or depression - a cloud over our heads.

When we stuff our feelings and don't address them in a safe manner, we're telling ourselves:

- It's not safe to do so
- It's not valid
- You can't trust what you're feeling

And remember again that feelings are based on emotions, and they need an outlet - your body is not the container!

We don't want emotional volcanoes exploding our hot lava feelings everywhere. That doesn't help - it just makes us feel sheepish and have to apologize later for the mess.

It's time to take note of our emotions - we ignore them mostly until we can't, and that's the problem.

We want to become emotionally efficacious - able to have real, full emotional experiences without them running the show.

A big mistake we all make is identifying ourselves as a certain way rather than what we're feeling -

"That's just the way I am" vs "That's what I'm feeling right now."

That's super helpful, right? But even more helpful is knowing HOW to handle the stuff that lights a fuse or causes us to retreat.

How do we do this?

1. Notice these things. I say this because a lot of us have stuffed them down.

Dr. Eger, in her book, **The Gift**, used to give her daughter cake when she was upset because she (Dr. Eger) stuffed her feelings.

I used to tell my children they were okay when they fell down, so they would control themselves better.

But what do these tactics do? Ignore and pretend - neither works.

But start with, "I'm noticing that I feel X right now..."  
Notice it. Label it. Both will help you get a grip!

2. Radical Acceptance - denial and blame usually go hand in hand.

- You can't change what happened
- Fighting the past blinds you to the present
- The present is all you have and all you can control

Radical Acceptance is a step beyond forgiveness and creates space to think and process without the emotional volcanic eruption - it's a gift!

3. Create a coping mechanism, because you CAN. Use breathwork, meditation, and "controlled relaxation," a technique that helps you get in touch with emotion in your body.

- Clench your fists for 5 seconds, then release QUICKLY. Feel the tight - feel the loose.
- Box breathing (a SEAL tactic)  
4-4-4: breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds, hold it for 4 seconds, then exhale through your mouth for 4 seconds. Keep doing it until you feel centered again.

4. Bring yourself BACK. If you spend a lot of time in the past, stop yourself mid-thought and say aloud, "Where am I right now?"

Remember you are not a time traveler in a sci-fi movie - EVEN when you try!

You can re-emote, re-live, and roll around in it all, but you'll still be here, in TODAY.

5. Distract yourself - this is only to buy some process time! Distraction is vastly different from avoidance!

I like to vacuum, walk the dog, spin on my bike, or jump on the rebounder.

Eric Barker suggests you R.E.S.T:

**Relax:** whatever you normally do, don't do that - stop the impulsivity. Remember, we have a body/ mind feedback loop - Relax your body (BATH TIME!) and your mind will follow suit.

**Evaluate:** What just happened? Focus on the FACTS - Just the facts, ma'am. Does what just happened require raised voices, a meltdown or a crying fest? Probably not...

**Set an Intention:** Know that you're a little calmer from relaxing and evaluating. Ask yourself, "What do I need right now?"

You're not necessarily solving your problem as much as you're finding a way to COPE.

Take Action: You chose not to escalate by doing the above 3 steps, now you can take measured action - perhaps having a conversation, making a decision, or changing something. It's better to take action in a calm state - remember, prisons are full of people who acted impulsively!

It's time to appreciate our feelings, but not to be RULED by them. Amen?