

Brief Fax on Emotional Intelligence

Jason T. Ramsay, Ph.D.

The term “emotional intelligence” is related to other terms such as “poise”, “composure” and “level headed”. Emotional intelligence is the ability to “hold your head while all around you are losing theirs” Like intelligence, it is a trait. Some are better at dealing with powerful emotions than others. It is a trait that differs widely amongst people. Some are very emotionally intelligent, others are not.

- The standard measure of how smart a person is –their “ I.Q.” (intelligence quotient) is not a very good predictor of life satisfaction, or success. For example, if you chose 100 people with IQs in the average range, their emotional intelligence is a better predictor of their life satisfaction and success.
- Studies show that having a “high I.Q.” does not guarantee success or happiness
- How a person copes with the emotional challenges of crises, rejection, disappointment and mistakes predicts, to a large degree, success and life satisfaction
- Emotional intelligence is not a fixed trait-it can change
- Emotionally intelligent people do not hide, repress or deny that they have emotions
- Emotional intelligence is about experiencing emotions, and using them to help in deciding what to do, how to act or behave and not make rash or hotheaded decisions that make a situation worse.
- Emotional intelligence is about learning how to not be overwhelmed by one’s emotions, but how to deal with them in a positive way
- There is a test called the ***Bar-On Emotional Intelligence Scale*** (developed by Professor Reuven Bar-On and published by Multi Health Systems of Toronto)
- The roots of emotional intelligence can be found in preschool or kindergarten in terms of how a given child reacts to challenges, frustrations and interpersonal conflicts
- There is a way of making a curriculum that helps children learn how to be more emotionally intelligent

Emotional Intelligence

Jason T. Ramsay, Ph.D.

Having emotional intelligence is being able to express one's emotions when they are in need of expressing, and being able to control your actions while doing so. It is not about being cool, or calculating or acting better than others.

Where Did This Idea Come From?

The idea of emotional intelligence (sometimes known as interpersonal or social intelligence) has been around since the time of Greek philosopher Plato. It is only recently, with the release of Gardner's landmark book "Multiple Intelligences" that the idea of emotional intelligence began to flourish. Gardner argued that there was more than one kind of intelligence. He argued that there were different types of intelligence that were equally important to success in the world. Some of the intelligences included personal (intelligence with people), musical, and spatial (artistic, design oriented intelligence).

Gardner broke personal intelligence into *interpersonal* (intelligence shown in managing interactions with others) and *intrapersonal* (intelligence in dealing with oneself-ones desires and goals). Both of these types of intelligence are captured by the term "emotional intelligence".

The term emotional intelligence was coined by Daniel Goleman, a psychologist and author. Drawing on diverse research, he argues that the most important skill is that of dealing with emotions. As emotions arise much of the time in our dealing and plans with

other people, emotional intelligence captures the ability to handle emotions and do well in relationships with other people.

What Goleman does not imply is the idea that emotional intelligence is about manipulation of others. Indeed the hallmark of emotional intelligence is compassion and empathy, both with others and oneself. He reveals that people who answer a certain way on a test that measures simple abilities that form in childhood dramatically predicts how successful, happy, and adjusted that person will be in later life.

The Roots of Emotional Intelligence in Childhood

There is a simple test that can determine, to a remarkable degree, how successful children will be later in life. The original version of this test was invented by Walter Mischel, a psychologist at Stanford University. It is called the *Stanford Marshmallow Test*. Offer a child a marshmallow, but then tell them that if they wait quietly for ten minutes, and not eat the one marshmallow, they can have two. Then ask them if they want one marshmallow now, or two in the near future, after a boring ten minute wait. Research has shown that the children who decided to wait were more successful, well adjusted, and satisfied with their lives in later life than those who chose the one-candy option were. These trends were remarkably robust. This is delayed gratification. How long can a person stay focussed on a goal when a half-decent reward is theirs for the taking right now? The children who waited also engaged in behaviors to distract themselves from the one candy option. They hummed, counted, looked around-did anything but looked at the candy. It is this ability to control one's impulses, and manage one's desires that is at the very root of emotional intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence and Empathy

Empathy for another, even when one is in distress oneself, is the hallmark of emotional intelligence. It indicates that you can sooth another, and engage in an altruistic that may only benefit another person. Children begin to develop this behavior on the playground-and show signs of it even earlier in the crib. If a child begins to cry, it distresses other children who are near to the crying child. Some will freeze and stare, others will begin crying themselves, a primitive form of sympathy. Some will attempt to soothe the child- offering a toy, patting the child, or trying to distract them. Children begin to show empathy near the end of the preschool years. At any age however, it is not too late to begin to teach to these capacities for delayed gratification, empathy and emotional poise. Research indicates that temperament can be changed, and it does not take something drastic to do it.

Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

The preschool classroom is the place where children start to become social creatures. Dramas are played out, toys fought over, and people's feelings are hurt. This is the hectic world of early childhood. In the preschool years, as we have seen, some of the capabilities that will help us succeed through adolescence into adulthood are being formed. This is the perfect place to create an environment that encourages emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is linked closely to language-the language we use with others and ourselves. It is through this constant internal dialogue that we attempt to control feelings and emotions. Internal language is a regulating mechanism. Think of a time when you were particularly angry. You probably remember a series of words or phrases that kept popping into your mind, or you said to yourself in an effort to anchor your feelings. Preschoolers are just beginning this internal dialogue. Research by people

like Martin Seligman, who coined the term “learned helplessness” and is the foremost researcher on childhood optimism has shown conclusively that it is how you explain events to yourself (called explanatory style”) that in large measure, defines your outlook on life, your abilities to succeed and your motivation. This is a large part of emotional intelligence.

“Use your words”: Some tips for promoting emotional intelligence in the classroom:

- One of the best things to ask an emotionally charged child to do is “*use their words*” to state their feelings and desires. This is one of the best interventions for a child who appears to be easily overwhelmed by their feelings. It helps the child understand that they can use talk to help regulate feelings that scare them. Ask them in the future to always think of a way to tell someone how they feel before the act on that feeling. This will highlight, to them, the importance of *thinking before they act*.
- A great group exercise involves having the children sit in a circle in the morning, and again before school ends and have them give one word to describe how they feel. This is most suitable for older preschoolers, but it is good to include the younger ones, even if they can’t offer a word. The activity lets the younger preschoolers know that this is what the big kids do. Eventually they will emulate the older children. It is also possible to ask for one reason why they feel the way they do.
- Another great technique that I have used with kids is an emotion recognition task. This involves offering pictures of other children with different facial expressions. You then ask the child to identify the emotion and offer a reason for why the character feels that way. Record the show then play it for the children. When an emotional event occurs, stop the tape and ask them to identify the emotion and what

caused it. Also ask for ways that they might change the situation so the character feels better.

- Another activity I have used involves breaking a large class into groups, and providing them with not-so-current magazines. Each group is given an emotion for which they have to find an example. For instance, one group might get “happy”. This group would then have to go through a magazine, find a good example of this and cut it out. Unfortunately, I have found that all the advertisements in fashion magazines tend to be used as examples of “sad”, “unhappy” and “angry”. Try to choose a variety of magazines.

Conclusions: Letting Things Unfold

In his book “Emotional Intelligence”, Daniel Goleman reported on the Yale/New Haven social skills project. New Haven is one of the hardest places to be a child in America. It is a poor neighborhood and has the highest per capita rate of HIV infection amongst women and their children. In the curricula at the local school, the youngest children are given lessons in self awareness, decision making and relationships. The lessons progress throughout the grades. Across North America, educators are realizing that providing curricula for emotional literacy and promoting emotional intelligence are a preventative measure. In recent years this has translated into programs that teach self awareness, relationship management and most recently, peer mediated conflict resolution. Although the children in the EC environment are too young to engage in an official peer mediation program, it is likely that they will be expected to partake in such a program. Encouraging children to recognize emotions, and be self aware early on is the key to

starting them on a trajectory away from the “curse of the young”: anger, impulsive decision making and poor self awareness.

References and Resources

Books:

Daniel Goleman. (2006). *Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam.

This is the book that synthesized a number of findings in different areas under the category of “emotional intelligence”. Readable but not simplistic, it is the best introduction to the concept of EQ. This also has a section on how to set up a curriculum that is informed by the concepts of emotional intelligence.

Seligman, M. (1996). *The Optimistic Child: Proven Program to Safeguard Children from Depression & Build Lifelong Resilience*. New York: Harper.

A classic in the field of child development. It is a groundbreaking book on how to help children explain the world to themselves in a meaningful, constructive manner.

Internet:

http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/05/18/090518fa_fact_lehrer

An essay on the relevance of the Stanford Marshmallow Test by note science writer Jonah Lehrer: