

A Little About Emotional Literacy – How it helps, and Why it is important

<https://www.habitsforwellbeing.com/what-is-emotional-literacy/>

General wellbeing includes experience of more and less desirable emotions. Less desirable emotions can be challenging to tolerate and the way we recognize, experience, and act on these emotions impacts our sense of self and relationship with others.



An emotionally literate person -

- can notice and name the emotions they are feeling and those they see in other people,
- understands the message an emotion is aiming to communicate (i.e. cause and effect),
- selects the emotion that they are experiencing and chooses what to communicate, and
- accepts emotions as a normal part of life and is at ease talking about and working with them with the people they trust.

Anger is a more armored emotion.

Anger is simple to identify. It can feel powerful to identify with our anger. (Primary Emotions)

Emotions like:

- **Fear,**
- **Embarrassment,**
- **Confusion,**
- **Sadness,**
- **Loneliness**

are more exposed emotions. They are more nuanced and can be more challenging to identify. It can feel vulnerable to identify with them. (Secondary Emotions)

When we avoid, cannot recognize, or don't feel safe experiencing secondary emotions we can "go to" the more armoring primary emotions instead. If we don't yet know we can tolerate exposure to our secondary emotions, our anger can feel stronger and it is tempting to stay there.

I imagine one of the reasons people cling to their hate so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with pain.

-James Baldwin -

We practiced **F-A-B** statements for awhile in our house to remind us to think further than just our anger.

I Feel _____ About _____ Because _____

"I *feel* angry *about* my brother going to his friend's house *because* I will be left here alone"

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Three Important Concepts:

Emotional literacy – recognition of our emotions is an important step for self regulation. Name it, face it, move on, repeat.

Emotional agility – learning to experience and move through the full range of our emotions is something we practice like any other skill. Learn to experience and tolerate all the different feels.

Distress tolerance – Less desirable emotions can cause distress. Our tolerance for distress can be increased with awareness and safe exposure. We can do this work when we feel safe and understood. Agree to exercise our tolerance for less desirable emotions to try to increase our experience and trust that emotions do pass. This is like exercising our bodies to increase physical strength. This requires effort and is often not intuitive. No one likes distress so we can also agree to support and be more patient with each other.

Understanding the value of increased distress tolerance and the chance it gives us to seek help from someone we trust or to calm ourselves before taking an action can help make the effort of learning to tolerate distress worthwhile.

One way to approach the value of developing emotional literacy and distress tolerance is to explore the flow from events to action and the benefits of giving ourselves some time.

<http://courageousgirlsclub.com/cgc-blog/2017/2/11/setting-the-groundwork-for-emotional-literacy>



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EVENT	EMOTION	THOUGHT	RESPONSE
Something happens	We have an emotion	We tell ourselves a story about the experience.	We take an action
We cannot always control what happens	An e 'motion' moves through us. We do not have a choice. An emotion is a signal. It tells us something happened. It doesn't last forever.	Our thoughts create a story that informs our beliefs. Beliefs last longer than emotions and can keep our big feelings going longer.	Our actions are a choice. We choose actions based on our thoughts and beliefs.
We can learn to seek and avoid some events and we will never control all events	We can get curious. We can learn to explore, recognize, and allow even unpleasant emotions. Again – they don't last forever.	We can adjust our thoughts and change our stories. We can take time to consider choices before acting. We can pick stories that allow us to be our best selves.	Ultimately we are in charge

This is just one illustration. Maybe you want to make your own family poster.