

# Emotional Intelligence

The ability to express and control our emotions is essential, but so is our ability to understand, interpret, and respond to the emotions of others. Imagine a world in which you could not understand when a friend was feeling sad or when a co-worker was angry. Psychologists refer to this ability as emotional intelligence.

## Overview

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to perceive, control, and evaluate emotions.

## Components

Salovey and Mayer proposed a model that identified four different levels of emotional intelligence, including emotional perception, the ability to reason using emotions, the ability to understand emotion, and the ability to manage emotions.

1. **Perceiving emotions:** The first step in understanding emotions is to perceive them accurately. In many cases, this might involve understanding nonverbal signals such as body language and facial expressions.
2. **Reasoning with emotions:** The next step involves using emotions to promote thinking and cognitive activity. Emotions help prioritize what we pay attention and react to; we respond emotionally to things that garner our attention.
3. **Understanding emotions:** The emotions that we perceive can carry a wide variety of meanings. If someone is expressing angry emotions, the observer must interpret the cause of the person's anger and what it could mean. For example, if your boss is acting angry, it might mean that he is dissatisfied with your work, or it could be because he got a speeding ticket on his way to work that morning or that he's been fighting with his wife.
4. **Managing emotions:** The ability to manage emotions effectively is a crucial part of emotional intelligence and the highest level. Regulating emotions, responding appropriately, and responding to the emotions of others are all important aspects of emotional management.

## Examples

There are many examples of how emotional intelligence can play a role in daily life.

Being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes - A large part of emotional intelligence is being able to think about and empathize with how other people are feeling. This often involves considering how you would respond if you were in the same situation. People who have strong emotional intelligence are able to consider the perspectives, experiences, and emotions of other people and use this information to explain why people behave the way that they do.

Considering a situation before reacting - Emotionally intelligent people know that emotions can be powerful, but also temporary. When a highly charged emotional event happens, such as becoming angry with a co-worker over some type of conflict, the emotionally intelligent response would be to take some time before responding. This allows everyone to calm their emotions and think more rationally about all the factors surrounding the argument.

Being aware of one's own emotions - Emotionally intelligent people are not only good at thinking about how other people might feel; they are also adept at understanding their own feelings. Self-awareness allows people to consider the many different factors that contribute to their emotions.

Clearly, being emotionally intelligent is important, but what steps can you take to improve your own social and emotional skills?

Here are some tips.

**Listen:** If you want to understand what other people are feeling, the first step is to pay attention. Take the time to listen to what people are trying to tell you, both verbally and non-verbally. Body language can carry a great deal of meaning. When you sense that someone is feeling a certain way, consider the different factors that might be contributing to that emotion.

**Empathize:** Picking up on emotions is critical, but you also need to be able to put yourself into someone else's shoes in order to truly understand their point of view. Practice empathizing with other people. Imagine how you would feel in their situation. Such activities can help you build an emotional understanding of a specific situation as well as develop stronger emotional skills in the long-term.

**Reflect:** The ability to reason with emotions is an important part of emotional intelligence. Consider how your own emotions influence your decisions and behaviors. When you are thinking about how other people respond, assess the role that their emotions play. Why is this person feeling this way? Are there any unseen factors that might be contributing to these feelings? How do your emotions differ from theirs? As you explore such questions, you may find that it becomes easier to understand the role that emotions play in how people think and behave.

Emotional intelligence is essential for good interpersonal communication. Some experts believe that this ability is more important in determining life success than IQ alone. Fortunately, there are things that you can do to strengthen your own social and emotional intelligence. Understanding emotions can be the key to better relationships, improved well-being, and stronger communication skills.

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