In this module we will be dealing with things in a very different kind of way. In the module on Family Education, we were dealing somewhat with facts; now building on that information we can move into the work on skills. As was mentioned, research on BPD is limited, but the information about “Expressed Emotion,” about how the environment can affect us all, is important. So, our first point to remember: the reason for looking at possible changes in the way we relate to our relative is that, “The more emotionally involved the key relative, the better the patient fared.” This is something of a balancing act however:

**We need to also do what is right for our own well-being.**

The main assumptions of this lesson are twofold: 1) We want to find that right balance, and 2) There are some things that we CAN control. One consequence of these assumptions is that it might require us to make changes in our own behaviors. Sometimes that is uncomfortable, for two reasons: perhaps we think the situation is not of our making, and so we question why we should change. Or, it might be that we cannot see our way to making changes, or even believe that the changes will make things better.

**We know from experience and from research that modifying our own behavior is beneficial to us.**

We are here to help ourselves. It is our belief that certain environments are more helpful to people with BPD than others, and that by thinking about our environment we can help the ones we love. But primarily, we want to focus on how our being attentive to the family environment and relationships can help us behave in ways that make us more comfortable.

**Forget the guilt**

To refresh ourselves about the background ideas, we need to keep several concepts in mind as we move into this module. In the Family Education module, we encountered Marsha Linehan’s term “invalidating environment” in the section on the bio-social theory. For many people this is an uncomfortable and even guilt-inducing term. Some people have offered other terms to cover the idea: based on the incompatibility that people can experience, a “poor fit”, or poor “mix and match.”

**Accentuate the positive**

In this module, we are looking at the positive: developing validating family environments and the means by which we can work to attain them. We know that people in Family Connections groups are at different stages in dealing with the disorder, both in terms of their own emotions and their relative’s health. Some people feel really hopeless and it is important not to have sessions turn into venting arenas. {If someone is feeling despair and helplessness, it is the leader’s role to acknowledge that the question is legitimate (i.e., validate the person), to make sure that there is equal talking/sharing time, and/or to remind that person and the group that the mutual work is to begin to acquire skills to help gain control, or a sense of control.}
Focus
The aim of this module is to give people a way of looking at relationships, to consider attitudes that can effect changes in their emotional climate. We are looking at changing the family environment in a positive way. Even if there is nothing a person can do to change a situation, there is control in how one might change reactions, how one deals with the situation.

Creating a More Validating Family Environment for Yourself and Your Loved Ones

What is a validating family environment?

A validating family environment:

▲ Legitimates family members’ experiences, especially private ones (emotions, wants and desires, thoughts, beliefs, sensations)
▲ Validates those experiences EVEN when they are quite discrepant from other people’s experiences
▲ Accepts: tolerates/appreciates differences; does not try to change or control
▲ Does not primarily use aversive control strategies
▲ Communicates acceptance and caring
▲ Facilitates problem solving, problem management, and coping
▲ De-escalates invalidating behavior

Exercise 1
List how many characteristics of a validating environment fit your family.

In addition, we have to each find our own short-hand definition, our own way of thinking of the concept, and one that we can remember and practice. Some people put notes on the fridge, or in their journal, or notes on their computer. Putting the phrase in your own terms (which you may want to hold off doing for a while): “being there in the moment,” “keeping your cool,” “thinking and not just plain reacting,” “stopping the knee-jerk reactions,” “keeping the love in your life.”

Relationship Mindfulness

Relationship Mindfulness is being mindful of another person, or your current conversation (or transaction) with that other person. This means paying attention to him or her, getting/staying balanced, keeping in mind your relationship and that anything you do will have an effect on him/her and on your relationship.
Framing the situation
Like a videographer, we need to frame or get the picture in the frame, in context. This means that we have to stand outside of ourselves and recognize the interconnectedness of relationships. For example, if parents get too caught up in a situation, then they cannot pay attention to both people’s needs. We all become caught up at times, but the important thing is the overall control (not of the other person, but of the situation and yourself) that you do have.

Standing aside
The issue is how to avoid getting “sucked into” a situation. Some people ask: How would someone else see this situation? If the situation is one that repeats itself, some people find role play or deciding how to deal with the situation in advance helpful. In some cases, people have to just say they need a few minutes to consider what to do. If it is possible, talking about a situation in advance so that both parties know what the reaction is going to be can help someone stay in control.

A collaborative situation
You may not be able to keep the balance in all situations, and keeping the balance is not an “accounting.” It is a statement that this is a relationship and that relationships need to work so that both parties “win.” You are both on the same team. Some people find it helpful to think of a team analogy. Consider yourself the manager: there are a number of games in a season, and you might lose one game, but have a winning season. And that’s ok: you don’t have to be right all the time; you don’t have to convince the other person. You can validate, step back, and avoid a fight; in the long run, this approach feels more comfortable. It often feels that we use more logic than emotions and that our relative uses more emotion than logic.

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<tr>
<th>Appropriate Balance in Relationships</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Me</strong></td>
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<td>My needs/desires</td>
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<td>Logic/Emotion</td>
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<td><strong>You</strong></td>
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<td>Your happiness</td>
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The key to Relationship Mindfulness is to be nonjudgmental. This means to see things just as they are. No blame. No adjectives. Judgments are toxic to our own well-being and toxic to our relationships. They make us more escalated. Don't impose your opinion onto the situation, event, and/or person or assess things as good or bad. No judgments, no opinions, “Just the facts.”

Healthy ways to reduce judgments
“The punishment fits the crime” or the reaction fits the action?
Up until now, we have been talking about how to think about things. This is the first of the activities that require practice. Learning how to be non-judgmental seems to be a lynch pin in dealing with family interactions. People become vested in “being right.” We need to keep in mind that there are different ways to achieve an end, and different ways work for different people. Responses elicit different reactions and affect how you feel after a transaction. Imagine returning a household item to a store. How the clerk greets you and deals with the problem strongly affects your behavior and actions, and, especially, feelings. An encounter can lead to a misunderstanding and/or to outrage and anger.

Parents need to be “right”
Parents feel the need to safeguard their children and “be right” about the morality and consequences of an action. We need to realize that we can be effective; we can appraise a risk without being judgmental. For example, if your child wants to go out with friends who you think might get him/her into trouble, it is reasonable to be concerned for your child’s welfare in that situation; however, this does not mean that the friends are “bad” or that the child’s desire to spend time with them is “wrong”. Getting caught in judgments like these makes it easy to forget that you and your child are on the same side, and that your main concern is for their well-being, not being “right.”

Find a mantra
In Relationship Mindfulness, what we need to think about is what we do and how we do it. The steps, and they need to be done one at a time without judgment, are to observe, describe, and participate. It’s a good idea to practice two or three times a day and even develop a mantra that will make you stop and think.
# Emotion Management

**Focus:** to learn to identify emotions.

## Knowing what you feel

We all know that communications can be difficult, but, hopefully, we come to realize that if we can keep strong emotions out of our thinking, judgments go and communication becomes more effective. Again, the idea is to stand back and look at the big picture. In a situation where things are not going well, the aim is to stop escalation and depolarize. We need to stop the escalation, with our internal dialogue or mantra, and identify our emotions and the emotions of the other person so that we can validate them. Also, remember the lesson in *Bambi:* “If you can’t say nothin’ nice, don’t say nothin’ at all!” In some situations, just not making things worse is the best you can do.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What</th>
<th>How</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Observe:</strong> just notice the other person</td>
<td><strong>Non-judgmentally:</strong> let go of “should’s” and right/wrong</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Describe:</strong> Attach words to the experience</td>
<td><strong>One-mindfully:</strong> only pay attention to the other person or to the relationship</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Participate:</strong> Involve yourself in the moment with your relative.</td>
<td><strong>Effectively:</strong> Reminder: you love this person even if you don’t like what they are doing</td>
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**Exercise #2**

*Using Relationship Mindfulness Skills: pick one interaction to monitor how the skills help you to reduce judgments. Notice if there is any change when you maintain a nonjudgmental attitude during the interaction.*

First, validate. Validate the person’s emotions, not necessarily their perspective. Second, be their sounding board of reality (if they want that). You can then express your own emotions.
**What is an emotion?**
We need to think about what a thought is and what an emotion is and the language we use to talk about emotions. Emotions are systemic. Most of us believe that emotions are distinct entities that arise in response to a thought or an event, but we make a mistake when we think that we are going from non-emotion to emotion. We are really going from one emotion to another; emotion is an ongoing, constantly changing process, rather than a static thing that you either have or you don’t.

**Becoming aware of emotions**
We need to become aware of what emotions are; how we read emotions in others; how we identify emotions in ourselves.

- We know that environmental events can affect emotions, as can our thoughts and feelings and memories.
- At times, we or other people might be vulnerable to high levels of emotion when we have not had enough to eat, or are suffering from sleep deprivation, or particular deficiencies (in diet, medications), other physical deprivations.
- Our reactions, too, are determined by our past experiences: we learn how to react to things by paying attention to cues in our environment, and we tend to interpret events based on what we’ve observed and experienced in the past.

### Emotion Management

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<th>Emotion Management (Page 14)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Emotion Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Awareness of rising emotional arousal (using mindfulness)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Recognize and label the PRIMARY emotion accurately (Anger is often not the primary emotion. More typically sadness and fear are the primary ones.)</td>
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| 3. “Treat” the primary emotion:  
  ✓ by acceptance of situation, or  
  ✓ change of situation |
| 4. Finally (and not before): Either avoid saying anything, go on with other activities, or engage the other person constructively. |

So how do we identify that we are feeling? Definitely do not act on anger, if possible. Anger pushes people away and a family member’s anger will stay with the BPD sufferer for a long time. Try to be a good role model of effectively managing anger, by expressing feelings clearly and non-judgmentally and taking a break from the situation if necessary. Do not simply try to suppress anger, as a flat non-expressive face often is interpreted as not being emotionally engaged.
If you need some time to think things through before you respond, allow yourself that time.

- We need to know that brain reactions can be affected by previous events, such as abuse, or other traumatic events. We know that we can change how the brain functions by talk therapy, by changing our environment. Medications can be also effective, for example, for depression. So we know that if you can look into the brain system appropriately, you can make a difference, but we don’t really know all that much about where to start. Emotions are a multi-system event.

- Many of us are not 100% percent accurate in labeling emotions, even the ones we feel ourselves! Paying mindful attention to cues like facial expression, voice tone and body posture can help us to identify emotion in ourselves and others.

- An important step to take is to practice observing, describing, and recognizing emotion. This is not easy since humans often work hard to hide emotions and we all have different emotional make-ups.

### TEACHING NOTES

**Steps in Identifying Emotions**

1. Events: a) external: environments; b) internal: thoughts, feelings
2. Vulnerability in the moment {If I am tired, sick, hungry, this will amplify my emotional reaction}.
3. Interpretation and perception of the event {You can either make malignant or benign interpretations. Try to give the benefit of the doubt.}
4. Prior experiences/history {Is this the first time this has happened?}
5. Brain reactions
6. Facial expressions
7. Body posture {Relaxed and leaning forward shows attentive listening}
8. Emotion labeling (accurate or inaccurate)

*Exercise #3 During the week go through the steps of Identifying Emotions when you are experiencing something that is emotional. Bring in an example.*
Primary and Secondary Emotions

Recognizing the primary emotion
You can be so angry that you fail to recognize the primary emotion. We all know that “big” anger is almost always destructive, and it is good to realize that you can let go of anger by letting go of judgments. We have to look at the cause of the anger. If you are really angry or ashamed, you are missing something important, as it is likely you are feeling fear, worry, sadness, or disappointment. An example would be the anger that you feel when a car cuts you off – the initial response (primary emotion) is fear, since the other car put you in danger; the emotion of anger only arises after you make a judgment (e.g. “what a jerk”).

The waterfall of emotions
We can start by looking at anger, and seeing it as a reaction. The question to ask: What am I missing? A familiar situation is the reactive emotion of a parent when a teenager comes in late. The parental fear of what might have happened (such as an accident) gives way almost immediately to anger following the relief felt when the teen walks through the door. The anger rolls over into judgment. “Where have you been?” “You should have known better!” The parent’s actions not only affect how the child will respond, but also how the child learns to express emotion him/herself. Does the parent just want to vent anger? Or regulate his/her emotions so that there is a change in the teen’s behavior?

Focus on the primary emotion
It is important to stress that understanding what we are feeling is crucial. Expressing anger in an appropriate way is important both for our sense of self-esteem and also for the relationship. It’s only when you focus on the primary emotion and figure out what the trigger is that you can effectively manage the emotion. Again, an inner rehearsal of an event can help you regulate behavior when the event happens.

Practice
One situation many of us have experiences is the kind of anger that is called “road rage.” Most of us have felt that “surge” when someone cuts us off, and almost forces us off the road – an overwhelming rush when you are taken unaware. If you can step back, if you think of possible reasons for the other person’s behavior, you can calm down, and feel less inadequate and threatened, and less anger. Relationship Mindfulness is really preparing yourself to avoid plummeting down the emotional slippery slope.

Primary and Secondary Emotions

▲ Primary emotion: initial response to a particular event; is normative, typically adaptive, effective.
▲ Secondary emotion(s): emotional response to a primary emotion. It is an emotional response to another emotion. This is usually problematic.
▲ Fear ➔ anger.
▲ Goal or strategy: identify the primary emotion; refocus away from secondary emotions.
Decrease emotional vulnerability and decrease emotional reactivity

**Basic physical, emotional, and mental self-care**
Most of us, as adults, have determined an approach to self-care, physically and, usually, emotionally and/or mentally. Often, our relative will have a crisis plan, and as a counterpart it is helpful if we have our own “crisis” plan. Without doubt, when someone in the family is ill, it places a strain on other family members, even for short-term occurrences like the flu. For longer-term illness or chronic illness, family members have to look to their own health. A practical approach is to have a written plan. It’s all too easy to forget the plan, let alone to actually take time to practice it. Experience, though, tells us that to look after others, we first have first to look after ourselves.

**Change is not easy**
If you look at the items listed in the Decrease Emotional Reactivity section, you will see that these suggestions are the same ones we would recommend to our relative. One thing we certainly have in common with our BPD relative is that we know that following these suggestions is hard work, and this makes us mindful of the interconnectedness we all have as human beings. These suggestions are easy to list, but very time consuming to practice so that they become automatic behaviors.

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### Secondary emotions happen in two ways

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<th>Secondary Emotions Happen in Two Ways (Page 15)</th>
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1. Repeated conditioning:

**Secondary Emotional Reactions**

- Sadness → Anger

2. Mediated by judgments:

**Secondary Emotional Reactions**

- Sadness → Fear → Anger
- Judgment → Guilt → Jealousy

**Exercise #4**

4a. Practice observing increasing anger and interrupting it.
4b. What emotion you were missing when focusing on anger?
Relationship Mindfulness Skills

Decrease Emotional Vulnerability

1. Take care of physical illness
2. Eat well
3. Get enough sleep
4. Exercise
5. Build a sense of competency, coping, mastery
If you are healthier (physically and emotionally), you will react better. Give yourself the oxygen first.

Decrease Emotional Reactivity

▲ Let go of strong anger in important relationships
▲ Use Relationship Mindfulness to sort out emotions, needs, wants and to interrupt your negative reactions, anger and toxic responses.
▲ Be mindful of your relationship and your goals
▲ Be mindful of appropriate and effective timing of discussions
▲ When tired, hungry or upset, remember that emotional reactivity is high for you and your BPD member
▲ Increase mindfulness of pleasant things that your family member does for you, you do for your family member, or you do together.

Exercise #5
Come up with the best strategy to decrease your emotional reactivity, and identify any underlying judgment, anger, or resentment. Don’t be the self-righteous martyr because underlying this is judgment, anger and resentment.

Linehan’s States of Mind:
Dr. Linehan identifies that we have three states of mind in which we function.

- **Emotion Mind**: This is where a mental place in which our emotions dominate our thoughts and often times determine our behaviors.
- **Rational Mind**: is the opposite of Emotion Mind. Everything is very logical and factual, behavior is planned out and problems are dealt with in a matter of fact, cool manner.

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<th>States of Mind (Page 16)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotion Mind</td>
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<td>Rational Mind</td>
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States of Mind:
Relationship Mindfulness Skills

States of Mind Continued (Page 17)

Wise Mind

- Wise Mind. This is the state we aim to function at in our lives. It balances Emotion Mind with Rational Mind, creating an internal state that combines the rational with the emotional. This combined state provides us with a feeling of peace and a place of relative control. You CAN be rational and emotional at the same time. These do not have to be opposites. What is the right mix: think of bath water. What is right temperature for you may not be the right temperature for me.

You can get to “Wise Mind” by following the steps of mindfulness: observe, describe, and participate; do so non-judgmentally, do one thing at a time, while focusing on being effective.

Exercises #6 and #7
Exercise #6 What State of Mind do you function in primarily? What particular situations bring you there?
Exercise #7 Be aware when you are in Wise Mind. What helps you get there?

Opposite Action (Page 17)

Another Relationship Skill:
Opposite Action (Linehan) (Show Linehan’s tape)
1. When we feel angry, acting counter to how we feel reduces the anger. Smiling reduces anger as the two are physiologically incompatible.
2. When we feel afraid of something, and we approach what we fear, we can decrease the fear.
3. When we feel ashamed about something, and we face it rather than run or hide from it, the shame lessens. When we feel sad, we should do something about it.

Summary

Relationship Mindfulness identifies the need to consider the following:
1. Being aware of longer-term relationship goals and desires (e.g., as a parent, partner, child). Try to avoid focusing on the short term
2. Experiencing oneself in the context of the other and the other in the context of oneself
3. Acting from this context effectively

Exercise #8
a) Observe your Relationship Mindfulness with a non-family member: observe, describe and non-judgmentally
b) Practice Relationship Mindfulness once with your family member during the week using observe, describe, participate, non-judgmentally, one-mindfully, and effectively. Report on how it went.
In both exercises, notice your own reactions and describe them.
c) Practice noticing when you disagree with another person.
d) Note what happens when you let go of judgments and notice your new reaction.
Practice Exercises

1. List how many characteristics of a validating environment fit your family.

2. Using the Relationship Mindfulness Skills, pick one interaction and use the “How” skills to help to reduce judgments.

3. During the week go through the Steps of Identifying Emotions when you are experiencing something that is emotional. a) Practice observing increasing anger and interrupting it. b) Look for what emotion you were missing when focusing on anger.

4. Come up with the best strategy for you to decrease your emotional reactivity.

5. What State of Mind do you function in primarily? What particular situations bring you there?

6. Be aware of when you are in Wise Mind. What helps you get there?

7. a) Observe your Relationship Mindfulness with a non family member: observe, describe, and participate - non-judgmentally.

    b) Practice Relationship Mindfulness at least once during the week with your family member using observe, describe, participate, non-judgmentally, one-mindfully, and effectively.

    In both exercises, notice your own reactions and describe them.

    c) Practice noticing when you disagree with another person.

    d) Note what happens when you let go of judgments and notice your new reaction.