



### ACTIVITY: The Power of Negative Emotions

#### Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to:

- Acknowledge the ways we avoid negative emotions and the effects of this avoidance
- Consider ways we could begin to “sit with discomfort” in the future

#### ESTIMATED TIME

**15** minutes

#### MATERIALS

##### Required:

- A. Pen and paper

#### Background

It is natural for us to avoid pain and seek pleasure. When we feel stressed or anxious, our first instinct is to find relief from these feelings. Relief often comes in the form of avoidance.

We may avoid painful emotions by avoiding situations that create or contribute to uncomfortable feelings. We may turn to certain behaviors or habits to distract us from our discomfort. Sometimes our avoidance behaviors are unhealthy (drinking, shopping compulsively, etc.) and can lead to bigger problems. Even if the behaviors we turn to are not unhealthy, avoidance is still a losing strategy.

Avoiding negative emotions doesn't cause them to go away. Instead, avoidance can:

- increase the amount of time we spend feeling anxious and fearful
- make us prisoners of our own fear and anxiety, as we begin to avoid more situations, peoples and opportunities
- decrease our sense of self-efficacy and limit our abilities to learn new skills

Resiliency comes from accepting the truth of our situations. When we tolerate and sit with uncomfortable feelings, we can begin to process them. We can accept them as feelings, not facts. We learn that negative emotions are temporary, and that we are strong enough to face them.

## Activity

- 1) Using the information on page one, and the discussion questions below, start a discussion with the group about the natural human tendency to avoid pain and discomfort. Discuss why avoidance is not a good coping strategy.
- 2) Ask participants to take a moment to think about their own avoidance behaviors and jot down answers to the following questions:
  - What difficult feelings do you try to avoid?
  - Can you name a time you avoided a situation because you knew it would mean facing uncomfortable emotions?
  - Is there an ongoing situation in your life that you avoid for fear of discomfort?
- 3) Share your answers before asking the group to share.

## Discussion Questions/ Key Points

- What happens when we avoid negative feelings?
- What types of situations do we end up avoiding? What is the result of that avoidance?
- Ask for volunteers to share what they have written.
- If you ended up facing the emotion or situation you've been avoiding, what might the result be?

## Follow-up

Follow-up this activity in a few weeks with the Resiliency Champion Guide Activity: Turning Towards. This activity will introduce participants to a mindfulness process for sitting with difficult emotions.

**Full Cup, Thirsty Spirit: Nourishing the Soul When Life's Just Too Much.** (2012). Karen Horneffer-Ginter.

**Emotional Acceptance: Why Feeling Bad is Good.** Psychology Today.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/insight-therapy/201009/emotional-acceptance-why-feeling-bad-is-good>