

...Emotional Intelligence



Emotional intelligence (otherwise known as emotional quotient or EQ) is the ability to understand, use, and manage your emotions positively to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathise with others, be resilient in the face of adversity and to handle conflict. It helps you with relationships as well as personal and professional achievements.

Having high EQ means you have the ability to connect with your feelings, reflect on them (with self-compassion) and assess how they have affected your actions. It helps you to make responsive (as opposed to reactive) decisions. Emotional intelligence is not about being perfect, it is about being able to grow emotionally and continuously develop your way of being in the world.

We can think of it in terms of four key attributes:

1

Self-management – having control over impulsive feelings and behaviours, managing emotions healthily, being consistent, reliable and flexible.

2

Self-awareness – You can identify your emotions and identify how they affect your thoughts and behavior. You can identify areas of strength and weakness, and are okay acknowledging these.

3

Social awareness – You can empathise with others, understanding their emotions, needs, and concerns as well as picking up on emotional cues. You feel comfortable socially, and can observe interpersonal dynamics in groups and organisations.

4

Relationship management – You can develop and maintain good relationships, communicate clearly, inspire and influence others, work well in a team, and manage conflict.

Clearly, these descriptions are for those who have high emotional intelligence - part of the developing EQ journey is about being able to identify where we can improve and develop these areas.

Consequently, the four attributes of EQ are underpinned by your ability to develop self-awareness and use an 'observation' mode of yourself and others. We talk more about this mode of being, something I will refer to as 'zooming out', a lot in our training and coaching sessions. Having awareness of self is powerful, it makes you more objective, and really changes how you operate especially when you are under pressure and have too much to do - which lets face it is most of the time in the social sector. Consciously developing it will help you to get from reactive to responsive even in a crisis and so we must mindfully adopt practices to develop it.

Why is Emotional Intelligence so important?

What is success in life? Is it riches? Love? Excitement? Often in today's society we consider those who are successful to be those with the most money, the biggest following, the best education. These are successes driven by our IQ (Intelligence Quotient), but what if they are underpinned by a chronic fear of failure, or harsh self-criticism? This is where our EQ comes into play. True success is about our ability to handle life. IQ might get you into university but your EQ will get you through those final exams. IQ and EQ are both valuable assets but they are most valuable together.



Your Physical Health

If you're unable to manage your emotions, you are probably not managing your stress either. This can lead to serious health problems. Uncontrolled stress raises blood pressure, suppresses the immune system, increases the risk of heart attacks and strokes, contributes to infertility, and speeds up the ageing process. The first step to improving emotional intelligence is to learn how to manage stress.

Your Mental Health

Difficult experiences, overwhelming emotions and stress...

Uncontrolled emotions and stress can also impact your mental health, making you vulnerable to anxiety and depression. If you are unable to understand, get comfortable with, or manage your emotions, you'll also struggle to form strong relationships. This in turn can leave you feeling lonely and isolated and further exacerbate any mental health problems.



Your Relationships

By understanding your emotions and how to control them, you're better able to express how you feel and understand how others are feeling. This allows you to communicate more effectively and forge stronger relationships, both at work and in your personal life.

Your Social Intelligence

Being in tune with your emotions serves a social purpose, connecting you to other people and the world around you. Social intelligence enables you to recognize friend from foe, measure another person's interest in you, manage boundaries, balance your nervous system through social communication, and feel loved and happy.



The 4 Attributes

Developing EQ can be a lifelong journey. Understanding what it is and applying it are distinct though. Just because you know you should do something doesn't mean you will—especially when you become overwhelmed by stress, which can cause you to revert to a previous you.

In order to permanently change behavior in ways that stand up under pressure, you need to learn how to overcome stress in the moment by cultivating emotional awareness.



SELF-MANAGEMENT

Think about a time when stress has overwhelmed you. Was it easy to think clearly or make a rational decision? Probably not. When you become overly stressed, your ability to both think clearly and accurately assess emotions—your own and other people's—becomes compromised.

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Emotions are both subjective (constructed in your life experience and nature) as well as important pieces of information that inform us helpfully if we observe them; but, in the face of stress - when our primitive responses may kick in - we can become overwhelmed and lose control of our rational self.

Managing stress allows us to stay emotionally present, you can learn to receive upsetting information without letting it override your thoughts and self-control. You can detach from the hooks around you and respond rather than react.

If you don't always manage this, that's okay - reflect on what happened - how did things overwhelm you? What could you change or do differently?

SELF-AWARENESS

Attachment theory tells us that our emotional experience is influenced and formed by our early life experiences.

Managing core feelings such as anger, sadness, fear, and joy often depends on the quality and consistency of your early emotional experiences. We can understand how our early life attachments and traumas may have influenced the way we feel about ourselves and the world. Understanding this can help us to appreciate why we feel the way we do, and help us to learn how to adapt and grow. Noticing our emotions as they ebb and flow is a valuable ability. Some people may need to go through a process of reconnecting to their feelings, because closing off to them has been a protective factor.



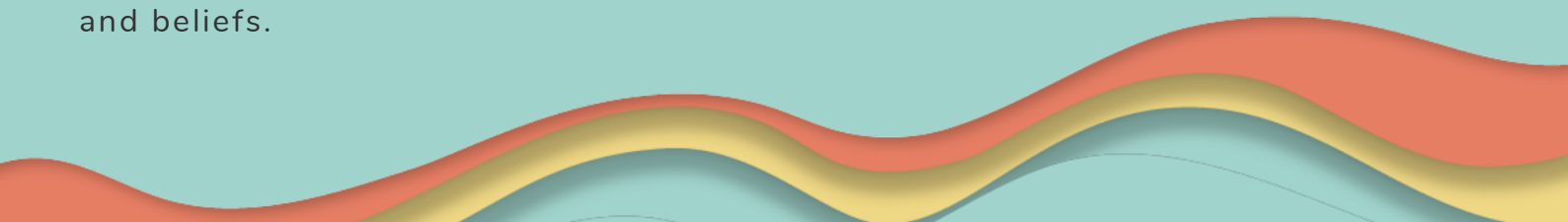
You may be able to grow this awareness just by observing and noticing where emotions take you, or you may need more specialised help to reconnect and learn to experience intense feelings without overwhelm. Start by reflecting on situations that go well and not so well - ask yourself what did you feel? Mindfulness practices are very helpful here, as is journaling, seeking feedback and learning to have self-compassion.

SOCIAL-AWARENESS

Social awareness means we can 'zoom out' interpret communication with a degree of objectivity. This means we can assess both verbal and non verbal communication without reacting to it mindlessly. It isn't to say we see everything, but we see more than those who are lost in the melee. Most communication is via nonverbal cues, they let you know how others are really feeling, how their emotional state is changing from moment to moment, and what's truly important to them. When groups of people send out similar nonverbal cues, you're able to read and understand the power dynamics and shared emotional experiences of the group. In short, you're empathetic and socially comfortable. All the time that you are self-conscious, reactive to what others say and do and stuck in your own head you will find it difficult to pick up on subtle nonverbal cues that tell you what is really going on for others (you'll come to realise you are not actually that important to them!).



Social awareness requires your presence in the moment. While many of us pride ourselves on an ability to multitask, this go, go, go mentality means we might miss out on important observations. By being present we can enhance our ability to connect with others, we can follow the flow of another person's emotional responses whilst also paying attention to the changes in our own emotional experience. By investing the time and effort to really pay attention to others, you'll gain valuable insight into your own emotional state as well as your values and beliefs.



RELATIONSHIPS

Relating well to others is a process that begins with emotional awareness and consequently enables us to use awareness of self, to have greater awareness of others and consequently more empathy, compassion, separation from drama and better responses to others feelings. That will help you to think about your nonverbal communication, for example, it is impossible to avoid sending these message and humans are primed to read them. The many muscles in the face, especially those around the eyes, nose, mouth and forehead, help you to wordlessly convey your own emotions as well as read other peoples' emotional intent. What do others see? Understanding this is vital.



A good example of this is how I learned that my social ineptitude came across as a stand-offishness, a barrier to the other person. People didn't see my discomfort, they saw a barrier because my vagal nerve (which feeds the facial muscles) was tense and would set my face hard. The emotional part of your brain is always on—and even if you ignore its messages—others won't. Recognizing the nonverbal messages that you send to others can play a huge part in improving your relationships. In my example, I taught myself to relax my face and smile more consciously. This made me more approachable and consequently less isolated in rooms full of people.

Tips for Developing your EQ



LEARN TO PLAY

We lose our playfulness in the seriousness of adult life. Sadly, some of us didn't even have this as children. Learning to play and be playful is an incredible antidote to stress, and a great way of reducing self-consciousness. Do an activity that you would love to do or loved as a child, do it on your own, laugh and enjoy it, get in touch with the free child within you.



LAUGH LIKE A CHILD

Find opportunities to laugh out loud. Watch some comedy, relax with friends, think about something hilarious, be silly. Find opportunities to smile and laugh during the day.

LEARN TO RELIEVE STRESS

Become aware of the signs that you feel stressed or things are getting on top of you. Do you become irritable? Short of breath? Do you get a 'must', 'should' or 'have to' way of thinking? Maybe you become very critical of others. Maybe you don't eat, get tension headaches or your back hurts. Whatever it is find ways to notice it, pre-empt it and release it.

There are countless techniques for dealing with stress. Talking face-to-face with an understanding friend, exercise, yoga, and meditation, for example, are all great ways to ease stress and anxiety. But it may not be practical (or even possible) to do these at all times. If that is the case then you will need the tips and techniques in our Grounding guide. There are many five minute practices you can use anywhere to move stress through the body and stabilise.



CONNECT WITH YOUR BODY

This is also covered in the **Grounding guide**, but what you need to think about here is the way we get lost in our heads, we disconnect from the body, we lose touch with the fact that we are a single, whole system and the whole time the mind is frazzled the body is reacting. So, dance it out, rub your body, walk bare feet in nature, drink a cup of tea with no other stimulation, do whatever it takes to come out of that head and be in your whole body.

REPLACE AVOIDANCE WITH AWARENESS

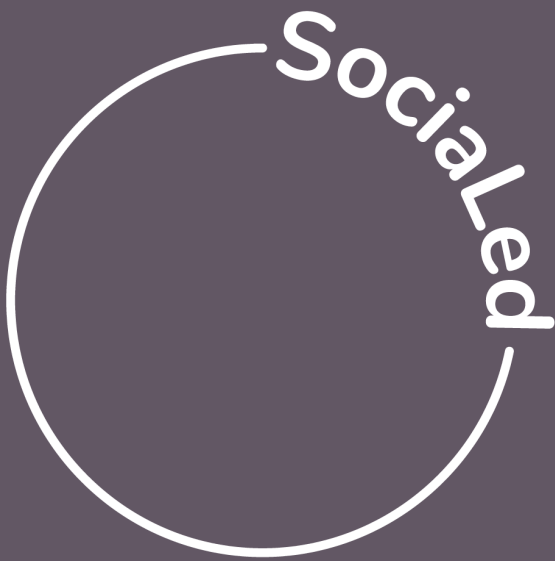
Drinking, zombie scrolling, too much TV, overeating, gambling and computer games can all be ways we avoid our feelings. It's okay to indulge in what we want sometimes, but try to ride the wave of emotions with good habits and then treat yourself to the zone out. Sitting with discomfort is a powerful way to teach ourselves that feelings are not facts, they ebb and flow and we can move them through the body with careful and compassionate awareness.





TALK IT OUT

You may find a great therapist, or coach, or have an incredibly empathic friend. Whatever it is talking about, and, in fact, learning to verbalise how we feel is a powerful way to surface emotions. It might be as simple as telling someone you are not okay and allowing a conversation to open up - thus avoiding the habit of telling everyone we are fine. Maybe you are always sharing how bad you feel, and need to come to realise that you are stuck in something that needs professional help. Whatever it is, being honest and learning to express emotions is a powerful way to sit with them and see what effect they have on you.



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