

## Doing The Opposite Of Your Emotional Urges

There are usually good reasons for feeling whatever it is you feel. Even when they are painful, your emotions are legitimate and valid. The larger problem is emotion-driven behavior. Acting on emotions often creates destructive outcomes. For example, letting your anger cause you to attack other people with words can disrupt your relationships. This is where opposite action comes in. Rather than fueling your emotion, opposite action helps regulate and change it. Opposite action isn't about denying or pretending an emotion isn't happening. Rather, it is about regulation.

### Example: Opposite Action

Emotion	Emotion-Driven Behavior	Opposite Action
Anger	Attack, criticize, hurt.	Validate, use soft voice
Sadness	Shut down, avoid, be passive, slump, hang your head.	Be active, get involved, set goals, stand straight.
Guilt/Shame	Punish yourself, confess, avoid, shut down.	If unfounded guilt, continue doing whatever is triggering guilt; if guilt is justified, atone and make amends.

### 6 Steps to creating opposite action:

1. Start by acknowledging what you feel. Describe the emotions in words.
2. Ask yourself if there's a good reason to regulate or reduce the intensity of the emotion. Is it overpowering you? Does it drive you to do dangerous or destructive things?
3. Notice the specific body language and behavior that accompany the emotion. What is your facial expression and posture like?
4. Identify your opposite action. How can you relax your face and body so it doesn't scream "I'm scared" or "I'm angry?" How can you change your posture to convey confidence and vitality rather than depression. When you are angry, how can you acknowledge or ignore rather than attack. Make a plan for opposite action that includes a specific description of your new behavior.

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5. Fully commit to opposite action and set a time frame to work at it. How long will you maintain the opposite behavior? As you think about making a commitment, keep in mind why you want to regulate your emotions. What happened in the past when you gave into emotion-driven behavior.
6. Monitor your emotions. As you do opposite action, notice how the original emotion may change or evolve . Opposite action literally sends a message to your brain that the old emotion is no longer appropriate and it helps you shift to a less painful emotion.

**Homework:** Using this chart or on a separate sheet of paper identify some common emotions that you feel, your emotion-driven behavior, and how you can begin to practice opposite action.

## Opposite Action

Emotion	Emotion-Driven Behavior	Opposite Action

Book: The Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Workbook (Second Edition) By: Mathew McKay PHD, Jeffrey C. Wood, PsyD, and Jeffrey Brantley, MD  
Worksheet By: Janay Bailey, LMHC