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Enhancing Emotional Intelligence



“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

– Maya Angelou, poet and activist

You may be familiar with the Intelligence Quotient, or IQ. We usually use IQ to measure how intelligent people are.

You may even have, at some point, taken an IQ test online to find out how ‘smart’ you were compared to your siblings or friends.

But what if we told you that there is a different kind of ‘smart’, an ability that determines whether you will develop great friendships and work well with other people, or have difficulty understanding and being understood by them?

Researchers have identified such an ability – they call it Emotional Intelligence.

In this short article, we will take a closer look at:

- **What Emotional Intelligence is**
- **Why Emotional Intelligence is important**



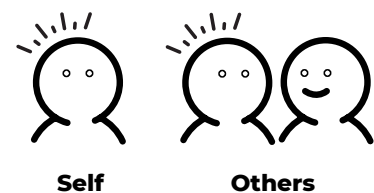
What is Emotional Intelligence

Emotions are feelings we experience all the time, such as joy, sadness, anger, and the all-too-familiar boredom. Sometimes, intense emotions can be overwhelming, and can change how we react to situations. For example, losing a loved one may cause us to be unable to do anything for weeks, and losing our cool in an argument may lead to an escalating chain of actions that ends badly.

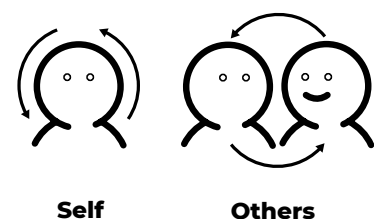
However, emotions are part of what makes us human, and are ultimately more helpful than harmful. Rather than suppressing our emotions, we should use them to our advantage. Having the ability to acknowledge and control the emotions we feel can help us navigate through school and life more effectively.

Emotional Intelligence is exactly that – it is the ability to be aware of and manage the emotions we are feeling. In addition, it is the ability to read the emotions of other people and use that knowledge to manage our relationships with others. You could say that having Emotional Intelligence is like mastering the use of emotions. Having Emotional Intelligence gives us numerous advantages, as you will see soon.

Awareness



Management



The Benefits of Emotional Intelligence

Currently, there is a large body of research studies documenting the benefits of having high levels of Emotional Intelligence. We have summarised those that are important or interesting below.

Avoiding Bad Behaviour



Let us start by looking at how Emotional Intelligence discourages youths from participating in activities usually not accepted by others.

In a research study conducted in the United Kingdom (UK), students in secondary schools were measured on their Emotional Intelligence while also answering other questions. Researchers found that students with a low level of Emotional Intelligence skipped school more than students with a high level of Emotional Intelligence.

Secondly, in New York City in the United States (US), upper primary school students answered questions on Emotional Intelligence and whether they planned to smoke cigarettes in the future. Students who had higher levels of Emotional Intelligence were less interested in smoking than students who had lower levels of it.

Thirdly, the Emotional Intelligence levels of Singaporean secondary school students were recorded and it was found that students better at managing emotions participated in fewer disapproved activities. Compared to students not as good at managing emotions, highly Emotionally Intelligent students were less likely to consume illegal drugs and alcohol, stay out till late, run away from home, and break rules.

Why is this so? The studies suggest several reasons. Emotional Intelligence may help youths be more aware of what others like and dislike, so behaviours that are not approved by a lot of people tend to be avoided by highly Emotionally Intelligent youths. Emotional Intelligence may also help youths cope with stress without resorting to undesirable methods. Indeed, a study conducted in Italy found that high school students with a high level of Emotional Intelligence were also highly resilient against stress.

Having More Friends



One way Emotional Intelligence helps youths cope with stress is through increasing support from friends. The ability to identify the emotions of other people and respond appropriately is essential to building strong friendships. No wonder, then, that emotionally-skilled youths are more well-liked among their classmates.

Can Emotional Intelligence determine friendships in school? A study conducted in the US says yes – even as early as primary school. Students took a test of Emotional Intelligence and were asked to choose, for each characteristic in a given list, a classmate who displayed the most of it. The results showed that students with higher Emotional Intelligence were chosen more often for cooperation and leadership compared to their counterparts with lower Emotional Intelligence. Furthermore, they were chosen less often for negative traits such as aggression and disruption. From this, we can see that the impressions people have of Emotionally Intelligent youths are usually more positive.

Why are emotionally-skilled youths more well-liked? Research on secondary school students in Greece tells us that youths who are high on Emotional Intelligence tend to have better social skills. For example, they may listen more attentively when their friends are speaking, or know how to best comfort a friend who is feeling down. This is not just true for students from Western countries – the same results were obtained for a group of high school students in Iran.

A common obstacle that stops youths from doing well in social interactions is social anxiety, or an intense fear of social situations. Some high school students from Henan Province in China were surveyed and a clear pattern emerged – the higher a student's Emotional Intelligence, the lower his or her social anxiety.

It is quite apparent by now that Emotional Intelligence is one of the most useful traits to have when interacting with classmates in school!

Achieving Better Grades



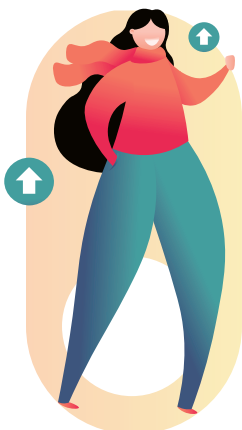
Speaking of school, there is also evidence that students who possess high Emotional Intelligence perform better academically than students who have less of it.

One such piece of evidence comes from a study conducted in Alabama in the US, which found that a student's level of Emotional Intelligence was related to his or her academic successes. That is, students with high levels of Emotional Intelligence tended to have better overall results than students with low levels of Emotional Intelligence.

In the UK, the Emotional Intelligence levels of 11-year-old students were noted down. 5 years later, when they took their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams, their results were obtained and compared. Amazingly, the students who scored higher on Emotional Intelligence 5 years ago were more likely to score higher on their GCSE exams as well.

This link between Emotional Intelligence and academic results could be a result of other benefits of Emotional Intelligence, such as having strong support from friends and a high ability to cope with stress.

Continuing to Excel



The advantages of Emotional Intelligence continue into future stages of life as well, such as university and work.

For many people, the jump from high school to university can be challenging. Emotional Intelligence can ease transitions to a new stage of life. For one year, researchers tracked a group of first-year university students in Canada. It turned out that students who dropped out before their second year of university had lower Emotional Intelligence than students who did not drop out. Hence, youths who already possess a good level of Emotional Intelligence are more likely to cope better in a new environment.

In another university in the same country, students were asked to complete tests of Emotional Intelligence during the first month of their studies. At the end of the year, the average grades of the students were examined. When the researchers compared the students who scored high average grades to those who scored lower grades, they realised the former also scored higher

on Emotional Intelligence than the latter. Thus, Emotional Intelligence may predict the results you will receive in university!

Lastly, in a pair of research studies conducted in Italy, it was also found that the higher students were in Emotional Intelligence, the more confident they felt in securing a job they wanted to do in the future, and the more capable they were of deciding the kind of career they wanted to have. As it seems, the earlier you build up your Emotional Intelligence, the more you stand to gain in life.

Feeling More Positive



Finally, the best and most straightforward benefit of having the ability to manage your emotions is that over time, you can have more control over how you feel in life and your wellbeing.

A study on Italian high school students found that those with higher Emotional Intelligence thought their lives were happier and more meaningful than those with lower Emotional Intelligence. Highly Emotionally Intelligent students also experienced more positive feelings such as joy or excitement and fewer negative feelings such as irritation or distress.

As mentioned above, Emotional Intelligence makes it easier for us to receive social support. Knowing we can count on others does wonders to how we feel. A study in Israel showed that Emotional Intelligence in students was linked to the amount of support they had from family members and friends. In turn, how much social support they received determined how satisfied they were with life and how often they felt positive emotions.

From this, we see a more general benefit of having Emotional Intelligence – by improving our ability to understand and handle our emotions, we can go about our lives in higher spirits.

Emotions are a Big Part of Life

At every moment, we feel something. What we feel has a large and direct impact on how we deal with situations in life.

This is not just the case for you, us, or only certain groups of people. Emotions are a biological feature of every person. We are all emotional creatures, and by understanding ourselves we can use this wisdom to understand each other and work better together.

This is why being the master of our emotions is so essential. By illustrating the many benefits of having Emotional Intelligence across various aspects of life, we hope that you can better appreciate the importance of being able to know and manage your emotions. We are hopeful that after you read this, you will be more interested in gaining control of your emotions.

Emotions are undoubtedly a large part of life, and we will all perform, collaborate, and grow better if we learn to live with them effectively.

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