

Top Ten Ways of Honouring Your Emotions Starting Today

by
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1. 'Get it' that all your emotions are OK.

We are designed to have emotions. They have a purpose. They are our internal guidance system. We have ignored them. We are taught by our culture and our family to ignore them. Science is now showing us the value of emotion. People who use emotion and reason together are more successful and happier than those who don't. Look for a surround yourself with the messages that show yourself that emotions are okay - all of them. Some ways to do that is through books, other forms of reading, tapes, websites, friends, mentors, coaches, therapists. I have a resource list under tools section of this website and a list of books and links and articles below on this website that are a good place to start.

2. Figure out the message that your emotion is trying to tell you.

Yes. Your emotions are trying to tell you something. At the most basic level, through pleasurable feelings, they are telling you to move towards something; through unpleasant feelings, they are telling you to move away from something.

When pleasurable becomes extreme as in the form of addiction, a secondary emotion that is unpleasant will tell you this doesn't feel right. It will tell you there is an unmet need here trying to get met in a way that will not bring lasting satisfaction. Getting in touch with the need(s) and finding healthy ways to get them met is the journey to be made here.

When depression hits, the bottom line is that it is usually a sign that you do not love yourself as you need to be loved. You may treat another person with respect and love and consideration and would not berate them, but you do completely the opposite with yourself. The message is that it is time to treat yourself with kind thoughts to yourself as if you were encouraging someone who is just trying something for the first time. Watch your thoughts. Catch yourself in the act of negative and unkind thinking toward yourself. Replace the thought with a kinder and more positive thought. Try it as an experiment. See what happens.

On the more subtle side, when you feel 'something', ask inside yourself, "what is it that I am feeling and what is the message?" To stop and ask this will provide you with information. If you are angry, it may be a message to protect your boundaries. If you are scared, it may be a message

to proceed with caution. Trust your emotions. Trust your intuition. They will guide you more accurately than any other skills you have developed. As you practice, you will receive more information and at deeper levels. It really is a wonderful discovery process. Be sure to read *Emotions as Honoured Guests* by Stephanie Noble under the Articles section - other authors of my website. It is a wonderful description of various emotions as messengers.

3. Understand the belief(s) that are behind the emotion.

Each emotion we experience is driven by a set of thoughts or beliefs about ourselves, other people and the world around us as well as our religious or spiritual beliefs. The beliefs tend to be subconscious although we can access them if we make a point of it. Some of the beliefs will be health or accurate and some will be unhealthy, irrational or inaccurate. We form these beliefs from the time we are very young and when we see models such as our parents. Since all of us are not perfect, we will tend to adopt or form beliefs from unhealthy modelling. When our emotions seem to be a large reaction to a small event, it is a good idea to examine the beliefs underlying our reaction. Sometimes, we need help to uncover our beliefs. That is where a friend or coach or therapist can be valuable. This is an ongoing process of self-discovery that leads to a healthier and happier life.

A tool used in many professions is known as the ABC Belief Exercise tool. It can be downloaded from this website in the tools section.

4. Give your emotion a name and recognize where it is in the body.

The first step to increase our emotional intelligence is to develop the EI competency known as self-awareness or recognition. Some people are a bit foggy about what emotion they are feeling, mainly because it has not been modelled for them. The way to start developing this awareness is to be able to give a name to what we are feeling and to turn our attention to our body to see where we are feeling it physically and to be able to describe how it feels. For example, if I am feeling anxious about an upcoming speaking engagement to an audience of 100 people, I may name the feeling as anxiety and describe the feeling to be in the stomach area of my body where it feels like movement that is unsettling. We know that more commonly as having “butterflies in my stomach.”

In the beginning, naming emotions can be confusing because there are so many subtle shades and variations. We have many different names for many different emotions. The way to start is to recognize six basic emotions and initially name your emotions as one of these six. All emotions will fall under one of these basic categories. They are happiness, anger, fear, sadness, disgust and surprise. These are pancultural emotions experienced by everyone on the planet and discovered as such by the research of Paul Ekman. For more information on the work of Paul Ekman, see Ch. 16 of *Cognition and Emotion* on my website under Articles - Other.

Later on, you will gradually be able to identify the subtleties. Take a look at the *Feelings List*

under the Tools section of my website to help get you started.

5. Suspend judgment about the emotion and about yourself.

One of the reasons we do not know our emotions is because it feels unsafe to do so. We have been taught that emotions get in the way, have no value or that certain emotions mean you are bad for having them. This is simply not true. It is the judgment about our emotions that cause us to feel unsafe. This judgment is one of the key factors in chronic depression. It is a self dialogue that continues to tell us how bad we are, how not enough we are in some way. It is this judgment that causes us to run from our emotions. Some of us hide in alcohol, drugs, shopping, sex, gambling, obsessive-compulsive behaviours, or chronic illness. If there was only one change to make around emotion, this would be the most important one. The negative self-judgment is destructive, demoralizing and deflating. It keeps us from recognizing the truth, from feeling good and from developing our potential. Here is a way to get started:

1. Choose one day or hour and observe how many times you have a negative thought about yourself or something you did. How does it make you feel?
2. Now, for day two or even hour two, find a more positive thought to replace each negative one. This can be a bit of a struggle. Don't be discouraged. It is normal. The critic inside your head may get louder. Just ignore him or her and keep doing it. If you need to, pretend for one hour that you are allowed to replace the negative thoughts with positive ones. Go ahead. Give yourself permission. Now, after one hour, how do you feel?
3. Be careful that you do not allow a negative self-judgment about your negative self-judgment. This is the new process that needs to be implemented in your life to start changing the pattern of dishonouring your emotions. You can enlist the help of a friend or coach to point out to you when you are being negative towards yourself. Awareness takes time to develop. Be patient with yourself, but be persistent. In twenty-one days you can already start to feel the new pattern being automatic, but find a way to stick with it. This is where an ongoing coaching program can be of immense help.

6. Be compassionate with yourself. The emotion has a good reason for being there.

This is a tool to counteract the negative self-judgment. Remember how you felt the last time you were upset about something and someone was able to acknowledge how you felt was perfectly justified under the circumstances and they were sympathetic to you? Would it have helped you if they were critical? No. So is there any value in treating yourself harshly? No. When a young child falls down and scrapes the skin on their knee and they are bleeding and crying, is not your first feeling and action toward them one comforting it and 'kissing it and making it all better'? Do we not gravitate towards people who are kind to us? Yes. So, why is it you would treat yourself differently than this? We are all human beings who are trying to do the best we can with the psychological resources that we have. Think of these things next time you treat yourself harshly. Replace it with kind 'parenting' toward yourself. This will go much farther than criticism and harsh internal reprimands that you 'should' be stronger, better, more.

It is important to have compassion for yourself. This is not about feeling sorry for yourself. This is about respecting and loving yourself as a human being including all your strengths and weaknesses. You are just as important as anyone else on this planet and have just as much right to be here. This is about knowing that you are doing the best that you can do given your present set of skills and abilities and capacity. This is about honouring the "Godness" in you and about being kind to yourself. This is about treating yourself as well as you would your best friend or a friend in need or a person for whom you have the highest respect and admiration. The word compassion comes from the root "com" which means "together" and "pati" which means "to suffer". The dictionary defines compassion as "deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the desire to relieve it". Compassion is about treating yourself kindly.

Compassion is one of the main antidotes to depression. It allows you to see yourself in a kind light and with love. When I learned to treat myself with compassion and that included negative self-talk, I moved out of chronic depression that I have had for over thirty years. I have been depression-free for about five years now. There have been a few minor bouts, but I have noticed the shift in thinking that starts the downhill slide and have asked myself what I needed in order to avoid that path. In using this strategy, I have rarely slid for more than 48 hours. An amazing accomplishment that I never thought was possible. I believe if this method was taught, most people who suffer from some form of recurring depression would not have to resort to medication and extensive psychotherapy. This is one of the programs I now teach in my coaching practice. It is very rewarding.

7. Allow yourself to manage the emotion. This is not the same as suppression or denial.

Part of managing your emotions also concerns two emotional intelligence competencies put forth in a book called *The EQ Edge* by Steven Stein and Howard Book.

The first competency is called Stress Tolerance and is defined as "the ability to withstand adverse events and stressful situations without falling apart by actively and positively coping with stress. This ability is based on (1) a capacity to choose courses of action for dealing with stress (being resourceful and effective, being able to come up with suitable methods, knowing what to do and how to do it); (2) an optimistic disposition toward new experiences and change in general and toward your own ability to successfully overcome the specific problem at hand; and (3) a feeling that you can control or influence the stressful situation by staying calm and maintaining control. Stress tolerance includes having a repertoire of suitable responses to stressful situations. It is associated with the capacity to be relaxed and composed and to calmly face difficulties without getting carried away by strong emotions. People who have good stress tolerance tend to face crises and problems rather than surrendering to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. Anxiety, which often results when this component is not functioning adequately, has an ill effect on general performance because it contributes to poor concentration, difficulty in making decision and somatic problems such as sleep disturbance."

The second competency is called Impulse Control and is defined as "the ability to resist or delay

an impulse, drive or temptation to act. Impulse control entails a capacity for accepting your aggressive impulses, being composed and controlling aggression, hostility and irresponsible behaviour. Problems in impulse control are manifested by low frustration tolerance, impulsiveness, anger control problems, abusiveness, loss of self-control and explosive and unpredictable behaviour."

Strategies for managing emotion will be learned in the upcoming teleclass series of Honouring Your Emotions.

8. Recognize when your emotion is a heightened reaction due to fatigue, lack of sleep, hunger, time of day or even loneliness. Get your needs met.

In order to increase your stress tolerance so you can more effectively cope with the challenges that you experience in life, some basic needs have to be adequately met. This is where it becomes important to take care of yourself. I teach a coaching program based on the extreme self-care philosophy which helps people put higher self-care into action. There is a strong demand for coaching in this area because many people do not give themselves permission to take good care of themselves. They see it as selfish when, in fact, self-care is necessary to be available for others. The basic needs are exercise, adequate quantity and quality of sleep, good nutrition and an unhurried life. These four alone would keep the majority of us busy making changes. And they are extremely worthwhile.

An excellent resource available that will help you on the road to getting your needs met is in the form of an e-book called *The Main Thing*. There is a link on my website in the products section. I found it to be a useful tool for me and would like to pass it on as a resource for you.

9. Express your emotion by talking or journalling or talking respectfully to the person who impacted you.

Part of management is the expression, the action. Expression of emotion is going to come out whether we like it or not. If we do not know how to do it in a healthy way, it will get expressed by pain and illness in the body or by blowing up at a family member, friend or even the store clerk. Or it will be expressed by sarcastic remarks or digs on a person's character or by gossiping. The trick is to find healthy means of expression. Again, some of this is done in the first four steps. When the emotion is in response to another person's actions, the expression usually needs to take place in the form of telling that person how their actions have impacted you and how you would like to remedy the situation. However, direct, honest and respectful communication is the key.

Verbal and written expression of emotion has been shown to reduce visits to the doctor and subjects report an increased sense of well-being. James Pennebaker has been in the forefront in designing studies to determine the effect of emotional expression on health. He has focussed on verbal articulation (talking to another person) and journal writing. People who journal process

their emotions faster and move through any issues to successful resolution more quickly. People who keep their emotions "bottled up" have a higher tendency toward cardiovascular diseases, particularly high blood pressure that does not seem to respond much to medication. Men are more susceptible to cardiovascular disease than women. "Poor management of anger has been implicated in the etiology of heart disease." (Fredrickson, Maynard et al, 1999)

Expression can take verbal and non-verbal forms, such as the arts - painting, drawing, dancing, drama, photography.

It has also been shown that there are negative effects if you go beyond optimum expression. To ruminate about a situation increases unpleasant emotions and anger is intensified after cathartic activity.

So, obviously there is a balance between not enough expression and too much expression. We need to find our balance and our emotions are our guide. They will tell us when we have gone over the top or we have not given them enough expression. If you go to either extreme, it just won't feel right. Listen to what your emotions are telling you. You will be able to interpret the message in increasing awareness and accuracy just by asking inside.

10. Take appropriate action on the message. Avoid rumination.

Notice when you are ruminating. If you are ruminating, it is another message that you have not adequately acknowledged the emotion that you are feeling, have not yet determined the message in the emotion and have not taken the action that is right for you. When you do these things the rumination will dissipate by itself. You will not have to keep trying to convince yourself through some form of self discipline to stop rumination. This honouring of emotional process is a much more pleasant and organic way of ceasing rumination.

Summary

The above points are the path to honouring your emotions. To support you in your growth process take a free teleclass with me, download free resources from my website, subscribe to the five-minute Emotional Intelligence (EI) newsletter, phone or email me for a free introductory coaching session (20 minutes), or take part in one of my celebrated teleclass series programs to keep you on track. Honour yourself. Take care of yourself. Give yourself the tools you need to be happy. See below for website information.

To access resources that will support you in honouring your emotions so they will benefit you in your life, continue to visit:

www.johannavanderpol.com

This website is continually being updated with new resources and programs for you.

