

WWW.EQI.ORG

**A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO
EMOTIONS AND EMOTIONAL
INTELLIGENCE**

An Encyclopedia of
www.EQI.org Topics

VOLUME 1
A-K

Steve Hein

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Introduction

The idea for this book was to give EQI.org site visitors something they can hold in their hand. Something they can take with them on airplanes and to the park or beach. Something they can refer back to and re-read several times. Something they can give as a gift to a friend or relative. It serves as an introduction to all the topics and information on our website. Most of the articles are taken directly from the site and summarized or edited for this book. Some are new articles. We encourage you to visit the site for much more.

We plan to have Volume 2 ready in the next few months. The paperback copy of this book is available on Lulu.com and the PDF version is available for free on our website. If you would like to be on our mailing list to be notified when Volume 2 is available, you can write to us at 2010book@eqi.org.

Thanks.

Steve Hein and the volunteers at EQI.org

Acceptance

One of our most basic emotional needs is to feel accepted. This is a need which comes from the first days of our lives. If our parents reject us, we die. It's as simple as that. So the fear of rejection and the need to feel accepted is instinctive and a fundamental part of our survival.

Along with the need for acceptance is the need for approval from the parents. Feeling approved of is almost the same to a child as feeling accepted and feeling disapproved of is equated with feeling rejected. Since rejection implies or literally means death, we instinctively seek approval and fear disapproval.

In a dysfunctional family, these natural feelings take an unhealthy importance. For example, if an older child or adult child is still afraid of their parents' rejection, they will enter adulthood with a basic, underlying insecurity. An example of this is an adult female who is still afraid of her mother's rejection. So I asked her how important her mother's approval was to her. She said, "Pretty important. About 7 out of 10". Then I asked her why. She hesitated. It was clear she really didn't know. Then we talked about this survival instinct and how her mother would hit her when she was young. When you are being hit, you definitely don't feel approved of and your behavior or your expression of your feelings is certainly not accepted. This creates a lasting fear of the parents' disapproval and rejection. Other forms of punishment can also create similar fears, even without any physical violence. Feeling punished and feeling approved of are mutually exclusive.

Not long ago someone brought something to my attention which helps us understand the deep-seated insecurity in our modern, Western world. It was a passage from the Bible that said if your children don't believe in your god, then you should kill them. The actual quote is:

If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, "Let us go and worship other gods" (gods that neither you nor your ancestors have known, gods of the peoples around you, whether near or far, from one end of the land to the other), do not yield to them or listen to them. Show them no pity. Do not spare them or shield them. You must certainly put them to death. Your hand must be the first in putting them to death, and then the hands of all the people. Stone them to death, because they tried to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and no one among you will do such an evil thing again. *Deuteronomy 13:6-11*

This, obviously, is about as far as you can get from accepting and approving of your children.

Another section, by the way, instructs parents to kill disobedient children:

If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him,¹⁹ his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town.²⁰ They shall say to the elders, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard."²¹ Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid. *Deuteronomy 18:21*

Of course, nowadays killing your own children is totally socially unacceptable and even illegal. Yet being aware of these historical writings helps us understand our current social problems in terms of our general fears and insecurities.

If children had to live in such fear of their own parents, they could only grow up to be insecure as adults. And it was not only the parents which people had to fear in those days, but there was always the fear of judgment by other adults and death by stoning. These fears and insecurities must have certainly been passed down from one generation to the next. Although we have progressed in many ways socially, there is still a tremendous amount of judgment, punishment, and intolerance.

Acceptance begins in the family and schools. A helpful question then, which parents and counselors can ask children and teens is "How accepted do you feel from 0-10?" The answer and explanation will provide valuable feedback when taken seriously.

Accepting Responsibility Releases Resentment - AR3

One of my most valuable insights when I began my own path of personal growth and my study of emotions in the mid 1990's is what I now call the "AR3" principle. That is, *Accepting Responsibility Releases Resentment*.

Sometimes when I find myself feeling resentful, or bitter, which is often a more intense indication of resentment, I remind myself of this. I then begin to search for ways in which I was responsible for contributing to the development of the situation. It has been extraordinarily helpful in avoiding placing "blame" on other people and on focusing my attention on my own areas for improvement, growth and learning.

One useful way for me to reduce my resentment is to focus on how I contributed to the situation and what I could have done to prevent it. In other words, to take more responsibility. I learned this after one particularly painful relationship.

I don't believe in "magic," but the word magical comes to mind. The power of these words, when applied, is indeed seemingly supernatural. Yet, nature has evolved certain truths, certain relationships in her complex web of life. These truths, when discovered, seem like magic at first only because so few people have discovered them for themselves.

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Note - Another AR3 principle I developed is *Accepting Reality Releases Resentment*. This principle seems to help when there is very little we have done to contribute to a situation and there is very little we can do about it.

By the way, in general, when I notice I am feeling resentful, I have found it helpful either try to learn something from what has happened or to take some constructive action.

Anger

Anger is a powerful emotion. It can be used either in productive or counter-productive ways. It can lengthen or shorten our lives. It is like electricity. It can run large equipment or it can electrocute you.

Here are more things to know about anger:

1. It is a powerful survival tool
2. It is a response to pain (physical or psychological)
3. It is a source of energy
4. It is a secondary emotion (See more on EQI.org or in section of Primary and Secondary Emotions in Volume 2)
5. When we are angry, the brain downshifts to a lower evolutionary level
6. Prolonged anger is unhealthy
7. Repressed anger is also unhealthy

Nature has developed the emotional state we call "anger" to help us stay alive. Anger sends signals to all parts of our body to help us fight or flee. This is the "fight or flight" response. So anger energizes us to prepare us for action. Many years ago we were threatened by wild animals who wanted to eat us. Now we more often feel threatened by other human beings, either psychologically or physically. But because we *are* humans, we have a third option to nature's primitive fight or flight response. It is the option to verbally problem solve. And this is an opportunity to use our emotional intelligence and emotional wisdom.

When we feel energized by anger, we might ask ourselves how we put this energy to the most productive use. As with the use of other forms of energy such as electricity or oil, we might want to use it efficiently, not wastefully.

Anger as a Response to Fear

One of the primitive functions of an animal's response to fear is to frighten away the attacker. But in modern human life, we often frighten away those who we need and care about most. Besides this, prolonged anger has clear health consequences. According to Dr. Herbert Benson, these include heart attacks, hardening of the arteries, strokes, hypertension, high blood pressure, heart rate changes and metabolism, muscle and respiratory problems. (*The Relaxation Response*, 1975)

Responding To and Learning From Anger

Anger provides evidence that we feel strongly about something. As with every emotion, it has a lesson for us. It can teach us what we value, what we need, what we lack, what we believe and what our insecurities are. It can help us become more aware of what we feel strongly about and which emotional needs are important to us. One way to learn from anger is shown in the example below:

Instead of saying,

She never should have done that. I can't believe how irresponsible, insensitive and inconsiderate she is. What a cold-hearted, evil witch she is.

A more productive response is:

I am really upset by this. Why does it bother me so much? What specifically am I feeling? What are my primary feelings? What need do I have that is not being met? What principles of mine have been violated?

From the answers to these questions, we can decide what course of action to take in view of what our goals are. Simply being aware that we have multiple options and that we can decide to pick the best one helps soothe the anger. It may help, for instance, to ask if we really want to frighten away the person we are angry at. As soon as we "upshift" and begin to think about our options and their consequences, and make appropriate plans, we start to feel more in control and less threatened. We get out of the automatic stimulus-response mode and realize that we have choices.

There is a quote which goes like this:

Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space lies our freedom and power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom. (Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*)

It may be helpful for us to try to widen this space during our lives. In fact this may be one sign of wisdom and maturity. It will also give us an increased sense of control over our feelings and reactions.

While the topic of primary and secondary feelings is discussed in more detail on the EQI.org website and in Volume 2, here are a few examples. When someone offends or ignores you slightly, you might simply feel offended or ignored. But when the feeling is more intense, it causes more of a change in our physical state, and we call this anger. In my own case I clearly remember once when I was driving and a car pulled out in front of me so quickly that I needed to slam on my brakes to avoid an accident. My body responded with all the instinct of a wild animal ready to kill the other driver. Later I realized my primary feeling had simply been fear of

crashing into him. But I also realized I felt offended and judgmental. I told myself things about the other driver and his driving skills, or lack thereof, which I won't repeat here! These thoughts and judgments contributed to my hostile feelings and the creating of unhealthy and unhelpful energy.

Another example of a secondary feeling is depression. More primary feelings which contribute to the umbrella feeling of depression are feeling alone, feeling not understood, feeling rejected, feeling worthless, feeling hopeless, feeling unsupported, and feeling trapped.

We could also call feeling loved a secondary feeling made up of feeling accepted, cared about, safe, protected, understood, valued. In fact, it is useful to remember that love consists of these more specific feelings or we could intellectually know someone loves us, yet not feel loved, which could cause us stressful confusion. Or likewise, we could know and state that we love someone, yet not feel accepting of them, not feel understanding of them, not feel empathy for them, not feel approving of them, and not even feel supportive of them.

The two habits of identifying our primary or more specific feelings and remembering that we have a choice help us feel more in control. I have found it helpful, for example, to identify when I am feeling provoked. Once I realize this I feel more in control of my response. Not surprisingly, studies show that people feel better and are healthier when they have a sense of control over their lives. This is where the balance between upper brain and lower brain comes in. Part of developing our emotional intelligence is learning to channel our anger in productive ways to help us achieve our goals rather than to sabotage them. Keeping our goals clearly in mind at all times helps accomplish this.

Here are some suggestions for responding to your anger:

1. Ask what you are afraid of.
2. Ask what feelings preceded the anger.
3. Ask what other specific feelings you are feeling.
4. Ask what you are trying to control.
5. Ask what you can control.
6. Consider your options.
7. Choose the one which will bring you the most long term happiness.

Finally, here is a technique I sometimes use to help me cope with "anger" (if I haven't already "downshifted" to a purely reactive animal instinct state). When I catch myself starting to say "I feel angry" or "I am starting to get really pissed off," I say instead, "I feel really energized." Then I ask myself how I want to channel my energy to its best use. It is a simple little technique, but sometimes it has made a big difference in how I feel and how I respond.

Awareness and Control

Here is a story from my website:

Awareness, Consciousness, Power and Control

Today I had what I believe is an important insight. I realized that the person who is more aware of feelings is more in control. (Psychologically, at least).

I came to this insight when I started thinking about a teacher at one of the schools I have been visiting fairly regularly. The last time I saw her she asked me: "Do you remember my name?"

I was not very aware of my feelings at that point, nor was I consciously aware of her feelings. I sensed that she felt hurt because I was not giving her much attention. I sensed she wanted me to feel guilty if I had forgotten her name, or even if it took me a while to remember it.

I could hear the hurt in her voice. She felt left out. I had been talking to others around her and neglecting her. She needed more attention. Since she was the head of the English department she might have also believed she deserved more attention compared to the other teachers, which would be understandable. Because I wasn't giving her the attention she wanted and needed she probably wanted me to feel guilty even if I had remembered her name quickly. Her question seemed to be her way of saying, "You are not spending enough time with me or showing me enough respect." She might have also wanted me to feel guilty because she could have felt a little used because she was the first person who invited me to speak to her class, yet I had not spent much time talking to her since then. Maybe she also felt a little possessive of me in the sense that because she met me first she somehow had more right to me.

As I reflected on the situation I regretted not saying "How would you feel if I said yes and how would you feel if I said no?" Or perhaps I could have said, "If you don't mind telling me, how are you feeling right now?" Or, "Are you feeling a little forgotten and neglected?" I suspect she was also feeling a little envious that I was spending time talking to others in her department. Other teachers were inviting me to come speak to their classes and she might have felt something like jealousy.

As I look back, there were more indications of her inner feelings, such as once when she said, "Sit down and talk to us." But I think she really meant, "Sit down and give me some attention and help me feel important and respected since I am the head of the department." But I don't like to show false respect to someone just because of their position, clothes, wealth, etc. Also, from a practical perspective, the time I spent in her office was time I would not be helping the students who wanted to practice their English.

On the day she asked if I had remembered her name, I had a sense of how she was feeling and how she wanted me to feel. But even though I had a sense of all of this, I was not consciously aware of all of it. My feelings and my awareness of her feelings affected my response but not on a conscious level. I felt afraid of not knowing the correct answer. But I didn't say that. I simply answered her question after I thought about it for what was surely "too long." And I did not say it with confidence. It was a complicated Thai name, or at least complicated for me. As it turns out I pronounced it okay, and felt some relief when she said "Yes."

But whether I answered correctly or not was not the main issue. The main, but unspoken issue was the feelings involved. The way she said yes, also told me she still wanted me to feel guilty and to be more careful to pay her more attention in the future. She didn't say it with a tone of happiness that I remembered it. I felt intimidated by her, which I expect is also how she wanted me to feel, though chances are she would never admit this and probably would not even be able to understand it herself. To her it is simply a way that she has learned to try to get her needs met. But because it is so indirect, manipulative and power based, it is actually counter-productive in the long run because people will not really respect or like her and people who have a choice probably will not spend time with her voluntarily.

Had I been more consciously aware of my own feelings, of her feelings and of her motives for asking me the question, I would have been in more in control of the situation. As it was, I was basically reduced to the level of one of her students or subordinate teachers, having to face a question with a "right" or "wrong" answer and then to be rewarded or punished accordingly. But even if I had the "right" answer, I was still being emotionally manipulated because the question itself was intended to do more than gather factual information about my memory. Besides just being an attempt to get more of my attention, she may have also wanted to remind me that she was an authority figure and that I was small in comparison to her.

In any case, by asking this question, she took a position of authority and control. The person who asks the questions is usually the one with the power in a relationship. It is like a lawyer or a judge. The "witness" is not allowed to ask questions. And they are forced to answer, unless they happen to live in a country where they have the "right" to remain silent. But in most authority-based relationships, a person does not have the "right" to remain silent. The authority figure demands an answer or punishes the person if an answer is not provided. The person is also punished if the "correct" or desired answer is not provided.

The person who asked me this question was feeling more emotionally needy than I was at that moment. Therefore, had I been more consciously aware, I could have helped fill her emotional needs by addressing them more directly. What took place was all very subtle and indirect. When things are subtle and indirect it is hard to take firm control of them because it is not very clear what is going on. I have noticed that insecure people often tend to be indirect. They are afraid to express their feelings directly, so they say things like, "Do you remember my name?"

By being more consciously aware of not only my feelings, but perhaps more importantly, of her feelings, motives and unmet emotional needs, I would have felt a little more in control of the situation and I would not have had to leave the situation feeling small, guilty (or guilt-tripped) and manipulated. A person who is very aware and who can process emotional information very quickly might say something like, "It sounds like you want me to feel guilty because you feel neglected and forgotten." But it might be wiser to say this silently to themselves rather than out loud if someone actually is in a position of authority.

Saying this to yourself still has a definite benefit. By identifying the feelings and the motives of the other person, you feel more in control of the situation. You feel more in control because you have more information about it and you understand it better. So you are not as easily manipulated and you are not as likely to just respond in the way that you were conditioned to respond to people like this when you were young. By being aware of what is happening you give yourself more options. You might even realize you don't have to answer the question at all, but instead ask a question in return.

Most of my life I have been very naive, trusting, and honest. And I have been fairly obedient until someone starts to abuse their power. If someone asks me a question, I usually just answer it without analyzing

it. But with experience I have learned many people around the world will abuse their power, so it helps to be more aware of what is happening. It helps to be more aware of how I am feeling so I can protect myself. In the case of the teacher I might have said with a laugh, "I am afraid to answer that question!" It is possible, even highly probable that if you are so emotionally honest, many people will invalidate you. But if you are at least aware of your and their feelings, you are in a much better position than if you are not.

S. Hein
Jan 13, 2004
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Awareness and Responsibility

With awareness of feelings comes a certain amount of power, and with that a certain amount of both danger and responsibility. One danger is that you might be tempted to use your awareness to help fill your own unmet needs to feel powerful and in control, at someone else's expense. You might also try to impress someone with how much you know, or you might try to really help them, but instead, you might end up damaging the relationship.

Here is an example. Let's say that you have a friend who is not as aware of his feelings as you are. If you try too hard to get your friend to identify his feelings, or to agree with your analysis of them, the friend could easily feel either offended, or frightened. He could feel offended because you are implying you know more about him than he does, or he could feel frightened because he feels exposed and unable to hide his true feelings. Rather than admit that you are right, he might chose to withdraw from the relationship, which could be just the opposite of what you wanted.

Feelings are intimate and this intimacy means vulnerability. Thus, you can use the power of awareness to either help or hurt someone. For that reason awareness brings with it a certain responsibility. The good thing is that when you can see by their feelings that people have unmet emotional needs you have a much better chance to help them fill some of these needs.

Caring vs. Control

One of the major problems in society is the imbalance of caring vs. control. War, terrorism and violence are the most extreme examples of this imbalance. When humans kill each other in a war or through acts of terrorism, the motive is to change or control the behavior of others. Those being killed obviously do not feel cared about.

We feel cared about when another person is concerned with our needs and our feelings. Imagine an environment where no one cared what you needed or how you felt, yet everyone was trying to change and control you. We may now have a world where many people are concerned with our physical needs, our material needs, and our physical safety without taking our individual feelings and our emotional needs into consideration.

A simple way to improve most relationships, then, is to help others feel cared about while trying to avoid contributing to their feeling controlled. Here are some suggestions on how to do this.

- Try to express your feelings rather than give commands.
- Avoid making threats.
- Say “I am afraid if you do so and so, you will get hurt, and I would feel very bad if that happened.”
- Avoid saying, “If you don’t do so and so, (followed by a threat).”
- Listen. Try to truly understand and to show understanding.
- Ask others how they feel. Help them express their specific feelings using the 0-10 scale.
- Ask them directly how much they feel cared about by you, from 0-10 and how much they feel controlled.

Common Negative Feelings

| Dignity/ Respect/Self- Worth | Freedom/Control | Love/Connection/ Importance | Justice/Truth | Safety | Trust |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------------|------------|
| A waste | Bossed around | Abandoned | Accused | Abused | Cynical |
| Ashamed | Controlled | Alone | Blamed | Afraid | Guarded |
| Beaten down | Imposed upon | Brushed off | Cheated | Attacked | Skeptical |
| Cut down | Imprisoned | Confused | Disbelieved | Defensive | Suspicious |
| Criticized | Inhibited | Disapproved of | Falsely | Frightened | Untrusted |
| Dehumanized | Invaded | Discouraged | accused | Insecure | Untrusting |
| Disrespected | Forced | Ignored | Guilt-tripped | Intimidated | |
| Embarrassed | Manipulated | Insignificant | Interrogated | Over- protected | |
| Humiliated | Obligated | Invisible | Judged | Scared | |
| Inferior | Over-controlled | Left out | Lied about | Terrified | |
| Insulted | Over-ruled | Lonely | Lied to | Threatened | |
| Invalidated | Powerless | Misunderstood | Misled | Under- protected | |
| Labeled | Pressured | Neglected | Punished | Unsafe | |
| Lectured to | Restricted | Rejected | Robbed | Violated | |
| Mocked | Suffocated | Uncared about | | | |
| Offended | Trapped | Unheard | | | |
| Put down | | Unknown | | | |
| Resentful | | Unimportant | | | |
| Ridiculed | | Uninformed | | | |
| Stereotyped | | Unloved | | | |
| Teased | | Unsupported | | | |
| Underestimated | | Unwanted | | | |
| Worthless | | | | | |

Using This List to Help Someone Else

It can be very helpful to show this list to someone. Then ask them to discuss or explain each feeling which applies to them. This can lead to a plan to address each negative feeling and its causes and possible solutions.

Conflict Resolution

Nearly all conflicts involve underlying emotional issues. The stronger the feelings, the more difficult the resolution. To resolve conflicts, then, it is absolutely necessary to address the feelings of all parties. Listed below is a conflict resolution model which emphasizes emotions.

Increasing the Chances of Success

The probability of a mutually agreeable solution is increased when:

- The parties are in direct communication
- The parties have learned the basics skills of Emotional Literacy, Listening, and Validating
- The parties honestly communicate both thoughts and feelings
- There is a mutual respect of needs and feelings.
- Neither party feels superior or more powerful.
- Participation is voluntary, not forced.
- The goal is a win-win outcome.
- This principle is followed: First seek to understand, then to be understood. (From Stephen Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*)

The Basic Steps

A. Seek To Understand

Validate each person's feeling.

Confirm a willingness to solve problem.

Seek understanding of the cause of the feeling.

Confirm accurate understanding. Paraphrase. Identify the underlying unmet emotional needs.

Show empathy.

Ask the powerful and positive question:

What would help you feel better?

B. Seek to be Understood:

Share your feelings & needs.

Confirm accurate reception & understanding.

C. Mutually generate options & resolutions

Brainstorm solutions (while withholding evaluation/judgment).

Discuss each parties' feelings about alternatives.

Make selection which maximizes positive feelings and minimizes negative feelings.

Hints

1. Resist the inclination to focus on behavior at the expense of addressing the feelings behind the behavior.
2. Allow the least powerful person the lead role in generating and evaluating options. This helps balance the power.

As noted in the section on anger humans have a third option besides just fight or flight. This option is to verbally problem-solve. I thank Manuel J. Smith, author of *When I Say No I Feel Guilty* for this important insight.

In all my reading, this is the only time I have ever seen this idea expressed, but how much sense it makes! And if we could all remember just this one point, what a difference it would make.

Dark Side of Emotional Intelligence

Most writers, researchers and consultants in the field of emotional intelligence (EI) typically promote only the "good" side of it. They say it makes people better students, better employees, better managers, etc. Or they say it makes everyone more "successful". How they define "better" or "successful" is an important question, but it is usually left unaddressed. What would we mean by a better or more successful terrorist or soldier, for example?

Instead of specifically defining these very subjective words, it is usually assumed that we all know what such words mean. In other words, we are all expected to accept the common definitions of them without question. But leaving aside the issue of what defines a "better" person, in this article I talk about what I call the dark side of EI.

Because I have not been satisfied with the common definition of EI, I have long suspected that a person's innate emotional intelligence could be warped by an abusive environment. In my experiences with emotionally abused teens, I have found this to be exactly the case. The depressed, suicidal and self-harming teens we at EQI have worked with all come from emotionally abusive and neglectful families. Almost always there has been some physical abuse, which typically stops around age 12 to 15, but the emotional abuse continues. And often, but less frequently, there has been sexual abuse.

Among these teens, those who I consider to be the most emotionally intelligent are fast learners and have good memory and recall. Sadly, because they are so emotionally hurt and starved, they are learning, remembering, developing and using unhealthy, destructive, hurtful or dangerous survival mechanisms.

Here is a list of some common characteristics of these emotionally intelligent, yet emotionally abused and neglected teens:

- They learn to manipulate. They need to manipulate because their needs were not met by simply asking or expressing their needs directly.
- They learn to use their tone of voice, their words, their silence to manipulate.
- They learn how to threaten others with whatever will hurt or frighten others the most.
- They remember things they can use to hurt others with when they feel hurt.

- They learn to use someone's own words against them.
- They learn how to lie and often are expert liars as well as good actors and actresses, since emotional honesty is not safe in their environments.
- They learn to tell you whatever you want to hear.
- They get hurt easily because they have been hurt so many times. This hurt causes them pain and they become desperate to stop it. It is this desperation which leads them to lie, manipulate, threaten etc.
- They become nearly constantly defensive and therefore lose their childhood ability to empathize.
- They may become bitter, cynical, and sarcastic.
- They learn how to verbally attack.
- They learn hurtful phrases and quickly recall and apply them.
- They can sense when someone is upset with them or is going to be, so if they are afraid of conflicts, as many are, they learn to do whatever it takes to avoid that person's disapproval or anger.
- They learn a variety of unhealthy responses to defend themselves.
- They learn when to be evasive, for example, when to say "I don't know" and "I don't remember"
- They learn how to lay guilt trips.
- They learn how to apologize when it serves them; how to beg for mercy and forgiveness.

This list is not meant to be comprehensive, by the way, but it is representative.

What is most sad to me is that all these teens feel alone, unloved and unwanted. They are desperate to feel connected, cared about, understood, loved and wanted. They often hate themselves, so they look for love, approval and acceptance in relationships. But they don't have the necessary ingredients to make a relationship work. They don't have the needed self-love or even self-acceptance.

Nor do they have the necessary relationship or communication skills. These things are not taught in schools, and at home all they see are dysfunctional models. These emotionally needy teens get into romantic relationships with other emotionally needy people. These relationships are

unlikely to work, so they end up feeling more disillusioned, bitter, jaded and depressed.

It is a vicious cycle. Their high level of innate EI has given them an ability to both feel emotional pain and to hurt others emotionally. The survival instinct has programmed humans to attack what is hurting us and to defend ourselves from it. Because emotionally intelligent people are sensitive, they are easily hurt. They are also insecure from years of feeling disapproved of, disappointing, threatened, afraid, unworthy, inadequate, guilty, etc. Because of this insecurity, they take everything personally and are easily put on the defensive. One way of defending is to withdraw for self-protection, but this obviously does not foster closeness, the exact closeness which could provide the needed safety and sense of security.

Besides defending, humans, like animals, may go on the attack. When the body is in attack mode, it doesn't feel its own pain. The energy is redirected. For some people, there may even be pleasure in hurting others. This brings to mind the lyrics in the song by Hall and Oates "it's so easy to hurt others when you can't feel pain."

But these young people did feel pain once. They felt it more intensely than their peers. They felt the pain of injustice and hypocrisy. They felt the pain of being invalidated and left alone or over-controlled and unfree. They felt the pain of crying in their rooms with no one to comfort them. They felt the pain of being mocked and ridiculed by those around them, including their parents, teachers and peers. They felt the pain of having no one to talk to who wouldn't judge or lecture them. We know these teens well because they have been writing to us for over ten years now.

Eventually, out of survival, they learned ways to numb their pain. This does not make them any less emotionally intelligent, though they might score lower on any of the current tests which are supposed to measure EI. It is also possible that they would still be able to get a high score, but it doesn't mean they are people you would want to have as friends or partners. This is something no EI researchers have addressed as yet, to my knowledge. I continue to urge the people who are seriously into EI research to consider the effects of emotional abuse and neglect on emotionally intelligent children and teens.

When emotionally intelligent teens develop the above-listed survival techniques while living at home, then apply these to relationships outside of the family, they eventually push away people they once wanted to be close to. Sadly I personally have been on both ends of this so I speak from personal experience. In general, I have found that people who are both emotionally intelligent and emotionally abused tend to enter into emotionally intense, codependent relationships. By codependent both parties are very emotionally needy and each person's moods strongly affect the other's to the point it becomes unhealthy.

It is well known, in fact, that people from abusive homes take their survival mechanisms along with them as adults where these mechanisms no longer work. These mechanisms didn't work very well in their families, but they were better than nothing. Cutting is one sad example of this. Those who cut and self harm and others from emotionally abusive and neglectful homes did not learn any better ways of surviving, and if they tried to use better ways, they found those ways did not work with the people they were dependent upon for food, money, clothing, shelter and acceptance. For example, if they tried to simply state their feelings with feeling words, their feelings were invalidated. As adults though, where people choose their close relationships voluntarily, these mechanisms become self-destructive because one person can simply leave when they decide to.

I believe emotionally intelligent people from emotionally abusive and neglectful homes can become some of the most hurtful, manipulative, greedy, controlling, arrogant people in society. Or they can become depressed and suicidal. Which direction they go depends on their genetic chemistry, their personalities and life experiences. But it is almost a given that an emotionally intelligent teen from an emotionally dysfunctional family, or society, will develop some seriously unhealthy thoughts, feelings and behaviors as adults. This is assuming, of course, he or she never becomes aware of their emotional problems and their causes, and never takes specific action to recover, heal and learn new skills and habits.

So all of this is what I would call the dark side of emotional intelligence. It could be prevented if parents, first, and teachers, second, were more emotionally competent, informed and educated. I make a distinction here between emotionally intelligent and emotionally competent. A parent does not have to be especially emotionally intelligent to stop invalidating their children and teens. A parent does not have to be an emotional genius to develop some basic listening skills. Some training in school or later on could provide a basic level of competency, just as most people have a basic competency in addition and subtraction without needing to be math geniuses.

The sooner we provide such training and education to all parents and prospective parents, the sooner we can begin to avoid the consequences of the dark side of EI.

Lying

In our experience with emotionally abused teens we have had several cases where the teen will lie to us and then admit it later. Even more common, they lie to their parents and school counselors. They lie for several reasons. Often they lie to avoid punishment. They typically come from very punitive homes and go to schools where punishment and the threat of it is used as a primary basis of behavior control.

They will also lie to protect their parents. For example, in one case the mother of a 17 year old hit her in the face and gave her a bloody lip. She lied to the school counselor and said it came from a play fight with her sister. If she told the truth the mother would have gotten in trouble, possibly even trouble with the law. Teens will also lie about sexual abuse to protect their parent or relative for the same reason. In another case a teen lied about having sex with her cousin to protect him and to avoid problems for his parents and family.

They may also lie because they want and need something so desperately. They may lie to get someone's approval, attention, love, acceptance, etc. since these emotional needs were not provided at home. It is very likely that the more emotionally intelligent they were at birth, the better liars they have the potential to become.

Here are some quotes from *How to Bring Up Your Parents*, by Stanley Gold and Peter Eisen:

“If we learn that to tell the truth is likely to bring us some sort of unhappiness, then we try to find some other way to deal with the situation. When we know we are going to be punished for doing something, parents should not really blame us for trying to get away with it. Usually when our parents are very strict, and we know they won't listen to any explanations, then we are more likely to lie to them.”

"None of us really want to lie, if we think that telling the truth is a safe thing to do. So when your parents ask "Why do you tell lies all the time?", the only way you can really answer them is to say, "Because it's easier." [Steve's note: I would say "Because I am afraid of you."] They might be prepared to go along with that, but what they never seem able to accept is that they are the ones that made it easier for you. Parents try not to believe it, but really there is no such thing as 'born liars.' They are made."

Why We Attack Others

There are many reasons we attack others. One is to try to control them by weakening them, making them feel guilty etc. The other is to push someone away who has hurt us so we can't be hurt again. Often, though, we push away the very people we need, so we end up feeling more alone. Or we may stay with the person in a mutually hurtful and resentment filled relationship. The more emotionally intelligent someone is, the better they are at hurting others emotionally if they come from emotionally abusive or neglectful homes. Parents who raise children in such environments are creating another generation of emotionally needy adults.

Defensiveness

Feeling Defensive

Another major social problem is that so many of us frequently feel defensive. We feel defensive when we feel insecure. And many of us do feel more emotionally insecure than we like to admit, or perhaps, than we even realize we are. Over thousands of years humans have judged, threatened and punished each other. (This is not even to mention fear of physical injury or attack.)

Fear could be said to be the basis of nearly all social control. This starts at an early age. I have noticed for example, that students will hurry to school not because they are so excited to get there, but because they are afraid of being late. Many, perhaps even a majority of high school students applying for a university do so not because they truly want to continue learning, but because they are afraid they will not get a job if they don't have a university degree. Employees often follow company rules not because they agree with them, but because they are afraid of getting fired if they do not.

Defensiveness is pervasive. There is no question about that. Let's look at feeling defensive in more detail.

Feeling Attacked and Defensive

A woman told me she received two emails from her parents. She said she felt attacked by them. She also felt defensive. Feeling defensive is, of course, a natural survival response. But this woman, who I will call Katrina, realized that these defensive feelings were causing her stress, taking mental energy and keeping the battle going between her and her parents. For several years she has been trying to get her parents to show her more respect and to admit that they made some mistakes in how they raised her. Her parents, though have also been feeling attacked and defensive. They respond by telling her that she is the one who has problems, that it is not normal for daughters not to want to talk to their parents every week, that she has mental problems and that she should go see a psychologist.

I asked Katrina what would help her feel better. I also asked her to tell me only the things she could control, because this helps us feel more in control and empowered when we do this, rather than focusing on what we would like others to do. She decided it would help her feel better if she did not feel so defensive when they attacked her. I asked her to how defensive and how attacked she felt, from 0-10. She said on this day she felt attacked 7 and defensive 7. We agreed that it would be good if she

could feel less defensive, even when she realized that she was feeling attacked.

We also agreed that when she reached the point in her personal growth where she felt more secure about herself, she would probably feel less defensive by similar letters. I told her how I can sometimes realize that I feel attacked, but yet not feel defensive. The example came to mind of a strong man who is being physically attacked by a young child, but who does not attack back because he feels confident and secure about his own strength.

I also remembered a scene from the movie Gandhi. It is the one where a line of Indian people were being beaten to the ground, one by one, by the British officers hitting them with clubs. Yet the Indians did not fight back. The Indian people knew they were right in wanting their freedom and independence. They believed it with all their hearts and minds. Because of this strong belief, they did not feel the need to defend themselves or attack the British. Their faith in themselves, in their cause and in the truth gave them this inner strength.

Defensive??

It was around 1995 that I first started noticing when people were feeling defensive. Like most enthusiastic students I was eager to try out my new knowledge. My first memorable experience in this area was during a discussion with a woman about her alcoholic boyfriend. As we talked it was obvious that she was becoming more and more defensive. I pointed this out to her in a half-joking way. She nearly shouted back at me, "DEFENSIVE??!!"

This was one of my first insights into how threatened some people can get if you try to tell them how they feel. Since then I have noticed how hard it is to have a close relationship with someone who does not acknowledge their own actual feelings. The inability to acknowledge one's feelings may even be a fatal sign for an intimate relationship.

In non-intimate relationships, however, things are different. In a work relationship, for example, it is helpful to recognize when someone is feeling defensive, but it is probably not helpful to point this out to them unless it is a very open relationship.

Defensiveness and Parenting

The other day a friend said something I found to be very insightful.

She said:

*I wonder if I get defensive so easily now
because my parents were always attacking me.*

When you notice someone is feeling defensive

Through experience I have learned to be a little more careful about when, how and if I give people feedback when I sense they are feeling defensive. I don't know if this is more of a skill or an art. It may also be related to how secure I feel about myself. For example, the more secure I feel, the less I feel a need to let others know that I know how they are feeling better than they do, or that at least I think I do!

On one occasion when I could tell a fairly good friend was getting defensive I said, "Maybe I am just taking things the wrong way, but I sense you are getting a little defensive." She replied to me that I must be taking things the wrong way then, because she certainly wasn't defensive, and that there was "no reason for her to feel defensive." She then proceeded to list all the reasons why she had no reason to be defensive.

In an earlier stage in life I would have spent considerable time and energy trying to prove to her that she was, in fact, feeling defensive. This time though, I just listened and said, "Okay." Still, this incident changed our relationship. We are more distant now. I am afraid to tell her how I really feel about things and what I really think, and she is probably also afraid of what I might say or think. We have talked about it a little, but from my side, I haven't felt as close to her since that day. Often, I try to keep quiet when I disagree with someone, but in this particular case it was something I felt very strongly about. I suppose it is good to know who can acknowledge their own defensiveness, but I feel discouraged when I think of how few people I have met who can do this. I am not sure I can do it myself actually! But at least I know that it is a good quality to possess or to develop.

Getting Past Feeling Defensive

Once I had just finished writing a story and was feeling quite proud of it. I showed it to a friend. I asked her what she thought. She said, "But do you want people to think that it is a true story or a fictional story?"

What I wanted, of course, was for her to say, "Wow. This is a very good story." (Yes, it is true, I will admit it...I never got enough compliments when I was young!) But when she didn't say this, and instead questioned me, I felt a little defensive. I gave her some mildly defensive answer and then we changed topics.

But I thought about her question some more and wondered why she had asked this question. So I said, "Say, why did you ask me earlier about whether I wanted people to think it was a true story?"

She then explained that she was afraid people might suspect it was fictional. They then might start to doubt other things on my website, and always wonder what was true and what was fiction. They might start to think I was just being dramatic and making up things which I say come directly from the people I talk to or from my own personal experiences.

I realized she had a very good point. So I added a note to clarify that it was a fictional story, but based on actual experiences.

The language of defensiveness

What gives you the right...

Who do you think you are to...

How dare you?

I'm not going to answer that.

I'll have you know...

Well, how was I supposed to know!

Well, of course, what did you expect?

Look,...

Listen,...

Let me tell you something...

Feeling Defensive – Another true story

Susan has gone to Denmark to visit her friend Marcos who she had not seen in several years. She finds him to be defensive about things which have nothing to do with him. Here is one example.

Susan: Oh, it is so hot. I get headaches in the hot sun.

Marcos: Well, I didn't promise you that it would be cool. You should have brought a hat.

She said he never accepted her personal comments and perceptions. He couldn't just let her have own opinions. He always wanted to have the last word and made it seem like his opinions were the absolute truth. She said after a few days of this type of thing she didn't know what she could say and what she couldn't.

Depression

Depression as a Secondary Emotion

Depression may be thought of as a secondary emotion. This means that there are other feelings which contribute to and cause it (See more on EQI.org or in section of Primary and Secondary Emotions in Volume 2)

For example, one might feel alone, lonely, rejected, discouraged, loss, grief, unfulfilled, disconnected, uninspired, invalidated, used, abused, unproductive, unaccomplished, uncertain, misunderstood, pessimistic, powerless, etc. Together, all of these feelings drain our energy, kill our motivation.

The Value of Identifying Specific Feelings

When depressed, or preferably before, it helps to isolate each specific feeling which contributes to the over-all loss of motivation and energy. When the specific feelings are identified, you have more information with which to work. From this information you will be better prepared to take action or least think about a plan to address each specific negative feeling individually. With each specific negative feeling, ask yourself, "What would help me feel less (lonely, unproductive, discouraged)?"

Helpful Questions to Ask Yourself

Here are some questions which might help you if you are trying to understand your own depression:

Have I lost something? A belief? A dream, a relationship? A vision? Is there some disillusionment? Some unmet expectation? Unfulfilled desire?

Am I feeling productive? Am I accomplishing anything?

Do I feel focused? Do I have any goals I am working towards?

Am I feeling pessimistic about something? About several things? Am I feeling discouraged about something? Hopeless?

What beliefs are helping me feel pessimistic, discouraged, hopeless?

Am I looking for something on the outside to happen before I will feel better?

Am I feeling dependent on someone?

Do I feel resentful about something? About someone?

Am I feeling disconnected from my emotional support system? Do I have an emotional support system?

Then ask yourself:

What would help me feel more optimistic? More encouraged?

What beliefs can I change?

What can I find to appreciate? To be thankful for?

What would help me feel more connected to others, or less dependent on them?

What could I do to strengthen my emotional support system?

What small goal could I achieve right now that I am sure I can do?

Taking your feelings one by one helps you feel less overwhelmed. And it helps you identify your emotional needs. When you feel better in just one area, it helps you feel more capable of handling the other negative feelings.

How to Help Someone Who is Depressed

Sometimes when someone is depressed and not talking people will say, "What are you thinking?" For many people, this is not a helpful question. When they are depressed it is too hard to answer that question.

When you are depressed your energy level is very, very low. To explain what you are thinking simply takes too much energy. That is why it is better to ask someone how they are feeling, if you need to ask them anything at all. There is a chance that they can find one word to summarize how they are feeling, or one word to tell you the main feeling. For example, they might say, "Alone." This could be a start to helping them talk.

Or if it is too difficult for them to say anything you might get them some paper and a pen, or colored markers.

Or you might show them a copy of the common negative feelings and ask them to just circle the ones they are feeling.

One of the keys to helping someone who is extremely depressed and not talking is not to ask them to do anything which requires a lot of effort, or even any effort. As mentioned above, asking them to tell you what they are thinking is probably something which requires a lot of effort at that moment. Also, if you ask them what they are thinking, they might feel pressured to say something and since they can't, they only feel worse and

less understood. If you get frustrated with them they will feel disapproved of on top of everything else. When someone is depressed, mostly they need to know someone cares about them and won't reject or abandon them.

If they are asked what they are thinking, and they can't reply at that moment, or if they are asked, or told to do anything which they can't do they may be afraid of your rejection or disapproval, which will only cause even more discomfort for them.

You might ask something like, "Are you afraid of telling me what you are thinking or how you are feeling?" They might say yes. Or they might say nothing. Here is a case story:

The other day I asked someone if she was afraid to tell me what she was thinking and she nodded her head yes. So this was a small step forward. I think she felt a little more understood, which in turn helped her feel less afraid to start opening up, which she did shortly after that.

More Suggestions:

Don't tell depressed people what you think. If they tell you something, don't disagree. Just listen.

If they have an idea, don't discourage it. Just listen.

Don't try to explain anything. Just listen and let them come up with their own explanations. If they want to hear your opinion about something, they will probably ask you.

Don't say things like

Maybe it is because...

She probably....

I think it is because...

It could be because...

That is because...

Don't tell them what you think before you tell them how you feel. Or maybe, don't tell them what you think at all.

Show them that you care by staying with them, if that is okay with them.

Give them some control by asking things like "Is it okay if I stay here?"

If you need to leave, tell them where you are going and when you will be back so they won't feel abandoned. If possible, ask them if it is okay if you go before you leave.

Help them feel in control

Ask if you can sit next to them. If they can't talk ask if they could give you some signal for a yes or a no answer such as showing one or two fingers. Or if they would like you to take their hand, ask them to squeeze it once for yes and twice for no. The more in control they feel, the safer they will feel and the less pain.

If they can't move or talk or express anything, tell them how you feel, if it is not something negative. Show acceptance, caring, understanding, patience.

Try to reduce their fears that you will abandon them.

Nature's Purpose for Depression

Depression has a natural purpose and survival value for the human species. It causes us to slow down and rest. This provides us with an opportunity to think. If we use this as an opportunity to reflect on why we are depressed, and to identify our unmet emotional needs, we can start to get some insight into what changes we need to make in our own individual lives, and in society as a whole.

Disappointment

There are several interesting things about how we use this word, and about the related feelings associated with it. For example, there seem to be at least two ways the word "disappointment" is used. One way is as a combination of sadness and surprise. For example, one day at a friend's, I opened a CD case expecting to find the CD inside, but the case was empty. I felt both surprised and a little sad, even a sense of loss. This, by the way, fits with some academic definitions of disappointment.

Another way the word is used is to represent a feeling of disbelief, mixed with feeling disapproving or judgmental. For example, consider a parent when their child gets suspended from school. They might use the word disappointed to lay a guilt trip by saying something like "What? I can't believe you got suspended! What is wrong with you? You really disappointed me."

I often find it helpful to look at disappointment as something we do to ourselves. I say this because it seems to arise out of our own expectations or demands about how we think the world should be or how we think people should act. In other words, I look at "disappointment" as an inaccurate view of reality. Looking at it this way could help us accept that we didn't really understand things as well as we thought we did and that our expectations were unrealistic. Let's say I expect my son to be a basketball player, but he has no interest in that. It is not helpful to either me or my son to say that I am disappointed in him. But if I tell myself I am not being realistic to want him to be a basketball player, and I had created an unrealistic illusion of him, then I won't feel so bad.

When we are creating an illusion in our minds you could say we are making a mistake about reality. For example, imagine you want to go to the bank and you forget that it is Sunday and the bank is closed. Then you go there and realize your mistake. You are surprised. You are in a state of disbelief... until you remember it is Sunday. If you realize you made a mistake, you can probably accept the reality of the situation and begin to adjust to it faster than if you are somewhat paralyzed by a feeling of disappointment.

In this way it is easier for us to take responsibility for our feelings and thus to reduce the negative effects which usually accompany disappointment. It also helps us avoid laying guilt trips on others as I explain below.

Instead of using the word "disappointed," I sometimes try to substitute the word "disillusioned." This helps remind me not to blame my feelings on external events or people so much. Calling something an illusion suggests that my interpretation of reality was inaccurate. So when things

don't go the way I expected or wanted them to, it usually helps to consciously take the perspective that I simply created an inaccurate image of reality. Then I can try to adjust myself to the actual reality. This gives me a bit more sense of control over my feelings, which puts me in a more positive state of mind than when I feel "disappointed."

Many people use the expression of disappointment as a way of laying a guilt trip on someone else.

Consider the parent who tells the child "I am utterly disappointed in you," or, "you really disappointed me." Think for a moment how you feel when someone says such things to you. You might feel guilty, blamed, inadequate, unworthy, ashamed.

A woman once said she felt devastated when her father said to her "You have utterly disappointed us."

Is this how we want our children to feel?

The father who feels disappointed does not stop to consider that it was the father himself who did not know his child as well as he thought. Turning it into an opportunity to lecture the child will hurt the child's self-esteem by causing him to feel "failful." The parent who uses disappointment to lay guilt trips doesn't consider the long term damages to the child's self-esteem. The parent is simply using guilt as an expedient way to emotionally manipulate the child as a form of control. Disappointment in another person is basically a form of rejection and disapproval. It can be powerful in its toxic effect on the self-esteem.

Another problem with telling someone you feel disappointed in them is that it encourages them to avoid sharing things truthfully with us. It helps others feel judged as well as disapproved of.

Note that it is the person in power who creates the expectations. They are the ones who say "I am disappointed." I noticed this in Australia when the government people said they were "disappointed" that the aboriginals put up a metal structure on the land where they have created the Aboriginal Tent Embassy. The Australian police soon came and tore it down.

Bitterness

A more intense form of disappointment is sometimes bitterness, which tells us that not only did we expect something, but we started to count on it or depend on it.

A healthier reaction would be to let the feeling provide an opportunity to get to know the other person or the child better. By showing sincere curiosity and a desire for knowledge instead of disappointment, we open the door to understanding and bonding. In other words, we might say to

ourselves, "Hmm, I expected x to happen, in fact I really wanted x to happen. I was even counting on it. I am sad, or hurt or frustrated that it didn't happen. I wonder why it didn't happen. What can I learn from this?" Such curiosity opens the door to seeking knowledge and helps get our thinking back in line with reality. In other words, situations where we initially feel disappointed can lead to wisdom if we allow ourselves to learn. In the case of the parent and child, the parent might learn about the circumstances surrounding the child's life, and the way the child makes decisions based on his or her values, beliefs, and needs. The same idea applies to friends or romantic partners.

Here is an example of how a mother might react when she initially starts to feel "disappointed":

"Jessica, I feel sad and confused about what you did. Can you help me understand? "

The mother might also ask: "How were you feeling when you did so and so?" or "How do you feel about it now?"

These questions, if asked without causing the child to feel interrogated or afraid, are much healthier than an expression of "disappointment."

Emotional Abuse

EQI.org has become one of the web's leading authorities on emotional abuse. Our readers write to us from around the world and share their stories while also telling us how much our information helps them feel less alone. Because the topic is so extensive, in this book we will only touch on it. For more information, please visit our site.

Originally the pages on emotional abuse at EQI were created to try to help suicidal and self-harming teens see how they are being emotionally abused in their homes. As I developed the pages I came to the conclusion that I had also been emotionally abused while growing up. This no doubt made me vulnerable to the sexual abuse I experienced as a first year university student by one of my professors, something which I have written about on the EQI site.

I still hesitate to say I was emotionally abused. It is easy to use the term when I see what has happened to others. And it is easier to say things like "They should teach all children and teens about emotional abuse and invalidation and how to show emotional support and be your own best friend when you have no emotional support at home or in school." Sometimes writing about other people's abuse, or trying to help them, is a way of avoiding our own pain, but sometimes it might also help us get in touch with it. In any case, I hope this section on emotional abuse helps raise people's awareness. I firmly believe emotional abuse is widespread and that sexual and physical abuse are just the tip of the iceberg.

What is Emotional Abuse?

Abuse is any behavior that is designed to control and subjugate another human being through the use of fear, humiliation, intimidation, invalidation, guilt, coercion, manipulation etc. Emotional abuse is any kind of abuse that is emotional rather than physical in nature. It can include anything from verbal abuse and constant criticism to more subtle tactics, such as repeated disapproval or even the refusal to ever be pleased.

Emotional abuse is like brain washing in that it systematically wears away at the victim's self-confidence, sense of self-worth, trust in their own perceptions, and self-concept. Whether it is done by constant berating and belittling, by intimidation, or under the guise of "guidance," "teaching", or "advice," the results are similar. Eventually, the recipient of the abuse loses all sense of self and remnants of personal value. Emotional abuse cuts to the very core of a person, creating scars that may be far deeper and more lasting than physical ones. In fact there is research to this effect. With emotional abuse, the insults, insinuations, criticism and accusations slowly eat away at the victim's self-esteem until she is incapable of judging

the situation realistically. She has become so beaten down emotionally that she blames herself for the abuse. Her self-esteem is so low that she clings to the abuser.

Emotional abuse victims can become so convinced that they are worthless that they believe that no one else could want them. They stay in abusive situations because they believe they have nowhere else to go. Their ultimate fear is being all alone.

Characteristics of Emotionally Abused People

This list is adapted from the work of Janet Geringer Woititz. She did her original work on adult children of alcoholics, but I believe her findings can be generalized to people who were emotionally abused in general. Certainly all children of alcoholics were emotionally abused.

- Can only guess at what healthy behavior is.
- Have trouble completing things
- Lie when they don't need to. Lying might have been a survival tactic in the home. (She explains that perhaps the child learned from parents who lied to cover up problems or avoid conflict. Or simply to avoid harsh punishment or to get needed attention. But as an adult, that tactic is no longer helpful.)
- Judge themselves without mercy.
- Have trouble accepting compliments.
- Often take responsibility for problems, but not successes.
- Or they go to the other extreme and refuse to take any responsibility for mistakes while trying to take credit for the work of others.
- Have trouble having fun since their childhoods were lost, stolen, repressed.
- Take themselves very seriously or not seriously at all.
- Have difficulty with intimate relationships.
- Expect others to just "know what they want." (They can't express it because they were so often disappointed as children that they learned to stop asking for things.)
- Over-react to things beyond their control.
- Constantly seek approval & affirmation.

- Feel different from others.
- Are extremely loyal, even when facing overwhelming evidence that their loyalty is undeserved.
- Are either super responsible or super irresponsible.
- Tend to lock themselves into a course of action without giving serious consideration to alternative behaviors or possible consequences. (This impulsiveness leads to confusion, self-loathing, and loss of control over their environment. The result is they spend much energy blaming others, feeling victimized and cleaning up messes.)

She also makes this observation:

Intelligent people, through their ability to analyze, often realize things which are disconcerting, which others would not see. They also are often capable of feeling more deeply, both pain and joy.
(Adapted from *Struggle for Intimacy*, by Janet Geringer Woititz)

Emotional Awareness

Emotional awareness means knowing when feelings are present in ourselves and others. It is closely related to emotional literacy, which means being able to label feelings with specific feeling words. At its highest level it means being able to predict feelings in advance.

In my adaptation of the academic model of emotional intelligence I place emotional awareness under the first branch of their framework: emotional identification, perception and expression. Increasing your awareness of your own feelings is perhaps the first step towards furthering the development of your EI.

The ability to forecast our feelings is probably a legitimate part of emotional intelligence, but Mayer et al have not addressed this as yet. I am not certain how you would test this with a paper and pencil test, but not all aspects of emotional intelligence are suitable for such tests. As Mayer et al acknowledge there is more to emotional intelligence than can be tested. Though they don't stress this in their writing, they do say effectively the same thing when they say that "aspects of" emotional intelligence can be tested. This clearly implies that they leave open the possibility that there are also aspects of it which can never be tested in a formal, controlled fashion.

If we are emotionally sensitive we will feel things sooner than others will. If we have no emotional sensitivity, or we have numbed ourselves from our feelings, we won't have any emotional awareness at all. Sensitive people living in abusive environments and insensitive cultures learn ways to numb themselves from their feelings because so many of their feelings are painful.

(See also the section on Emotional Awareness Levels.)

Emotional Awareness and Happiness

Emotional awareness is a key to leading a happier and more fulfilling life. To really "know oneself," as the Greek philosophers urged us to do, requires that we know how we feel in all of life's many situations. When we know how we feel we know what we enjoy doing and who we enjoy doing it with. We know who we feel safe with, who we feel accepted by and understood by.

Though we might be able to lead a productive life, even a "successful" life -- if one defines success by the level of status, education, or material worth -- it is unlikely we will actually ever be happy unless we are very aware of our specific feelings. In fact, it is quite possible to be successful and miserable, as I have personally experienced.

It is easy to unquestioningly accept other people's definition of success and happiness. But when we become more aware of our own true and unique feelings we are more likely to find our own individual happiness. This may be the essence of using our emotional intelligence.

Emotional Awareness Levels

Below are several levels of self-awareness: Knowing the feeling is present, acknowledging it, identifying it, accepting it, and reflecting on it. Another level of emotional awareness is the ability to forecast feelings.

Knowing the Feeling is Present

The first level of emotional awareness is knowing when feelings are present in ourselves. We become "aware" of the feeling when we first think about it or realize we feel something at that moment.

Example: We might be feeling impatient and start to tap our fingers. But at first we are not aware either that we are tapping our fingers or of our feeling. Then we might notice we are tapping our fingers and we might also realize we are feeling impatient. We might also be saying to ourselves, "I can't believe how long this is taking." Then we might realize we are feeling judgmental by judging how long it "should" take.

Another example: You are in a room. Another person enters. At first you don't see them, but maybe you realize there is a new noise. You turn and then you see the person and become aware they are in the room.

Acknowledging the Feeling

Let's continue the example of the person in the room with you. After you have become aware there is someone in the room, you might acknowledge that person by waving or saying hello.

We may not know exactly what the feeling is, but if we notice and acknowledge that we have some feeling, we have taken the next step.

Nature has given us a sophisticated guidance system in our feelings. Our negative feelings, for example, call our attention to things which are not healthy for us. They tell us when we are out of balance. If we feel lonely, for example, we need more connection with other people.

The literature on emotional intelligence points out that our feelings direct us to what is important to think about. Through thought, our feelings can point us to the causes of our negative feelings and to possible solutions. But if we fail to acknowledge our negative feelings, we won't be able to focus our attention on the problem that needs to be solved. For nature's inner guidance system to function we must acknowledge our feelings.

Many people try to stop themselves from feeling their negative emotions. They may use drugs and alcohol. They may use entertainment and distraction. They may also try to simply deny the existence of their negative feelings. Even education, memorization, intellectual or religious

pursuits can serve to stop us from acknowledging our feelings. All of this defeats nature's purpose in supplying us with negative feelings.

Identifying the Feeling

Still continuing the example of the person in the room, a further acknowledgement of the person could be to greet the person by name. In a similar way we can identify and name our feelings once we realize we have them.

The more specific we are in identifying our feelings, the more accurate we can be in identifying the unmet emotional need and taking appropriate corrective action. (See emotions page) In particular with anger, it helps to identify the more specific or more primary feelings. Even with our positive feelings it helps to identify them specifically so we can use this information to help us create happier lives.

Like anything else, the more we practice identifying emotions, the better we get at quickly selecting the correct name for the feeling. Each time we identify an emotion and assign a label to it, the brain's cognitive and emotional systems work together to remember the emotion, the circumstances and the label for the emotion.

I read once that just the simple act of naming a feeling helps us feel better, and I have often found this to be true. Evidently this happens for several reasons. First, we have a natural fear of the unknown. When we label our feeling, we move it from the unknown to the known and thus we help make it less scary and more manageable.

Second, when we label it, we are using a different part of the brain than where we feel the feeling. I suspect that we are actually diffusing and moving the chemicals from their concentration in the emotional section to the cognitive section where the pain is not felt as much.

Finally, by beginning to think about our feeling, we are also taking the next step towards solving our problem. When our thoughts are clear, this helps us feel more in control and empowered.

Accepting the Feeling

Going back to the person in the room, after we have greeted him by name, we can help him feel accepted. Similarly, once we have felt, acknowledged and identified our feelings, the next step in emotional awareness and in benefitting from the natural value of our emotions is to accept the feeling.

Sometimes we might think that we shouldn't feel the way we do. Such thoughts are the result of beliefs which have been programmed into us by others. One of the primary benefits of a highly developed emotional

intelligence, though, may be that it helps us become more independent from the opinions and beliefs of others. Instead of listening to others' voices, we are able to put more value on our inner voice, a voice which speaks to us through our individual emotions.

There are several benefits to fully accepting our feelings.

First, our feelings are a major part of us. Accepting our feelings is therefore a major part of self-acceptance. This does not mean we wish to stay as we are, but I agree with those who say it is easier to make positive changes in our lives if we first accept that we are how we are at the present moment.

Second, accepting our feelings takes less energy than trying to deny or suppress them.

Third, accepting our feelings sometimes helps prevent them from recurring over and over.

Finally, when we have fully accepted our feelings we can shift our energy to productive thoughts or actions.

Reflecting on the Feeling

Reflecting on our feelings actually could come at two different levels of emotional awareness.

First, at a low level of emotional awareness we might only reflect on our feelings after the fact. We might lay awake at night, for example, and think about an event during the day and our feelings about that event. This might help lead us to identifying our feelings sooner in the future.

I believe, though, that when our emotional intelligence is highly developed, the process of feeling our feelings and identifying them takes place quickly enough for us to reflect on the feeling nearly instantaneously or in "real time."

The sooner we can accurately identify the feeling and reflect on it, the sooner we can take actions which are in our best interest.

Forecasting Feelings

The more aware of our feelings, the better chance we have of predicting how we will feel in the future. This can be thought of as forecasting our feelings.

We can improve this ability by considering how we will feel if we choose one course of action as opposed to another. The value of this ability

cannot be overstated. Only when we can predict our feelings can we make decisions which will lead to our long term happiness.

Consider these statements:

I know I am going to regret this.

I know I will feel guilty if I do this.

Versus

It's going to feel so good to...

I know I will feel better if I ...

In the first case, our prediction of negative feelings is trying to help us avoid something. In the second case, our prediction of positive feelings helps motivate us. We simply make better decisions when we listen to our inner messages, in other words, our feelings.

The ability to forecast feelings extends to other people as well. In other words, when we are more aware of our own feelings and develop a greater ability to forecast our own feelings, it is more likely we will be able to forecast how someone else will feel. This naturally leads to being more considerate of others. Simply put, as we get in touch with our own feelings we realize that what doesn't feel good to us probably won't feel good to others.

Emotional Honesty

*We wear a mask that grins and lies
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes
This debt we pay to human guile
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile.*

Paul Lawrence Dunbar

Emotional honesty means expressing your true feelings. To be emotionally honest we must first be emotionally aware. This emotional awareness is related to our emotional intelligence. It is our emotional intelligence, combined with the necessary learning, practice and experience, which gives us the ability to accurately identify our feelings.

Emotional intelligence may also give us the ability to decide when it is in our best interest to be emotionally honest by sharing our real feelings. There are times when it is not healthy or safe for us to be emotionally honest. In general though, I believe we would be better off individually and as a society if we would be more emotionally honest.

If we are more emotionally honest with ourselves we will get to know our "true selves" on a deeper level. This could help us become more self-accepting. It could also help us make better choices about how to spend our time and who to spend it with.

If we are emotionally honest with others, it may encourage them to be more emotionally honest. When we are emotionally honest we are more likely not to be asked or pressured to do things which we do not want to do. We will also find out sooner who respects our feelings.

Here is a quote from Gerry Spence, one of the most successful (based on number of cases won) lawyers in American history:

Openly revealing our feelings establishes credibility.

How Society Discourages Emotional Honesty

It takes emotional awareness, self-confidence, even courage to be emotionally honest.

This is because, in many ways, society teaches us to ignore, repress, deny and lie about our feelings. For example, when asked how we feel, most of us will reply "fine" or "good," even if that is not true. Often, people will also say that they are not angry or not defensive, when it is obvious that they are.

Children start out emotionally honest. They express their true feelings freely and spontaneously. But the training to be emotionally dishonest begins at an early age. Parents and teachers frequently encourage or even demand that children speak or act in ways which are inconsistent with the child's true feelings. The child is told to smile when actually she is sad. She is told to apologize when she feels no regret. She is told to say "thank you," when she feels no appreciation. She is told to "stop complaining" when she feels mistreated. She may be told to kiss people good night when she would never do so voluntarily. She may be told it is "rude" and "selfish" to protest being forced to act in ways which go against her feelings.

Also, children are told they can't use certain words to express themselves. I have seen more than one parent tell their child not to use the word "hate," for example. And of course, the use of profanity to express one's feelings is often punished, sometimes harshly. In some cases the parent never allows the children to explain why they feel so strongly.

As children become adolescents they begin to think more for themselves. They begin to speak out more, "talk back" more and challenge the adults around them. If these adults feel threatened they are likely to defend themselves by invalidating the adolescent's feelings and perceptions. There is also peer pressure to conform to the group norms.

Through all of this many young people learn they can't be honest with their feelings. They gradually stop being emotionally honest with their parents, their teachers, their friends and even themselves. They learn it just doesn't pay to express, or perhaps even feel, one's true feelings.

Emotional Honesty and Parenting

Parents can create an emotionally safe environment, where the child and adolescent is free to be emotionally honest, or they may create just the opposite. The way we were parented is probably the main factor in how emotionally honest we are later in life.

The primary way to create an emotionally safe environment is through emotional validation. When we are accepted and validated emotionally we aren't afraid of being rejected or punished for expressing any feelings, thoughts, questions or perceptions we might have. We are free to be ourselves, and our parents get to know us as we really are.

When we are accepted as we really are, and not just as the image we believe we need to portray, we feel a strong sense of inner security. We can be more emotionally honest with others because we are not as afraid of their rejection. Since we feel secure within ourselves, the acceptance or rejection from others is simply not as important to us. We are more free to be ourselves with everyone. This quality attracts other people who are also secure and can be themselves. Therefore, we are likely to be

surrounded by secure, self-confident, emotionally honest people as the years go by.

On the other hand when we, as children, are discouraged from being anything less than fully emotionally honest, the parents don't see the true "us." Over time, some children drift further and further away from their parents emotionally. During adolescence this distance often becomes more evident. Then when the adolescent is legally free to leave the home they avoid contact with the parents, or they may stay in contact only out of a feeling of obligation or guilt rather than a desire to share things with them. After all, the parents don't really know the person who was living under the same roof with them for all those years.

Worse yet, the parents might really believe they do know their children. They may then be confused and frustrated by the things their child or adolescent does. They might say, "I don't understand how you can do so and so!" But the reason they don't understand is because they don't really know their son or daughter due to the many years of discouraging emotional honesty.

We feel most understood when someone understands how we feel. But if we have not been allowed to express our true feelings, then it is impossible for someone to really understand us. Especially during the adolescent years it is important for us to feel understood by our parents. Parents may believe they understand us "from head to toe," but the child does not feel understood, and this is what matters the most.

More Thoughts on Emotional Honesty

Emotional dishonesty also requires more energy than emotional honesty.

When we are emotionally dishonest we lose out on the value of our natural feelings.

When we are emotionally dishonest we are going against the forces of evolution rather than in harmony with them.

When we are emotionally dishonest we are being false, unreal and in opposition to reality. It takes energy to oppose reality, nature and evolution.

Emotional dishonesty, inauthenticity and falseness create distrust and tension in society.

At the same time, I have no doubt that part of a highly developed EI is knowing when to be emotionally honest, when to remain silent and when to act in line with or counter to our true feelings. There is something of a continuum of emotional honesty which includes unintended repression, full disclosure, discretionary disclosure, and intentional manipulation and

emotional fraud. Furthermore, there is a constant trade-off between our short term vs. long term interests, our needs vs. others' needs and our self-judgment vs. judgment by others. Because all of this is largely an emotional problem to be solved, and a complex one at that, I believe emotional intelligence is being used when we make our decisions about when and how much to be emotionally honest. In my experience, approaching full emotional honesty simplifies my life, helps me see who will accept me as I am -- which in itself is a freeing discovery -- and offers me the opportunity for a rare sense of integrity, closeness and fulfillment.

Nathaniel Branden writes:

If communication is to be successful, if love is to be successful, if relationships are to be successful, we must give up the absurd notion that there is something "heroic" or "strong" about lying, about faking what we feel, about misrepresenting, by commission or omission, the reality of our experience or the truth of our being. We must learn that if heroism and strength mean anything, it is the willingness to face reality, to face truth, to respect facts, to accept that that which is, is. (Source: *Psychology of Romantic Love*)

Excerpt from an article by Lynn Lott, a marriage and family counselor in the USA:

If something is on your mind, it's O.K. to put it on your lips and say it, including saying no when you want, setting your limits and boundaries, and telling another how you honestly think and feel. This may not be easy, because you may have lost the ability to know what a feeling is or the courage to say what's inside because you were told to stay quiet as a child or corrected and told you didn't really feel a certain way. But emotional honesty is a skill that can be learned. It starts when you believe you have feelings inside of you, that feelings aren't right or wrong, and that you can use words to communicate your feelings to others.

This can be very frightening to be honest about your feelings. You may be concerned about hurting someone's feelings or making yourself vulnerable. Not all people around you are good listeners. They too have learned ways to be indirect and show their displeasure by sighing, pouting, screaming about something else, or attacking. You can encourage them to listen and let them know that what you say is simply information about you and that you don't expect them to agree or fix anything. What you are hoping for is that they would try to understand what is going on inside of you so they can know you better.

Most people find that when they take a risk and practice emotional honesty, they feel closer to others and worry less about trying to maintain an image of perfection. The more you practice emotional

honesty, the more you are practicing self acceptance, self love and mutual respect. You soon realize that emotional honesty works two ways. In addition to saying how you feel, you realize that others have feelings, too, and need to be heard without being judged, criticized, fixed or having to defend themselves.

(Taken from: <http://lifematters.com/relatemyth.html>. Inactive link as of Dec 2010. Lynn's website is LynnLott.com)

Stories About Discouraging Emotional Honesty

Teaching Your Children to Lie

While staying with a family once I noticed that the teenage son, David, age 16, did not share his true feelings with his parents. If his parents were present when I asked him how he felt about something, he would look down or away and say something evasive such as, "I don't know" or "Okay, I guess."

But when we were alone he would open up and tell me how he feels using my scale of 0-10. For example, while sitting at the dinner table I asked him how interested he felt in his history class. He thought for a moment and then just shrugged his shoulders. I sensed he was afraid to answer in front of his parents, so later I asked him again in private. He said, "Not at all. On a scale of 0-10, it is a big fat zero. He is the most boring teacher I have ever had." I asked him why he didn't tell me this earlier. He said it was because his parents don't want to hear that. They want to hear that everything is wonderful. They tell him to stop complaining. They tell him things are not as bad as he makes them out to be.

Then I told him that when he was with me, I'd like him to be honest with me and tell me how he really feels about things. He looked at me with surprise in his eyes, and said something I will never forget. He said, "But we were always taught to lie about our feelings." To this day I am still awed by how children and teenagers like David are sometimes so aware of such simple truths which we as adults totally overlook.

The very next day while I was in the kitchen, I overheard David's six year old sister say, "I hate my new teacher!" Her mother immediately shot back, "I don't want you to use that word! That is not a nice word. I don't like to hear you using it. It is rude and not something for you to be saying." The child was silent.

When the mother came out of the room I asked what her daughter didn't like about the new teacher. The mother said, "I don't know, but I don't want her using that word. I just don't want her talking like that. She doesn't need to use words like that. She can find something else to say. I don't want that kind of language in my house. I want this to be a house

where we talk about love, not hate. There is already too much hate in the world. I don't want it in my house too. I just won't allow it."

As I thought about how the girl would now be more afraid of expressing her true feelings in the future, I suddenly understood exactly why his older brother had initially refused to tell me how he felt about his history class. I saw that this family was doing just as David had said, they were teaching their children to lie.

I was not completely surprised, by the way, when I talked to David many years later and he gave me an update on the family. He told me that he often gets so drunk he can't remember what he did the night before, and that one of his other sisters had tried to kill herself when she was around 17.

My belief is that children are born with an innate desire to share things. I also believe they are born with perfect emotional honesty. There is plenty of time to "correct" the way they express their feelings. What is important is that we first allow them to express themselves freely. I believe it is these kinds of small incidents which discourage the natural tendencies of freely sharing emotional honesty. When the desire to share emotions is frightened out of a child, I feel a terrible loss. I believe this loss will negatively affect both the child's ability to know himself and to succeed in his future relationships. This is especially likely in his intimate romantic relationships where knowing oneself and emotional honesty are two of the keys to a successful relationship.

I see both of these situations as a missed opportunity. An opportunity for the parent to become closer to the child. An opportunity to understand their children and to help them feel understood. Instead, the communication lines were cut. The mothers were more interested in "correcting" their children's way of expressing themselves than they were in getting to know their children. I think of Haim Ginott's advice that the parent never deny the child's perception of things.

Lack of Emotional Honesty Leads to Miscommunication

Someone told me about a time when he and his girlfriend were on a date. She asked him if he were ready to leave. He thought she was asking him because she was ready to leave herself. So he said, "I guess so," even though he really would have preferred to stay. He then asked her if she wanted to leave. She said, "Yeah. I suppose so." So they left.

Later they talked about it. They discovered that when she asked the question about leaving, she was simply feeling afraid that he was bored. She said that actually she had wanted to stay there longer too!

Emotional Honesty, Life and Death

This is a story about Mary. It is based on a true story which happened in Sherbrooke, Quebec.

One day a teacher noticed Mary crying softly. She went over and asked what was wrong. Mary wiped her eyes and said, "Nothing. I am okay. Really. I am fine."

The next day the gym teacher noticed several long scars on Mary's arm. She asked Mary how she got the cuts. Mary said, "My cat scratched me." The gym teacher said, "Are you sure? Those don't look like cat scratches to me." Mary said, "I am sure. I am fine. Really."

The next day the gym teacher decided to tell the school counselor about Mary's cuts. The school counselor called Mary into the office. She asked Mary if she was feeling okay lately. Mary said, "Yes. I am fine. Really. I promise." The school counselor said, "Are you sure? Is everything okay at home?" Mary said, "Yes. Everything is fine. It is perfect. Really."

The next day at home Mary started walking towards the door. Her mother said, "Where are you going?" Mary said, "For a walk." Her mother said, "You look depressed. Are you okay? Don't lie to me." Mary said, "Yes. I am fine. I am just going for a walk. I promise. I will be back soon." The mother said, "Are you sure everything is okay? You have been acting very strangely lately." As she walked out the door Mary said, "Yes. Everything is fine. It is perfect. Really."

Mary walked over to her father's house. She took out her extra key and went inside. She knew he would not be home yet because he always worked late. She went to the closet where he kept his hunting rifle. She took it out and loaded it with the cartridges from the top shelf. She sat down on the floor inside the closet and closed the door. She pointed the gun to her head. She closed her eyes and told herself, "Everything is fine. It is perfect. Really." Then she pulled the trigger.

A little background information:

At 12 months old Mary was told to stop crying.

At 2 years old Mary was told big girls don't cry.

At 6 years old Mary was told to stop complaining.

At 12 years old Mary was told she was being melodramatic.

At 14 years old Mary was found dead in her father's closet.

Everyone Was Unhappy. (Fiction)

For many months a father was excited about taking his 17 year old daughter skiing in Canada. He loved skiing and he did not get to see his daughter often because they had lived in different countries since his divorce 10 years earlier. The daughter did not really want to go, but she knew how much her father wanted to. Also, her mother had also been subtly pressuring her to go by telling her how important it was to spend time with her father, reminding her of all the nice things he had done for her, all the presents and money he had sent her, etc. A few weeks before they were scheduled to leave for the trip, the daughter started dating someone. It was her first serious boyfriend. The more she thought about being away from her boyfriend for two weeks, the less she wanted to go to Canada with her father, especially since it was the only vacation time she would have before school started again, and because her boyfriend would be leaving to go to a university in another country before she got home.

The father knew she had started dating, but he didn't approve because her boyfriend was older and also from another culture and religion. The father was afraid to ask how his daughter felt about going and the daughter was afraid to tell him. He just kept on talking about how good it would be for them to spend time together and how much he was looking forward to the trip. Her best friend, though, saw how miserable she was feeling and asked her how much she wanted to go from 0-10. She said 0, but she added that she could never tell her father that because it would start an argument and it would hurt him too much. The friend suggested she at least tell her mother, but she said that if she did tell her, she would have to lie and say that it was more like a 5 than a 0, since she knew her mother wanted her to go and her mother also disapproved of her relationship. She said it was simpler if she just went.

The mother, though, could tell that the daughter wasn't very excited about the trip. She knew her daughter did not like the cold and did not like to ski. She knew her daughter would rather spend this time with her new boyfriend, but she never asked her daughter directly how she felt about going. Instead, she suggested to her ex-husband that he ask her. But of course the father was afraid to ask because he was afraid of what he might hear. So the daughter ended up going on the trip, trying to pretend to enjoy it, and crying herself to sleep nearly every night. In the end, everyone was unhappy because the mother and father felt guilty and defensive, and the daughter and her boyfriend felt disrespected and resentful.

I Would Be Happy to Water Your Plants (True Story)

Sandra checked her answering machine when she got home. There was a message from a friend of hers who asked if she could water his plants while he was on vacation. When she heard this, she said, "I really don't want to do that." Then she called the friend. She said, "Patrick I would be happy to water your plants."

Emotional Intelligence

The Innate Potential Model of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is the innate potential to feel, use, communicate, recognize, remember, describe, identify, learn from, manage, understand and explain emotions. - S.Hein, 2007

This definition is based on the academic work of Jack Mayer and Peter Salovey. This definition differs from the Mayer Salovey definition in one very important way because it emphasizes that emotional intelligence is an innate potential.

In other words, each baby is born with a specific and unique potential for these components of emotional intelligence:

1. Emotional sensitivity
2. Emotional memory
3. Emotional processing ability
4. Emotional learning ability

Because the definition offered here is based on an innate potential, it makes a very important distinction between this inborn potential and what actually happens to that potential over a person's life.

Applying The Innate Potential Model of EI to a Baby

As a practical example of emotional intelligence, and to see how even one baby's innate level of emotional intelligence can be different than another's, let's look at a baby's feelings of fear.

Fear, of course, is a natural feeling. Its purpose, as designed by nature, is to help the baby survive. A baby has a natural fear of abandonment because the baby knows its life depends on others. When it is left alone, it feels afraid. A baby is also afraid of being separated from its parents, so if a stranger tries to take the baby away from them, it is natural for the baby to feel afraid. But not all babies respond to fear in exactly the same way. Let's consider a baby's fear as we look at each of the components of emotional intelligence. First, here is a reminder of my definition of EI.

Emotional intelligence is the innate potential to feel, use, communicate, recognize, remember, describe, identify, learn from, manage, understand and explain emotions.

Feel Emotions

Feeling afraid is the first step in the baby trying to meet its survival needs. If it does not feel afraid, it won't take the steps needed to ensure its own safety and survival.

Use Emotions

A frightened baby uses its fear to take needed action.

Communicate Emotions

The action the baby takes is typically crying, or screaming when very, very afraid. A more emotionally intelligent baby will do a better job of communicating its fear, and thus will have a higher chance of survival.

Recognize Emotions

A baby with high emotional intelligence will quickly learn to recognize when the mother or father is angry. Later, perhaps with the help of education and modeling, a child learns to recognize their own feelings and become more self-aware. But because the child's survival depends more on their external environment when they are young, the ability to recognize emotions probably begins with the awareness of how others, on whose survival the baby or child depends, feel.

Remember Emotions

The highly emotionally intelligent baby will remember the details of how the mother and father look when they are angry, afraid, happy, pleased, or displeased. They will learn how their parents' voices sound and what movements they make.

Describe Emotions

The ability to describe emotions obviously comes with the child's ability to speak, but the more emotionally intelligent they are, the faster they will learn to do this and the better they will be at it.

Identify Emotions

At first, a baby or child can not identify emotions by name. This is one aspect of the development of emotional intelligence which depends almost completely on the person's education, information and modeling.

Learn from Emotions

The highly emotionally intelligent baby will quickly learn when it does something which angers, pleases or displeases the parent.

Manage Emotions

A baby with high EI will more quickly learn to manage its own emotions so as not to anger the parents. For example, it will learn not to cry, even though crying is natural, if crying angers the parent.

Understand Emotions

A baby does not yet understand emotions, but the more emotionally intelligent they are, the faster they will develop this understanding, and, if there is not abuse in the home, the more accurate their understanding will be.

Explain Emotions

As with other aspects of emotional intelligence, the ability to explain their emotions will develop with time, experience, modeling, information and education.

Note that the ability to understand and explain emotions, in particular, will be partly a function of a child or teens ability to reason. This is one way a person's emotional intelligence is closely correlated with their intellectual intelligence.

Potential EI vs. Actual EI Skills

As with our intellectual intelligence and our other innate potential, the way we are raised dramatically affects what happens to this inborn potential. For example a baby might be born with a very high potential for music -- he or she might be a potential Mozart -- but if that child's potential is never recognized, nurtured, and encouraged, and if the child is never given the chance to develop their musical potential, they will never become a talented musician later in life. The world will then miss out on this person's special gift to humanity.

Also, a child being raised in an emotionally abusive home can be expected to use their emotional potential in unhealthy ways later in life. (See section on "Dark Side of Emotional Intelligence")

Because of these very different outcomes, it is important to make a distinction between a person's inborn emotional potential versus their actual emotional skills and use of their emotional intelligence later in life. I suggest we use the term "emotional intelligence" only for a person's inborn, innate emotional potential.

In comparison to say, mathematical intelligence, it is important to note that relatively few people start out with high innate mathematical abilities and then have this ability damaged through misleading or false math training or modeling. I say relatively few because I mean in comparison to the number of emotionally sensitive children who receive unhealthy and self-destructive emotional imprinting from any number of sources. Parents and television shows don't generally teach that $2+2=15$, but they do often teach emotional lessons which are as equivalent in unhealthiness as this equation is in inaccuracy. Or we might say which would be as damaging to an intimate relationship as the false equation would be to the career of an accountant or scientist.

At present, all other models of emotional intelligence, including even the most "pure" of the group, the Mayer/Salovey/Caruso model, combine the measurement of the innate emotional variables (sensitivity, memory, processing and learning) with the environmental effects on those same variables. Certain writers have defined intelligence in general as "potential." I agree with this and this is why I want to distinguish between innate potential and observable or measurable behavior.

The Mayer - Salovey Academic Definition of EI

Jack Mayer and Peter Salovey have been the leading researchers in emotional intelligence since 1990. They refer to their model of EI as the "ability" model as opposed to models which are based on self-report personality tests. The difference between an ability model and a self-report model could be compared to the difference between asking someone how fast they can type vs. giving them a typing test. The problem with calling the results in either case an indication of any kind of intelligence is the same problem with trying to measure a person's emotional intelligence. In other words, when someone is born, you have no idea how fast they will be able to type later in life. But genetically, some babies have the potential to type faster than others. What happens to this potential depends on their environment, education and nurturing.

It would not be fair or helpful to call someone unintelligent if they could not type but had never been given the opportunity to practice. In the same way, it is not fair, accurate or helpful to say someone is not emotionally intelligent if they act in seemingly emotionally unintelligent ways if they have grown up in an abusive environment.

Another problem with the Mayer Salovey definition of emotional intelligence is that they are not clear what they mean by "ability". This word can mean either *potential* or *skill*. Unfortunately, Mayer and Salovey have never addressed this impreciseness as far as I am aware, and to my knowledge, no one else interested in the field of emotional intelligence has either.

This is another reason I believe it is important to distinguish between innate potential and learned or developed skills and competencies.

Emotional Intelligence Tests

There are many tests which claim to be measures of emotional intelligence. The website EQI.org discusses these in detail. To summarize our position, we do not believe any tests currently exist which accurately measure a person's EI. Each test has its own major flaws.

One of the most well respected tests is the Mayer Salovey Caruso test, the MSCEIT. We have very carefully analyzed this test and we do not recommend it. Other popular tests are the Goleman test and the BarOn test, which we believe are even worse.

As an example of the problems with the tests, the BarOn test was originally based on a self-report personality test developed for military use. In other words, what is now being called a test of emotional intelligence was designed to identify individuals who would make good soldiers. This test is now one of the best-selling and profitable tests in the corporate world. We believe such tests are corrupting and commercializing the true meaning of the term emotional intelligence, along with greatly demeaning its potential value to humanity.

We believe that a healthy development of our innate potential to feel our feelings, to empathize, and to understand and manage emotions could bring peace in the world. We believe it would be impossible for someone who is emotionally sensitive, and compassionate, and who has received training in empathetic listening, could possibly kill another human being when they think of the pain it would bring to that person's mother, father, son, daughter, sister, daughter or friend.

We also believe that when people understand emotions and think intelligently about them, they will quickly realize that killing will create feelings of resentment, hatred, bitterness, and revenge. If emotional intelligence has any real value to society, doesn't it lie in its potential to help us make the world a safer place?

Emotional Literacy

I define emotional literacy as:

The ability to express feelings with specific feeling words, in 3 word sentences.

For example, "I feel rejected."

Developing your emotional literacy

The purpose for developing our emotional literacy is to precisely identify and communicate our feelings. When we do this we are helping nature fulfill its design for our feelings. We must know how we feel in order to be able to fill our emotional needs. And we must communicate our feelings in order to get the emotional support and understanding we need from others, as well as to show our emotional support and understanding to them.

Also, one of the first steps to developing our emotional intelligence is to improve our emotional literacy. In other words, to improve our ability to identify our feelings by their specific names - and the more specific we can be, the better. Though the term emotional literacy is not used in the Mayer Salovey model of emotional intelligence, they do say that the first branch of emotional intelligence is "...the capacity to perceive and to express feelings." They then add that "Emotional intelligence cannot begin without the first branch..." Mayer and Salovey have also written that the "ability to label emotions" is part of the third branch of their model (Emotional understanding).

In the English language we have thousands of words which describe and identify our emotions, we just don't use many of them. At EQI we have been compiling a list of such words since 1995 and the list now has over 4,000 words. (This list is available for purchase from our website for a small fee.) Later in this section we have a very short list of some common positive and negative feelings, and in the section on Feeling Words, we have more examples of how many words exist to describe feelings.

There are a lot of reasons we don't make much use of this rich vocabulary which is available to us. One is that we just aren't taught to speak using feeling words. Other reasons are listed below under "Why it is hard to talk about feelings." I have found, though, that many people can identify their feelings quite well when given a little help.

If you are interested in working on your emotional literacy, the first step is to start using simple, three word sentences such as these:

I feel sad. I feel motivated. I feel offended. I feel appreciated. I feel hurt. I feel disrespected.

This may feel strange at first, since not many people do this. But it gets easier with time, and as you find other people who you can share your true feelings with. (See section on Emotional Honesty)

In my experience, sometimes just by naming a feeling, we begin to actually feel the feeling. It seems that by naming the feeling we help our mind access the emotional part of the brain where feelings are stored. This step of identifying the feeling by name is, I believe, essential to a high development of one's innate emotional processing abilities. I also believe that most of the literature on EI fails to acknowledge the importance of this and of the importance of having a rich emotional vocabulary.

Why it can be hard to talk about feelings

Once a friend of mine was telling me about a time she tried to talk to her romantic partner about feelings. She tried to use some of the ideas I suggested, such as talking about respect using the 0-10 scale. For example, she asked her partner how much he felt respected by her from 0-10. The discussion did not go as easily as she hoped. On the train ride home she made a list of why she thought it was hard for some people to have such a discussion. We later expanded her ideas and came up with this list.

- Talking about feelings directly is an unfamiliar and unknown field
- It is strange to have someone ask such personal questions
- People are not used to thinking about how much they feel something, in other words to what intensity
- They are especially not used to putting a number on their feelings
- Putting a specific number on their feelings may be even more frightening than giving a relatively honest, but vague answer when asked how they feel about something
- Something like this has never been taught to them
- They are embarrassed or ashamed, afraid, to talk about feelings
- It makes one feel too vulnerable
- Just the question frightens them because it is so personal
- They are afraid of exposing themselves, of being "naked"
- They don't know if they should be honest or what the consequences might be if they are honest

- They are afraid to hurt someone with their answers
- We are taught that feelings are bad or weak or are too personal to talk about to others
- They are afraid to ask how someone else feels because they might hear something they don't want to hear
- They are especially afraid to ask how much someone feels something from 0-10 because they are afraid to hear a number which they won't want to hear
- It takes a lot of energy to think about such things when one is unfamiliar, uncomfortable, afraid
- The definitions of the words can vary from one person to another
- The definitions of the feeling words and the ways feelings are expressed can vary from one culture to another

What Is and Isn't Emotional Literacy

Examples of Emotional Literacy:

I feel...

Criticized

Unimportant

Disrespected

Bored

Examples of what is NOT Emotional Literacy:

I feel like...

I feel that...

I feel like you... (This is a "you message" in disguise – see below)

“I Messages” Vs “You Messages”

When we talk about our feelings using three words sentences we are sending what have been called "I messages". On the other hand when we say things like "You make me so jealous" we are sending a "you message". These "you messages" typically put the other person on the defensive, which hurts communication and relationships rather than helping.

Note that when we say something similar to "I feel like you..." we are sending a "you message" in disguise as an "I message"!

A Few Basic Feeling Words

| Positive | Negative |
|--------------------|--|
| Comfortable | Uncomfortable |
| Accepted | Rejected |
| Acknowledged | Ignored |
| Appreciated | Unappreciated |
| Loved | Resentful, hated |
| Lovable | Unloved, bitter |
| Desirable | Unlovable, undesirable |
| Happy | Angry, sad, hurt |
| Aware | Unaware, confused |
| Satisfied | Unsatisfied, frustrated |
| Supported | Unsupported, squelched, thwarted, obstructed |
| Encouraged | Discouraged |
| Optimistic | Pessimistic, hopeless |
| Respected | Disrespected, insulted, mocked |
| Safe, secure | Afraid, insecure |
| Peaceful, relaxed | Tense, frustrated |
| Motivated | Bored, lethargic, unmotivated |
| Focused | Lost |
| Free | Trapped, controlled, forced, obligated |
| Independent | Dependent, needy |
| Confident | Nervous, worried, scared |
| Competent, capable | Incompetent, inadequate, dumb, stupid |
| Proud | Guilty, embarrassed, ashamed |
| Worthy, deserving | Unworthy, undeserving, inadequate |
| Excited, energetic | Depressed, numb, frozen |
| Fulfilled | Empty, need |
| Validated | Invalidated |
| Connected | Disconnected, isolated, lonely |

Expressing the intensity of the feeling

Some feeling words not only express a feeling, but also express the intensity of the feeling. By expressing intensity, they communicate the degree to which our needs are being met and our values and beliefs are being upheld. Accurately capturing the intensity of an emotion is critical to judging the message our feelings are sending. If we either exaggerate or minimize the feeling, we are distorting reality and undermining the effectiveness of our communication.

Here are a few ways to verbally express the intensity of a feeling.

1. Weighting the feeling with a modifier:

I feel a little hurt. I feel extremely hurt

2. Choosing a specific word on the continuum of that emotion:

I feel: annoyed... angry... incensed... ballistic

3. Making use of a 0 to 10 scale:

I feel hurt 2 out of 10

Of the three methods, the 0 to 10 scale is the one I like the best, especially if someone else is really interested in my feelings.

Miscommunicating our Feelings

Often, it is socially unacceptable to directly express certain emotions. We are too afraid of offending others, too afraid of appearing unhappy or unhealthy, and too afraid of social disapproval. Sadly, we live in a world where appearances matter more than reality. This seems to be especially true in the upper classes of society where conformity and etiquette are so important.

So instead of truthfully expressing our feelings clearly and directly, we express the same emotions indirectly, either through our actions or our body language. Sometimes we actually outright lie about our feelings. When we start to hide our feelings, lie about them, or tell people only what we think they want to hear, we impede communication, distort reality, fight evolutionary intelligence and dishonor nature.

Let's look at some examples of how we corrupt the language of feelings.

Masking Our Real Feelings - There are many ways we mask our real feelings. Sometimes we just plain lie about them, for example when someone says she is "fine" though she is obviously irritated, worried, or stressed. Sometimes we intentionally or unintentionally substitute one feeling for another. For example, if I say "I hope it doesn't rain," we might actually be feeling afraid that it will!

Inconsistency - Often, our tone of voice or our body language contradicts the words we are saying. None of us can totally hide our true feelings, but many of us do try to disguise our voices to go along with the act. People who are especially superficial even adopt the cosmetic voices found on television in order to further conform to societal expectations, and further mask their true feelings.

Overuse - One of the ways we corrupt language is to over-use a word. Consider the word "love." We love corn on the cob, root beer, apple pie,

and our mothers. Doesn't it seem there should be a different word for the way we feel about our parents as opposed to food?

Hate is another word which is tremendously overused. If someone hates traffic, hates spinach, and hates lawyers, how can they express their feelings about child abuse?

Exaggeration - When we exaggerate our feelings we are lying in order to get attention. People who need to exaggerate have had their feelings neglected for so long, they have resorted to dramatization to be noticed and cared about. Unfortunately, when they send out false signals, they alienate people and risk becoming like the boy who cried wolf. As the story goes, because he sent out too many false alarms, he was ignored when he truly needed help.

Consider these exclamations, none of which are typically true in a literal sense:

I feel mortified. I feel devastated. I feel crushed. I feel decimated. I felt run over by a truck.

Minimization - Many people minimize their feelings, particularly when they are upset, worried or depressed. They use expressions such as:

I'm fine. I'll be alright. I'm okay, don't worry about me. There is nothing wrong. I said I was fine.

Such people typically are either too proud, too stubborn, too scared or feel too unworthy to share their feelings. They desperately need to be connected with others, but they will not allow others to get close to them. They effectively push people away by withholding their true feelings.

Indirect Communication

Because we are not skilled at directly expressing our feelings, we often use indirect communication of our emotions, such as by using examples, figures of speech, and non-verbal communication. Let's look at a few of these forms of indirect communication.

I Feel Like

Using sentences that begin with "I feel like..." may be the most common form of communicating our feelings. The literal result is that we often feel like labels, thoughts, and behaviors, as we can see below:

I feel like (a label) - In the examples below we are labeling ourselves, and not clearly and directly expressing our feelings.

I feel like: ... an idiot ... a baby ... a failure

We typically use lots of expressions which put ourselves down. These negative labels certainly don't help us feel any better about ourselves. In fact, by mentally branding us, they make it more likely we will repeat the exact kinds of actions which caused our feelings.

I feel like (a thought) - In these examples we are actually conveying more of a thought than a feeling.

I feel like you are crazy. I feel like it was wrong. I feel like he is going to win.

I recall a conversation where I asked someone how she felt about something and she said, "I feel like you shouldn't have done that." At another point when I asked about her feelings, she said "I don't want to get into all of that." Such a lack of emotional literacy and emotional honesty makes it difficult to have a relationship, even a friendship or a working relationship.

I feel like (a behavior) - Here, we are expressing our feelings in the form of a behavior. Again, these are unclear and indirect. They may be graphic and entertaining, but they are usually exaggerations and distortions which don't help us focus on our true feelings.

I feel like: ... strangling him ... shooting him ... wringing his neck ... telling her off ... teaching him a lesson ... filing for divorce ... dumping him ... quitting ... giving up ... jumping off of a cliff

In other words, people who use such expressions feel like a behavior, an action, an act. Thus, they are not in touch with their feelings. They may be acting out their lives as they think others would rather than acting as unique individuals. Or they simply imagine themselves taking action rather than actually using their emotions to motivate them to take appropriate action.

Non-verbal Communication

Studies show that up to 90 percent of our communication is non-verbal. When we communicate non-verbally our bodies are literally expressing themselves. When Shakespeare said the eyes are the windows to the soul he was implying the eyes are the best non-verbal indicator of our emotional and intellectual state of mind.

For example, we think of those who will not look us in the eyes as untrustworthy, dishonest, afraid or insecure. We think of those who have alert, expressive eyes as intelligent, energetic, and emotional. Our eyes have the power to judge, to attract, and to frighten. Through our eyes we can show: interest, boredom, disbelief, surprise, terror, disgust, approval, and disapproval. Many parents can bring their children to tears, for example, without saying a word.

Our faces often express what we are not saying verbally. Our lips may tremble when we are afraid. Our forehead wrinkles when we are concerned or confused. And when people tap their fingers or feet they are usually feeling impatient.

Research shows that some people are better at reading these non-verbal cues. This gives them valuable information, particularly from people who are not expressing themselves verbally, or whose body language is inconsistent with their words.

Practical Value of Communicating with Feeling Words

After we learn to find the right word for our feeling and its intensity, the next step is explaining why we feel what we feel. At this point, our analytical brain is called into action. We actually make things much easier on ourselves and others when our language is clear, direct, and precise. When our words and our non-verbal communication is consistent, we gain respect because we come across as having integrity. Clear, honest communication is not only helpful in personal relationships, but essential to a society. We are simply all better off when we all follow the old rule: *Say what you mean and mean what you say.*

Here are a few personal examples of the practical value of using feeling words.

Feeling Mocked

On two occasions I realized I was being mocked. In both cases I expressed my feeling directly and it proved very helpful to me.

In one situation I told my brother I felt mocked. It took me until I was approximately 37 years old to realize that he had mocked me all of my life. Once I realized it and named the feeling and confronted him with it, it freed me to stop defending myself. It also helped me realize that this was one of the ways my self-esteem was damaged when I was young. And it helped me decided not to spend more time with that brother.

On another occasion I was attending an open lecture to approximately ten students by a university professor on socialism and communism. (At a university in Florida for especially high IQ undergraduates) I was asking a lot of questions he did not want to answer. Except for me, all the others in the room were sympathetic to his beliefs. At one point one of the students mocked a question of mine as a way of defending the professor. The other students were laughing at my expense. I said firmly, "I feel mocked and I would like to have my question answered." This quieted the room and the professor answered my question. From that point on, because I had asserted myself in a clear and direct way, I felt more self-respect and more respect from the students who were otherwise starting to join in on their attacks on me. That was several years ago. I still feel the tension in that room, yet I feel proud that I handled it in the way I did.

These students had never seen me before, by the way, since I was visiting their campus and just happened to stop in for the lecture.

Feeling Attacked, Undermined

I can think of two times when I was giving a talk and someone in the audience was clearly feeling skeptical. Instead of saying they felt skeptical though, on both occasions the person was asking me questions to try to lower my credibility. In one case I said, "I will answer your question, but first I will ask you to tell me how you are feeling". This immediately helped the audience focus on the person asking the question, thereby taking the pressure off of me. It also helped the audience see that the person was feeling a little hostile, which helped the audience feel more empathy for me. And it helped me realize that this particular person was the one with the problem, so to speak. This helped me feel less defensive, more in control, and more secure. I even felt some compassion for him as he tried to explain how he was feeling and why.

In the other case, I said to the person, "It sounds like you are feeling a little skeptical, is that fair to say?" He answered that yes, it was fair to say. Just correctly identifying his feeling helped him feel more relaxed, something which I could see by his facial expression and body language. I told him I could understand why he might feel skeptical. I then asked him to just try to have an open mind and I would do my best to answer his question. He agreed to this and ended up being a helpful participant for the remainder of the talk.

The value of naming feelings:

The examples above show that there is some psychological power in naming what is happening. When one person is attacking another with words and the victim does not really know what is going on, the attacker has even more psychological power. But as soon as the victim correctly identifies what is happening, the attacker loses some psychological advantage and the victim somehow feels more secure. This is evidently because the mind has a need to know what is happening, especially when there is danger. Once the danger is identified, it can be addressed. Also, there is a fear of the unknown which is removed when the feelings are named. Naming the other person's feeling seems to have a disarming or a de-masking value. Naming a feeling can be used as a form of counter-attack, or it can be used as a form of understanding and agreement. It all depends on how the technique is used. The ability to identify and name feelings is a form of power, and like all power it can be used to hurt or help.

Emotionally Abusive Mothers

An emotionally abusive mother is a mother who uses her son or daughter in an attempt to fill her own unmet emotional needs.

This section is just a brief introduction to the topic of emotionally abusive mothers in order to help raise awareness. Please refer to our website for more details and personal stories.

What is an "Emotionally Abusive Mother"?

Generally, I don't like to use labels, but in this case the subject is important enough to try to define the term and create a profile of those who might fairly be called "emotionally abusive mothers". There are many degrees of abuse, so it may sometimes be difficult to say someone definitely "is" or "isn't" an emotionally abusive mother. Can a "good" mother sometimes be emotionally abusive? Yes, I believe so. What matters is the overall nature of the relationship with her children/teens. Though it may be difficult to achieve consensus on exactly what qualifies someone as an "emotionally abusive mother," we can at least try to arrive at some common characteristics.

In broad terms an emotionally abusive mother is a mother who uses her son or daughter in an attempt to fill her own unmet emotional needs. This is similar to defining sexual abuse as someone who uses another person in order to fill their own sexual needs.

By nature, women generally have instinctive needs to raise and nurture children. The fulfillment of these needs is natural and healthy. Emotional abuse occurs only when the mother attempts to use the child or teen to fulfill needs which are not consistent with those of an emotionally healthy adult. Emotional abuse occurs, in other words, when the mother tries to fill those needs of hers which normally would have already been filled during a healthy childhood and adolescence.

It might help to consider the distinction between the emotional needs of a child, of an adolescent and of an adult.

A child has a need to feel loved. A child has a need to feel secure. A child has a need to feel protected. A child has a need to feel approved of.

A teen has a need to feel independent and in control of himself and over his environment.

Both children and teens have a need to feel accepted and respected. Both children and teens have a need to feel appreciated and valued.

For the species to survive, the emotional needs of the adults must compliment those of the children. For example, while the child needs to feel loved, safe, secure, and protected, the adults must need to feel loving, non-threatening, secure, and protective. While the child needs to feel respected and accepted, the adults needs to feel respectful and accepting. While the child needs to feel appreciated, the adult needs to feel appreciative for the gift of nature that is called "their child."

If the mother did not feel adequately loved, safe, secure, protected, appreciated, valued, accepted and respected before giving birth, she will, in all likelihood, attempt to use the child (and later the teen) to fill these needs. If she did not feel adequately in control of her own life as a child and teen, she can be expected to try to control her son or daughter as compensation. This is the recipe for emotional abuse.

To fill her unmet need for respect, a mother might try to demand that her daughter "respect" her. To fill her unmet need to feel loved, the mother might try to manipulate the son into performing what she perceives as acts of love. To fill her unmet need to feel appreciated, the mother might try to spoil her daughter or she might constantly remind the daughter of all the things she does for her and all the sacrifices she makes for her.

Mothers are particularly adept at emotional manipulation. They are skilled in setting up their sons and daughters to fill their unmet emotional needs left over from childhood and adolescence. Ultimately, though, this arrangement fails. It is impossible for a son or daughter to fully meet the unmet childhood and adolescent emotional needs of the parent. A child or teen cannot be the filler of someone else's needs when they have their own needs. This is a clear case of role reversal, the consequences of which are very serious.

A child in this situation feels overwhelmed, facing an impossible burden yet still trying his or her best to do the impossible. The child will necessarily feel inadequate as he fails to do the impossible. By the time the child is a teen, he will feel not only inadequate, but drained and empty. He will feel insecure and afraid of failure, disapproval, rejection and abandonment. The implicit, if not explicit, message has always been "if you don't fill Mother's needs, she will reject or abandon you."

The teenager will have also learned that it is impossible to make mother happy. No matter what the teen has done to try to make her happy it is never enough. So the teenager starts to feel like a failure, or "failful" as opposed to successful. This shatters his or her self-esteem.

This, briefly, is the danger of the emotionally needy, and therefore often, emotionally abusive mother.

General Characteristics of Emotionally Abusive Mothers

- Making the child/teen feel responsible for the mother's feelings.
- Threatening them in general.
- Threatening them specifically with rejection or abandonment.
- Threatening them with vague, unstated consequences.
- Using force upon them.
- Invalidating their feelings.
- Laying undeserved guilt on them.
- Placing undeserved blame on them.
- Dominating the conversations.
- Refusing to apologize.
- Always needing to have the last word.
- Judging or rejecting their friends.
- Sending them to their rooms for crying.
- Locking them out of the house.
- Using punishments and rewards to manipulate and control them.
- Invading their privacy.
- Under-estimating them.
- Failing to show trust in them.
- Labeling them.
- Criticizing them.
- Giving them the silent treatment.
- Failing to give them real explanations.
- Giving non-explanations such as "because it is wrong" or "because it is inappropriate" or "because it is a sin"
- Slapping (see below)

Slapping

One clear sign of an emotionally abusive mother is slapping the son or daughter in the face. Slapping is emotional abuse because it is intended to intimidate more than to physically hurt. It leaves an emotional scar, not a physical one. It is usually designed to oppress unwanted opposition. Typically, a mother slaps her son/daughter in the face as a response to feeling threatened by their child or teen's spoken words.

Good Mom - Bad Mom Test

We have developed what we call the Mom test to help people identify emotionally abusive mothers. Here are some of the questions from the text:

1. Does your mother tend to be unforgiving? Does she say things like "I will never be able to forgive you for that." or "If you do so and so I would never be able to forgive you." "What he did was unforgivable."
2. Does she tell you that it is a sign of weakness to cry?
3. Is it hard or impossible for your mother to admit mistakes?
4. Does your mother always have to have the last word?
5. Is it important for her that she always appears to be right and to win all the arguments?
6. Does your mother make you feel responsible for her feelings (for her happiness or unhappiness or hurt or disappointments)?
7. Does your mother tell you she is disappointed in you?
8. Does your mother ever tell you that you don't deserve things? For example, "You don't deserve all the things your father and I do for you."
9. Does she try to get you to question your own intelligence by saying things like "You think you are so smart." or "You are not smart as you like to think you are." Or "If you are so smart, how can you do something so stupid.?" or "Why didn't you think of that?"
10. Does your mother say things like "You could do better" in a disapproving way?

For more information about this test and emotionally abusive mothers, please visit www.EQI.org.

Empathy

Showing Empathy

To show empathy is to identify with another's feelings. It is to emotionally put yourself in the place of another. The ability to empathize is directly dependent on your ability to feel your own feelings and identify them.

If you have never felt a certain feeling, it will be hard for you to understand how another person is feeling. This holds equally true for pleasure and pain. If, for example, you have never put your hand in a flame, you will not know the pain of fire. If you have not experienced sexual passion, you will not understand its power. Similarly, if you have never felt rebellious or defiant, you will not understand those feelings. Reading about a feeling and intellectually knowing about it is very different than actually experiencing it for yourself.

Among those with an equal level of innate emotional intelligence, the person who has actually experienced the widest range and variety of feelings -- the great depths of depression and the heights of fulfillment, for example, -- is the one who is most able to empathize with the greatest number of people from all walks of life. On the other hand, when we say that someone "can't relate" to other people, it is likely because they haven't experienced, acknowledged or accepted many feelings of their own.

Once you have felt discriminated against, for example, it is much easier to relate with someone else who has been discriminated against. Our innate emotional intelligence gives us the ability to quickly recall those instances and form associations when we encounter discrimination again. We then can use the "reliving" of those emotions to guide our thinking and actions. This is one of the ways nature slowly evolves towards a higher level of survival. In other words, over time, awareness of our own feelings may lead us to treat others in a more pro-survival way.

For this process to work, the first step is that we must be able to experience our own emotions. This means we must be open to them and not distract ourselves from them or try to numb ourselves from our feelings through drugs, alcohol, etc.

Next, we need to become aware of what we are actually feeling -- to acknowledge, identify, and accept our feelings. Only then can we empathize with others. That is one reason it is important to work on your own emotional awareness and sensitivity-- in other words, to be "in touch with" your feelings. -- and to help children stay in touch with their feelings.

Awareness & Acknowledgment

Empathy begins with awareness of another person's feelings. It would be easier to be aware of other people's emotions if they would simply tell us how they felt. But since most people do not, we must resort to asking questions, reading between the lines, guessing, and trying to interpret non-verbal cues. Emotionally expressive people are easiest to read because their eyes and faces are constantly letting us know how they are feeling.

Once we have figured out how another person feels, we show empathy by acknowledging the emotion. We may say, for example,

- I can see you are really uncomfortable about this.
- I can understand why you would be upset.

We can also show empathy through a simple sign of affection such as hug or a tender touch. Though empathy is usually used in reference to sensing someone else's painful feelings, it can also apply to someone's positive feelings of success, accomplishment, pride, achievement etc. In this case a "high five" would also be a sign of empathy.

Empathy and Sensitivity

In one of the Mayer et al studies, many variables were measured. Of these many variables, sensitivity was found to have the highest correlation to emotional intelligence as they define and measure it (*Selecting a Measure of Emotional Intelligence*). It can be assumed that empathy and sensitivity are also significantly correlated. By definition sensitive people are more likely to notice someone else's feelings and to feel something themselves. But even those who are not naturally sensitive, or do not have a high natural level of EI, can take steps to show more sensitivity to the feelings of others.

A basic guideline for showing sensitivity to someone is to not invalidate their feelings by belittling, diminishing, rejecting, judging, or ignoring them. Even just a simple acknowledgment without any real empathy is much better than totally ignoring someone's feeling. (See section on invalidation)

Sensitivity also means being receptive to others' cues, particularly the non-verbal ones such as facial expressions. This is similar to a highly sensitive radio antenna which can pick up faint signals. The more information you are able to receive, the more you can help them and yourself. By the way, a person can never actually be "too sensitive" any more than someone can be too intelligent. It is only a question of how they use the information their extra sensitivity is giving them.

Empathy, Understanding and Compassion

Empathy is closely related to compassion, but empathy both precedes compassion and is a pre-requisite for compassion. When we feel empathy for someone we are getting emotional information about them and their situation. By collecting information about other people's feelings, you get to know them better. As you get to know others on an emotional level, you are likely to see similarities between your feelings and theirs, and between your basic emotional needs and theirs. When you realize that someone else's basic emotional needs are similar to yours, you are more able to identify with them, relate to them and empathize with them.

All humans share similar emotional needs. (See section on Human Emotional Needs) The wide variety among our needs is mostly a difference in degree, rather than in type. For example, we all need to feel some degree of freedom, but one person may need more freedom than another.

Compassion can be defined as a combination of empathy and understanding. Greater empathy gives you greater information, and the more information you have on something, the more likely you are to understand it. Higher emotional intelligence makes possible a greater capacity for such understanding. Thus, the logical sequence is as follows: Higher emotional sensitivity and awareness leads to higher levels of empathy. This leads to higher levels of understanding which then leads to higher levels of compassion.

Haim Ginott wrote that "It takes time and wisdom to realize that the personal parallels the universal and what pains one man pains mankind." Now we might add that it also takes highly developed emotional intelligence.

Empathy and Conscience

Those who are not in touch with their own feelings are not likely to have a sense of conscience. They may feel no remorse, no guilt for causing harm to others. As could be expected, studies show that such people are unlikely to respond to rehabilitation.

One thing which could easily cause a person to lose touch with his own feelings and to lose his sense natural sense of conscience is an extremely painful childhood and adolescence. Such people have experienced so much pain that they shut themselves from it. This pain may have come from physical, sexual or emotional abuse. The end result though is similar. They do not experience their own pain, so they have no compassion for the pain of another. Nor do they have any empathy.

They are also likely to be extremely needy. In other words they have many, and deep, unmet emotional needs. As adults, they will have

developed elaborate defense mechanisms in an attempt to block the pain coming from both these unmet needs and from the guilt they would feel if they allowed themselves to feel.

As Freud helped us see, attempts to defend our brains from psychological pain usually involve the cognitive parts of the brain. For example, common defenses are rationalization, justification, denial, intellectualization, moralizing, preaching, proselytizing, self-righteousness, projection, suppression, etc.

In the absence of a conscience, behavior must be controlled by fear, threats and punishment, or by separation from society. This comes at tremendous social cost, and evidently is ineffective, given the overcrowded prisons and rising fines.

It seems that laws are really only needed when conscience has failed. We might say that the more laws a society needs, the less emotionally intelligent.

Too Much Empathy?

In one of their 1990 publications Salovey and Mayer hypothesized that there was a positive relationship between empathy and emotional intelligence. Since then their studies have indeed shown this to be the case (using their test which tries to measure IE). Still, their definition of EI and their detailed chart of its many aspects does not mention empathy -- something which is a bit puzzling. Upon reflection though, it does seem possible that one could feel too much empathy, to the point where they become overly-affected by another person's moods, for example, in an unhealthy co-dependent relationship.

Therefore, it seems to make sense that while our innate emotional sensitivity gives us the ability to feel empathy, our emotional intelligence helps us decide what to do when we feel empathy and what to do when someone else's moods are affecting us too much.

Even though it may be possible to sometimes feel too much empathy, many people, including the new President of the USA, Barack Obama, believe empathy is something we could use more of in society. In fact it is likely that our human ability to empathize is one of the main ways our emotions contribute to the survival of the species.

Fear

In the right amount, fear protects us. It protects us from both physical and psychological danger. In excessive amounts, however, it paralyzes us, or distorts our perception of reality. It is up to us to capture the positive value in fear without succumbing to its excesses. Your fear is excessive if it prevents you from experiencing the positive feelings in life, such as joy, intimacy, and fulfillment.

Many of us have what can be called "irrational fears." They are irrational because they have little or no chance of actually occurring. They are still fears though and the Mayer Salovey model of emotional intelligence (EI) suggests that when our EI has been developed in a healthy way, our feelings guide us to what is important to think about. Even if something is "irrational," it is still important to give it some thought to see why it is irrational.

We are almost always afraid of something. For our more "rational" or realistic fears we use our emotional intelligence to help us generate and evaluate options which will address our fears or other emotional concerns. Whenever we feel any negative feeling, it is useful to ask ourselves, "What am I afraid of?" Specifically identifying the fear is the first step to addressing the feeling by either logic, action or both.

Some of the ways various types of fear can actually help us are listed below. In each case, an extreme amount of the fear is unhealthy for us, but in moderation, our fears help us live a better life.

Fear of losing control - Helps us take the steps necessary to regain a sense of control over our lives.

Fear of failure - Helps us accomplish our goals. Helps motivate us to prepare, organize, and persist.

Fear of being alone - Helps us reach compromises with others.

Fear of the unknown - Helps us take reasonable precautions and prevents us from unreasonable risk.

Fear of dependence - Helps us develop our own resources and become self-reliant.

Acknowledging a Fear

Psychologist Nathaniel Branden tells the story of a client who was obviously afraid of Branden's disapproval and who obviously wanted very much to be approved of. This fear of disapproval was making it difficult for them to work together. Branden suggested to the client that he say out loud, "Nathaniel, I am afraid of your disapproval and I really want your approval." He had the client repeat this several times and then the issue was put to rest and they could proceed with their work.

Feeling Words

Here are just a few of the 4,000 words we have compiled.

Sample “A” Words

| | | | | |
|---------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| aback | abstracted | accused | admonished | aflutter |
| abandoned | abulic | accusatory | adorable | afraid |
| abashed | abused | accused | adored | against |
| abducted | abusive | accusing | adoring | agape |
| aberrant | abysmal | acerbic | adorned | aggravated |
| aberration | abyssal | aching | adrift | aggressive |
| abhorred | accelerated | acknowledged | adroit | aggrieved |
| abject | acceptable | acquiescent | adult | aghost |
| ablaze | accepted | acquisitive | adulterated | agitated |
| able | accepting | acrimonious | advanced | aglow |
| abnormal | accessible | activated | adventurous | agnostic |
| abominable | accident-prone | active | adverse | agog |
| about | acclaimed | actualized | affable | agonized |
| above average | acclimated | accurate | affected | agony |
| abrasive | accommodated | adamant | affection | agoraphobic |
| absent-minded | accommodating | addicted | affectionate | agreeable |
| absolved | accomplished | adept | affirmed | ahead |
| absorbed | accosted | adequate | afflicted | ail |
| absorbent | accosting | admirable | affluent | ailed |
| abstemious | accountable | admiration | affray | aimless |
| abstract | accredited | admired | affrayed | |
| absurd | accurate | admiring | affronted | |

Sample “B” Words

| | | | | |
|--------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|
| babied | battered | beleaguered | bewildered | blanketed |
| babyish | battle-weary | belittled | bewitched | blase |
| backward | battle-worn | bellicose | bewitching | blasphemous |
| bad | bawled out | belligerent | biased | blasted |
| bad-tempered | bearable | belonging | big | bleak |
| badgered | bearish | below average | bilious | bled |
| baffled | beastly | beloved | bitched at | bleeding |
| baited | beat | bemused | bitchin' | blighted |
| balanced | beaten | benevolent | bitchy | blind |
| ballistic | beaten down | benign | biting | bliss |
| bamboozled | beatific | bent | bitter | blissful |
| banal | beautiful | berated | bizarre | blithe |
| banished | beckoned | bereaved | black | blocked |
| bankrupt | bedazzled | bereft | blackened | bloody |
| banned | bedeviled | beseached | blacklisted | bloody-minded |
| bantered | bedraggled | beserk | blackmailed | bloomed |
| bare | befriended | beset | blah | blooming |
| barracked | befuddled | besieged | blame free | blossomed |
| barraged | beggarly | besmirched | blamed | blossoming |
| barred | begged | besotted | blameless | blown apart |
| barren | beguiled | bestial | blaming | blown around |
| base | behind | betrayed | bland | |
| bashful | beholden | better | blank | |

Sample “C” Words

| | | | | |
|--------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|-----------------|
| caged | careless | changed | childish | clingy |
| cajoled | careworn | changing | childless | cloistered |
| calculating | caring | chaotic | childlike | close |
| callous | carried away | charged | chilled | closed |
| callow | cast | charismatic | chipper | closed in |
| calm | cast about | charitable | chivalrous | closed-minded |
| calmed down | cast out | charmed | choked | clouded |
| cannibalized | castigated | charming | choked-up | cloudy |
| canny | catapulted | chased | chosen | clowned (made a |
| cantankerous | catatonic | chaste | chucked out | fool of) |
| capable | categorized | chastised | chuffed | clued in |
| capitulated | catty | chatty | churlish | clueless |
| capitulating | caught | cheap | circumspect | clumsy |
| capitulation | cautious | cheapened | circumvented | clung to |
| capricious | cavalier | cheated | civil | coarse |
| captious | censored | cheated on | civilized | coaxed |
| captivated | censured | cheeky | classy | cocky |
| captivating | centered | cheerful | claustrophobic | codependent |
| captive | certain | cheerless | clean | coddled |
| captured | chafed | cheery | cleansed | coerced |
| cared about | chagrined | cherished | clear | cold |
| cared for | chained | chic | clear-headed | cold-blooded |
| carefree | challenged | chicken | clenched | |
| careful | challenging | chided | clever | |

See our website for more words and how to get a copy of the full list.

Feelings Predict Behavior

One day this simple truth occurred to me. It was when I was reflecting on an email I got from a student who had volunteered to help me when I was living in Montenegro. Here is the email:

hi steve. today i was thinking a lot about everything, and i thought that its better if give me something real to work on, because I dont have to much time to be at your place and not do anything. i relly like to talk with you, but in past few days there is to many people. im more for action. i would relly like to do something and earn some money, but... i dont know. try to understand. if you need anything, i will always try to help.

I thought about Armin's email and realized that it was very helpful to me for him to let me know this. I knew that if he feels bored, unproductive and un-useful, he will stop coming over to help. So I realized that his feelings were predicting his behavior if nothing changes. I then wrote him back this email

thanks for telling me this. i could also see u were feeling a little bored yesterday. i also know that u want to help and u have already helped me. so i dont want you to lose interest and stop being involved. i would feel very sad then.

Later I thought again of this idea that "feelings predict behavior". I realized that I was starting to feel hurtful towards someone. I knew this could forecast me actually doing something hurtful, which I don't want to do. I don't want to act in a deliberately hurtful way towards this person because a) it is against my guiding principle of not hurting others, even when they have hurt me, b) I know this person has been hurt a lot in the past and that is why they do many of the things they do, and c) it is probably not in my best interest to hurt this person intentionally.

When I searched Google the same day for "feelings predict behavior" I only found this result.

feelings, predict behavior, and camouflage authorial opinion. Phoenix tells. a story centered on Meleager, not a "legendary" hero by any means, but ...

<http://www.muse.jhu.edu/journals/arethusa/v040/40.3gwara.pdf>

It was a little hard for me to believe that the words "feelings predict behavior" were not found anywhere else in Google, but when I checked a second time, I still got the same single result.

I was really surprised some of the psychologists around the world haven't talked more about this, or at least not in a place which got copied onto the Internet. One might be tempted to say this is evidence that they tend to make things too complicated!

In any case, this idea that feelings predict behavior makes a lot of sense to me. For example, if someone is feeling hungry, what are they likely to do? So if they are feeling hurt, threatened or bored, what are they likely to do? We can definitely start to make some predictions, but before we answer correctly we would have to know something about the person and the particular situation they are in.

This reminds me of one of the flaws in the tests which are now being marketed and promoted as tests of emotional intelligence. The tests don't allow for individual differences in deciding what is the "correct" answer. When one person is feeling hurt, the best response for them might be to leave the situation, while for another it might be to tell a joke. The "best" response, therefore depends on the individual, not necessarily on what anyone else thinks is "best".

Still, feelings do predict behavior. It is quite possible, in fact, that they are the best predictors of behavior we could find. This is another reason why identifying feelings and talking about them specifically in emotionally literate ways is important in any human interactions or relationships. In a work setting, I am becoming more and more convinced that talking specifically about feelings, and creating an emotionally safe work environment where people can be emotionally honest, is a very efficient, and therefore time and cost saving, form of communication. When there is any kind of emotional problem and you get to the actual feelings, you get to core of the problem. Then you can more quickly start to resolve it.

Note: This article was originally written in December of 2008. We did a search again for the phrase "feelings predict behavior" in November 2010, and this time we found over 50 results.

Guilt

Guilt - Deserved and Undeserved

When you feel guilty, you are at war with yourself. You have violated some internal standard. This is a good time to examine your standards, apologize, ask for forgiveness, make restitution, learn from the experience, and learn to forgive yourself.

Evaluate your standards - Ask yourself if the standards you are comparing your actions against are really your standards. In other words, did you consciously select them, or were they just handed down to you or forced upon you (as is the case with most of our religion-based guilt). If you do not really believe in the standard, you are punishing yourself needlessly.

Apologize - If you have done something involving another person which you feel bad about, apologize by expressing your honest feelings. Ask the injured party how she felt about what you did, then listen without defending yourself. When the injured party has fully expressed herself, you will have learned a great deal, and she will feel much better. If appropriate, offer to make restitution, by asking what you can do to make it up to her. By these actions you are showing that her feelings matter to you, and that she matters to you. Finally, ask if you have been forgiven. When you have apologized, made restitution, and been forgiven, you will feel much better because you have closure.

There is a chance that the other person will not accept your apology, particularly if she is highly insecure. She may say something to the effect of: "There is nothing you can do! I never want to talk to you again!" When someone denies you the opportunity to apologize, she is attempting to punish you. This makes her feel self-righteous and superior to you. If you feel punished as a result, you must sooner or later forgive yourself the sooner the better, for your sake. The other person is playing a game with you; if you feel punished, she wins.

Learn - Sometimes there is no one to apologize to, no one to make amends to, and no way to make restitution. In such cases, truly learning from the experience will help dissipate your guilt. Truly learning means applying what you have learned in order to change your behavior. It doesn't mean just saying "Well, I guess I shouldn't have done that," and then doing it again later. Truly learning also means accepting your faults. It means learning to accept the fact that just because you made a mistake, it doesn't mean you are a mistake.

A story about guilt

Dianne is married to an alcoholic. When I met her five years ago she was separated from him and dating another man. She told me how guilty she felt for leaving her husband and dating someone else while she was legally still married. A few weeks later she broke off the relationship with the other man and moved back in with her husband. She told me her family had made her feel horrible about what she had been doing. She said they laid a huge guilt trip on her about how much she was hurting her husband. She said her mother had always taught her that when you get married you stay married for life.

After she moved back in with him she would stay at work as long as she could to avoid going home. Some nights she would stay all night in the extra room at her office. She told me she just couldn't leave her husband again because she would feel too guilty, so she just tried to avoid him. She said her husband was so hurt when she left the first time that he drank even more and lost his job. She told me she felt responsible for that too, which added to her feelings of guilt.

Guilt Trips

This section was written while I was living in South America

I am from the United States, but I have visited many countries in South America and now I am living in Peru. I have observed that people in South America are experts in the feelings of others, or "working the feelings" as they say in Spanish. The favorite way of "working the feelings" is trying to make the other person feel guilty. In English we have an expression for this: *guilt trip*.

The idea is that one person is sending the other person on a trip of guilty feelings and thoughts. When we feel guilty we feel weaker also. Thus it is easier for someone to control us. The objective, then, when we guilt trip someone is to make them feel weaker and to control them. Another objective is to make them think about our needs and desires instead of their own.

It is important to be aware of all of this so other people don't take advantage of you. So when you realize that another person wants them to feel guilty, you can say "I feel guilt tripped" just like when you realize that someone is threatening you and you say "I feel threatened".

"Promise me..." and "I am worried about you," – A Story About Guilt Trips and Two Ways of Manipulating

I have been thinking about these two words: "Promise me..."

The other day someone told me that her boyfriend "made her" promise she wouldn't do something. But shortly thereafter she broke her "promise."

Let's think about what is going on here emotionally. How is the boyfriend feeling when he says "Promise me..."? How is the girlfriend feeling? How does the boyfriend want the girlfriend to feel? How does the girlfriend feel when she breaks her promise? How does he want her to feel and why?

I'd say the boyfriend feels afraid of something. But instead of saying "I feel afraid..." he says, "Promise me..."

I would guess the girlfriend feels pressured when he says "Promise me..." I would guess she also feels manipulated, but she might be less likely to realize it. She might not even realize she feels pressured soon enough to say, "I feel pressured."

To me this is purely a manipulative way of trying to control someone by making them be afraid of breaking their "promise" and then feeling guilty

because they broke it. It is a very subtle form of manipulation, but that makes it all the more important to look out for.

When a person says something like, "Promise me..." they are not telling you how they feel. They are simply trying to control your behavior. They are communicating indirectly and they are not being emotionally honest. In this case, the boyfriend did try to convince my friend that he is worried about her. He claims he is worried she is going to get hurt. So that was his justification for trying to control her. I suspect, however, that he was feeling more jealous and insecure than worried about her getting hurt. Of course it is impossible to know how someone is really feeling-- Even if they tell you with feeling words, they could be lying.

So since we can't tell how another person is feeling, it is probably better for us to concentrate on how we are feeling. If someone says something to us like "Promise me..." then we could stop for a moment and ask ourselves how we feel when they say that. Then we could communicate our feelings with feeling words. Then we could watch to see how the other person reacts. This will help us decide who we want to spend our time with.

This same person told me her mother was always worried about her. So both the mother and the boyfriend are using the claim of being worried about her to try to control her. Of course, when we care about someone we do worry about them. But how do we communicate our feelings? Do we express them honestly and directly, or do we communicate them indirectly or try to cover them up?

For example, when a boyfriend is jealous and afraid he will lose his girlfriend, does he say this directly, or does he use guilt trips and manipulation to try to keep his girlfriend in the relationship a little longer? And when a mother is afraid of losing control of her daughter or afraid the daughter enjoys spending time more with other people than she does at home, or if she feels hurt that the daughter would rather share things with someone else, does the mother say this honestly and directly? And if she does say it, does she take responsibility for her feelings?

For instance, if the daughter does prefer to share things with someone else, what is the reason for this? Is it because she was born with a bad character? Or is it because the daughter has found better listeners? If the latter is the case, would the mother take responsibility for not being the best listener or would she lay a guilt trip on the daughter for not sharing things with her? Would she want her daughter to feel guilty? And if so, why?

When we feel guilty we feel weak. We feel less able to defend ourselves. We are more vulnerable. This makes us easier to control. That is what people who are trying to control us want. So this answers the question why the boyfriend, or the mother, would want my friend to feel guilty.

But let me return to my story...

While we were walking to her house, she said she was afraid her mother would be angry at her when she got home. I asked why and she said her mother would be worried. So I suggested she call her mother and tell her she was still alive. So she did.

As my friend expected, the mother said she had been very worried. My friend asked why the mother didn't call her on her cell phone to see if she was okay if she was so worried. The mother said, "I didn't know if you had it with you."

This made me wonder if the mother actually was intentionally, though perhaps subconsciously, using her worrying to manipulate the daughter. After years of training, the daughter feels a) afraid the mother will be worried, b) afraid the mother will be angry c) afraid the mother will punish her by allowing her even less freedom than she already has and d) guilty whenever she comes home later than the mother expects.

It seems to me the mother actually prefers being worried than checking to see if the daughter has the phone and is alright. The motivation would be that as long as she is worried she has a reason to get upset when the daughter comes home. Each time she gets upset, she intimidates the daughter a little more. This makes her a little easier to control. Or so the mother expects, though probably not consciously. It could backfire though, because one day the daughter might get tired of being controlled and she may simply stop letting her mother control her. For example, she might move away if that is what it takes.

At this point in her life, the daughter thinks her mother is worried and upset because she loves her, but it might be more that the mother needs her. One big difference is that when you love someone, you want them to be free to do what makes them happiest. You support them in this. But when you need them, you want them to do what helps fill your own unmet needs. For example, one of your unmet needs might be the need to be in control of something or someone. Another might be the need to feel loved and appreciated.

The daughter probably also has been conditioned to think she deserves to be punished if she stays out later than her mother expects. And she probably thinks her mother is entitled to be worried since she "loves" her so much. And she probably thinks she is responsible for her mother worrying.

So both the mother and the boyfriend are trying, and succeeding, in controlling my friend by using guilt and manipulation. But this is causing my friend a lot of unnecessary stress from the guilt and fear. On some level she is afraid of abandonment by both the mother and the boyfriend.

She is afraid of losing them both. She has been raised on fear and guilt. And she is not able to live her life in freedom as a result.

Some more notes:

Before the daughter called home she said, "If my mother is worried, she can call me." This might be logical, but at the same time she told me she was afraid that her mother would punish her by taking away more of her freedom.

When I first suggested that she call the mother she said, "I don't want to use any time off my calling card." She wanted to use it to spend it all on talking to her boyfriend, which is completely understandable to me so I offered her my phone card. She agreed to this.

After the mother said how worried she was, she thanked my friend for calling. This pleased my friend. The phone call took less than two minutes, meaning I still had credit left on my phone card. This pleased me. Thus our little story had a happy ending that day.

S. Hein
Quito, Ecuador
March 19, 2004

A father's guilt trip on his daughter, and the effect on her

Here is part of an email I got from a teen.

oh god, i can't fucking take this. he told me i've upset everything and everyone and i brought this on myself and i'm such an awful daughter.. and what happened to me?.. and he told me i made him cry when he was driving to work.. and he used to thank god for me every night and now he wonders what happened to me..

i'm sorry, i can't reply to your other mail right now, tho i was planning to... i'm hoping to be able to tonight.. i'm sorry for taking so long to do that. i just.. i can't right now.. i'm still crying.

Frustrated with myself for laying a guilt trip as a joke

This morning I feel frustrated with myself for not talking about feelings. For laying a guilt trip on three people yesterday in a joking way. Here is what happened:

I was waiting to meet three tourism students who came to talk more about my ideas. They came about 20 minutes late and someone asked me if I had been waiting long. I joked and said "Yes, hours, days even!" They were a bit confused. They couldn't tell if I were serious and actually felt

upset with them or if I were joking. I am guessing that they don't use this kind of humor much in Argentina.

There was then an uncomfortable moment of silence and I then changed the subject and started asking them about their days.

Now though, about 18 hours later I am thinking about all of this again and feeling frustrated with myself. I regret not saying something more direct and honest like, "Are you afraid you kept me waiting or that I was feeling impatient?" This would be about the most direct way of starting to talk about all of our feelings but they might or might not have given an honest answer. Or I might have said "No, thanks for asking. Did you have some trouble getting here?" This would have helped them feel relieved and then given them an opportunity to tell me of any little problems they had.

Actually I feel kind of impressed that three people showed up so close to the agreed time. They all came together. This means they had to all meet somewhere else first. Possibly two of them met in one place then picked someone else up. At any rate there had to be some planning and scheduling involved. And probably they had to send a few text messages back and forth to get it all arranged. I will ask them about it later. And apologize for joking and leaving them feeling a bit guilty or unsure.

I learned to lay guilt trips on people in these kinds of ways and I don't like it. I would like to unlearn it. This writing is part of my lesson plan.

They might think I am over-analyzing or over-sensitive or just generally weird, but that's ok. I will show this to them and ask them to tell me what they think, how they feel and how they actually did organize things yesterday and whether they ran into some problems.

Then I will feel better for trying to correct a mistake I made. And possibly help raise their awareness, too, as well as possibly bringing us a bit closer together. In any case, even if none of that happens, I know that this little article will help someone, somewhere.

Steve
March 24, 2006
Salta, Argentina

How To Develop Your Emotional Intelligence

Here is an outline of how to develop your emotional intelligence. We plan to expand this into a full book in the future.

1. Identify Your Feelings

- Ask yourself: How am I feeling?
- Answer using three word sentences beginning with "I feel..."
- Label your feelings, not people and situations.

2. Become More Emotionally Literate

- Use three word sentences beginning with "I feel".
- Help others express their specific feelings.
- Distinguish between thoughts and feelings.

3. Take More Responsibility for Your Feelings

- Don't blame the others so much for your feelings.
- Take more responsibility by not thinking in terms of:

You are making me angry.
You kids are driving me crazy.

- Remember that there is a little space between stimulus and response, and in this space lies your power to choose your reaction. Don't give away this power. If others are in charge or in control of your emotions, you are in trouble!

4. Use Your Emotional Awareness to Learn About Yourself

Remember that your negative feelings reveal your unmet emotional needs. For example: If you feel alone, you need to feel more connected.

5. Use Your Emotions to Help You Set Your Goals

Think about how you will feel if you do one thing vs. another.

6. Try to Think of Anger as Energy

Try to use it in a productive, not destructive way.

7. Learn to Validate Your Own Feelings, and the Feelings of Others

8. Become Aware of Forms of Invalidation and Try To Avoid Invalidating Yourself or Others

See section on invalidation

9. Try not to Advise, Command, Control, Criticize, Judge or Lecture to Others

Instead, express your feelings more with specific feeling words.

10. Start Talking About Feelings Using the 0 to 10 Scale

For example,

How understood do you feel from 0-10?

How respected do you feel by ___ from 0-10?

How fine (good, ok) are you from 0-10?

These questions can open the door to a wealth of information which can be used to improve our lives and relationships.

Hugs

Hugs. What a simple, yet powerful act and sign of humanity. To hug must surely be one of the most natural, most universal forms of bonding and connection. To hug shows you care. It helps us feel secure and reassured.

Looking back in my own life, I can see that I didn't get enough hugs. I used to associate hugs with romantic feelings alone. I didn't appreciate the profound emotional value of non-romantic hugs. Now I do. And I thank the young people for teaching me. For the young, hugs are given and received much more freely. It still touches me whenever I see young children or teenagers spontaneously offer a hug at just the right moment.

In my family, we did not hug a lot. But I have talked to too many people who have told me that their fathers, for example, have never hugged them. That's right. Never. In some cultures, this is sadly quite common. Apparently India is one of these cultures. I have asked many girls and women if their fathers ever hugged them and very often the answer is no, though I believe this is changing. I know some women that have told me in fact, that they are teaching their fathers to hug!

There is a complete book on the benefits of hugging. It is called the Hug Therapy book. I highly recommend it. And I even more highly recommend hugging as many people as you can. And asking for hugs when you need one.

During a very lonely period of my life, I came to the sad realization that you can pay someone to do just about anything to you or for you. You can pay for the finest medical treatment in a hospital for example. But you cannot pay someone to truly care. A hug shows that someone cares. And there is no charge at all. In speaking to high school and university students about the dangers of over-focusing on money and material success I have often joked that I made a lot of money in the computer programming business. But along the way I got married and divorced twice. So what good did all the money do me? Could I withdraw it from the bank in one dollar bills and make a big pile and hug it?! This always got a laugh, but there is a real sadness behind the truth that I could not pay someone to hug me when I was crying and most needed it.

I hope that anyone who reads this will give more hugs to their children, their friends, their family members, their romantic partners - assuming those hugs are wanted, of course. I needed to add the note of caution, by the way, because to respect someone, you must respect their desire not to be hugged, if that is the case.

Hugs and Education

While I lived in South America for four years, I visited many schools and talked to many teachers. One thing I noticed is that in all the countries I traveled in, teachers can still give students hugs. This goes for both younger students and teenagers. In the USA, where I grew up, for many years it has been prohibited for a teacher to hug a student of any age. I believe this is also true in England, and Australia, and perhaps other English speaking countries. It is even prohibited to give a crying child a hug.

Imagine a child is crying and goes to someone for a hug. Then that person rejects them.

What does this do to a child? How does it affect the child's brain chemistry? His or her sense of security? Are there long term effects of not giving children hugs? I believe there are. I believe the countries that have made hugging children illegal are becoming more and more cold and inhumane. I suspect that the children slowly turn into adults who are more and more insecure on a deep level. Then they try to compensate in all kinds of unhealthy ways. But there is nothing that can take the place of a simple hug when it comes to emotional security.

All of the above was written before I learned about something even more disturbing. There seems to be a new and growing trend in American schools to actually prohibit students from hugging each other. I first heard of this around 2008. Since then I have been to many countries and each time I tell someone that it is prohibited for one student to hug another in some American schools, they literally cannot believe it. I have to show them the YouTube video of the news reports for them to take me seriously. In every case they are shocked. People around the world believe that America is a free country, and they cannot understand how a young person could possibly be punished for such a simple, healthy, human thing as hugging in the USA of all places.

I am deeply troubled by this trend. It frightens me. I do not know what will happen to future generations of students who are taught that there is something “inappropriate” about such a natural act of human connection.

(If you are not familiar with the news stories I refer to you can find them by searching “Punished for hugging” in YouTube, or you can check EQI.org in our hugging section.)

Hugs and Norma Spurlock

One of my mentors was an incredible woman named Norma Spurlock. Norma worked in an experimental school operated by the University of Florida. One day when I was visiting her at the school, a little black girl

ran up to her and jumped into her arms. Norma gave her a big hug. As she did so she said, "This is illegal, but I don't care. I will explain later."

Later she told me that it was illegal for her to give hugs to the kids, but she said that this little girl is abused at home and she needs the hugs. She told me that she didn't care if they tried to fire her for giving the girl hugs, she was still going to give them.

I believe we need more people like Norma in the world. And more people who understand the importance of hugs and get the laws prohibiting them reversed so we can make the world a more humane place.

Hugs vs. Positive Psychology

One day when talking with a volunteer I told him that there is nothing like a hug to help you feel better. He agreed and we talked about how all the positive psychology in the world can't take the place of a hug. Positive thoughts are important, I don't want to deny that, but they will never be a substitute for a real hug from someone who loves or cares about you.

Hugs Balance Brain Chemicals

Many people believe that depressed, self-harming teens have chemical imbalances. I sometimes wonder if this idea of a chemical imbalance has now almost become a convenient excuse for parents who are not meeting the emotional needs of their children and teens. I am definitely a firm believer that adequate emotional support prevents depression in young people.

My own view, after over ten years of experience with depressed adolescents, is that these teens do not have any innate chemical imbalances. Nor do I think they were born with any kind of brain problem whatsoever. I believe, instead, that they were born with very sensitive brain connections, but not "chemical imbalances."

I believe for these teens, when their environment causes them pain, they are affected by it more intensely, and it is then that their brain chemicals are *temporarily* out of balance in moments of pain.

One of the many things that depressed teens have in common is that they don't regularly get enough hugs at home. (And if they live in the USA, they may not be able to get hugs at school either.) Given the known mental health benefits of hugs, we might literally say that hugs balance brain chemicals.

If then, the teens would have consistently received hugs during their moments of emotional pain while growing up, it is very likely they would be much less depressed as teenagers. Isn't it true for all of us that many

times all we need when we are emotionally upset is someone to listen to us and give us a hug?

This is the most natural way for us to get our brain chemicals back into balance. And it is the most peaceful way. While violence breeds violence, hugs breed only hugs.

Can Hugs Prevent Suicide?

During my original writing about how hugs balance brain chemicals, I started thinking about hugs and my own suicidal thoughts. When I eventually entered into a relationship after years of being alone, I was fortunate enough to have someone as a partner who surely must have given me hundreds of hugs in the first few months of our being together. At that time, almost magically, I almost completely stopped feeling suicidal. When I think too of the many suicidal teens who have said they wanted and needed a hug so badly, I feel a deep sadness and a type of emptiness as I begin to wonder if something so simple as hugs could actually prevent suicides.

Is it really this simple? Can listening to someone and giving them a hug when they are in emotional pain really make the difference between life and death?

I believe it can. I don't know if there are any studies about hugs and suicide. Maybe someone can let us know at EQI if they know of any.

In my own case, it was always good to have someone listen to me. But it is much better to be hugged besides just listened to. As I write this I am again in a supportive relationship. There have been many times when I have cried and my partner has simply held me. I can safely say there is definitely nothing better for my mental health than this.

When we are hugged we feel a close connection to another human being. On the other hand, it is the intenseness of feeling alone which is one of the biggest contributors to feeling suicidal. A hug is nature's way of helping us feel connected. A hug does so much for us that nothing else can do. Besides feeling connected, we feel safe, we feel supported, we feel understood, we feel important, we feel accepted.

I do believe hugs can prevent suicide, especially among the teenagers who have lived less years of emotional pain than adults. In our experience, the majority of the teens are still open to getting and giving hugs. They are still close to their inner nature. They know how important hugs are.

The teens in our online support group give each other lots of electronic hug. I believe that if they could meet each other in person, or if someone could go to their homes and give them hugs, they would feel a lot less suicidal. One of my dreams, in fact, is to have a network of people around

the world who could give "house calls" to the teens and give them the hugs they so desperately need. I really don't know why the mental health authorities and social workers haven't come up with something like this before, but there is a huge need for it. Sadly, we have heard many reports that teens who are in the care of mental health authorities, for example when placed in treatment centers, are actually prohibited from hugging each other. They report that it is also prohibited in these institutions for an adult to give them an emotionally supportive hug. Of course there are some risks involved with hugging, but surely the mental health benefits must outweigh the risks.

Silent Hugs

Once when I was in Holland I stayed with a young family for a few days. One morning I was working on the computer when the seven year old came downstairs crying and sat on the sofa. Her mother had gone to the store so I felt responsible to do something.

I got up from my chair and sat next to her. She came closer to me and I offered her my arm to give her a hug. She quickly buried her head into my chest and kept crying. I felt unsure what to do next and a little powerless to stop her crying or to comfort her. Then she suddenly looked up at me for a few seconds. Next, she looked out into the room and just started talking. But since it was in Dutch, I didn't understand one word. The only thing I understood was the name of her sister, who she had been upstairs with. I assumed they got into some kind of argument and that is why she came down crying. I just held her, saying nothing at all. In about one minute she looked up at me again and smiled. Then she got up and went back to play.

This showed me the value of a silent hug. It also showed me that you don't need to say anything to comfort someone. You don't need to talk them out of their pain. Just be there for them and the pain will pass right out of them.

Human Emotional Needs

Here are examples of some of the basic human emotional needs expressed as feelings. While all humans share these needs, each differs in the strength of the need, just as some of us need more water, more food or more sleep.

One person may need more freedom and independence, another may need more security and social connections. When a person's natural emotional needs are met, healthy behavior naturally follows.

In various degrees, each according to his or her own unique nature, we each have a natural emotional need to feel:

| | | |
|----------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Accepted | Free | Private |
| Acknowledged | Fulfilled | Productive / useful |
| Admired | Heard | Reassured |
| Appreciated | Helped | Recognized |
| Approved of | Helpful | Respected |
| Believed in | Important | Safe / secure |
| Capable | In control | Supported |
| Challenged | Included | Treated fairly |
| Clear (not confused) | Listened to | Trusted |
| Competent | Loved | Understanding |
| Confident | Needed | Understood |
| Forgiven | Noticed | Valued |
| Forgiving | Powerful | Worthy |

(This list was originally based on the work of Robert Myrick in his book, *Caring and Sharing: Becoming a Peer Facilitator*.)

Children, Adolescents and Schools

One problem in typical schools is the treatment of all students as if their emotional and psychological needs were identical. The result is many needs are unsatisfied. For example, one child, or adolescent, may have a greater curiosity and a greater need for understanding than is provided in traditional schools, while another is content to accept whatever is told to him.

Those with unmet emotional needs become frustrated, as any of us do when our needs are unmet. They can be expected to "act out" their frustration in various ways which are typically seen as "misbehavior." This is especially evident when children are expected to all do the same thing for the same length of time. The better we identify their unique needs and satisfy them, the fewer problems.

If a young person's emotional needs are significantly unmet, there is a much higher chance for them to have serious mental health problems, including depression and suicidal feelings, by the time they reach their teen years.

In dysfunctional families it is most often the emotional needs which are not met. The children and teenagers are getting enough to eat and they have a roof over their heads, but their emotional needs are not being met.

It is helpful to become more aware of these emotional needs as a first step towards helping each other fill them.

Importance of Emotions

Here are a few of the reasons our emotions are important in our lives. By the way, the first few chapters of Goleman's 1995 book, *Emotional Intelligence*, have a good presentation on evolution and emotions.

Survival

Nature developed our emotions over millions of years of evolution. As a result, our emotions have the potential to serve us today as a delicate and sophisticated internal guidance system. Our emotions alert us when one of our natural human needs is not being met. For example, when we feel lonely, our need for connection with other people is unmet. When we feel afraid, our need for safety is unmet. When we feel rejected, it is our need for acceptance which is unmet.

Decision Making

Our emotions are a valuable source of information. Our emotions help us make decisions. Studies show that when a person's emotional connections are severed in the brain, he cannot make even simple decisions. Why? Because he doesn't know how he will feel about his choices.

Predicting Behavior

Our feelings are also useful in helping us predict our own, and others' behavior. (See section on Feelings Predict Behavior.)

Boundary Setting

When we feel uncomfortable with a person's behavior, our emotions alert us. If we learn to trust our emotions and feel confident expressing ourselves we can let the person know we feel uncomfortable as soon as we are aware of our feeling. This will help us set our boundaries which are necessary to protect our physical and mental health.

Communication

Our emotions help us communicate with others. Our facial expressions, for example, can convey a wide range of emotions. If we look sad or hurt,

we are signaling to others that we need their help. If we are verbally skilled we will be able to express more of our emotional needs and thereby have a better chance of filling them. If we are effective at listening to the emotional troubles of others, we are better able to help them feel understood, important and cared about.

Happiness

The only real way to know that we are happy is when we feel happy. When we feel happy, we feel content and fulfilled. This feeling comes from having our needs met, particularly our emotional needs. We can be warm, dry, and full of food, but still unhappy. Our emotions and our feelings let us know when we are unhappy and when something is missing or needed. The better we can identify our emotions, the easier it will be to determine what is needed to be happy.

Unity

Our emotions are perhaps the greatest potential source of uniting all members of the human species. Clearly, our various religious, cultural and political beliefs have not united us. Far too often, in fact, they have tragically and even fatally divided us. Emotions, on the other hand, are universal. Charles Darwin wrote about this years ago in one of his lesser-known books called "The Expression of Emotion In Man and Animal". The emotions of empathy, compassion, cooperation, and forgiveness, for instance, all have the potential to unite us as a species. It seems fair to say that, generally speaking: Beliefs divide us. Emotions unite us.

Invalidation

Invalidation may be the single most damaging form of psychological abuse.

Introduction

Invalidation is to reject, ignore, mock, tease, judge, or diminish someone's feelings. It is an attempt to control how they feel and for how long they feel it.

Constant invalidation may be one of the most significant reasons a person with high innate emotional intelligence suffers from unmet emotional needs later in life. A sensitive child who is repeatedly invalidated becomes confused and begins to distrust his own emotions. He fails to develop confidence in, and healthy use of, his emotional brain -- one of nature's most basic survival tools. To adapt to this unhealthy and dysfunctional environment, the working relationship between his thoughts and feelings becomes twisted. His emotional responses, emotional management, and emotional development will likely be seriously, and perhaps permanently, impaired. The emotional processes which worked for him as a child may work against him as an adult. In fact, one definition of the so-called "borderline personality disorder" is "the normal response of a sensitive person to an invalidating environment."

Psychiatrist R.D. Laing said that when we invalidate people or deny their perceptions and personal experiences, we make mental invalids of them. He found that when one's feelings are denied, a person can be made to feel crazy even if they are perfectly mentally healthy. Other's have simply called invalidation "crazy-making."

Recent research by Thomas R. Lynch, Ph.D. of Duke University supports the idea that invalidation leads to mental health problems. He writes "...a history of emotion invalidation (i.e., a history of childhood psychological abuse and parental punishment, minimization, and distress in response to negative emotion) was significantly associated with emotion inhibition (i.e., ambivalence over emotional expression, thought suppression, and avoidant stress responses). Further, emotion inhibition significantly predicted psychological distress, including depression and anxiety symptoms."

Invalidation goes beyond mere rejection by implying not only that our feelings are disapproved of, but that we are fundamentally abnormal. This

implies that there is something wrong with us because we aren't like everyone else; we are strange; we are different; we are weird.

None of this feels good, and all of it damages us. The more different from the mass norm a person is, for example, more intelligent or more sensitive, the more he is likely to be invalidated. When we are invalidated by having our feelings repudiated, we are attacked at the deepest level possible, since our feelings are the innermost expression of our individual identities.

Psychological invalidation is one of the most lethal forms of emotional abuse. It kills confidence, creativity and individuality.

Telling a person she shouldn't feel the way she does feel is akin to telling water it shouldn't be wet, grass it shouldn't be green, or rocks they shouldn't be hard. Each person's feelings are real. Whether we like or understand someone's feelings, they are still real. Rejecting feelings is rejecting reality. To invalidate is to go against nature. It may even be justly called a crime against nature. We may also call it "psychological murder", or "soul murder."

Considering that trying to fight feelings, rather than accept them, is trying to fight all of nature, you can see why it is so frustrating, draining and futile. A good guideline, particularly when working with children is:

First accept the feelings, then address the behavior.

One of the great leaders in education, Haim Ginott, said this:

Primum non nocere - First do no harm. Do not deny your teenager's perception. Do not argue with his experience. Do not disown his feelings.

We regularly invalidate others because we ourselves were, and are often invalidated, so it has become habitual. Below are a few of the many ways we are invalidated:

- We are told we shouldn't feel the way we feel
- We are dictated not to feel the way we feel
- We are told we are too sensitive, too "dramatic"
- We are ignored
- We are judged

- We are led to believe there is something wrong with us for feeling how we feel

You Can't Heal an Emotional Wound with Logic

People with high IQ and poorly developed emotional intelligence tend to use logic to address emotional issues. They may say, "You are not being rational. There is no reason for you to feel the way you do. Let's look at the facts." By the way, in our work with depressed teenagers we find they are regularly told by their parents "There is no real reason for you to be depressed."

Businesses, for example, and "professionals" are traditionally out of balance towards logic at the expense of emotions. This tends to alienate people and diminish their potential.

Actually, all emotions do have a basis in reality, and feelings are facts, fleeting though they may be. But trying to dress an emotional wound, with logic tends to either confuse, sadden or infuriate a person. Or it may eventually isolate them from their feelings, with a resulting loss of major part of their natural intelligence.

Remember:

You can't solve an emotional problem, or heal an emotional wound, with logic alone.

There are many forms of invalidation. Most of them are so insidious that we don't even know what is happening. We know that something doesn't feel good, but we sometimes can't put our finger on it. We have been conditioned to think that invalidation is "normal." Indeed, it is extremely common, but it is certainly not healthy.

I have heard parents and teachers call children:

dramatic, crybabies, whiners, whingers, too sensitive, worry warts, drama queens

I have also heard them say things like: "He cries at the drop of a hat." One teacher said "When she starts to cry, I just ignore her and eventually she stops." Another said, "When one kid's crying is disrupting the lesson, I tell them to go cry in the hall till they can pull themselves back together again."

Defensiveness and Invalidation

All invalidation is a form of psychological attack. When we are attacked, our survival instinct tells us to defend ourselves either through withdrawal or counter-attack. Repeated withdrawal, though, tends to decrease our self-confidence and lead to a sense of powerlessness and depression. On the other hand, going on the offensive often escalates the conflict or puts us in the position of trying to change another person.

One sign of high self-esteem and well developed EI, which themselves both come from a mentally safe and supportive environment, is the absence of either of these defensive responses. A healthier response, one which is both informative and assertive, without being aggressive, is to simply express your feelings clearly and concisely. For example, you might respond, "I feel invalidated," "I feel mocked," or "I feel judged."

How the other person responds to your emotional honesty will depend upon, and be indicative of:

- (a) how much they respect you
- (b) how much they care about you and your feelings
- (c) how insecure and defensive they are
- (d) how much they are trying to change or control you
- (e) how educated and informed they are about emotions

All of this is information which will help you make decisions which are in your best interest.

Self-Injury and Invalidation

Invalidation has been suggested as one of the primary reasons people cut, burn and injure themselves.

For example this quote is from D. Martinson
(www.crystal.palace.net/~llama/selfinjury/guide.html)

One factor common to most people who self-injure, whether they were abused or not, is invalidation. They were taught at an early age that their interpretations of and feelings about the things around them were bad and wrong. They learned that certain feelings weren't allowed. In abusive

homes, they may have been severely punished for expressing certain thoughts and feelings.

Martnison also writes:

(www.service4you.net/selfinjury/aware.shtml)

Self-injury is probably the result of many different factors. Among them: Lack of role models and invalidation - most people who self-injure were chronically invalidated in some way as children (many self-injurers report abuse, but almost all report chronic invalidation).

Examples of Invalidating Expressions. -- Each is an attempt to talk you out of your feelings.

"Ordering" You to Feel Differently

Smile.
Be happy.
Cheer up.
Lighten up.
Get over it.
Grow up.
Get a life.
Don't cry.
Don't worry.
Don't be sad.
Stop whining.
Stop laughing.
Don't get angry.
Deal with it.
Give it a rest.
Forget about it.
Stop complaining.
Don't be so dramatic.
Don't be so sensitive.
Stop being so emotional.
Stop feeling sorry for yourself.
Stop taking everything so personally.

Ordering You to "Look" Different

Don't look so sad.
Don't look so smug.

Don't look so down.
Don't look like that.
Don't make that face.
Don't look so serious.
Don't look so proud of yourself.
Don't look so pleased with yourself.

Denying Your Perception, Defending

You've got it all wrong.
But of course I respect you.
But I do listen to you.
That is ridiculous (nonsense, totally absurd, etc.)
I was only kidding.
That's not the way things are.
That's not how things are.
I honestly don't judge you as much as you think.
It's not going to happen.

Trying to Make You Feel Guilty While Invalidating You

I tried to help you...
At least I...
At least you...
How do you think I feel?
How do you think that makes me feel?
You are making everyone else miserable.

Trying to Isolate You

You are the only one who feels that way.
It doesn't bother anyone else, why should it bother you?

Minimizing Your Feelings

You must be kidding.
You can't be serious.
It can't be that bad.
Your life can't be that bad.
You are just (being difficult; being dramatic, in a bad mood, tired, etc).
It's nothing to get upset over.
It's not worth getting that upset over.
There's nothing wrong with you.

Using Reason

There is no reason to get upset.
You are not being rational.
But it doesn't make any sense to feel that way.
Let's look at the facts.
Let's stick to the facts.
But if you really think about it....

Debating

I don't always do that.
It's not that bad (that far, that heavy, that hot, that serious, etc.)

Judging & Labeling You

You are a cry baby.
You have a problem.
You are too sensitive.
You are over-reacting. You are too thin-skinned.
You are way too emotional.
You are an insensitive jerk. .
You need to get your head examined!
You are impossible to talk to.
You are impossible.
You are hopeless.

Turning Things Around

You are making a big deal out of nothing.
You are blowing this way out of proportion.
You are making a mountain out of a molehill.

Trying to Get You to Question Yourself

What is your problem?
What's wrong with you?
What's the matter with you?
Why can't you just get over it?
Why do you always have to...?
Is that all you can do, complain?
Why are you making such a big deal over it?
What's wrong with you, can't you take a joke?
How can you let a little thing like that bother you?

Don't you think you are being a little dramatic?
Do you really think that crying about it is going to help anything?

Telling You How You "Should" Feel or Act

You should be excited.
You should be thrilled.
You should feel guilty.
You should feel thankful that...
You should be happy that...
You should be glad that...
You shouldn't feel like that.
You should just drop it.
You shouldn't worry so much.
You shouldn't let it bother you.
You should just forget about it.
You should feel ashamed of yourself.
You shouldn't wear your heart out on your sleeve.
You shouldn't say that about your father.

Defending The Other Person

Maybe they were just having a bad day.
I am sure she didn't mean it like that.
You just took it wrong.
I am sure she means well.
But he is your father. He loves you.
She is your mother. She is only doing it because she loves you.

Negating, Denial & Confusion

Now you know that isn't true.
You don't mean that. You know you love your baby brother.
You don't really mean that. You are just ... (in a bad mood today, tired, cranky)

Sarcasm and Mocking

Oh, you poor thing. Did I hurt your little feelings?
What did you think? The world was created to serve you?
What happened to you? Did you get out of the wrong side of bed again?

Laying Guilt Trips (More examples above)

Don't you ever think of anyone but yourself?
What about my feelings?!
Have you ever stopped to consider my feelings?

Philosophizing Or Clichés

Time heals all wounds.
Every cloud has a silver lining.
Life is full of pain and pleasure.
In time you will understand this.
When you are older you will understand
You are just going through a phase.
Everything has its reasons.
Everything is just the way it is supposed to be.

Talking About You When You Can Hear It

She is impossible to talk to.
You can't say anything to her.

Showing Intolerance

This is getting really old.
This is getting really pathetic.
I am sick of hearing about it.

Trying to Control How Long You Feel Something, or Judging You for How Long You Feel It

Are you still upset over that? It happened a long time ago.
You should be over that by now.

Explanations

Maybe it is because...
That is because
Of course, because you....

(This one hurts four ways. First, the "of course" minimizes what you feel, second the "because" explains what you feel, as if explaining it nullifies the feeling, third the "you" blames you and fourth, blaming you is a form of attack which is likely to make you feel either defensive or guilt-tripped or both.)

Sometimes, even when we are happy, unhappy people want to ruin it for us by saying diminishing things like: What are you so happy about? That's it? That's all you are so excited about?

There was an expression I heard when I was growing up. It was "Who put a quarter in you?" A quarter is a 25 cent coin in the USA. It was a coin which was once enough to start music in a juke box. So the implication was the person was acting abnormally happy, excited, lively etc.

When your awareness rises, you'll begin to notice such comments on a regular basis. Together, they take their toll on us. We wonder if there is something wrong with us for feeling how we do. It seems fair to say that with enough invalidation, one person can figuratively, if not literally, drive another person crazy. This is especially possible, I believe, in the case where one person has long-term power over another. Examples of such relationships are parent/child, teacher/child, "spiritual" leader/follower, boss/employee, spouse A/spouse B. Such a sad scenario appears to be even more likely when the person being invalidated is highly sensitive, intelligent, has previously suffered self-esteem damage and has no stable emotional support.

The more sensitive the person, the more serious the damage of invalidation. Invalidation undermines self-confidence because it causes self-doubt. This in turn further diminishes self-esteem. Invalidation is serious violation of one's "true self." I believe it is one of the worst crimes one person can commit against another without ever lifting a finger against them. And yet it is neither illegal, "immoral" by most who consider themselves moralists, nor even widely recognized as a problem. I believe though that:

An emotionally healthy, emotionally intelligent person will never invalidate another person's feelings, especially not the feelings of a sensitive child.

A Letter From a Social Worker About Invalidation

Steve,

I LOVE your site! You've put a lot of work into this and I found your site helpful.

I quit my previous job to return to school and study Child Psychology. Last week I obtained employment as a Social Worker at a 'Safehouse' for abused/neglected children.

Often I notice other social workers invalidating a child's feelings. We social workers want so badly for the kids to be happy that we often unintentionally invalidate the kids' feelings.

Just the other day we took a small boy to the doctor's office and I asked him if he was a little bit scared. It was obvious by his face that he was scared and I wanted to share, understand, and validate his feeling. But after I asked if he were a little bit scared and before he had a chance to answer the other social worker interrupted us and in a scolding tone of voice told him there was nothing to be afraid of! I felt very sad for the boy but I wasn't sure how to handle the situation. I need to get along with my coworkers too... but these kids desperately need to be heard.

I read everything I could find on your site about validating feelings...it was a huge help... THANKS!

Have a beautiful day,

Jeffrey

Here are some examples of how quickly young people learn to invalidate each other. These were notes that were passed between teenage girls:

Teen 1: Wake up and look at the world, it's not made to please anyone, much less you. There is not one thing that gives you the right to say something like that to Sarah. She is better than you will ever be. Just because you're not strong enough to get over your own problems, it doesn't give you the right to try and make our lives worse. Grow up.

Teen 2: We're all sick of everyone being mad at every one so please just hurry your ass up and get over your damn problems. Please, for every ones sakes.

Teen 3:

I have tried to understand your pain. I tried to be your friend. Somewhere you stopped talking to me. I'm sure I did something and believe me, I do feel bad for it. But this is getting really pathetic. I care about you. And I worry that you're hurting and won't get help. Anyways, at the risk of sounding like a copycat - grow up. Move on.

Talk, write, sleep, walk, whatever it takes to get better. And if you want to talk, we're all here. Until then, the silence and hurtful things we say to each other are getting really old.

Reading these notes reminds me of the need to teach about invalidation in school. It is probably more important than anything else they are teaching, but it wasn't something I learned either in public school or the universities I attended.

On my site I try to teach about feelings and emotional support because I want others to learn to care for people and to understand the meaning of the term invalidation. I want people to stop hurting others when they are hurt. I want others to have a better life than I have had.

I was taught how to really hurt someone with my words. I was once called the master of turning things around by a girl I was very happy with. It was with tears of frustration that she told me, and I will never forget it. I am still trying to unlearn the unhealthy emotional habits I was taught.

When you hurt people and invalidate people you push them away. Then you end up alone, even if you are living with someone or have created a family in an attempt to try to get the love you never got from your parents.

Notice that in the above notes, when the third teen says "I tried..." She is not showing empathy. She is defending herself, something I am sure she learned to do. It hurts more, though, to have someone pretend to care when they are actually defending themselves and attacking you. When she says "Somewhere you stopped talking to me..." she is attacking and blaming. When she says "and believe me" she is defending herself and implying that she is not sincere, because if she were sincere it would be evident and she wouldn't have to add "and believe me."

When teen 3 says "I'm sure I did something" without trying to figure out what she did, she minimizes her role and responsibility. Thus, while the intention might have been good, the effect is that it ends up sounding more like a lecture than a show of true empathy or regret.

I felt very, very sad when I read these notes. They came from teens in the USA, by the way, a culture which someone once said seems to "have everything except mental health".

True Stories About Invalidation

The Invalidating Couple

I met someone once who said her boyfriend was jealous. I asked if he was able to tell him directly that he is jealous. She said yes. I asked him what she said in reply. She said she tells him he has no reason to be jealous!

Later this same person said she felt disrespected when he walks in front of her. I asked what she thought he might say if she said, "I feel a little disrespected when you walk in front of me." She said he would probably say, "That is totally absurd!"

These are two highly intelligent people, and both university graduates. They are highly skilled in debating facts, but untrained, uneducated and unskilled in listening and showing understanding.

Heaps of Fun!

One day in Australia I decided to try hang gliding. I went up with an instructor, floated and flew above the waves and coastline for about 20 minutes, then landed on the sand. His wife was there to meet us so she could drive us back up to the top of the hill. Their son, about 8 years old, was with her. As the four of us were standing there a woman named Sue came up with a big smile on her face. She gave a warm hello to the couple, then asked the boy, "How's school, mate?" With a troubled look on his young face, the boy quietly said, "Not good." In response Sue exclaimed, sounding surprised and incredulous, "Not good!? I bet it is heaps of fun."

Then she turned her attention back to the boy's parents. They started talking about some of their friends, smiling and laughing. Meanwhile all three of them completely ignored the boy. But I watched him. I watched his head drop. I watched his face change. I watched him turn away from the group. I watched him take a few steps, then just stand there, alone.

I still find it hard to believe that anyone could miss a child's reaction that completely. I wondered how the three adults could stand there and laugh while that boy stood there alone, troubled now not only about school but also because no one was interested in his troubles. They wanted everything to be positive. They want it all to be good. But it wasn't all good for that boy. No one showed him any understanding whatsoever. What's worse is that when he gave them a golden opportunity to understand him and his world, he was completely invalidated, then completely ignored.

Maybe his father was the type who would try to distract his son with thrilling and risky sports such as hang gliding, soccer, surfing, and race car driving. This is probably how he was taught to deal with feelings by his

father and by the Australian culture. As long as you are active, you can't feel your emotional pain. But what if his son is not interested in sports? Then what? What will his father do then? What will his mother do? She seemed as athletic as the father, which makes sense of course. Otherwise they would not have been compatible.

Again I feel guilty because I did not say anything. I just stood there, stunned, while I watched and made mental notes. I probably will never forget the dejected way he turned and walked away. And I never want to forget it. I want it to inspire me to keep working for the needs of children and teenagers.

These were parents which most people would say are "good parents." I doubt anyone will ever accuse them of child abuse or neglect. But it actually was total emotional neglect at that moment. Now you might think this one incident is a small thing. Yes, it is. Maybe they are good listeners when it really counts. Maybe. But then again, maybe not.

In any case, this one incident says a lot about how quickly, easily and often children are psychologically invalidated. This story reminds us that it is these little interactions with children that make a difference in their lives and in society. When we listen to children and teenagers, and hear and understand their explanations for why they feel the way they do, we have the chance to both provide emotional support and to learn what needs to be improved.

If one were to ask that child how much he felt understood, between 0 and 10, at that moment, what might he have said? I would guess he would say zero. Is that what we want? Is that acceptable to our society? Is it healthy?

One day I believe there will be conclusive research which proves that children who did not feel understood by their parents, teachers, parents' friends, etc. are among the most self-destructive or socially destructive adults.

We all need to feel understood. It is a basic, natural human need. It is not a "right", it is not something nice to have. It is a need. When our needs go unmet one incident at a time, for years and years, we and society all suffer.

It's Not Going to Happen

Once I was telling someone that I was afraid about something. The other person quickly said "It's not going to happen." This didn't help me feel any better. In fact, I felt worse.

Hearing "Don't worry" Worries Me

When I am worried about something and I tell someone who is involved in the situation and they say "Don't worry," I actually feel more worried.

This is because it is evidence they don't take me and my feelings very seriously. I see that they are not going to do anything to help prevent what it is that I am worried about.

For example, let's say I am traveling with someone and I say I am afraid someone could come into our room and steal my laptop computer if they keep leaving the door unlocked. If they tell me "don't worry", then I am more worried, because they are not taking my fear seriously and they may just keep leaving the door unlocked. Besides worrying about my laptop getting stolen, I am now also worried about traveling with someone who invalidates me.

Summary

I believe that invalidating an intelligent, sensitive child is a crime against humanity.

On our website and in the second volume of this book, examples are given on how to validate and show empathy and understanding.

Volume Two

Here is a partial list of topics which will be included in Volume Two of this encyclopedia:

Listening

Love

Malamutes

Mom Test

Neglected

Parenting

Positive Value of Negative Emotions

Primary and Secondary Emotions

Questions

Resentment

Respect

Romance

Suicide Prevention

Understanding

Validation

Zero to Ten