

## 3.1: Emotions and Feelings

### Learning Outcomes

- Explain the interrelationships among emotions and feelings.
- Describe emotional awareness and its importance to interpersonal communication.
- Differentiate between “I” and “You” statements.
- Explain the concept of emotional intelligence.

To start our examination of the idea of emotions and feelings and how they relate to harmony and discord in a relationship, it’s important to differentiate between emotions and feelings. Emotions are our reactions to stimuli in the outside environment. **Emotions**, therefore, can be objectively measured by blood flow, brain activity, and nonverbal reactions to things. **Feelings**, on the other hand, are the responses to thoughts and interpretations given to emotions based on experiences, memory, expectations, and personality. So, there is an inherent relationship between emotions and feelings, but we do differentiate between them. Table 3.1.1 breaks down the differences between the two concepts.

Table 3.1.1: The Differences of Emotions and Feelings

Feelings:	Emotions:
Feelings tell us “ <b>how to live.</b> ”	Emotions tell us <b>what</b> we “ <b>like</b> ” and “ <b>dislike.</b> ”
Feelings state: “There is a <b>right</b> and <b>wrong</b> way <b>to be.</b> ”	Emotions state: “There are <b>good</b> and <b>bad</b> actions.”
Feelings state: “ <b>your emotions matter.</b> ”	Emotions state: “ <b>The external world matters.</b> ”
Feelings establish our <b>long-term attitude</b> toward reality.	Emotions establish our <b>initial attitude</b> toward reality.
Feelings alert us to <b>anticipated dangers</b> and prepares us for action.	Emotions alert us to <b>immediate dangers</b> and prepare us for action.
Feelings ensure <b>long-term survival</b> of self (body and mind).	Emotions ensure <b>immediate survival</b> of self (body and mind).
<b>Feelings are Low-key</b> but <b>Sustainable.</b>	<b>Emotions are Intense</b> but <b>Temporary.</b>
<b>Happiness:</b> is a feeling.	<b>Joy:</b> is an emotion.
<b>Worry:</b> is a feeling.	<b>Fear:</b> is an emotion.
<b>Contentment:</b> is a feeling.	<b>Enthusiasm:</b> is an emotion.
<b>Bitterness:</b> is a feeling.	<b>Anger:</b> is an emotion.
<b>Love:</b> is a feeling.	<b>Lust:</b> is an emotion.
<b>Depression:</b> is a feeling.	<b>Sadness:</b> is an emotion.

It’s important to understand that we are all allowed to be emotional beings. Being emotional is an inherent part of being a human. For this reason, it’s important to avoid phrases like “don’t feel that way” or “they have no right to feel that way.” Again, our emotions are our emotions, and, when we negate someone else’s emotions, we are negating that person as an individual and taking away their right to emotional responses. At the same time, though, no one else can make you “feel” a specific way. Our emotions are our emotions. They are how we interpret and cope with life. A person may set up a context where you experience an emotion, but you are the one who is still experiencing that emotion and allowing yourself to experience that emotion. If you don’t like “feeling” a specific way, then change it. We all have the ability to alter our emotions. Altering our emotional states (in a proactive way) is how we get through life. Maybe you just broke up with someone, and listening to music helps you work through the grief you are experiencing to get to a better place. For others, they need to openly communicate about how they are feeling in an effort to process and work through emotions. The worst thing a person can do is attempt to deny that the emotion exists.

Think of this like a balloon. With each breath of air you blow into the balloon, you are bottling up more and more emotions. Eventually, that balloon will get to a point where it cannot handle any more air in it before it explodes. Humans can be the same way with emotions when we bottle them up inside. The final breath of air in our emotional balloon doesn’t have to be big or

intense. However, it can still cause tremendous emotional outpouring that is often very damaging to the person and their interpersonal relationships with others.

Other research has demonstrated that handling negative emotions during conflicts within a marriage (especially on the part of the wife) can lead to faster de-escalations of conflicts and faster conflict mediation between spouses.<sup>16</sup>

## Emotional Awareness

Sadly, many people are just completely unaware of their own emotions. **Emotional awareness**, or an individual's ability to clearly express, in words, what they are feeling and why, is an extremely important factor in effective interpersonal communication. Unfortunately, our emotional vocabulary is often quite limited. One extreme version of not having an emotional vocabulary is called **alexithymia**, "a general deficit in emotional vocabulary—the ability to identify emotional feelings, differentiate emotional states from physical sensations, communicate feelings to others, and process emotion in a meaningful way."<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, there are many people who can accurately differentiate emotional states but lack the actual vocabulary for a wide range of different emotions. For some people, their emotional vocabulary may consist of good, bad, angry, and fine. Learning how to communicate one's emotions is very important for effective interpersonal relationships.<sup>18</sup> First, it's important to distinguish between our emotional states and how we interpret an emotional state. For example, you can feel sad or depressed, but you really cannot feel alienated. Your sadness and depression may lead you to perceive yourself as alienated, but alienation is a perception of one's self and not an actual emotional state. There are several evaluative terms that people ascribe themselves (usually in the process of blaming others for their feelings) that they label emotions, but which are in actuality evaluations and not emotions. Table 3.1.2: presents a list of common evaluative words that people confuse for emotional states.

Table 3.1.2: Evaluative Words Confused for Emotions

Abandoned	Cornered	Mistreated	Scorned
Abused	Devalued	Misunderstood	Taken for granted
Affronted	Diminished	Neglected	Threatened
Alienated	Distrusted	Overworked	Thwarted
Attacked	Humiliated	Patronized	Tortured
Belittled	Injured	Pressured	Unappreciated
Betrayed	Interrupted	Provoked	Unheard
Boxed-in	Intimidated	Put away	Unseen
Bullied	Let down	Putdown	Unsupported
Cheated	Maligned	Rejected	Unwanted
Coerced	Manipulated	Ridiculed	Used
Co-opted	Mocked	Ruined	Wounded

Instead, people need to avoid these evaluative words and learn how to communicate effectively using a wide range of emotions. Tables 3.1.3: and 3.1.4: provide a list of both positive and negative feelings that people can express. Go through the list considering the power of each emotion. Do you associate light, medium, or strong emotions with the words provided on these lists? Why? There is no right or wrong way to answer this question. Still, it is important to understand that people can differ in their interpretations of the strength of different emotionally laden words. If you don't know what a word means, you should look it up and add another word to your list of feelings that you can express to others.

Table 3.1.3: Positive Emotions

Absorbed	Eager	Happy	Rapturous
Adventurous	Ebullient	Helpful	Refreshed
Affectionate	Ecstatic	Hopeful	Relaxed
Aglow	Effervescent	Inquisitive	Relieved

Alert	Elated	Inspired	Sanguine
Alive	Enchanted	Intense	Satisfied
Amazed	Encouraged	Interested	Secure
Amused	Energetic	Intrigued	Sensitive
Animated	Engrossed	Invigorated	Serene
Appreciative	Enlivened	Involved	Spellbound
Ardent	Enthusiastic	Jovial	Splendid
Aroused	Euphoric	Joyous	Stimulated
Astonished	Excited	Jubilant	Sunny
Blissful	Exhilarated	Keyed-up	Surprised
Breathless	Expansive	Lively	Tender
Buoyant	Expectant	Loving	Thankful
Calm	Exultant	Mellow	Thrilled
Carefree	Fascinated	Merry	Tickled Pink
Cheerful	Free	Mirthful	Touched
Comfortable	Friendly	Moved	Tranquil
Complacent	Fulfilled	Optimistic	Trusting
Composed	Genial	Overwhelmed	Upbeat
Concerned	Glad	Peaceful	Vibrant
Confident	Gleeful	Perky	Warm
Content	Glorious	Pleasant	Wonderful
Cool	Glowing	Pleased	Zippy
Curious	Good-humored	Proud	
Dazzled	Grateful	Quiet	
Delighted	Gratified	Radiant	

Table 3.1.4: Negative Emotions

Agitated	Dismayed	Intense	Shameful
Alarmed	Displeased	Irate	Shocked
Angry	Disquieted	Irked	Skeptical
Anguished	Disturbed	Irritated	Sleepy
Annoyed	Distressed	Jealous	Sorrowful
Antagonistic	Downcast	Jittery	Sorry
Anxious	Downhearted	Keyed-up	Spiritless
Apathetic	Dull	Lazy	Spiteful
Appalled	Edgy	Leery	Startled

Apprehensive	Embarrassed	Lethargic	Sullen
Aroused	Embittered	Listless	Surprised
Ashamed	Exasperated	Lonely	Suspicious
Beat	Exhausted	Mad	Tearful
Bewildered	Fatigued	Mean	Tepid
Bitter	Fearful	Melancholy	Terrified
Blah	Fidgety	Miserable	Ticked off
Blue	Forlorn	Mopey	Tired
Bored	Frightened	Morose	Uncomfortable
Brokenhearted	Frustrated	Mournful	Unconcerned
Cold	Galled	Nettled	Uneasy
Concerned	Gloomy	Numb	Unglued
Confused	Grim	Overwhelmed	Unhappy
Cool	Grouchy	Panicky	Unnerved
Crabby	Guilty	Passive	Unsteady
Cranky	Harried	Perplexed	Upset
Cross	Heavy	Pessimistic	Uptight
Dejected	Helpless	Petulant	Vexed
Depressed	Hesitant	Puzzled	Weary
Despairing	Hopeless	Rancorous	Weepy
Despondent	Horried	Repelled	Withdrawn
Disaffected	Hostile	Resentful	Woeful
Disenchanted	Hot	Restless	Worried
Disappointed	Humdrum	Sad	Wretched
Discouraged	Hurt	Scared	Sensitive
Disgruntled	Ill-Tempered	Seething	Shaky

## The Problem of You Statements

According to Marshall Rosenberg, the father of nonviolent communication, “You” statements ultimately are moralistic judgments where we imply the wrongness or badness of another person and the way they have behaved.<sup>19</sup> When we make moralistic judgments about others, we tend to deny responsibility for our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Remember, when it comes to feelings, no one can “make” you feel a specific way. We choose the feelings we inhabit; we do not inhabit the feelings that choose us. When we make moralistic judgments and deny responsibility, we end up in a constant cycle of defensiveness where your individual needs are not going to be met by your relational partner. Behind every negative emotion is a need not being fulfilled, and when we start blaming others, those needs will keep getting unfilled in the process. Often this lack of need fulfillment will result in us demanding someone fulfill our need or face blame or punishment. For example, “if you go hang out with your friends tonight, I’m going to hurt myself and it will your fault.” In this simple sentence, we see someone who disapproves of another’s behaviors and threatens to blame their relational partner for the individual’s behavior. In highly volatile relationships, this constant blame cycle can become very detrimental, and no one’s needs are getting met.

However, just observing behavior and stating how you feel only gets you part of the way there because you're still not describing your need. Now, when we talk about the idea of "needing" something, we are not talking about this strictly in terms of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, though those are all entirely appropriate needs. At the same time, relational needs are generally not rewards like tangible items or money. Instead, Marshall Rosenberg categorizes basic needs that we all have falling into the categories: autonomy, celebration, play, spiritual communion, physical nurturance, integrity, and interdependence (Table 3.1.5). As you can imagine, any time these needs are not being met, you will reach out to get them fulfilled. As such, when we communicate about our feelings, they are generally tied to an unmet or fulfilled need. For example, you could say, "I feel dejected when you yell at me because I need to be respected." In this sentence, you are identifying your need, observing the behavior, and labeling the need. Notice that there isn't judgment associated with identifying one's needs.

Table 3.1.5: Needs

<b>Autonomy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to choose one's dreams, goals, values</li> <li>• to choose one's plan for fulfilling one's dreams, goals, values</li> </ul>
<b>Celebration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to celebrate the creation of life and dreams fulfilled</li> <li>• to celebrate losses: loved ones, dreams, etc. (mourning)</li> </ul>
<b>Play</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fun</li> <li>• laughter</li> </ul>
<b>Spiritual Communion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• beauty</li> <li>• harmony</li> <li>• inspiration</li> <li>• order</li> <li>• peace</li> </ul>
<b>Physical Nurturance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• air</li> <li>• food</li> <li>• movement, exercise</li> <li>• protection from life-threatening forms of life: viruses, bacteria, insects, predatory animals</li> <li>• rest</li> <li>• sexual expression</li> <li>• shelter</li> <li>• touch</li> <li>• water</li> </ul>
<b>Integrity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• authenticity</li> <li>• creativity</li> <li>• meaning</li> <li>• self-worth</li> </ul>

## Interdependence

- acceptance
- appreciation
- closeness
- community
- consideration
- contribution to the enrichment of life (to exercise one's power by giving that which contributes to life)
- emotional safety
- empathy
- honesty (the empowering honest that enables us to learn from our limitations)
- love
- reassurance
- respect
- support
- trust
- understanding
- warmth

## Emotional Intelligence

In Chapter 3, we first discussed the concept of emotional intelligence. However, it's important to revisit this concept before we move on. In Chapter 3, we defined **emotional intelligence** (EQ) as an individual's appraisal and expression of their emotions and the emotions of others in a manner that enhances thought, living, and communicative interactions. Furthermore, we learned that EQ is built by four distinct emotional processes: perceiving, understanding, managing, and using emotions.<sup>20</sup> Although we are talking about the importance of EQ, take a minute and complete Table 3.1.6, which is a simple 20- item questionnaire designed to help you evaluate your own EQ.

### ✓ Example: Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire

Read the following questions and select the answer that corresponds with your perception. Do not be concerned if some of the items appear similar. Please use the scale below to rate the degree to which each statement applies to you.

Strongly Disagree - 1	Disagree - 2	Neutral - 3	Agree - 4	Strongly Agree - 5
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1. I am aware of my emotions as I experience them. \_\_\_\_\_
2. I easily recognize my emotions. \_\_\_\_\_
3. I can tell how others are feeling simply by watching their body movements. \_\_\_\_\_
4. I can tell how others are feeling by listening to their voices. \_\_\_\_\_
5. When I look at people's faces, I generally know how they are feeling. \_\_\_\_\_
6. When my emotions change, I know why. \_\_\_\_\_
7. I understand that my emotional state is rarely comprised of one single emotion. \_\_\_\_\_
8. When I am experiencing an emotion, I have no problem easily labeling that emotion. \_\_\_\_\_
9. It's completely possible to experience two opposite emotions at the same time (e.g., love & hate; awe & fear; joy & sadness). \_\_\_\_\_
10. I can generally tell when my emotional state is shifting from one emotion to another. \_\_\_\_\_
11. I don't let my emotions get the best of me. \_\_\_\_\_
12. I have control over my own emotions. \_\_\_\_\_
13. I can analyze my emotions and determine if they are reasonable or not. \_\_\_\_\_
14. I can engage or detach from an emotion depending on whether I find it informative or useful. \_\_\_\_\_
15. When I'm feeling sad, I know how to seek out activities that will make me happy. \_\_\_\_\_
16. I can create situations that will cause others to experience specific emotions. \_\_\_\_\_
17. I can use my understanding of emotions to have more productive interactions with others. \_\_\_\_\_

18. I know how to make other people happy or sad. \_\_\_\_\_
19. I often lift people's spirits when they are feeling down. \_\_\_\_\_
20. I know how to generate negative emotions and enhance pleasant ones in my interactions with others. \_\_\_\_\_

### Scoring

Understanding Emotions	Add scores for items 6, 7, 8, 9, & 10 = _____
Managing Emotions	Add scores for items 11, 12, 13, 14, & 15 = _____
Using Emotions	Add scores for items 16, 17, 18, 19, & 20 = _____

### Interpretation

Each of the four parts of the EQ Model can have a range of 5 to 25.

Scores under 11 represent low levels of EQ for each aspect.

Scores between 12 and 18 represent average levels of EQ.

Scores 19 and higher represent high levels of EQ.

### Research Spotlight



In 2020, researchers Anna Wollny, Ingo Jacobs, and Luise Pabel set out to examine the impact that trait EQ has on both relationship satisfaction and dyadic coping. Dyadic coping is based on Guy Bodenmann's Systemic Transactional Model (STM), which predicts that stress in dyadic relationships is felt by both partners.<sup>21</sup> So, if one partner experiences the stress of a job loss, that stress really impacts both partners. As a result, both partners can engage in mutual shared problem-solving or joint emotion-regulation.<sup>22</sup> According to Bodenmann, there are three different common forms of dyadic coping:

1. Positive dyadic coping involves the provision of problem- and emotion-focused support and reducing the partner's stress by a new division of responsibilities and contributions to the coping process.
2. Common dyadic coping (i.e., joint dyadic coping) includes strategies in which both partners jointly engage to reduce stress (e.g., exchange tenderness, joint problem-solving).
3. Negative dyadic coping comprises insufficient support and ambivalent or hostile intervention attempts (e.g., reluctant provision of support while believing that the partner should solve the problem alone).<sup>23</sup>

In the Wollny et al. (2000) study, the researchers studied 136 heterosexual couples. Trait EQ was positively related to relationship satisfaction. Trait EQ was positively related to positive dyadic coping and common dyadic coping but not related to negative dyadic coping.

Wollny, A., Jacobs, I., & Pabel, L. (2020, 2020/01/02). Trait emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction: The mediating role of dyadic coping. *The Journal of Psychology*, 154(1), 75-93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.2019.1661343>

### Letting Go of Negative Thoughts

We often refer to these negative thoughts as vulture statements (as discussed in Chapter 3).<sup>24</sup> Some of us have huge, gigantic vultures sitting on our shoulders every day, and we keep feeding them with all of our negative thoughts. Right when that thought enters your head, you have started to feed that vulture sitting on your shoulders.

Unfortunately, many of us will focus on that negative thought and keep that negative thought in our heads for a long period. It's like have a bag full of carrion, and we just keep lifting it to the vulture, who just keeps getting fatter and fatter, weighing you down more and more.

Every time we point out a negative thought instead of harping on that thought, we take a pause and stop feeding the vulture. Do this long enough, and you will see the benefits to your self-concept. Furthermore, when we have a healthy self-concept, we also have stronger interpersonal relationships.<sup>25</sup>

## Positive Emotions During Conflict

Researchers have found that serious relationship problems arise when those in the relationship are unable to reach beyond the immediate conflict and include positive as well as negative emotions in their discussions. In a landmark study of newlywed couples, for example, researchers attempted to predict who would have a happy marriage versus an unhappy marriage or a divorce, based on how the newlyweds communicated with each other. Specifically, they created a stressful conflict situation for couples. The researchers then evaluated how many times the newlyweds expressed positive emotions and how many times they expressed negative emotions in talking with each other about the situation.

When the marital status and happiness of each couple were evaluated over the next six years, the study found that the strongest predictor of a marriage that stayed together and was happy was the degree of positive emotions expressed during the conflict situation in the initial interview.<sup>26</sup>

In happy marriages, instead of always responding to anger with anger, the couples found a way to lighten the tension and to de-escalate the conflict. In long-lasting marriages, during stressful times or in the middle of conflict, couples were able to interject some positive comments and positive regard for each other. When this finding is generalized to other types of interpersonal relationships, it makes a strong case for having some positive interactions, interjecting some humor, some light-hearted fun, or some playfulness into your conversation while you are trying to resolve conflicts.

### Key Takeaways

- Emotions are our physical reactions to stimuli in the outside environment; whereas, feelings are the responses to thoughts and interpretations given to emotions based on experiences, memory, expectations, and personality.
- Emotional awareness involves an individual's ability to recognize their feelings and communicate about them effectively. One of the common problems that some people have with regards to emotional awareness is a lack of a concrete emotional vocabulary for both positive and negative feelings. When people cannot adequately communicate about their feelings, they will never get what they need out of a relationship.
- One common problem in interpersonal communication is the overuse of "You" statements. "I" statements are statements that take responsibility for how one is feeling. "You" statements are statements that place the blame of one's feelings on another person. Remember, another person cannot make you feel a specific way. Furthermore, when we communicate "you" statements, people tend to become more defensive, which could escalate into conflict.
- Emotional intelligence is the degree to which an individual has the ability to perceive (recognizing emotions when they occur), understand (the ability to understand why emotions and feelings arise), communicate (articulating one's emotions and feelings to another person), and manage emotions and feelings (being able to use emotions effectively during interpersonal relationships).

### Exercises

1. Think of an extreme emotion you've felt recently. Explain the interrelationships between that emotion, your thoughts, and your feelings when you experienced that extreme emotion.
2. Complete the Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire. What areas are your strengths with regard to EQ? What areas are your weaknesses? How can you go about improving your strengths while alleviating your weaknesses?
3. Think of a conflict you've had with a significant other in your relationship. How many of the statements that were made during that conflict were "You" statements as compared to "I" statements? How could you have more clearly expressed your feelings and link them to your needs?

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