

Emotional Intelligence (EQ)

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is a different type of intelligence. It's about being "heart smart," not just "book smart." The evidence shows that emotional intelligence matters just as much as intellectual ability, if not more so, when it comes to happiness and success in life. Emotional intelligence helps you build strong relationships, succeed at work, and achieve your goals. The skills of emotional intelligence can be developed throughout life. You can boost your own "EQ" by learning how to rapidly reduce stress; connect to your emotions; communicate nonverbally; use humor and play to deal with challenges; and defuse conflicts with confidence and self-assurance.

What is emotional intelligence?

Emotional intelligence is the ability to identify, use, understand, and manage your emotions in positive and constructive ways. It's about recognizing your own emotional state and the emotional states of others. Emotional intelligence is also about engaging with others in ways that draw people to you.

Emotional intelligence consists of four core abilities

- **Self-awareness** — The ability to recognize your own emotions and how they affect your thoughts and behavior; know your strengths and weaknesses; and have self-confidence.
- **Self-management** — The ability to control impulsive feelings and behaviors; manage your emotions in healthy ways; take initiative; follow through on commitments; and adapt to changing circumstances.
- **Social awareness** — The ability to understand the emotions, needs, and concerns of other people; pick up on emotional cues; feel comfortable socially; and recognize the power dynamics in a group or organization.
- **Relationship management** — The ability to develop and maintain good relationships; communicate clearly; inspire and influence others; work well in a team; and manage conflict.

Emotional Intelligence (EQ) vs. Intellectual Intelligence (IQ)

Most of us have learned not to trust our emotions. We've been told emotions distort the more "accurate" information our intellect supplies. Even the term "emotional" has come to mean weak, out of control, and even childish. "Don't be a baby!" we say to the little boy who is crying on the playground. "Leave him alone! Let him work it out!" we admonish the little girl who runs to help the little boy.

On the other hand, our abilities to memorize and problem-solve, to spell words and do mathematical calculations, are easily measured on written tests and slapped as grades on report cards. Ultimately, these intellectual abilities dictate which college will accept us and which career paths we're advised to follow.

However, intellectual intelligence (IQ) is usually less important in determining how successful we are than emotional intelligence (EQ). We all know people who are academically brilliant and yet are socially inept and unsuccessful. What they are missing is emotional intelligence.

Emotional Development: How to raise your emotional intelligence

Most of us know that there is a world of difference between knowledge and behavior, or applying that knowledge to make changes in our lives. There are many things we may know and want to do, but don't or can't when we're under pressure. This is especially true when it comes to emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence is not learned in the standard intellectual way; it must be learned and understood on an emotional level. We can't simply read about emotional intelligence or master it through memorization. In order to learn about emotional intelligence in a way that produces change, we need to engage the emotional parts of the brain in ways that connect us to others. This kind of learning is based on what we see, hear, and feel. Intellectual understanding is an important first step, but the development of emotional intelligence depends on sensory, nonverbal learning and real-life practice.

Raising your emotional intelligence by engaging your emotions

When you become overwhelmed by stress, the emotional parts of your brain override the rational parts—hijacking your best-laid plans, intentions, and strategies. In order to permanently change behavior in ways that stand up under pressure, you need to learn how to take advantage of the powerful emotional parts of the brain that remain active and accessible even in times of stress. This means that you can't simply read about emotional intelligence in order to master it. You have to learn the skills on a deeper, emotional level—experiencing and practicing them in your everyday life. Emotional intelligence can be learned by anyone, at anytime. But there is a difference between learning about emotional intelligence and applying that knowledge to your life. Just because you know you should do something doesn't mean you will—especially when you're feeling stressed. This is especially true when it comes to the skills of emotional intelligence.

FIVE KEY SKILLS FOR RAISING YOUR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

1: Rapidly reduce stress

When we're under high levels of stress, rational thinking and decision making go out the window. Runaway stress overwhelms the mind and body, getting in the way of our ability to accurately "read" a situation, hear what someone else is saying, be aware of our own feelings and needs, and communicate clearly. The first key skill of emotional intelligence is the ability to quickly calm yourself down when you're feeling overwhelmed. Being able to manage stress in the moment is the key to resilience. This emotional intelligence skill helps you stay balanced, focused, and in control—no matter what challenges you face.

Stress busting: functioning well in the heat of the moment

Develop your stress busting skills by working through the following three steps:

- **Realize when you're stressed** – The first step to reducing stress is recognizing what stress feels like. Many of us spend so much time in an unbalanced state that we've forgotten what it feels like to be calm and relaxed.
- **Identify your stress response** – Everyone reacts differently to stress. Do you tend to space out and get depressed? Become angry and agitated? Freeze with anxiety? The best way to quickly calm yourself depends on your specific stress response.
- **Discover the stress busting techniques that work for you** – The best way to reduce stress quickly is through the senses: through sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. But each person responds differently to sensory input, so you need to find things that are soothing to you.

2: Connect to your emotions

The second key skill of emotional intelligence is having a moment-to-moment awareness of your emotions and how they influence your thoughts and actions. Emotional awareness is the key to understanding yourself and others.

Many people are disconnected from their emotions—especially strong core emotions such as anger, sadness, fear, and joy. But although we can distort, deny, or numb our feelings, we can't eliminate them. They're still there, whether we're aware of them or not. Unfortunately, without emotional awareness, we are unable to fully understand our own motivations and needs, or to communicate effectively with others.

What kind of a relationship do you have with your emotions?

- **Do you experience feelings that flow**, encountering one emotion after another as your experiences change from moment to moment?
- **Are your emotions accompanied by physical sensations** that you experience in places like your stomach or chest?
- **Do you experience discrete feelings and emotions**, such as anger, sadness, fear, joy, each of which is evident in subtle facial expressions?
- **Can you experience intense feelings** that are strong enough to capture both your attention and that of others?
- **Do you pay attention to your emotions?** Do they factor into your decision making?

If any of these experiences are unfamiliar, your emotions may be turned down or turned off. In order to be emotionally healthy and emotionally intelligent, you must reconnect to your core emotions, accept them, and become comfortable with them.

3: Nonverbal communication

Being a good communicator requires more than just verbal skills. Oftentimes, what we say is less important than how we say it or the other nonverbal signals we send out. In order to hold the attention of others and build connection and trust, we need to be aware of and in control of our nonverbal cues. We also need to be able to accurately read and respond to the nonverbal cues that other people send us.

Nonverbal communication is the third skill of emotional intelligence. This wordless form of communication is emotionally driven. It asks the questions: "Are you listening?" and "Do you understand and care?" Answers to these questions are expressed in the way we listen, look, move, and react. Our nonverbal messages will produce a sense of interest, trust, excitement, and desire for connection—or they will generate fear, confusion, distrust, and disinterest.

Part of improving nonverbal communication involves paying attention to

- Eye contact
- Facial expression
- Tone of voice
- Posture and gesture
- Touch
- Timing and pace

4: Use humor and play to deal with challenges

Humor, laughter, and play are natural antidotes to life's difficulties. They lighten our burdens and help us keep things in perspective. A good hearty laugh reduces stress, elevates mood, and brings our nervous system back into balance.

The ability to deal with challenges using humor and play is the fourth skill of emotional intelligence. Playful communication broadens our emotional intelligence and helps us:

- **Take hardships in stride.** By allowing us to view our frustrations and disappointments from new perspectives, laughter and play enable us to survive annoyances, hard times, and setbacks.
- **Smooth over differences.** Using gentle humor often helps us say things that might be otherwise difficult to express without creating a flap.
- **Simultaneously relax and energize ourselves.** Playful communication relieves fatigue and relaxes our bodies, which allows us to recharge and accomplish more.
- **Become more creative.** When we loosen up, we free ourselves of rigid ways of thinking and being, allowing us to get creative and see things in new ways.

5: Resolve conflict positively

Conflict and disagreements are inevitable in relationships. Two people can't possibly have the same needs, opinions, and expectations at all times. However, that needn't be a bad thing! Resolving conflict in healthy, constructive ways can strengthen trust between people. When conflict isn't perceived as threatening or punishing, it fosters freedom, creativity, and safety in relationships.

The ability to manage conflicts in a positive, trust-building way is the fifth key skill of emotional intelligence. Successfully resolving differences is supported by the previous four skills of emotional intelligence. Once you know how to manage stress, stay emotionally present and aware, communicate nonverbally, and use humor and play, you'll be better equipped to handle emotionally-charged situations and catch and defuse many issues before they escalate.

Tips for resolving conflict in a trust-building way

- **Stay focused in the present.** When we are not holding on to old hurts and resentments, we can recognize the reality of a current situation and view it as a new opportunity for resolving old feelings about conflicts.
- **Choose your arguments.** Arguments take time and energy, especially if you want to resolve them in a positive way. Consider what is worth arguing about and what is not.
- **Forgive.** If you continue to be hurt or mistreated, protect yourself. But someone else's hurtful behavior is in the past, remember that conflict resolution involves giving up the urge to punish.
- **End conflicts that can't be resolved.** It takes two people to keep an argument going. You can choose to disengage from a conflict, even if you still disagree.