

Focus on Emotions

Developing Emotional Intelligence in Relationships

What is Emotional Intelligence?

... emotional intelligence is the ability to accurately perceive your own and others' emotions; to understand the signals that emotions send about relationships; and to manage your own and others' emotions.

John D. Mayer

Two Aspects of EI

- **Self emotions:** The ability to recognize, feel and manage our own emotions in a positive way
- **Other's emotions:** The ability to recognize and empathize with other people's emotions

EI for our Selves

- **Self-awareness** – know what we are feeling and how that affects what we think and do
- **Self-management** – express emotions appropriately and control our emotional impulses and behaviors

EI for Others

- **Social-awareness** – pick up on emotional cues and understand the feelings and emotional needs of others
- **Relationship-management** – maintain and develop empathy and compassionate boundaries in intimate relationships

Low EI in Couples

The couple are unable to:

- Know what they are feeling and why
- Control their own emotional reactions
- Understand each other's feelings and responses
- Listen to each other without getting upset or angry
- Understand the nature of *mature love*

What is Love?

- Impossible to define completely
- Is not primarily a feeling or emotional attachment
- Is essentially a compassionate set of attitudes and actions—*love equals loving*
- Requires: Tolerance, Acceptance and Understanding

Facilitating Emotional Intelligence

- Listen for the emotional and motivational aspects of communication—the *What and Why* of emotions
- Ask questions about their emotional state—*What are you feeling right now?*

Facilitating Emotional Intelligence

- Help the couple name and label specific feelings—both positive and negative
- Use circular questioning to elicit and clarify emotional reactions and motivations

Naming Feelings

- Naming emotions (*affect labeling*) reduces the intensity of negative emotions and increases positive feelings
- Specific descriptions are more effective than general words and are best done out loud
- Learning shades of feeling and their labels helps self-awareness and self-control

Circular Questions

- Help evoke, clarify and amplify what a person feels in themselves
- Helps evoke, clarify and amplify what a person feels in relationship to their partner
- Helps each person understand the connection between their own feelings and the other person's

Circular Questions for Individual Feelings

- When you feel X:
 - How do you know you feel X?
 - What are the best words to describe that feeling?
 - Where do you feel X in your body?
 - What do you do when you feel X?

Circular Questions for Relational Feelings

- When your spouse feels X (or expresses X):
 - How do you feel in response?
 - What do you do in response?
 - What is the most difficult thing about that for you?
 - What do you want him/her to feel?

Circular Questions for Relational Intentions

- When you express the feeling X:
 - What do you want your spouse to do?
 - How do you want your spouse to feel?
 - What do you hope he/she will do?
- When your spouse does X:
 - Why do you think he/she does that?
 - How do you think he/she wants you to feel?
 - What do you think he/she hopes you will do?

Practicing Circular Questions

- Listen to the emotions and intentions
- Reflect what you believe the emotion is
- Help the partner clarify and name the feeling
- Ask both partners circular questions about the feeling
- Ask both partners circular questions about the intentions behind the feelings