

EMOTIONS ARE A LIFE PUZZLE

by Marie Wall

Life can be very complex, with many components that make up our world and our relationships. Emotions are but one part of the larger picture of who we are. Feelings drive much of what we do, often from when we eat to what our purpose is in life. Feelings can be a puzzle in our lives. A puzzle has many shapes and sizes, and while each piece is distinct from the others, it may also have many similarities. And while each emotion is valid in its own right, when they are put together you have a complete picture. Being emotionally illiterate, not knowing what you are feeling or what to do because of the feeling, can affect a person's esteem. It can be compared to not knowing the language while living in a foreign country. With the world of emotions being such a puzzle it is worth the bother to become more aware of them. Emotions are the language of life.

Joyful and painful emotions are not to be judged as good or bad, but to be felt and accepted for what they are -- messages, part of the bigger picture. They are a response to some events in life. They are messages that help us know what is happening, or not happening, and they give us direction for what may need to occur. Emotions are the basis for much of what we do and how we live. Experiencing the vitality of life is the desire most of us yearn for. Emotions play a big role in this quest.



Emotions are the basis of the language of relationships. Love relationships begin by intense feelings that are sparked at the start of a relationship. Very few, if any, people marry because of logical reasons. Whether the marriage is based on true love or personal need, the basis of marriage is most often emotional.

The fondness felt when a friend is near, the bonding of fun and play between comrades, or the intense love for your child are experiences that draw on your emotions. This also plays out in the classroom, your like or dislike for a student resonates with an internal response. Relationships, decisions, and actions are integrally connected to our emotional state. While most of our actions are based on our invisible internal drive few people are able to name what they are feeling at any given time.

Feelings and emotions have often been given a bad rap. In the body-mind duel, we have been taught to pay attention to the logical side of a battle. The mind has been valued more than emotion and often people are dismissed for showing strong emotion. There is also a gender difference when it comes to emotions; women have more permission to express their feelings than men. As well, women are often expected to carry the burden of doing the emotional work within a relationship or family. The perception is that men either do not feel or will not share their feelings. These attitudes shortchange everybody. We all have feelings and are capable of relating to others, yet it does require skills that may not have been learned at critical times in our lives.

Many people have never developed a good understanding of their emotional world because they have never been taught to recognize what they are feeling, the purpose of feelings, or what to do with them. Feelings are most often judged as good or bad, thus it is easier to say, "I am feeling good today," or "this is awful." It is more difficult to say what is the good feeling, whether it is confidence, ease, or love. The same is true

when a person is feeling "bad".

Many people have a very poor understanding of their emotional life. How often have you heard someone say, "don't be so foolish", "get over it", or "stop crying". These statements discount a person's feelings and teach that it is not safe to express your emotions. It follows that if this happened on a regular basis the individual would stop trusting their emotions and sharing the experience with others. For the person who has discounted the feelings of another this is often the result of being uncomfortable with feelings or unable to fix it for the other person. It is easier to dismiss the experience than listen to the person. Unfortunately this response can play a role in breaking the bond in a relationship.

Being emotionally literate is a challenge today for many adults. Feelings act as messengers, internal responses to external experiences, which motivate us to action. Learning to pay attention to these messages, to what is happening and what action needs to take place is essential for a healthy adult. We have all used traffic lights to know how to proceed. Emotions are the traffic cop of our body. There are red, yellow and green light emotions. The thing about traffic lights is we learned what they meant and how to respond early in our lives. It did not need to be relearned when we got our drivers licence, we just knew. We did not all learn about emotions as we grew up. As adults it becomes our responsibility to learn. The red light tells us we must stop. There are also emotions that tell us to stop, such as fear, guilt or shame. The yellow light warns to proceed with caution, as do anxiety and tension. Just as the green light signals to carry on, contentment and confidence are emotions that encourage us to move on in our lives. The thing to remember is, just as the traffic lights change and you act accordingly, so do emotions. We must listen to the message of the emotion and take action. Would you ever stay at a traffic light for an hour just watching it change or would you move with the signal? It is also important to move with emotions. Staying in anger, shame or guilt will result in being stagnated in our lives. Feel the emotion, listen for the message and act.

Being able to share our feelings, needs and insights enhances our relationships. Some of the predominate emotions that we deal with in our lives are anger, sadness, fear, joy, excitement and contentment. Expanding your emotional understanding will give you more confidence in dealing with this important area of life. If we are to know the language of emotions then we need to know what they are and what we can do with them. This makes the puzzle easier to decipher and enhances the essential elements of life, relationships, with others and ourselves.

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