

Permission to Feel:

Unlocking the Power of Emotions to Help Our Kids, Ourselves, and Our Society Thrive

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(Summary by C.Bibby)

Part I.

Prologue:

“We all want our lives, & the lives of the people we love, to be free of hardship & troubling events. We can never make that happen. We all want our lives to be filled w/hx rxs, compassion & a sense of purpose. *That* we can make happen.”

“If you mishandled it today, and you have sufficient emotion skills to recognize that, you may do better tomorrow.” (chapt3).

Thesis: Emotion skills are the missing link in a child’s ability to grow up to be a successful adult.

A. We all have feelings more or less continuously, like a *streaming river*. And yet, bc 1) they seem so out of control & 2) unpleasant emotions connect us to our weaknesses & we have an instinct to protect ourselves by hiding our vulnerability: we go through life trying hard to **numb them**.

When we can’t recognize, understand or put into words what we feel, it’s impossible for us to master our feelings. Emotional intelligence/skills are necessary to a child’s ability to grow into a successful adult. The lack of skills impairs learning and adaptive functioning in all areas of life, including the ability to be successful at work/make greater income, family life and o.all health.

Skills are available! If we can learn to identify, express, & harness our feelings, even the most challenging ones, we can use those emotions to help us *create positive, satisfying lives*. Help cts **create authorship** of their own lives; help them take control of their own emotional destinies, w/o ignoring or silencing what is going on inside.

Healthy adults are open to experiencing positive and “negative” (**uncomfortable**) feelings. Parents & teachers must learn to use & model these skills if we hope to have children absorb them.

Emotion skills are a bulwark against the epidemic of anger, bullying, disengagement, anxiety, & dread in this country (p.170).

Author suffered repeated bullying and some neglect/abuse from parents; sexually abused by neighbor but pt. couldn’t talk about it. He responded w/raging, bad grades, GI sxs, self-hatred, bulimia, social isolation, becoming numb; this “was my form of expression” of his emotional suffering. Uncle Marvin gave him permission to feel.

Sometimes the tale isn't nearly so dramatic – just people who grew up in homes where everyday emotional issues were ignored bc no one had ever learned how to talk about them or take action to address them.

B. Recommendations:

1. We need a *wide vocabulary* to express our emotions.
2. Become an “emotional scientists” rather than an “emotional judges.”
3. Use **RULER**, w/particular focus on *Regulation*.
4. Developing emotion skills isn't about attending a workshop, going on a retreat, or adopting a “program.” It's a way of life. It's about recognizing that how people feel and what we do with our feelings determines, to a large extent, the quality of our lives.

(In this book, we'll use the words emotions & feelings to mean more or less the same thing.)

Chapter 1 + 2: Permission to Feel + Emotions are Information

Emotional sickness is avoiding reality at any cost. Emotional hx is facing reality at any cost. M. Scott Peck

A. Feelings are a form of information.

Our senses bring us new reports from our bodies, our minds and the outside world. Then our brains process and analyze it and formulate our experience. We call that a feeling.

B. They serve these vital functions:

1. Determine where we direct our attention, what we remember & what we learn. Emotions determine whether academic content will be processed deeply & remembered. Linking emotion to learning ensures that students find classroom instruction relevant. It supports students in discovering their purpose & passion, it's what drives their persistence.
2. Decision making. The grip of emotions (anger, sadness, elation, joy) strongly influences how we perceive the world & the decisions we make. We want to make informed decisions.

Our emotions exert a huge, though *mostly unconscious*, influence over how our minds function.

3. Relationships. Rxs are the most important aspects of our lives (Most important factor in mental health vs. illness. There's plentiful scientific research showing the enormous

influence they have on our well-being – pp w/robust social networks enjoy better mental & physical hx & even live longer, while unfavorable outcomes are ass.d w/a lack of connections to other pp.

The basic dynamic of rxs is approach or avoid, and what people do is a result of their emotions saying ‘approach’ or ‘avoid.’

4. Health. Positive & uncomfortable emotions cause different physiological reactions w/in our bodies & brains, releasing powerful chemicals that, in turn, affect our physical & mental well-being.

The difference bw good stress & bad stress mainly has to do w/duration and intensity (p. 39). Small amount of early-life exposure to stress builds resilience. Chronic stressors destroy it.

Even a positive mindset regarding stress can influence hx outcomes, from wt. loss to insomnia.

5. They *motivate* us to act. They give purpose, priority & focus to our thinking. Used for creativity, effectiveness & performance.

C. Psycho-physics

Ignored or suppressed feelings only become stronger. The really powerful emotions build up inside us, like a *dark force* that inevitably poisons everything we do. “Hurt feelings don’t vanish on their own. They don’t heal themselves. If we don’t express our emotions, they pile up *like a debt that will eventually come due*. (Chap1)”

D. Recommendations

1. Make a *conscious choice* that you & others have permission to feel anything.
2. Develop a **wide vocabulary** to express your emotions.
3. Be open to uncomfortable feelings.

“Perpetual happiness can’t be our goal – it’s just not how real life works. We need the ability to experience & express all emotions, to down- or up-regulate both pleasant & unpleasant emotions in order to achieve greater well-being, make the most informed decisions, build & maintain meaningful rxs & realize our potential.”

4. Do pleasurable things to create positive moods toward a positive “**cognitive loop**”.

We perceive & retrieve “mood-congruent” information most easily. When we do pleasurable things, they create good moods, positive thoughts & memories, which tends

to lead to good judgment, all of which tends to keep the person thinking about positive things. (study on p.25).

Chapter 3: How to Become an Emotional Scientist

A. Emotional Intelligence: The ability to monitor one's own & others' feelings & emotions, to discriminate among them & to use this information to guide one's thinking & actions.

The ability to perceive accurately, appraise, & express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion & emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional & intellectual growth.

EQ is made up of 4 (bucket of) skills:

(Bradberry & Greaves, 2009)

Personal Competence = 1) self-awareness & 2) self-management

Social Competence = 3) social awareness & 4) relationship management

EQ characteristics include: empathy, emotional stability, grit ("perseverance & passion for long-term goals"), resilience ("the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress – such as family & rx pxs, serious hx pxs or workplace & financial stressors"; emotional skills are likely the antecedent to building resilience.), perseverance, courage to take personal responsibility, work cooperatively w/the team.

B. Definitions

emotion: arises from an *interpretation* of an internal or external stimulus, often have >1 at a time, mostly short-lived.

feeling: our internal response to an emotion; motivational & relationship states that are steeped in emotion; more nuanced, subtle and multidimensional than emotions.

mood: more diffuse & less intense than an emotion or a feeling but longer lasting; can be the aftermath of an emotion (most typically, we don't quite know why we're feeling the way we are during a mood, but we are very certain when feeling an emotion).

meta-emotions: Emotions about having certain emotions

integral emotion: emotions directly caused by the actions at hand

incidental emotions: emotion that have nothing to do w/what's going on; infiltrate our thinking w/o us being aware

incidental mood bias: feelings that linger long past the moment that inspires them to influence subsequent bx w/o us knowing it

personality traits: our *predisposition* to feel, think & act in a particular way; feels like who we are, at our core; can change, but gradually over time & w/hard work!

C. EQ is more important to (& a better predictor of) success as IQ.

Your emotions will have an influence – positive or negative – on your rational thought processes. You could be brilliant, but if you're unable to recognize your emotions and see how they're affecting your behavior, all that cognitive firepower won't do you much good. *Together, emotions & rational thoughts* determine significant real-life outcomes: our relationships, our performance, our decision making, even our physical health.

This isn't a touchy-feeling retreat from reality. These are *mental skills* like any others – they enable us to think smarter, more creatively & get better results from ourselves & the people around us. EQ doesn't allow feelings to get in the way – it does just the opposite. It *restores balance* to our thought processes; it prevents emotions from having undue influence over our actions; and it helps us to realize that we might be feeling a certain way for a reason. Emotion skills *amplify our strengths* & help us through challenges.

We base most of life's decisions on how we think our actions will make us feel. But w/o emotion skills, research shows that *we are notoriously bad at predicting what will make us happy*. Many of us have spent time chasing the wrong goals or refusing to engage in activities that actually might make us feel better. We eat sugar to lift a depressed mood when exercise likely will do a better job; we engage w/social media to feel connected when we know it amplifies anxiety.

High EQ individuals hang onto their reality/perceptions. They *intuitively* know that well-being depends less on objective events than on how those events are perceived, dealt with & shared w/others.

Emotion scientists are better able to correctly ID event that cause emotions, and therefore, are able to screen out the influence of "incidental emotions" (carryover emotions from the past that infiltrate our thinking w/o us being aware & influence the current situation) and "incidental mood bias" (feelings that linger long past the moment that inspires them to influence subsequent bx w/o us knowing it).

Placebo: When we believe that emotion skills can be taught, we have greater faith in their ability to change outcomes for the better. If we think that our emotional makeup is more or less fixed and unchangeable, we're less likely to invest much time/effort in developing our own skills.

We're most vulnerable to emotion's impact on your thinking when *we fail to detect it*.

This will help us 1) get better data from the emotions; 2) function better in our lives; 3) be healthier; & 4) create a safe atmosphere for children to express their emotions.

EQ skills must be acquired. Nobody is born w/them all in place & ready to work.

D. Recommendations.

1. Evolve from an emotion judge to an **Emotion Scientist**.
 - a. Emotion Judge characteristics:
 - i. approaches emotions w/curiosity, openness & acceptance; attempts to evaluate feelings & deem them good or bad, useful/harmful, grounded in reality/figment of the imagination;
 - ii. tend to deny, defend & blame;
 - iii. rigid need to be right;
 - iv. wants the power to validate feelings or negate them;
 - v. usually afraid of hearing something dreadful;
 - iv. less likely to believe people can change (fixed mindset) & more willing to work at it (e.g. placebo).
 - b. Emotion scientist characteristics:
 - i. seeks to understand;
 - ii. comes equipped only w/questions & a desire to listen & learn;
 - iii. doesn't render opinions or judgments;
 - iv. open to being wrong;
 - v. skilled at reading facial expressions, tone of voice, non-verbals
 - vi. more likely to believe people can change (growth mindset)
2. *Don't judge* yourself for ANY of your honest feelings. All emotions are morally-neutral, neither good nor bad.
3. Do a *regular self check-in* to gather data & learn.

Evaluate your feelings honestly, w/o judging yourselves for having them. Every time you've successfully employed a strategy to regulate our feelings, we have to ask: That may have

worked (for now), but what did it accomplish (for the long run)? If you're not successful, learn from those mistakes.

EQ Self-assessment:

Score yourself from 1 (v. unskilled) to 5 (v. skilled) on:

- I am able to accurately recognize my own & others' emotions.
- I am aware of the causes & consequences of my own & others' feelings.
- I have a refined emotion vocabulary.
- I am skilled at expressing the full range of emotions.
- I am skilled at managing my own emotions & at helping others manage theirs.

Scores: Range from 25 (perfecto) to 5 (le worst).