Emotionally Intelligent Relationships

What are They, Do I Have One, and How Do I Get One

Part 1 - Emotionally Intelligent Relationships: What are they?

Emotionally Intelligent Relationships- now that's a misnomer if I ever heard of one. You might be thinking, "what on earth is an Emotionally Intelligent Relationship"?, or "that sounds like something I would like to have and more importantly, how can I have one"?

An emotionally intelligent relationship can be any ongoing relationship that you have with a partner, co-worker, boss, child, friend, or family member where successful communication is the norm. Yes, it's as simple as that, but you might now be asking yourself, "what defines successful"? Successful relationships are relationships that are peaceful, calm, connected, compassionate, empathic, cooperative, open, honest, respectful, trusting, and loving most of the time. Notice I say *most of the time* and not *all of the time* because every relationship, no matter how successful, occasionally encounters challenges and pitfalls.

In order to experience an **Emotionally Intelligent Relationship (EIR),** it helps to understand how it all begins. In order to experience a successful relationship with healthy communication you must first look within. It all starts with yourself – the **"I" of "I-TO-WE".**

Lets try to understand this concept by breaking down the phrase *Emotionally Intelligent Relationship* one word at a time. For explanatory purposes, we will be stepping out of order for a moment by first considering the word ***Intelligent.*** This word refers to the mind. Your mind is the organ that generates your thoughts. I like to think of the mind as a radio with many different channels and a wide range of volume control. Thoughts are generated from your mind, and the frequency and volume of your radio determines the quality and intensity of your thoughts, as well as the type of energy released.

The nature of your life experiences and your interpretation of those experiences is directly related to the frequency and volume of your radio. There are positive channels (happy, optimistic, enthusiastic, peaceful hopeful, etc.) and negative channels (sad, frustrated, angry, resentful, fearful, etc.). It is important to know that you control the radio; the radio does not control you. You can always decide to change the channel or lower the volume.

Next, let's consider the first word in the phrase, ***Emotionally.*** As previously mentioned, the frequency and volume of your radio is connected to your perception of the experiences you have. So, the term *Emotionally* represents the energy that is released by your mind into your body, and experienced as a wide range of positive and negative emotions.

If the frequency of your radio is negative and the volume is low, you might experience fleeting sadness. If the frequency is *extremely* negative and the volume is loud, you might find yourself feeling severely depressed or angry. If the frequency is positive and the volume is low, you will most likely be feeling content or happy. If the frequency is *extremely* positive and the volume is loud, you will probably find yourself feeling ecstatic or overjoyed.

You project your emotions outwards as reactions. Your ability to handle your emotions without becoming reactive determines the quality of your communication and the health of your relationships.

Finally, the term ***Relationship*** refers to your interactions with others across a wide range of contexts and situations. Chances are, you have at one time or another felt the desire to improve the quality of one or more of your relationships. The number one reason people seek help with a coach or psychologist is due to some type of relationship struggle, whether it is with others or themselves. The quality of your marriage, the bond you share with your children, the success of your career, the friendships you build, and your connection to your family all influence your satisfaction level and degree of internal fulfillment with your life.

In review, your mind controls your thoughts, thoughts control your emotions, and emotions control your perspectives and expectations of others and the world around you. Furthermore, your perspectives and expectations influence the quality (positive or negative) and intensity (weak or strong) of the thoughts that are broadcast from your radio.

Everything works in a circular process and it is difficult to tease apart thoughts from emotions and emotions from perspectives and expectations. What does all this mean in terms of Emotionally Intelligent Relationships?

Part 2 – Emotionally Intelligent Relationships: The 6 Steps to Conflict in Relationships?

Ask yourself, why can't I experience an Emotionally Intelligent Relationship? The answer can be summed up with one simple word – Reactivity. In order to create an EIR, you must understand ***The 6 Steps to Conflict in Relationships.***

Allow me to explain. All of us have emotional wounds that can originate from four different sources. *Emotional wounds* are the aftermath of painful relationship experiences where your needs went unmet, feelings were invalidated, or emotional pain was somehow inflicted on you.

When an event occurs, your mind tends to interpret the event as a positive or negative experience. A negative experience can be anything from a parent minimizing or invalidating, peers teasing or ridiculing, or a boss telling you are incompetent, to a partner being unfaithful or inflicting emotional/physical abuse. Sound familiar? Unfortunately, these types of events set the stage for emotional wounds.

After these type of experiences, your mind begins a self-dialogue that creates *fear.* The fear presents itself in a number of ways – feeling insecure, unworthy, unlovable, threatened by abandonment, a desire for control, or mistrust. Fear leads to sadness, loneliness, anxiety, and pain that go hand in hand with emotional wounds.

If your fears become too intense, they can lead your mind to create the *twin pillars of distorted perspectives and unrealistic expectations.* The twin pillars skew your view of reality and blur the lines between past pain and present reality. Thus, you view events through the foggy lens of fear.

When an everyday issue, situation, or problem arises that does not match the distorted perspective or unrealistic expectation, it acts as an *"emotional trigger"*and activates the associated fear from the emotional wound. Triggers lead to *emotional reactivity* through a release of negative energy. It is this reactivity that causes most of the problems in relationships and leads you to behave in an emotionally *unintelligent* manner.

The intensity of the reactions is directly correlated to the severity of the wound and the intensity of the associated fears. Reactivity comes in two forms. People either react inwardly by withdrawing or outwardly by exploding and lashing out at others. Common forms of inward reactivity include avoidance, silence, and isolation. Conversely, typical forms of outward reactivity include yelling, tantrums, name-calling, and throwing or breaking objects.

I call negative reactive behaviors **Relationship Killers.** They include the following (and many other forms) of words, actions, and behaviors:

Mocking, Blaming, Justifying, Accusing, Ridiculing, Invalidating, Criticizing, Minimizing, Angry Outbursts, Spiteful verbal darts, Excessive nit-picking, Selfish demands, Disrespectful judgments, Emotional Withdrawal and Disengagement Condescending attitudes, Threatening Verbal/ Physical Behavior

Reactivity is the release of negative energy associated with emotional wounds and fears. Reactivity does not define who you are as a person. Unfortunately, because of the hurtful words, actions and behaviors associated with reactivity, it can begin to define the manner in which people perceive, respond to, and treat you.

An unfortunate consequence of your reactivity frequently occurs when individuals treat you in a manner that reaffirms your wounds and perpetuates your fear. It is similar to the *Law of Attraction* - you receive what you send out. If you project negative energy onto your partner through emotional reactivity, it is likely your partner will view you and treat you in ways that validate your fears, actions, and behaviors. This vicious cycle will not be broken until you understand *The 6 Steps to Conflict in Relationships* and learn to act in an emotionally intelligent manner. However, help is on the way, and change is entirely possible!

Part 3 – Emotionally Intelligent Relationships: How do I get one?

Change happens when you *gain awareness and understanding* of your emotional wounds and break your denial of their existence and the impact they have on your life and relationships. This process requires you to identify your fears, subsequent distorted perspectives, and unrealistic expectations. It is vital to understand how the twin pillars create emotional triggers and how the triggers lead to reactivity.

The next step is to *consider and adopt new perspectives and expectations.* Assume absolute personal responsibility for your reactive behaviors and accept the truth of how your behaviors create conflict. Then, create a plan and make a commitment to change. Don't worry, the process is not as difficult as it may sound.

For *outwardly reactive people,* the plan should include an internal check-in that identifies the physical sensation of reactivity. Most people feel a ball of energy in the pit of their stomach rising up as it moves closer to being released. For *inwardly reactive people* it is common to feel overwhelmed by a wave of emptiness and heaviness. It is like energy draining out of your body and loving feelings melting away, accompanied by an urge to sink deep inside.

Regardless of the type of reactivity you experience, when an everyday issue, situation, or problem triggers you, try to recognize the warning signs of trouble early enough to stop the reactivity and subsequent conflict. When you begin to feel the sensations of reactivity, consider that you possibly have a distorted perspective or unrealistic expectation and are not distinguishing between past pain and present reality. Understand that it is simply fear stemming from an emotional wound and allow yourself to think of new perspectives.

It is important to recognize when you are triggered early enough to insert some safe space between emotions and reactivity. It is helpful to learn how to *self-soothe* before the emotions reach their maximum threshold. Effective self-soothing techniques include deep breathing, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, exercise, taking a walk and taking a time-out to remove oneself from the source of the trigger.

In addition to fostering healthy and peaceful relationships, learning to self-soothe and circumvent emotional reactivity leads to increased self-respect, feelings of empowerment, improved physical health, and a peaceful soul. Have you ever noticed that when you take a time-out from escalating conflict and re-direct your attention elsewhere, later the issue that was the source of the conflict no longer holds the same power or significance? This is exactly why it is important to learn to self-soothe when faced with emotional triggers.

Well, that is my theory of *Emotionally Intelligent Relationships.* I know for myself that until recently, I had no idea what they were and now I am enjoying the wonderful benefits of being in a emotionally intelligent relationship, most of the time. In my practice, I have seen many couples in perpetual conflict make dramatic improvements when they worked to create an Emotionally Intelligent Relationship. I know you can too!

In the meantime, remember, that *your reactivity is not who you are, rather it is how you cope.* As a wonderfully unique individual, you have emotional wounds to heal. The more you understand them and know how to heal them, the quicker you will enjoy the amazing benefits of having ***Emotionally Intelligent Relationships.***

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