Calm down. Strategies for emotion regulation in clinical practice.

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Being human means experiencing emotions on a daily basis. So as not to let our lives be ruled by emotions, we need to influence them in adaptive ways. Some of us are effective in doing this, with the result that our emotions (both positive and negative) are usually more helpful than problematic. However, for some people, a limited ability to influence their emotions causes considerable dysfunction and suffering. This limited ability is common in people who seek help from health care professionals working with problems in which psychological factors are of importance. Such people include patients who experience chronic pain or severe anxiety. Problems with emotion regulation have been highlighted as important in fully understanding both these conditions, but as a clinician it is very often challenging to know how best to help these patients regulate their emotions.

DBT is a treatment that greatly emphasizes functional emotion regulation, and the treatment contains many strategies that can be used in effectively regulating emotions. DBT has a strong empirical basis for patients with borderline personality disorder, who are known for intense emotions that spin out of control. The effectiveness of DBT in borderline personality disorder has raised the question of whether the treatment and its more specific components might also be helpful for other patients with emotion regulation problems.

This dissertation provides some insight into how to use principles and strategies from DBT to help people with chronic pain and patients suffering from severe anxiety to regulate their emotions. Results confirm the need for functional emotion regulation strategies in these settings and indicate that emotion regulation strategies from DBT can be effective in regulating emotions in these patients. This research also illustrates some of the difficulties in doing this and provides important information for future work, for example, suggestions for modifications that might further increase positive outcomes.