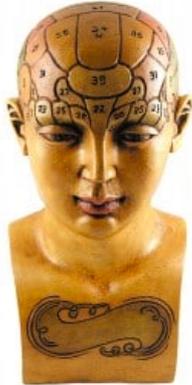


7 Ways to Improve Your Emotional Intelligence

By Leslie Santana



Howard Gardner argued that instead of intelligence being a single ability, humans have the ability to develop multiple intelligences, nine to be exact. Some people have a natural proficiency in emotional or interpersonal intelligence; others have difficulty with this. Although this article focuses on one type of intelligence, I suggest for each reader to practice personal insight and assess himself or herself on every intelligence scale.

1. Opening the door

Emotions are like visitors that knock on your door on any given day and leave once they have gotten what they have come for. Emotional development starts by opening the door and allowing those emotions in. Part of coping with distress involves allowing the emotions entry instead of ignoring the knock on the door.

2. Releasing all judgments

This is where our societal norms come into play and interfere with our healthy development of emotional intelligence. All emotions are equally important. Because they are equally important and vital to each person, they are neither better nor worse emotions. Society emphasizes happiness and discourages any anger or sad emotions. Unfortunately, this causes an imbalance in each person and contributes to distress.

All emotions should be focused on equally as experiencing all emotions equally contributes to a balanced psyche. To illustrate, take a look at the duality of the yin yang circle.

3. Emotional insight

This, for me, is my favorite part of the therapeutic process and is really the driving force in recovery. Emotional insight is each individual's unique experience of every emotion throughout his or her life. It's like a library of memories that begins at birth.

Part of developing emotional insight consists of recognizing what events trigger certain emotions and why. It consists of recognizing what emotions visit you the most, what emotion you have the most difficulty experiencing, and what emotions are encouraged and discouraged in your nuclear family and culture.

4. Disentangling emotions

Emotions are so complex that they get enmeshed with other emotions, other people, and cognitions. The feeling of love can get enmeshed with feelings of disappointment. Most commonly, feelings of sadness manifest themselves as anger.

People, too, can enmesh emotions with each other. For example, an individual can transfer anger to his or her partner causing an unhealthy cycle of resentment. A mother might overcompensate feelings of disappointment to a child and thus cause the child to develop unresolved issues as well.

Lastly, emotions can also become enmeshed with core beliefs. This statement is a good example of tangled beliefs and emotions: "I feel like everyone thinks I'm a joke." No feelings were actually described here and this statement is actually a distorted cognition. A disentangled statement would be something like this: "My belief that people think I am a joke causes me to have feelings of sadness and disappointment." An individual who masters this skill is able to not be affected by the emotions of others and can separate emotions from each other and from cognitions.

5. Practicing compassion

To say the least, emotions are complex. They are not easy to balance and can be tough to experience. Be compassionate towards yourself and others when emotions are at play.

6. Closing the door

This is probably one of the trickier parts of emotional intelligence and can shed some light on how an individual comes to develop mental illness, such as depression. If you begin by ignoring the emotion, it becomes more difficult to find peace with the emotion once you have allowed it in. This is why it is important to start from the beginning.

It is also important to remember that just because an emotion knocks on your door, doesn't mean you need to act on it. Allow yourself to listen to what the emotion is teaching you about yourself. Closing the door to anger, contempt, and sadness is difficult so it is important to realize when you could use some outside help.

7. Connecting the dots

Developing emotional intelligence is an active intervention that requires constant attention but gets stronger with practice. In connecting the dots, you begin by opening the door to your visiting emotion, releasing all judgments of that emotion, understanding your personal experience of that emotion, developing compassion for yourself and others, and closing the door to that emotion.