

# Understanding Emotional Health

**Emotions are pivotal to human life and can determine the quality and growth of our lives.** We see, we feel; we hear, we feel; we touch, we feel; we smell, we feel; we taste, we feel: An unnegotiable, biological process. What is negotiable is how well we develop our capacity to emote, and whether we prioritise and nurture attention to our feelings and those of others.

**Emotions, therefore, are a biological imperative;** they are the **jewels** or gems of our existence, given their value, their fragility and their role to facilitate functional and adaptive behaviours.

People are complex systems of thinking, feeling and responding using attitudes and actions. The human ability to be aware, attend to, label and manage feelings in order to better respond to the demands of our environment, is referred to as, Emotional Fitness.

**Emotional Fitness** is central to wellbeing; it **opens us to experience the entire spectrum of emotions from high energy to low energy, and from high intensity to low intensity.**

*Emotional Fitness is the development and consistent training of emotional skills which allow individuals to regulate their energy and manage their intensity of emotions, so that individuals are able to respond and live in concordant with human values, regardless of adversity.* For example if Adele has strong emotional fitness and values *respect*, and someone accidentally dints her bumper bar whilst driving, rather than come out of her car screaming and abusing the other driver [due to her intense level of fright] she can regulate her feelings, and behave assertively and with care, for herself and the other person.

Quality human life calls for empathy, connectedness, care, gratitude, kindness and a number of other strengths, which informs survival and develops cognition. Emotion is prescriptive in these processes; it is a neurobiological and neurochemical function of experiences and perceptions, strongly linked to memory formation.

**Feelings matter. We are designed to experience and process all emotions** - the entire range of them. However, we tend to get stuck in paying attention to only a few, which limits our emotional development and impacts resilience, coping, prosocial skills, problem-solving, appraisal and decision-making. It also impacts our cognitive development; how we learn and how we grow to our values.

**Emotional health** is learning to become emotionally fit - to create a space where our choice of focus on our feelings is not skewed, but balanced. This determines our mental capacity and our overall wellbeing. Our experience of emotion is highly intimate, and for most of us, extremely private due to this intense intimacy.

Our capacity to raise tolerance, adapt, and formulate strong functioning is moderated by our execution of emotion; to become agile in the use and application of our feelings in response to our environment. **Emotional health calls for the deprivatisation of our feelings** and invites us to step out into a journey of attention, expression, and dialogue.

Emotional Intelligence is the psychological framework used to define and predict the dimensions of emotional health based on research. A set of skills and abilities pertaining to EI dimensions which are assessable and teachable. Swinburne University in their Centre for Human Psychopharmacology outline the EI competencies into 4 dimensions:

1. **Emotional Recognition and Expression** - the ability to identify, label and express emotions. It is the capacity to understand the existence of emotions and to effectively communicate them in order to be understood.
2. **Understanding the Emotions of Others** - the ability to recognise micro expressions, non-verbal behaviour in other people, including the environmental conditions with which they are activated.
3. **Emotional Reasoning** - is the ability to have an awareness and language into your own emotions as well as those of others, and consider the environmental needs when making decisions or problem-solving. It is about using all this information in moderating a functional outcome for self and others.
4. **Emotional Management and Control** - is the ability to mediate stressors and better adapt to environmental needs through the capacity to manage strong negative emotion. It also involves a direction toward positive mood to foster functional relationships toward any repair.

<http://www.swinburne.edu.au/research/human-psychopharmacology/our-research/emotional-intelligence/>

## **Emotional Literacy**

**Learning to name feelings helps people find ways to express them without having to act them out.** When feelings are ignored or dismissed or repressed, the body is forced to hold the energy of these feelings. Emotional energy is then expressed through behaviours, driven by intensity and without the help of clear thinking, to be forced out through behaviours.

When feelings are understood, named and articulated, talked about, there is emotional diffusion. It is the naming of the feeling out aloud and the matched tag to the emotion, that validates the emotional experience and defuses the energy into manageable behaviours.

**Learning to pay attention to how people are feeling helps individuals understand that they can have emotions without being controlled by them.**

Emotional literacy is identified as a fundamental tool in the development of emotional fitness and health. Learning to tune into internal experiences and cues, to differentiate the subtle shifts of the energy of feelings, and to then find the correct label to name that experience, is to become emotionally literate. There are well over 350 emotions in the English language, yet most of us use only the most basic labels like “good”, “bad”, “happy”, “bored”, “sad”, “worried”, “disgusted”.

As literacy is raised, so is the ability to correctly communicate our positions, needs and requests effectively. Our internal states are validated and our resources can then be made available to better mediate our environments.

## Quotes

"Emotions determine the quality of our lives.

We couldn't live life without emotions - the issue is how to live better with them"

Paul Ekman, 2007

"Among our birthrights as humans is the experience of the subtle and fleeting pleasant feelings of positivity"

Barbara Fredrickson, 2009

## Youtube Video Links:

### **Why It's Good To Embrace Negative Feelings**

Alison Ledgerwood - Social Psychologist

PhD 2008 research - TED Talk published 2013

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7XFLTDQ4JMk> 10:00mins

### **The Strongest Predictor of How Long You'll Live**

Susan Pinker - Psychologist [Pinker refers to neuroscience research Bringham Young University 2015]

TED Talk Published 2017

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptlecdCZ3dg> 16:03mins

### **A Simply Way to Break a Bad Habit**

Judson Brewer - Psychiatrist [Brewer explains emotion reward]

TED Talk Published 2016

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-moW9jvvMr4> 9:24mins

### **There's More to Being Happy**

Emily Esfahani Smith - Journalist and Social Researcher [positive psychology research]

TED Talk Published 2017

[https://www.ted.com/talks/emily\\_esfahani\\_smith\\_there\\_s\\_more\\_to\\_life\\_than\\_being\\_happy](https://www.ted.com/talks/emily_esfahani_smith_there_s_more_to_life_than_being_happy) 11:16mis

### **Emotional Health**

Dr John Gottman [my EI hero - discusses emotional climate of child]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmsDTT3xgjo> 7:49mins

## Weblinks

Aha Parenting!

### **Easy Way to Teach Kids about Emotions in Daily Life**

<http://www.ahaparenting.com/blog/talking-with-kids-about-emotions-in-daily-life>

Scary Mommy

### **We Feel Our Kids feelings, and it's Exhausting**

<http://www.scarymommy.com/parental-empathy/>

Bounce Back Parenting

### **64 Positive Things to Say to Kids**

<https://bouncebackparenting.com/64-encouraging-things-to-say-to-kids/>

Scientific American

### **5 Body Hacks to Instantly Calm Overwhelming Emotion**

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/5-body-hacks-to-instantly-calm-overwhelming-emotion/>

Mindful

### **4 Common Types of Self Talk**

<https://www.mindful.org/4-common-types-self-talk/>

Scientific American

### **The Importance of Fostering Emotional Diversity in Boys**

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-importance-of-fostering-emotional-diversity-in-boys/>

Psychology Today

### **6 Ways Emotionally Intelligent People Handle Their Anger**

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/feeling-it/201709/6-ways-emotionally-intelligent-people-handle-their-anger>

Mindful

### **How To Teach Your Kids About the Brain** [laying the foundations for emotional intelligence]

<https://www.mindful.org/how-to-teach-your-kids-about-the-brain/>

World Economic Forum

### **Kids Ages 4-6 Perform Better on Boring Tasks When Dressed as Batman**

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/12/new-research-finds-that-kids-aged-4-6-perform-better-during-boring-tasks-when-dressed-as-batman/>

Harvard Business Review

### **How to Control Your Emotions During a Difficult Conversation**

<https://hbr.org/2017/12/how-to-control-your-emotions-during-a-difficult-conversation>

Inc.

**You Need to Learn How to Make Emotions Work For You, Instead of Against You**

<https://www.inc.com/justin-bariso/why-we-all-need-emotional-intelligence-more-than-ever.html>

Mindful

**How to Fight Stress with Empathy** [psychologist Arthur Ciaramicoli, 2017]

<https://www.mindful.org/fight-stress-empathy/>

Mother Jones

**What if Everything You Knew about Disciplining Kids was Wrong** [referenced research]

<https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/07/schools-behavior-discipline-collaborative-proactive-solutions-ross-greene/>

The Gottman Institute

**Helping Little Ones with Big Emotions**

<https://www.gottman.com/blog/helping-little-ones-big-emotions/>

Mothering

**Teach your Child to Gently Work Through a Mistake with these 5 Questions** [restorative justice approach] <http://www.mothering.com/articles/teach-child-gently-work-mistake-5-questions/>

Uplift

**11 Traits of People with Emotional Intelligence**

<http://upliftconnect.com/11-traits-people-emotional-intelligence/>

Huffington Post

**How to Stop Automatic Negative Thoughts** [applying the 3 Cs approach]

[https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/how-to-stop-automatic-negative-thoughts\\_us\\_58330f18e4b0eaa5f14d4833](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/how-to-stop-automatic-negative-thoughts_us_58330f18e4b0eaa5f14d4833)

Offspring

**How to Help Your Kid Calm Down: An age by age guide**

<https://offspring.lifehacker.com/how-you-can-help-your-kid-calm-down-an-age-by-age-guid-1818854699?IR=T>

Medical News Today

**Psychopathy: Children at risk respond differently to laughter**

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/319560.php>

Motherly

**You Can't Love Too Much: How secure attachment helps kids thrive**

<https://www.mother.ly/child/you-cant-love-too-much-attachment-doesnt-slow-growth-it-fuels-it>

Pick Any Two

**The Train Analogy that will Completely Change the Way You See your Crying Child**

<https://pickanytwo.net/the-train-analogy-that-will-change-how-you-see-your-crying-child/>

KidsActivities.com

**How to Teach Kids Self Control** [some good ideas/tips]

[https://www.themaven.net/kidsactivities/parenting/how-to-teach-kids-self-control-OTs9xdJT\\_02OhrhxbbO95w?full=1](https://www.themaven.net/kidsactivities/parenting/how-to-teach-kids-self-control-OTs9xdJT_02OhrhxbbO95w?full=1)

Happify

**What Makes Negative Thinking Such a Difficult Habit to Break**

<https://my.happify.com/hd/what-makes-negative-thinking-a-difficult-habit-to-break/>

Mindful

**Your Breath is Your Brain's Remote Control**

<https://www.mindful.org/breath-brains-remote-control/>

## Research Articles and Sites

Swinburne University

**Centre for Human Psychopharmacology**

<http://www.swinburne.edu.au/research/human-psychopharmacology/our-research/emotional-intelligence/>

Swinburne University Emotional Intelligence Program

**Aristotle - EI**

<http://aristotle-ei.com/>

Moss, R.A., [2014]. *Emotional Restructuring: Clinical Biological Perspective on Brain Involvement*. The Neuropsychotherapist. (5)054-065

<http://www.neuropsychotherapist.com/emotional-restructuring/>

Law, Duane. [2014]. *Food and Feelings: Nutrition and Mental Health*. The Neuropsychotherapist.

(4)076-083. <http://www.neuropsychotherapist.com/food-and-feelings/>