

Managing Difficult Emotions

Quarter 7 | Lesson 10 | Life Skills

1. **Connecting:** Watch a pretend argument and talk about difficult emotions.
2. **Teaching:** Learn biblical ways to control emotions (Ecclesiastes 3:1–8; Proverbs 12:15; 16:32; James 1:5; Psalm 94:19; 2 Corinthians 4:18; Philippians 4:8).
3. **Responding:** Practice managing emotions in healthy ways.

SUPPLIES

- Bible
- Optional Supplies:*
 - Pencils
 - Memory Verse Poster
 - *The Action Bible*, the image of “A Time for Everything”
 - Student Pages

Teacher Devotion

*My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*
Psalm 73:26

Our strong and difficult emotions may cause us to feel weak. We are sure we cannot go on feeling as we do. We cry out to God with our tears, anger, complaints, regrets, and all the difficult emotions that fill our hearts—and God always listens. But in our humanity, we often act before we allow God to respond. Instead of trusting God’s heart, we often trust our own hearts. We allow our emotions to control our choices—and these emotional decisions often hurt us and others.

What difficult emotions have you struggled with? Bitterness and anger? Grief and despair? What unwise decisions have you made because of these emotions? As your flesh and heart fail, bring your difficult emotions to God. He is the strength of your heart and your portion forever! Allow Him to direct your choices. When you ask God to help you control your emotions instead of letting your emotions control you, He can help you to make wise, God-honouring choices in your behaviour and words.

Teacher Tip: Before class, choose 2 outgoing students who will pretend to have an argument during the Connecting activity. Tell them that they should pretend to argue as they come into class. They can argue about whatever they choose, but the argument should continue to get louder and more out of control. Tell them they cannot hurt anyone physically, and they should not say things that are personally painful. The argument should continue until you clap to end it after about 2 minutes. At the end, they should shake hands or show in another way that it was all pretend.

Lesson Time

1. Connecting: Watch a pretend argument and talk about difficult emotions.

Greet your students warmly as they arrive. Ask if they had opportunities to recognize and celebrate their emotions since the last class.

The 2 students who are arguing should be getting louder and more out of control as you greet students entering class. After a couple minutes, clap to end the activity. Lead the rest of the class in clapping for their performance.

Teacher Tip: For some students who experience violent arguments regularly in their homes or communities, this activity may be difficult. If you notice any students who are reacting strongly, you can quietly whisper to them that this argument is pretend and meant to teach an idea.

- **When you heard this argument, how did it make you feel?**
- **Did you think about getting involved in their argument? Why or why not?**

Anger is a normal human emotion. But it can be frightening, especially when it gets out of control, as we just saw. Today we will learn more about what to do with strong emotions such as anger.

Allow 2–3 students to share their answers to the following questions.

- **What are some of the emotions we talked about last time?**
- **Which of these emotions are the easiest for people to express? Why?**
- **Which of these emotions are the hardest for people to express? Why?**

It is normal to experience difficult and even intense emotions, such as sadness, anger, and fear at some times in our lives. These difficult emotions become a problem when they are too intense, last too long, happen too often, or cause us to do things that are unwise or unsafe or lead us to dishonour God. These emotions can also cause problems when we do not take responsibility for them—when we choose to blame others instead of accepting our own responsibility in the situation.

When we allow our emotions to take control and we react in emotional ways, we can damage our relationships with others and cause harm to ourselves. Our emotions may even cause us to sin against God or others. But even our difficult emotions can help us to make wise, God-honouring choices when we are able to identify and control them. These emotions can help us to grow and connect more deeply with other people.

In order to learn from our strong emotions, it is important to learn to recognize them and balance them with wisdom. Today we will learn about emotional intelligence. This is the ability to recognize your emotions and use that information to guide your thinking and behaviour.

2. Teaching: Learn biblical ways to control emotions (Ecclesiastes 3:1–8; Proverbs 12:15; 16:32; James 1:5; Psalm 94:19; 2 Corinthians 4:18; Philippians 4:8).

Last time, we talked about many different emotions. We read a Bible verse that says there is a time for everything. Let's read it again.

Have a student read Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 aloud from the Bible. If that is not possible, the verses are printed here for you.

Optional: If possible, share the image from The Action Bible.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1–8

- Which of the emotions mentioned in this passage are difficult not just to express but also to feel?

Allow 5–6 students to share their thoughts.

- Why are they difficult?

Allow 2–3 students to share their thoughts.

Some emotions are difficult to express and difficult to feel. Emotions such as anger, pain, fear, shame, bitterness, and grief are often very intense and very difficult to control. But when you allow these emotions to determine your choices, you can hurt yourself or someone else. You may make an unwise choice that you will regret or that makes your situation worse. And you may even do something that is dishonouring to God.

Teacher Tip: Youth who have experienced difficult things, such as abuse, early sexual experiences, great loss, and other difficult things, may struggle with this lesson. If you notice any students who are struggling, pause to pray for them. Offer to talk with them after class.

- What are some ways someone might express a strong emotion like anger?

Students may give answers such as breaking things, yelling, being violent, or even becoming very quiet.

- What are some ways someone might express a strong emotion like shame?

Students may give answers such as hiding, laughing a lot to hide the emotion, acting angry, or other things.

- **What are some ways someone might express a strong emotion like fear?**

Students may give answers such as withdrawing from the situation or person, being physically sick, acting nervous, or other things.

While you cannot always control the emotions you experience, you can learn to control the way you respond to them. This will help you to guard your relationships with others and make wise choices. Also, learning to express strong emotions can help you to deal with them in healthy ways, which can help you to grow and heal.

The Bible tells us it is important to control our emotions.

*Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty,
and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.*
Proverbs 16:32, ESV

- **What do you think it means to “rule your spirit?”**

Allow students to offer their ideas, and then guide them to understand that ruling your spirit means controlling your emotions instead of allowing them to control you.

- **Why would learning to control your emotions be better than being a mighty warrior who has won a battle?**

Allow students to offer their ideas, and then guide them to understand that learning to control his emotions allows a person to bring benefit to himself and others, while conquering a city only brings glory to the warrior who won the battle. It can also mean that winning a battle over your own emotions is harder than conquering a city.

Here are some tips to help you to control your difficult emotions instead of allowing them to control you.

1. Pray and think before you react. Often when we experience strong emotions, our first thoughts about how to react could cause harm. But when we understand why we are feeling that emotion, we can use that understanding to help us make wise decisions. Listen to this verse about asking God for wisdom.

Have a student read James 1:5 aloud from the Bible. If that is not possible, the verse is printed here for you.

*If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all
without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*
James 1:5

- **How could asking God for wisdom help you when you are experiencing difficult emotions?**

Guide the students to understand that thinking and praying can help a person calm down.

2. Let go of what you cannot control. Sometimes we feel angry or sad about something we cannot change, such as the fact that someone close to us has died. But our emotions in these types of situations can cause us to make decisions we will regret. For example, if someone close

to us has died, we might deal with our emotions by drinking alcohol instead of finding comfort in healthy ways. We may not be able to change our situations, but we can choose to trust God and allow His peace to calm us so we can choose wisely. Listen to this verse:

When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy.

Psalm 94:19

Teacher Tip: If it is helpful, explain to your students that “consolation” means to be comforted after a loss or disappointment.

- **How do you think you could do this?**

Guide the students to understand that consolation means comfort. God can help us when our thoughts and emotions are too heavy for us to carry.

3. Determine what is most important. Our emotions often seem more important than anything else when we experience them. But emotions are not more important than honouring God, having strong relationships with others, and doing what is right. Even strong emotions can change quickly. Think about how your emotional choices could affect the people in your life. Then make a decision that honours what is truly important in your life. Listen to what the Bible teaches us about this.

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:18

- **What are the “unseen” things in your life?**

Guide the students to understand that their well-being and their relationships with others are things they cannot see but these things are still important. Remind them that their relationship with God is unseen but is of eternal importance.

- **Do you think these things are more important than many of the things you can see? Why or why not?**

4. Change your focus. When you feel your emotions taking control, try to think about something else that is positive. Often giving yourself some time can help you to see your emotions more clearly and make a better decision.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Philippians 4:8

- **How do you think focusing on things that are good, as this verse instructs, could help you to deal with strong emotions?**

Allow students to answer. Then guide them to understand that beginning to think the way God does can help you to see the negative things in your life, including strong emotions, in a new way. This can help you to control your emotions instead of letting them control you.

5. Talk to someone you trust. Sharing your emotions with your friends, your family, and God can help you to feel better. And you may receive some wise advice to help you! Listen to what the Bible says about seeking advice.

The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.

Proverbs 12:15

- • **Why would the way of a fool seem right to him but may not necessarily be wise?**

Allow students to answer, and then guide them to understand that we often do not consider the whole situation, especially when we are emotional. But talking to someone else can help us to see things more clearly.

- **How can listening to advice help you to make wise, God-honouring decisions?**

Allow students to answer, and then guide them to understand that, when we are emotional, it is important to listen to wise advice to help us to respond correctly to our emotions.

Have the students pair up and talk about the following questions with their partners.

- **Think of a situation when you were experiencing strong emotions and did not tell anyone about them. What did you do?**
- **How did your emotions affect your choices?**
- **What could have helped you to make a wiser choice?**

Our lives are filled with emotions—enjoyable ones and difficult ones. We like experiencing the enjoyable ones, but even the difficult ones can help us. When we learn to handle the difficult ones in healthy ways, we can be healthier and happier, make wise choices, protect our relationships with others, and, most of all, honour God.

3. Responding: Practice managing emotions in healthy ways.

Have the students remain with their partners.

I will list some difficult emotions. After each, talk with your partner about which tip might help you most with that emotion. Then share a positive thing that might result.

State the emotions below and ask each pair to choose 1. More than 1 pair can have the same emotion. Then give the pairs about 2 minutes to decide which tip they can use to control that emotion and what positive thing might result. Allow students from 2–3 different pairs to share their thoughts. Then repeat the process, with each pair choosing a different emotion.

Annoyed

Angry

Worried

Afraid
Lonely
Hopeless
Depressed
Ashamed
Jealous

Optional: If you are using the Student Pages, the students can complete this activity on their pages.

God cares about your emotions. He does not want you to experience them alone. He wants you to share them with others and with Him—even your difficult ones.

Have your teens spread out in your teaching space. Tell them to cup their hands together.

You may have difficult emotions you have never expressed to anyone. Think of those emotions now. They may be things you are feeling right now or things you have felt in the past. Now whisper those emotions into your hands.

Pause to allow the teens to whisper their emotions.

Listen to this Bible verse about finding God's peace.

If you are using the Memory Verse Poster, show it to the students.

*Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way.
The Lord be with all of you.
2 Thessalonians 3:16*

This verse reminds us that we are not alone. We all experience difficult emotions, and we can share them with those we trust and with God. When we invite Him to, God can fill us with peace.

You can release difficult emotions. Open your hands and blow them away. They do not have to rule your life.

You can share your positive emotions, too! God and the people you trust want to know when you are happy and hopeful just as much as they want to know when you are afraid or sad.

Whisper your positive emotions into your hands. Share your positive emotions with others by holding your hands out and open. You can bring peace to others by sharing your positive emotions.

Close class with this blessing based on 2 Thessalonians 3:16.

Blessing: May you know that you are not alone in experiencing difficult emotions. When you face strong, difficult emotions, may God's peace fill your heart.

Family Connection: Encourage the students to ask a family member, "What do you do when you experience difficult emotions?" Teens can then share the strategies they learned and the message that God can bring peace in times when emotions are intense. If possible, send copies of the Resource Article home with the students to share with their families.

Lead the children in singing this quarter's song, if possible.

"What a Beautiful Name" by Hillsong Worship: <https://youtu.be/r5L6QIAH3L4>