



# Biosocial Theory of Emotions

adapted from Linehan, (2015) 'DBT Skills Training Manual, 2nd ed.'

The biosocial theory of emotions explains why some people have more difficulty regulating emotions & behaviours than other people.

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Emotional  
intensity has a  
biological basis.

#### SENSITIVITY:

Some people are more sensitive to emotional stimuli than others.

They are able to detect emotional information even before others notice.

- They feel emotions more often than others.
- Their emotions seem to come out of nowhere.

#### INTENSITY:

Some people have more intense emotions than others.

- They feel their emotions more powerfully than other people do.
- Their emotions last longer.

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# Biosocial Theory of Emotions



Impulsivity has  
a biological  
basis.

Some people find it harder than others to adjust, control & regulate their behaviours. They find it hard to stop impulsive behaviours.

- Not being able to control impulsive urges can get them into trouble.
- The behaviours can appear to come out of nowhere.

They also find it hard to be effective.

- They struggle to keep organized because their moods get in the way.
- They find it difficult to control behaviours linked to their moods/emotions.

Social  
environment  
plays a  
significant role.

Some social environments can reinforce intense emotions & impulsive behaviours.

- If people submit and give you what you want when you behave impulsively, it will be harder for you to stop.
- If people demand that you change but don't tell you how to achieve this change, it is easier to stop trying to regulate your emotions.

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Invalidating social environments make it extremely difficult to regulate emotions.

An invalidating environment fails to understand emotions.

- It communicates that certain emotions are invalid, wrong, weird, strange, bad.

For example:

- "Normal people don't feel that way"
- "Don't be such a baby"
- "You'll be fine, get on with it"
- "Stop complaining"

An invalidating environment can occur for many reasons:

- People might not know how to validate emotions.
- People might worry that if they validate certain emotions, it will make the emotions more intense, not less intense.
- People may be too stressed, or lack the capacity to validate.
- There may be incompatibility between the person and the social environment.

The environment & the person both influence each other.

- Biology & social environment will influence the person.
- The person then reacts & influences the environment.
- The social environment adapts (or maladapts) to again influence the person.
- And on it can go.

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