

## Unified Alternative Therapies: A Seven Actions Program

Alternative therapies are *alternatives* to drug therapy for mental distress; it is unfortunate that each contrasts drug therapy separately without allying with other alternative therapy programs. We are long overdue for combining different types of alternative therapies into a single comprehensive program; we are long overdue for *Unified Alternative Therapies*. Unified Alternative Therapies unifies alternatives into seven categories and advocates actions that promote each category (and can be used in conjunction with drug therapy). Consistently, this comprehensive program incorporates behaviors that promote the four dimensions of “mental health” advocated by the US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Unifying alternatives to drug therapy creates a multi-faceted approach that is far more effective than any single therapy program alone.

There are no magic pills that can change injustice and other distressful experiences that cause painful emotional suffering and other naturally painful problems with living. Emotional well-being is achievable through positive habits that promote positive experiences (including increased justice) from positive life changes. The journey from emotional suffering (pain) to emotional well-being is typically a process of countering injustice. Assuming personal responsibility for the journey is essential for success, and a sense of agency and empowerment are essential for assuming personal responsibility. Although it is difficult to motivate behavior when goals are distant; regular, minimum time commitments at each action category create habits that promote affirming life experiences. The schedule of minimum time commitments for each category is provided solely for consideration; each person should determine time intervals that best suit themselves. Daily time commitments may start conservatively to promote the establishment of habits since the first step of any journey is the hardest. Habits are difficult to establish but easier to maintain as initial resistance recedes and habits begin producing rewarding outcomes. Positive habits promote increased emotional well-being.

When painfully distressful experiences create overwhelming anxiety and painfully depressing experiences cause difficulty seeing a positive path forward, it is wise to seek assistance from supportive people (who promote agency, empowerment and self-advocacy). Supportive assistance from others can provide important feedback about the environment and our relationship to it; counselors are especially educated about public assistance resources. Empathy and transparent social support are critical for a counselor to create a therapeutic environment for a client. Counselors should offer crucial empathy for social injustices and promote increased justice when possible. A good counselor replicates a good friend; they should offer “tea and sympathy.” Poorly matched counselors cannot provide acceptable care; “peer support specialists” may assist with improving counselor services.

Please be advised that emotional well-being is a human right as advocated by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights with their Universal Declaration of Human

Rights (of 1948). It declared human rights to “nutritious food ...habitable shelter ...and freedom to make sense of (personal) experience in one’s own way.”

## **Seven Actions for Improved Emotional Well-being**

**Action 1) Improve physical health for a related improvement in emotional well-being. Satisfy physiological needs and avoid physical illness; consider a minimum of 15 minutes of moderate cardio-vascular exercise, four days per week, plenty of rest and eating a moderate quantity of healthy foods.**

Emotional well-being is related to physical health; satisfying physical needs of safety, regular nutritional food, some exercise, a comfortable environment for sleeping, and protection from adverse weather to reduce sickness promote emotional well-being. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration can assist with difficulties in managing physical needs.

Good nutrition promotes emotional well-being; nutritional food and clean water (free of heavy metals) are critical for creating enough physical energy for the optimal brain health that promotes emotional well-being. Conversely, food toxins, allergens and nutritional deficits from compulsive dieting harm physical health (and potentially viability) and emotional well-being. Improved physical health from exercise also fosters improved emotional well-being. Exercise should be tailored to a personal concept of recreation to encourage frequency over strenuousness; walking is a good start for most people. Exercise should begin with moderation to ensure wellness; consult a physician if you have any question about whether you are healthy enough for physical exercise. Besides nutrition and exercise, sleep is critical for emotional well-being. Unfortunately, it is naturally difficult to sleep when under duress; hopefully, this therapy program will promote better sleep habits.

Exercise, rest and a healthy diet promote physical health and emotional well-being while toxins harm physical health and emotional well-being. Compulsive substance abuse of alcohol and other drugs causes extreme physical sickness and emotional distress that (unfortunately) often promotes a cycle of abuse. Although the sedative affect of psychiatric drugs may be beneficial during emotional crises; heavy, long-term use of neuroleptic drugs is generally counterproductive. Unfortunately, most neuroleptic drugs are addictive (especially in heavier doses) and withdrawal can be dangerous. The *Harm Reduction Guide to Coming Off Psychiatric Drugs* (by Will Hall) and an educational seminar at the Mad in America website (MadinAmerica.com) may provide valuable tips.

**Action 2: Create a behavior habit that counters emotionally distressful experiences; consider a minimum of an hour, two days per week. Consider behaviors that best neutralize, confront or otherwise counter personally distressful experiences and tailor a behavior with that goal in mind.**

Distressful experiences cause anxiety; consider the source of your distress.

Neutralizing distressful experiences often centers on confronting the cause of the distress, or preventing others from experiencing similar distress, or comforting those who have experienced similar distress. Thus a rape victim might consider self-advocating for prosecution, volunteering at a rape hotline, advocating for educational programs for youthful offenders or campaigning for stronger laws against rape. Consistently, someone who was abused as a child might consider testifying to the truth, advocating for better foster care programs or parenting programs, advocating for stronger laws against child abuse or volunteering at a Boys & Girls Club. Moreover, someone afflicted by the sorrow of war might consider joining a veterans support organization or an anti-war organization. Consistently, guilt is reduced by actions that counter a transgression- that make a person deserving of forgiveness. Thus a person who injured someone while driving impaired might consider volunteering at Meals-on-Wheels or with programs that make homes more accessible for people with disabilities.

Compulsions (broadly construed) and phobias (broadly construed) are best countered with conditioning techniques as well as addressing the sources of distress.

If actions that counter personally traumatic experiences are difficult to specify, consider community service to generally counter social injustice.

A life change may be necessary if a personal environment is distressful.

Assistance from supportive people (who promote agency and empowerment) may be helpful when having difficulty imagining an action that counters personally distressful experiences or when changing personal environments.

**Action 3) Create behavior habits that promote emotional well-being; consider a minimum of an hour, two days per week. Consider behaviors that are most likely to eventually create enjoyment in life and create habits to promote them.**

Actions that promote emotional well-being often relate to creative arts including dance; other options include hobbies, social recreation and time spent emerged in a comforting natural environment. A habit that promotes well-being often plays to personal strengths or strengthens personal weaknesses. Consider behaviors that increase personal efficacy (including peer education) if mental distress makes it temporarily repugnant to foster an enjoyable experience.

Assistance from supportive people (who promote agency and empowerment) may be helpful when having difficulty imagining behaviors that might eventually promote some enjoyment of life.

**Action 4) Create a behavior habit of relaxation therapy (broadly construed); consider a minimum of 15 minutes daily.**

Relaxation therapy is a natural form of therapy that reduces stress and increases emotional well-being; it is impossible to be emotionally agitated while physically relaxed. Consistently, different forms of relaxation therapy from hot mineral baths to meditation have been popular in different cultures for thousands of years.

Choose a form of relaxation therapy that is the most personally enjoyable. Broadly construed, relaxation therapy include progressive muscle relaxation and deep breathing techniques, massages, saunas and sweat lodges, spas and hot baths, meditation, yoga and tai chi, acupuncture, and hypnosis. Consistently, Sensorimotor Psychotherapy may also be valuable.

Consider increasing time spent with relaxation therapy during periods of increased emotional distress.

**Action 5) Manage personal business to reduce personal problems that promote mental distress; consider a minimum of 15 minutes of planning and organizing personal tasks, two days per week.**

Painful emotional suffering often distracts attention from taking care of the personal business that promotes physical and emotional well-being; failing to manage personal business promotes distressful experiences (emotional distress). Organize and expedite personal tasks including scheduling and managing appointments, grocery shopping, cleaning personal space, paying bills, balancing checkbook, etc. Create a more comforting, productive routine to daily life by listing regular daily and weekly activities (including time allocated for each of the seven actions); occasionally update the list. A schedule should include time for creating scenarios in advance that promote better outcomes for “triggers.” Consider Occupational Therapy that focuses on promoting the management of personal business if some guidance seems valuable.

For those who have been deep in the “mental health care” system, the Wellness Recovery Action Plan wisely advocates an advanced crisis plan including a legal Advanced Medical Directive. A proactive crisis plan often includes information about responsibility for decision-making during a time of crisis, health care information including choices about primary care and support, a plan for staying at home, things that help during a crisis and things that aggravate a crisis, and people that help during a crisis and people that aggravate a crisis. A legal Advanced Medical Directive Plan can promote some feelings of empowerment when things seem otherwise; the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration should assist upon request.

**Action 6) Seek positive thinking with mindfulness towards a personal affirmation and gratitude for one’s blessings; consider a minimum of 30 minutes creating habits that promote positive thinking, two days per week; 30 minutes developing social relationships for positive thinking once per week; and a minute of personal affirmation, three times daily.**

Be mindful of your emotional state and seek a more positive disposition. Although most distressed people resent the repetition of the theme of positive thinking, “counting one’s blessings” promotes emotional well-being. Consistent with the central theme of most self-help books, positive thinking promotes positive thoughts, experiences and memories; conversely, negative thinking promotes negative thoughts, experiences and

memories. A positive disposition includes being kind to oneself and less self-critical of perceived shortcomings; self-acceptance is vitally important for improving emotional well-being. Be mindful that you are not alone in suffering; a multitude of people are experiencing extremely distressful experiences.

Numerous popular alternative therapies promote positive thinking. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is the most popular form of psychotherapy; it provides valuable strategies for promoting positive thinking (including visualizing positive change) and for reducing self-defeating behavior patterns and triggers. Cognitive behavioral therapy may also assist with strategies to improve social relationships (including tips on being supportive without imposing) and to overcome attachment to abusers. *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: Basics and Beyond* by Judith Beck and *Feeling Good* by David Burns are popular CBT programs). Narrative Therapy may also be valuable; it exposes injustices underlying negative self-images and “rewrites the narrative.” Consistently, social service organizations may assist with strategies to improve social and/or employment skills to increase emotional well-being. Consider your right to social support (empathy and compassion) from a supportive friend, counselor or peer-specialist. The Wellness Recovery Action Plan program, Peter Breggin’s Empathetic Therapy, Emotional CPR, Well-being therapy, Positive therapy and Paul Gilbert’s Compassion Focused Therapy are additional tools for promoting personal affirmation and reducing self-criticism.

Affirming music and other entertainment, pleasant aromas and a comforting personal space promote positive thinking and emotional well-being; additional lighting may also be desirable during long, dark winters.

Emotional well-being is also promoted by the natural affirmation of fellowship-social relationships; humans share a therapeutic, affirming natural bond based on our common humanity. Collaborating with people who are confronting similar types of distressful experiences generally promotes affirmation and emotional well-being. Social relationships (through peer groups, community service and volunteerism, school and work, recreational and political activities, and religious organizations) promote positive thinking and improved emotional well-being.

Consistent with the natural affirmation of fellowship, animal companionship can also promote natural affirmation.

Positive thinking is also promoted by habitually reminding oneself (morning, noon and night) to respect oneself and others, and seek a positive perspective of personal challenges.

Be mindful that painful emotional suffering is the natural reaction to distressful experiences. Use the suffering as motivation for empowering actions; self-advocacy and increased authenticity promote emotional well-being. Also, be mindful that humans are naturally resourceful and adaptive, and that there is always hope for improved emotional well-being because “the only constant in life is change.”

**Action 7) Consider the meaning to life and your purpose in life for improved emotional well-being; consider a minimum of 5 minutes of consideration daily.**

Consider how best to understand the natural and/or spiritual meaning to life and how to achieve your individual purpose.

Our humanity has natural purpose that promotes species survival; this provides therapeutic meaning to life. Unfortunately, human nature has been historically maligned for self-promotion and greed; the cooperation and compromise that have promoted the survival of the human species have been maligned. It is irrational to believe that despicable behaviors (consistent with “social ‘Darwinism’”) are human nature while admirable behaviors are philosophical or theological. All behavior is natural (a function of human nature) and increasingly altruistic (albeit with setbacks). Our natural motivation demands increased fellowship and an increased appreciation for the stewardship of Mother Earth. Some people instinctively know their natural purpose; others should consider promoting fellowship and the stewardship of the environment.

Many people may consider a theological purpose to life beyond our natural purpose (and the scope of natural science). Natural science is our best tool for understanding ourselves and our environment but is limited in understanding meaning beyond the physical world. Understanding spiritual purpose promotes emotional well-being whether your spiritual purpose has natural or theological meaning.

**Conclusion:**

Unified Alternative Therapies advocates actions that promote seven categories of alternative therapies. Creating positive habits promotes a change in life circumstances for more positive experiences of increased emotional well-being. Humans have intrinsic value and a human right to emotional well-being as advocated by the UN Commission on Human Rights. **“Keep your eyes on the prize;” never abandon your inalienable right to improved emotional well-being!**

**Acknowledgment:** Unified Alternative Therapies is a work-in-progress; feedback is appreciated through the contact form.

**Disclaimer:** As a work-in-progress, this therapy program is not intended to substitute for professional medical or mental health care advice; please see a mental health care professional for specific needs.