

Gray Matters on Emotional Intelligence; Part 1 of 2

by Leslie Gray, LCMHC

I would like to share with you a little-known fact about emotions. But before I do, please take a moment to *go inside of your Self* and consider the range of emotions you typically experience. Let these different emotions play out a little and notice how they vary; the way they physically feel, what causes them to show up when they do, and even how you feel toward them. You may find that you have a particular affinity for some while you downright loath others.

Consider happiness, for instance. Who doesn't love feeling happy? In fact, we love this emotion so much that we go out of our way to feel it. We make plans, creating situations where we believe we might get the chance to experience it. And sometimes, we feel great disappointment (a different but equally valuable emotion) when those plans do not work out or fail to produce the happiness we had anticipated.

On the other hand, consider jealousy. Notice how you feel inside just seeing this emotion in writing. The word itself is ugly, let alone how it might make us feel. Where does the feeling of jealousy show up in your body? What does it feel like? And again, how do you feel toward it?

You might find that you have some rather strong opinions about emotions--your own as well as the emotions of others. And while that makes perfect sense, (let's face it, some emotions are really tough to take, whether you are the one feeling them or are on the receiving end of them) there is something you should know that just might improve your emotional experience.

Emotions are neither positive nor negative--good nor bad; they are merely functional. You might be asking how this could possibly be true. A list of 'negative' emotions might be popping into your head right now: anger, disgust, shame... Of *course* these emotions feel negative compared to others such as joy, pride, and gratitude. But in reality, they all serve a valuable purpose. It is not possible for a person to feel joyful all the time, nor is it appropriate. Our emotions show up in different situations to help us, motivate us, provide fuel and encouragement to affect some action or change, offer protection and Self-preservation... the list goes on. If you are celebrating a happy occasion, joy is perfectly appropriate, but what about when you are at a funeral? Joy does not possess the qualities of sadness to allow for the process of grief to occur and grieving is how we are able to adapt to loss for survival purposes. On the other hand, sadness would not be necessarily appropriate at a joyous occasion, either. Unless, of course, you have something sad going on in your life and you are trying to engage in a joyful event despite your sadness. As you can see, they each serve a valuable purpose in the various events and circumstances of our lives. And as the latter example demonstrates, emotions can also be quite complicated.

Consider an emotion such as frustration. Think about a recent time when you felt really frustrated with some thing or another, (or maybe *someone*). What did your frustration get you to do? Maybe it motivated you to take some action to address a problem. How did it do that? By making you feel *frustrated*. In other words, it made you really uncomfortable so that you would be motivated to take some action to resolve the issue which, in turn, alleviated the feeling of frustration. Functional. And, quite frankly, clever.

If you are so inclined, do keep this internal exploration going. Start paying close attention to your emotional experiences, bringing in some curiosity about them and what they are trying to do *for you*.

Next month's article will unveil the truth about emotional *over*-reactions: why they happen and what you can do about it.

This is emotional intelligence: the ability to recognize, experience, and express a broad range of emotions in an effective manner. Emotions are not happening *to* you; they are happening *for* you. When we realize this, we start to feel a little more gratitude about our emotional states and believe it or not, those states will often relax a bit inside when they see that you are listening.

As explained so succinctly in a Cherokee Proverb: "Listen to the whispers and you won't have to hear the screams."

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