

Why should we be thinking about our emotions?

Janet is 42 and has 3 teenage children and a pet dog. She works part-time as a primary school teacher and takes care of her mum who lives around the corner. Recently, she went into hospital complaining of double vision. She had some scans and was sent home and now, in the oncology outpatient department, her doctor has told her that the chemo she'd been taking hadn't stopped the spread of the cancer she's been battling and now it's in her bones, her lungs and her brain. She is going to die from this.

Take a moment.

How do you feel?

How do you think she feels?

What are you both thinking?

Have you had experiences like this before?

Is there a reason you feel this way?

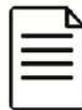
Emotional intelligence is a concept that you may or may not have encountered over recent years. As a term, it was coined by Goleman and later Mayer in the states in the late 80s and early 90s. Loosely, it describes one's ability to recognise, understand and manage our own emotions & recognise, understand and influence the emotions of others. It is accepted as an intelligence distinct from other areas such as academic intelligence. Mayer defined 4 emotion related abilities in one's ability to identify emotions, use emotions to aid thinking, understand emotions in context and manage or regulate emotions.



Perception



Cognitive
Integration



Contextualisation



Regulation

As a theory it's been widely explored and used within psychological and business-related academic studies. It's been shown that high levels of emotional intelligence correlate strongly with (amongst other things) better communication skills and empathy, better coping mechanisms in the face of stress, better leadership skills and career progressions as well as better satisfaction with that career. Perhaps most importantly for us to consider is the evidence that emotional intelligence isn't fixed but learned and that through directed study or self-reflection it can be improved.

Emotional intelligence hasn't been explored extensively within medicine or within educational spheres. It's my hope that we can explore its implications within the way that we prepare our undergraduate and postgraduate learners for experiences in the real world, both for better patient experience, and for their wellbeing and satisfaction at work.

Let's go back to Janet and the feelings and thoughts you were having earlier with her.

See if you can think about any personal or professional experiences that might have something to do with how you responded when you heard her story. Think about how you might best relate to her. Think about how you might best empathise and encourage her to share her feelings. Think about how you might best manage your own feelings so that they allow you to be there for her, and allow you to best protect yourself.

Throughout your career you likely have or will have many encounters with people who will stir up different emotions within you. Developing your emotional intelligence is one way to better use your emotions, helping you to build better relationships and understand yourself better.

If you're interested in learning more check out this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LgUCyWhJf6s>

and get in touch with me on Twitter: @SimonTavabie

References:

Goleman D. 1998; Working with emotional intelligence. New York: Bantam Books. P383, xi

Mayer J, Salovey P. 1997; What is emotional intelligence? In: Salovey P, STuyter DJ, editors. Emotional development and emotional intelligence: Educational implications. New York: 1997; Basic Books. 3-31