

Emotional Intelligence

The subject of Emotional Intelligence is huge and somewhat controversial. Let's take a brief snapshot at what it's all about...

EI: the definition

EI is defined as your capacity to perceive and reason about your emotions and your ability to use these emotions to enhance your thinking.

Emotional Intelligence or EI as it is popularly known is a subject that has psychologists arguing about what exactly it is, and even whether it exists in the first place. There are some who argue that EI is just another facet of your personality.

Your emotions, and how you react to them, are important in how you manage life

Whatever your thoughts, there's no doubt that your emotions, and how you react to them, are important in how you manage life.

Psychologists, Dr Peter Salovey, PhD, of Yale

University and Dr John Mayer, PhD, of the University of New Hampshire updated their original definition of Emotional Intelligence in 1997 to the following – “Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions; to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought; to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth.” Being a relatively new area of study the definition is constantly being refined as research is carried out.

Putting it simply

Emotional Intelligence deals with every aspect of our interactions with ourselves

and others. It's all about being sensitive to your own

Emotions do cause actual physical changes within your body

feelings and to those of others, be they friends, family, work colleagues or strangers. It's possible to have a high IQ and not be able to deal with emotions or relate to people socially, so therefore have a low EQ.

There's no doubt that your emotions, and how you react to them, are important, and there has been much discussion about this over recent years. Debates argue about how important they really are; the purpose they serve in our modern society

and, importantly, what happens if you ignore your basic emotions? Does this cause internal conflict and stress, which may in turn make you ill? For example, conditions such as ME and fibromyalgia have been linked, by some, to the ignoring of emotions which may result in a range of very real symptoms. As you can imagine, suggestions of this type are highly controversial, but we should keep an open mind as emotions can be very powerful.

Emotions do cause actual physical changes within your body, so it would appear logical to us that ignoring negative emotions, which increase stress levels, could have a negative effect on your body as a whole. If left unchecked these could lead to a diverse number of

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symptoms, which then trigger cycles of ill health and negative feelings. Not experiencing or allowing yourself to enjoy positive emotions such as happiness or joy could have detrimental effects, too.

Let's break down the two words, Emotional Intelligence, so we can

understand the term a little better. Emotion is defined as a state of feeling, whilst intelligence is defined as being able to learn, understand and think things out and to be able to modify or initiate action in the light of ongoing events. For example, the emotion of fear is a feeling that elicits the 'fight or flight' response, but this might not be an appropriate reaction in our modern world.

Becoming aware

The fight-or-flight response evolved millions of years ago when Man was faced with situations where he literally had to stand and fight or run away from danger. The surge of hormones triggered during the fight-or-flight response prepares your body for action! The resultant action of fighting or fleeing dissipated the high levels of stress hormones. Thankfully these days we rarely, if ever, face such situations. However stress is more prolonged in modern society and the flight-or-flight response can be triggered by relatively minor events, such as a balloon bursting behind you, or public speaking! Being aware of this means you can call on your past experiences which may enable you to reason through your position and come to a more appropriate line of action than running away!

EI is defined as your capacity to perceive and reason about your emotions

and your ability to use these emotions to enhance your thinking. Emotionally intelligent people are able to accurately perceive, then

Each of our emotions is linked to a potentially powerful urge for action

listen to their emotions and manage them. They are also able to reason and problem solve on the basis of the information they receive from these emotions and are able to pick up on and understand the feelings of others.

Look on emotions as a way of conveying important information both about the state of your own self and of others around you and your relationships with them. The more you can 'tune into' this information and learn from it, the better equipped you'll be.

Each of our emotions is linked to a potentially powerful urge for action. As we've heard, fear can result in a strong urge to run away, but the emotionally intelligent will be able to look at the true message behind that fear and determine whether this is the best course of action. For example, you may experience the emotion of fear when you find yourself in a new situation, when you meet new people, or if you have to give a presentation at work. In these situations if you are aware of, and understand

the emotion and physiological changes that occur as a result, you can use them positively to enhance your performance. So the correct decision here would be to stand and face your fear, reasoning with yourself that you will gain and learn from your experience.

Tuning into your feelings and acting appropriately is important in achieving a good perspective in life and finding balance. Acting inappropriately can result in increased stress levels and feelings of inadequacy and failure. Ask yourself, would you have felt better if you'd acted on your first instinct, which was to run from that presentation you were giving your colleagues? Or would you have felt better if you'd recognised those feelings and reasoned with yourself

Being aware of how we react to various emotions is really important

about the actual danger you felt you were in, then used the heightened state of awareness to give an improved performance?

Thoughts and actions

It's clear from the above example that our emotions affect the way we think and act. They can prioritise our thoughts and our actions, so being aware of how we react

to various emotions is really important. Once you've learnt to identify these feelings you can learn how to understand them, reason around and manage them.

This ability to perceive, comprehend and reason around your emotions is key to emotional intelligence. Researchers have shown that negative emotions and moods are linked to negative thoughts, which can trigger chains of other symptoms and plunge a person back into downward spirals of depression. So learning to recognise these patterns and links right at the beginning can be effective in helping you to prevent them from spiralling out of control.

Emotions and moods are different in that emotions are shorter lived and more intense and occur as a response to a specific stimulus. They communicate basic feeling states between individuals and are accompanied by facial expressions, consistent changes in your autonomic nervous system and subjective feelings.

Returning to our example of fear – it will be accompanied by facial changes, autonomic changes, which will give rise to increased heart rate and sweating and a feeling of 'being frightened'. Emotions can be prolonged into a mood and can result in a mood change.

We show our emotions in a number of ways, most of which is non verbal.

Researchers believe that about 90% of emotional communication is non-verbal. Facial expressions, the quality and tone of a voice, the inner depths of your eyes, all give out clues to emotions such as happiness, fear, sadness,

It's easy in this modern, high-speed world to ignore the state of our own emotional wellbeing

disgust and anger. Body language and non verbal communication play a big part in this basic step of perceiving emotions in others. So if we are stressed or too busy it's easy to see how we can 'miss' vital signs displayed by those around us.

As far as your own emotions are concerned, the physiological changes, such as those in your stress hormones, endorphin release, heart rate and muscle tension all give important clues and send messages to your brain about your own emotional state. But that needs to be listened to. It's easy in this modern, high-speed world to ignore the state of our own emotional wellbeing.

Discovering your level of Emotional Intelligence may be more important than scoring highly in an EI test.

Simply knowing that this subtle information exists, and that some people can read it more easily than others, can make you aware of when to ask for help from those who are more emotionally perceptive. As with everything in life, we will all be able to tune into our emotions at different levels and we'll each be more aware in certain areas than in others. There may also be gender differences. For example women are often thought of as 'more intuitive'

than men and can often pick up unspoken communication more effectively, but they suffer twice the rate of depression and are less able to manage moods.

Time to tune in

Over the years you may have got 'into the habit' of tuning out your emotions, or not showing your feelings. We hope that this article will encourage you to tune back in and become aware of your reactions to various situations in life. And, as with most

things, having knowledge empowers you to change your situation. Let us know what you think.

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Stitchlinks Tips

- *Tune into your emotions as you knit or stitch. Think about the valuable information they're giving you and act on them.*
 - *Make a list of five negative thoughts that you regularly have. Under each thought write down a different way of looking at the problem.*
 - *Think of five positive things that have happened today. Make yourself write down five, however small. Do this every day this month.*
 - *Take one of your negative thoughts and look at it within the context of worldwide events. Ask yourself if it is really important within the pattern of events and try to place it in perspective.*
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