What is emotional intelligence?

While your intelligence quotient (IQ) can be measured, your emotional intelligence is more abstract—and maybe more important. Having emotional intelligence means you can recognize, understand and manage your emotions or feelings.

While positive emotions like joy are welcome, negative emotions like anger, sadness, fear and resentment that appear when you’re under stress should be handled with extra care. Having emotional intelligence means:

- **Self-awareness**—You recognize your own emotions, what triggers them, and how they affect your thoughts and behavior.
- **Self-management**—You’re able to control impulsive feelings and behaviors, deal with your emotions in healthy ways, and adapt to changes.
- **Social awareness**—You can understand the needs and concerns of those around you, pick up on their emotional cues, and have empathy.
- **Relationship skills**—You know how to nurture and maintain good relationships and manage conflicts.

When people display behaviors like being overly fearful, easily angered, having unrealistic expectations or blaming others, they often end up acting in unproductive ways. Luckily, everyone can build emotional intelligence and improve at overcoming obstacles in life.

People with higher emotional intelligence are likely to achieve success in work and life because they can control their emotions in challenging situations and are sensitive to the needs of others.
Managing your emotions

While everyone gets their buttons pushed sometimes, it’s best to learn to manage your emotions. When emotions control our lives, it can lead to anxiety, depression and poor health and relationships.

• If you quickly act on your emotions without thinking things through, you may say something you’ll later regret.
• You can change uncomfortable thoughts even though you may not be able to change the situation. Decide whether your thoughts are based on the truth or your view of the truth. Then try to find something positive in the situation.
• If a situation triggers an uncomfortable emotion like anger or resentment, step away and do some slow breathing to calm down. Deeply breathe in and out at least five times. Focus only on your breathing.
• It helps to let go of emotions in a healthy way. Don’t keep them inside! Talk with a friend, journal, meditate, exercise, or do whatever helps you release pent-up feelings.

Building strong emotional habits

Follow your own path
Don’t compare your life to others or try to be who you think others expect you to be. It’s easy to feel down when you think you aren’t as successful as others. Instead, think about what’s truly important to you in life. Take small daily steps toward reaching goals that are uniquely yours.

Strive for balance
Keeping an even keel can help make going through life easier. Even though you’re busy, it’s important to always seek a balance between your daily responsibilities and the things that bring you delight. If you can stay balanced, you’ll be better able to cope with daily challenges.

Let go of worry
Life is full of events we can’t control. If you’re often worrying and having negative thoughts about the world and your situation, you lose time, energy and happiness. It’s better to let go of things that annoy us in life, and focus on what you can do to feel good today.


Webinar—On Wednesday, Dec. 13, join us for a webinar, Human Appreciation: Cultural Awareness in the Workplace, focusing on valuing others’ differences. Register here.