

# Our Emotions

## What are emotions?

Emotions are dynamic. Emotions are a unique built-in technology for experiencing the world around us through our communities, cultural, and social lives. Emotions possess a phenomenal superpower, such that they can act as a time machine that takes us back to experience the past or launches us forward into emotions around future unknowns.

Emotions can act as clues and artifacts allowing us to identify possible origins of when, where, who, and how they occur for us. Emotions are shared and also live between the people we interact with. Emotions are both universal and diverse. We can experience emotions as individuals as well as experience emotions as part of the collective community, system, or culture we are a part of.

Emotions bring us closer to understanding our limits, our capacity, our truth, our possibilities, and what matters. (Values)

Developing an awareness (Interoception) and self-trust with our emotions is a lifelong exercise. Our truth can live in the emotions we experience and as a result we can embrace the emotions and honor them. On the other hand, our emotions can also be misled and become lost in translation based on how we label them or differentiate them from the shared emotions of the system we are a part of.

Both individual and shared emotions can influence our pattern of behavior or the scripts we hold in our minds. Our emotions can also be influenced by the stories and narratives that we tell ourselves. These stories and narratives are more commonly referred to as our beliefs. Our subjective feelings can lead us to turn away from the emotions and try to avoid, neglect, or deny them through a variation of mental and behavioral defenses or inhibitory actions.

Often, we can foreclose on understanding emotions, due to a misinterpretation based on our feelings and/or beliefs, as well as we simply do not understand there are other emotions, we may be able to tap into that may be more fitting for the circumstances. An additional influence on how diverse we allow ourselves to experience our emotions is also often influenced and reinforced by the community, culture, and systems we function within.

Our emotional responses can become habitual which can trigger repetitive cycles and induce an emotion into lasting longer than necessary. Such as "fear" or "anger" or "sadness" or "joy." The default emotion can then become how we "show up" most often and become the source of safety, predictability, and even comfort based on the influence of our feelings vs. honoring the truth of the emotion.

What should be recognized and honored is that emotions are ever changing and transient. The context, community, set, setting, and cultural norms play a tremendous part. Emotions come and go and that itself offers an interesting paradox.

The paradox of emotions involves the ability to embrace the full spectrum of emotions while also learning how to be open to letting them move through us and feeling that we will be okay afterwards.

## How do we embrace the paradox of emotions?

As stated previously, emotions are ever changing and transient. Emotions flow through us similar to how electricity runs through a home.

The emotion cycle begins from some form of stimulus or activation. Simultaneously our beliefs (stories, narratives, scripts, etc.) will respond to the stimulus, most often the beliefs will initiate a response through our emotions. Our beliefs will connect to emotions and flow through us in a state of arousal, eventually emotions can become visible to others - as a signal, are felt within - as a symptom, or discharge in the form of an externalized expression or behavior.

Said another way, energy flows in, flows through, and flows out. Unless...A knot occurs!

When the energy of emotions become stuck or backed up a knot may form. The knot can be something simple or it can become a complex knot that involves a multitude of threads.

# Our Emotions

## What are emotional knots?

Emotions can back up, build up, or discharge in ways that can become uncomfortable, unhealthy, restricting, and limiting.

Often, knots can occur, they can be physical knots or cognitive knots rooted in our beliefs. Both are more often due to a number of factors such as a lack of healthy modeling and mirroring from the environment one developed within. A lack of healthy reinforcement from family, peers, social, or cultural norms regarding emotions. A cumulative buildup of unhealthy or unfortunate experiences that contribute towards low self-esteem, diminished confidence, social isolation, etc.

In addition, a lack of emotional and psychological safety and attachment may have inhibited one from avoiding sharing their emotions. Furthermore, experiences associated with physical safety such as harm from others can become long term traumas.

The contributions from a multitude of factors can lead to a limited, diminished, or blunt expression of emotions.

From the very beginning of one's development emotions need to be activated, mirrored, and accepted. Cultivating an open and safe emotional environment is the foundation. Otherwise, a lack of safety and effective mirroring will contribute to challenges across the lifespan.

## How are emotional knots expressed?

Knots can look and feel different. Knots can manifest in many ways. For example, emotional knots can evolve into tears, crying, embarrassment, shame, grief, self-blame, impatience, and a lack of self-compassion within us.

Psychological knots, aka – stories, narratives, scripts, beliefs, etc., can take the form of intellectualization, explaining emotions away, or dissociation. Physical knots can be expressed in forms such as facial expressions, ticks, red in the face, tension in the muscles, fatigue, migraines, etc.

Knots can take place behaviorally through attempts to stuff them away, avoid, control, substance use, excessive exercise, diet, self-harm, etc.

## How do we manage our emotions?

The first step to cultivating a healthy relationship with our emotions is to get to know them - awareness. Understand them. Build awareness around what they are, expand your vocabulary to label them, understand when they arise, where they occur, and who or what may trigger them. Understand what may activate your emotional response. Understand the stories, narratives, scripts, and beliefs that may be tied to those emotional responses. Understand the patterns and context around when they take place, with whom, etc. Take a survey of the community, culture, and social influences to determine the impact those factors have on your emotional expression.

It is important to tease apart the difference between a trigger and someone who triggers our emotions. Others may be a catalyst for our emotions, although no one is a cause of our emotions. For example, if you rub two sticks together, one stick cannot be singled out as the one that caused the fire.

As you build an awareness and a relationship with your emotions then it becomes valuable to understand how you feel safe expressing them. Our body is a well calibrated smoke detector. The body will "chirp" when it doesn't feel safe. When we don't pay attention to the "chirp", the body will get louder until we pay attention.

There are times when the body has experienced trauma that our calibration can become disoriented and remain vigilant. For those situations and circumstances, it may take additional tools and resources to support your effort, although it doesn't mean one is broken or bad.

Most often, we express emotions when we feel safe to do so. When we don't feel safe, the nervous system kicks in and our protective mechanisms take over, we often implement one of many tactics to protect ourselves physically and emotionally. Furthermore, if we don't trust the other person, the environment we are in, or the situation taking place we won't be open and share/express our emotions. It is critical to develop the mind|body connection to cultivate our own self-trust. Aka, "instinct"

## Our Emotions

Said another way, we play a game of poker with others when our emotions are involved. We only lay down our cards when we believe the situation can be trusted. Otherwise, we avoid the risk, the vulnerability, the social exclusion, and judgment that may be used against us.

As you get to know your emotions and the stories, scripts, narratives, and beliefs associated with them, identify what safety looks and feels like, it will also be valuable to develop the skills to regulate your emotions as they come and go.

Emotion regulation is a practice. It is a combination of a "top down" and "bottom's up" approach. It involves planning and awareness. Building the knowledge, skills, and abilities is a lifetime practice that involves testing/learning what works for you and when. At times, "top down" strategies will help you navigate situations whereas at other times a "bottom's up" approach will be the most appropriate.

One approach is not enough. The complement of both approaches will empower you to navigate the dynamic flow of emotions as they arise.

Which also means, as part of your tool kit, you will want to develop and practice self-compassion. Being kind to yourself. While emotions are transient, feelings can stick and get knotted up due to self-judgment, unhealthy internalized talk, and deep seeded shame.

Self-compassion allows you to be open to the waves of emotions, it provides space to be self-forgiving, and gives you permission to make mistakes and try it again next time.

### Where do I begin?

Start by identifying how you want to show up...Start by identifying the stories, narratives, scripts, and beliefs tied to your emotions...Start by noticing when you feel safe...Start by surveying the various environments and systems you navigate...Start by reflecting on how culture, society, and social norms play an influence...Start by identifying when shared emotions are taking place...Start by noticing when you feel your body "chirp" and you don't trust the situation and/or you don't feel safe...Start by noticing how you label the emotions...Start by noticing how those labels impact you...Start by practicing different labels to understand the impact...Start by practicing self-compassion and kindness when your emotions go side-ways...Start testing/learning different tactics and strategies to surf the emotions when they arise...Start by being open to your emotions!