

Family Tapestries Strengthening Family Bonds



Fact Sheet

Emotional Intelligence ... What Is It?

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For many years, it was thought that a person's intelligence (IQ or intelligence quotient) determined how people succeeded in life. Schools used IQ tests to choose children for gifted programs and some companies even used IQ scores when hiring. In the last ten years, researchers have found that IQ isn't the only predictor of a person's success. They are now looking at emotional intelligence (EQ) as another determinant of a person's success in life.

“Emotional intelligence is a different way of being smart. It includes knowing what your feelings are and using your feelings to make good decisions in life. It's being able to manage distressing moods well and control impulses. It's being motivated and remaining hopeful and optimistic when you have setbacks in working toward goals. It's empathy; knowing what the people around you are feeling. And it's social skill—getting along well with other people, managing emotions in relationships, being able to persuade or lead others,” (O'Neil, 1996, p. 6).

Emotional intelligence was popularized in 1995 when psychologist Daniel Goleman wrote his book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*.

Emotional, or social intelligence, involves at least five types of skills:

- **Self-awareness** is a person's ability to understand and be aware of their feelings and moods. Self-awareness helps a person keep an eye on their thoughts and emotions so they can better understand why they feel a particular way.
- **Managing emotions** This skill helps people display their emotions in socially appropriate ways. It helps one control anger, sadness, and fear.
- **Motivation** helps a person use their emotions to reach their goals. It helps them hold back their impulses and delay gratification to reach these goals.
- **Empathy** is the ability to understand how a person feels. It is different from feeling sorry for someone. It is feeling like “walking in their shoes.”
- **Social skills** are dealing with others in social situations. It is the ability to carry on a conversation and deal with other's emotions. It is being socially competent.

Both types of intelligence are important but in different ways. The IQ contributes about 20% to the factors that determine life accomplishments (O'Neil, 1996). That leaves about 80% for everything else. Research has shown that emotional

intelligence can make a difference in life's successes (O'Neil, 1996). For example, boys in the second grade who are impulsive and always getting into trouble are six to eight times more likely than other children to be violent in their teens and commit crimes. Sixth grade girls who confuse feelings of boredom and anger with hunger are the ones most likely to have eating disorders when they become teenagers. These children are unaware of how they are feeling and what it's called. So if a person doesn't have these skills, he or she can get into trouble, especially as a child transitions into adulthood. If a person does have these abilities or emotional intelligence, they can help one throughout life. These abilities affect everything from success in marriage to how well one does on the job. Emotional skills also help a person academically. Such skills as delaying satisfaction or enjoyment when searching for long-term goals are helpful to children academically (O'Neil, 1996). Children who can stick with tasks and finish homework or assignments do much better later in life than those children who are easily distracted and go off to do something else.

Emotional Intelligence is Learned

Although children are born with different temperaments, or how they approach things—social, laid back, intense, shy, etc., EQ helps parents and teachers work with these qualities so children can better cope in the world. For example, instead of protecting shy children from the world and catering to them, parents encouraged their young children to participate in challenging situations (meeting new kids, going to new places). They encouraged in ways that kids weren't over-

whelmed but used methods that gave the children the experience of mastering something new. By the time these children reached kindergarten age, they weren't shy. They weren't the most outgoing children, but they weren't the most withdrawn either.

There are some patterns that block the use of a person's emotional intelligence: fear and worry, avoiding pain, negative self-image, unrealistic expectations, and blaming others. When these blocks occur and emotional intelligence isn't used, people end up acting in unsuccessful ways. The goal is to be more informed about emotions and let them help overcome obstacles in life.

Much information has been written on the subject of emotional intelligence and sometimes sorting out the information can be confusing. The first step to increasing emotional intelligence is self-awareness. What are your feelings and why are you feeling that way? Although this can be very difficult for some, once a person begins to understand himself or herself, he or she can begin to develop other emotional skills, which leads to more emotional intelligence.

References

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