I. Questions:
   A. What do you think of when you hear the term “emotional rollercoaster”?
   B. What do you think your emotions do for you/what purpose do they serve/what do they mean?
   C. What are you hoping to learn or take away from this workshop today?

II. Understanding Emotions
   A. Emotions are a natural part of human experience
      - We can experience a slew of emotions throughout the day—some develop from within (thoughts) and others can seem imposed externally (other people, events)
      - The Two-factor Theory of Emotions—it’s the way you interpret your experience (of the physical sensations, thoughts, feelings) that determines the emotions you feel.
      - Your feelings are “just your feelings”, neither good nor bad—it is your judgment of them that usually leads to secondary emotions
   B. Responses to/interpretations of emotions
      - If you avoid/suppress/ignore your emotions \( \rightarrow \) emotions fester
        • since emotions are both cognitive and physical, suppressing emotions influences the mind and the body (give example from research linking stress and suppression with physical aches/pains—may be cultural in that there is less of a stigma in American culture against physical pain than there is against emotional “dis-ease”
      - If you exaggerate/catastrophize/dramatize \( \rightarrow \) emotions linger
        • emotions come and go as part of normal daily human experience—it is usually only when you “feed” the emotion that is sticks around and becomes a “mood”
      - If you reject your emotions \( \rightarrow \) schism between mind/body
        • ignoring the “pit” in your stomach because you don’t like feeling that particular emotion sets up an internal battle between your feelings and your thoughts—this internal conflict depletes you of energy
If you acknowledge/are aware/mindful of emotions → emotions naturally come and go

- accepting “what is, is” allows you to make a choice—once you recognize things as they are, you can choose to act in a way that you deem appropriate and worthy of yourself (we’ll talk more about this “active acceptance” later)
- acknowledging and accepting emotions provides a channel for expression (i.e., once you accept the emotion, you can talk with a friend about your anger or anxiety; write in a journal about your fear or jealousy; allow yourself to shed a tear—of sorrow or of joy—in solitude or in the presence of someone you trust

Group activity/discussion: Now we’re going to talk about how we each handle emotions. Can you think of an emotional experience that “carried you away”? How did your interpretations affect the emotions you felt?

Group activity: Guided exercise to help remove emotional barriers/help the flow of an emotion pass through (from Nathaniel Branden)

III. Skills for Emotional Regulation

A. Mindfulness Skills—Mindfulness is simply tuning in to the present moment (to feelings, thoughts, behaviors)

- identify, observe, label, or put words on your experience (i.e., say in your mind “sadness has just enveloped me” or “pit in my stomach” or “the thought ‘I can’t do this’ has just come into my mind”)
- decrease negative “feeding” (rather than adding “fuel” to the fire by attaching negative meaning to the emotion, just tell yourself “my feelings are just my feelings” or “a thought is just a thought”—don’t get caught up in the content)
- increase positive self-talk (reminding yourself that emotions are a part of life and will come and go—give yourself permission to be human)

B. “Active Acceptance”

- Qualifying “acceptance” with “active” refers to the choice we have following the experience. Both action and acceptance are necessary: acceptance without action is resignation; and by acting without first accepting how we feel, we are more likely to act on the negative emotion.
- First choice is to acknowledge and accept our emotional reaction (that which “is”), otherwise your emotions control you!
- Second choice is deciding whether to act on your initial impulse or go beyond it (i.e., you can accept your fear of auditioning and decide whether you want to act on it by running away and convincing yourself you didn’t really want it anyway or go beyond it by allowing the fear to come and go while you go through with your audition). You have a choice to be afraid AND act courageously; to be jealous AND act benevolently.
- Fear of pain, in many cases, is the underlying cause of not accepting emotions
  - to overcome pain, you have to first accept its existence
  - paradox of self-acceptance is that when you accept your feelings—whether you are sad or happy, whatever—you are more likely to feel better
Consider this quote from psychologist Nathaniel Branden:
“The willingness to experience and accept our feelings carries no implication that emotions are to have the last word on what we do. I may not be in the mood to work today; I can acknowledge my feelings, experience them, accept them—and then go to work. I will work with a clearer mind because I have not begun the day with self-deception. Often, when we fully experience and accept negative feelings, we are able to let go of them; they have been allowed to have their say and they relinquish center stage.”

IV. Skills for increasing positive emotions

Build Positive Experiences in your life

- Short-term:
  - do pleasant things that are possible now (vs. waiting for things to just happen)
  - practice gratitude and appreciation—much research in this field of positive psychology demonstrates the link between gratitude and happiness. A few simple exercise to get started:
    - each night before bed, write down “3 good things” that happened in your day—anything at all that you appreciated, and why
    - be mindful of positive experiences: any moment throughout the day when something good happens, pause to remind yourself “this is nice” or “I’m so glad this happened”
    - write a letter of thanks to someone you have never fully expressed thanks (for a more powerful experience, read it out loud to them)

- Long-term:
  - make changes in your life so that positive events will occur more often (build a “life worth living”)
  - work towards goals (ask yourself, “what do I really, really want in my life?”)
  - attend to relationships

Group exercise: “Half-Smile” meditation

References:
Ben-Shahar, T. (2007). Permission to be Human, article retrieved from:
http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~psy1504/AssignedReadings/Bk-Permission1504.doc

Also see:
http://talbenshahar.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=37&Itemid=51