

Message Received!
Don't Blue-Tick Your Emotions
#WellbeingWarriors

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Focus on what you are feeling right now. Happy? Sad? Irritated? Anxious? Or perhaps a mixture of emotions? Emotions are part of our human experience. To feel (at times intensely) is often what makes our lives more meaningful. However, we frequently prefer not to feel anything, especially when what we are feeling is unpleasant. People often say how they wish to never have to feel “bad” or “negative” emotions such as pain, disappointment or sadness. In general, people would rather try to avoid feeling any kind of emotional pain or suffering. The irony is that without these emotions, we would experience less connectedness with ourselves, others and the world around us. Our relationships would feel more fake than meaningful, and we would probably experience a lack of purpose in our lives.

In reality, no emotion is “bad”. Yes, it can be quite unpleasant when we are feeling a difficult emotion. But, if we change our perspective on emotions, we can open ourselves up to new possibilities and opportunities. When we start listening and responding to our emotions, instead of trying to avoid them, we will live a more authentic life.

Quote by Joshua Freedman: “Vilifying our own emotions is the single biggest obstacle to emotional intelligence.”

First, we need to understand the purpose of emotions:

Our emotions are continually [sending us messages](#). They contain vital information about an aspect (or aspects) in our lives that require us to pay more attention. Sometimes, emotions tell us where we urgently need to make changes to improve our wellbeing. Other times, they warn us to set boundaries in our lives, or they may help us become aware of how deeply we care for someone.

For example, You are feeling hurt, disappointed and sad. Instead of pushing these emotions aside, you listen and reflect. You then realise that you are experiencing your partner to be emotionally distant. You talk to your partner, who shares that they have been really busy with work and didn't realise the impact this has been having on your relationship.

Another example: For the past two weeks, you have been feeling irritable, tired, overwhelmed and anxious. Once you start exploring these emotions, you become aware of the fact that even though you received the exam timetable two weeks ago, you have not yet started preparing. This awareness and insight may help motivate you to start studying.

In both these examples, had you ignored the emotions, you would not have become aware of something important, and consequently not been able to make the necessary changes.

So, how do we go about responding to and managing our difficult emotions?

Acknowledge and Accept

We start by acknowledging and accepting all our emotions. No emotion is bad or wrong, and we can't stop having feelings. Our reaction or actions when experiencing emotions is what counts. We, for example, have a choice with what to do when feeling anxious – do we further procrastinate or do we start studying? So, instead of trying to push away or avoid our feelings; we acknowledge and accept them. Practising [mindfulness](#) can help in being more accepting of emotions, as well as teaching us ways of dealing with difficult emotions.

"I am experiencing an unpleasant emotion right now."

Naming emotions

Research has shown that once we can accurately identify our emotions, we already feel better, and can effectively communicate our feelings to others. Improving our [emotional vocabulary](#) will assist with this.

"I think the emotion I am experiencing is anxiety / anger."

Pause and Listen

Take the time needed to identify what you are feeling and the possible triggers or reasons for that. We may not always know where our emotions originated, and that is also okay. It is more important to accept these emotions and to "sit" or "be" with them, instead of pushing them away. The more we [practise listening](#) to our emotions, the easier it will become to hear the messages.

"I wonder what my anxiety is trying to tell me?"

Normalise emotions

Don't be scared of being honest with yourself and others about what you are feeling. All emotions are normal. Allowing ourselves to be vulnerable by voicing our feelings shows courage, not weakness.

"It is okay for me to be feeling what I am feeling. I am only human – all emotions are normal."

Constructively use emotional energy

The energy we experience while feeling a specific emotion (such as anger or anxiety), can be overwhelming. Learn how to channel that energy in healthy ways. Physical exercise, listening to music or doing something creative (writing/painting) can be beneficial in decreasing the intensity of some emotions. Once this energy begins to subside, we are better able to listen to and respond to our emotions effectively.

"Perhaps I should first do something to help me decrease the nervous energy; I'll listen to some music."

Communicate

When our emotions are connected to a relationship, it is essential that we communicate our perceptions, needs and feelings to the other person(s). If we do not communicate, it may lead to long-term resentment, unhappiness or conflict. Remember always to own your emotions, and not to blame others for them. You have control over your interpretations of events and actions.

“I need to tell my friends that I am anxious about the test tomorrow, and that I can’t go out tonight.”

Realise that emotions don’t last forever

All emotions are temporary. We experience a variety of emotions in a single day. You are not always going to feel the way you are in this current moment. Thus, you have already experienced “difficult” emotions – and survived them!

“I am only feeling anxious / lost in this moment; it will pass.”

Practise self-compassion

While we are experiencing difficult emotions, it is vital to practise self-compassion either by actions (such as self-care) or being more gentle with your thoughts. So, instead of self-blame or feeling guilty for your emotions, remind yourself that you are human and acknowledge that you are going through a difficult time.

Kristen Neff’s mantra is especially helpful during such times: “This is a moment of suffering. Suffering is part of life. May I be kind to myself in this moment. May I give myself the compassion I need.”

When we are able to see emotions as our “helpful messenger” instead of our enemy, we will reap the rewards of experiencing all of our feelings. Emotions will become our motivator, energy and guide.

Quote by Michael Miller: “When we suppress or ignore difficult emotions, the real victim is our own wellbeing.”