

Emotional Onion Tool

To improve your ability to manage stress, aggression, anxiety and other distressing, disturbing emotions, three things need to happen.

- 1.) **You must be safe.** (Resolve physical danger). Humans will not relax and remain calm when hunted by predators. If your life is in danger, seek safety before working on emotional management skills.
- 2.) **You must address your physical needs...aka health.** This includes brain health. If you have mood, concentration, or thought disturbance that requires medication, then taking meds as prescribed is essential. Get enough rest. Stop excessive use of caffeine, sugar, alcohol, marijuana and illegal drugs. Practice good nutrition and maintain an active, healthy, lifestyle. Adults who fail to address physical health and wellness needs eventually devolve into emotional toddlers who tantrum until they have a nap and a snack.
- 3.) **You must raise your emotional intelligence (EI) and practice emotional self-regulation** (stress management). As you increase your emotional intelligence, you practice more self-regulation and you decrease your toddler moments.

Emotional Dysregulation (ED): is the fancy pants term for a toddler moment (over-reacting, hot temper or melting down into a puddle of emotions.) These outbursts do not fall within the normal range of mature responses. ED is more commonly known as *mood swings*. Examples: angry outbursts (yelling, screaming) or tantrums (slamming, banging, throwing or destroying objects). ED may escalate to aggression toward others including pushing, slapping— aggressive physical violence or threats of harm toward self or others. These variations may occur within seconds, minutes or hours. Emotional dysregulation may lead to behavioral problems that interfere with social interactions and relationships at home, school or work.

The *Emotional Onion tool* guides you through a checklist of questions (peeling the layers) designed to transform distressing emotions such as blame, worry, frustration and anger into opportunities for insight and self-awareness. Just like peeling an onion, as you work through the layers, tears may flow.

1. First calming yourself down, then asking yourself the right questions (peeling the layers of the emotional onion) requires an ability to use your logic and reasoning skills. Accessing your logic and reasoning allows you to rise above the fight or flight response. Taking a few deep breaths brings oxygen to the brain, calming it enough so that it can think rationally....becoming more human and much less beastie.

Ask yourself a series of questions to improve your emotional intelligence.

How do my own thoughts and feelings influence the choices I make?

Exactly what is happening in this moment? (Observe the facts. Reality without exaggeration.)

Look for danger: Is real danger present when I feel angry or worried?

Physical cues: Am I triggered by hunger, fatigue, hormones, pain or another medical condition?

Now try this:

Create inner calm by taking another moment to breathe, relax your muscles, slow your mind. Allow oxygen to fill the nostrils, the lungs, and the brain. Oxygen calms the beastie brain. Let deep breathing soothe tight muscles, impatience, irritation, annoyance, and anger. Mindfully peel the layers of the emotional onion to transform your anger to insight.

As you attempt to peel your layers, you may notice an urge to blame someone or something for your feelings of impatience, judgement, irritability, anxiety, insecurity, jealousy, guilt or anger. *BLAME focuses attention outward* → away from insight.

“It’s only fair when I yell at you, she said to me once.

You had a better childhood.” Brian Andreas

I got angry because.....



“They are sinners! Evil! Devil Spawn!

“They made the mess!”

“They disrespected me!”

“They did not listen to me!”

“They were not doing what they were supposed to do!”

“They are always picking on me!”

****“Remaining angry, it is like drinking rat poison and waiting for the rat to die.”*** Anne Lamonte

BLAME → creates a cycle of justifying, rationalizing and defending your emotional upset, pain, or anger rather than using insightful emotional intelligence to process the information at a higher level. Blame locks your brain into emotional functioning at a primitive level—toddler moments of “Bam Bam!” “You bad”

It is true that people, circumstances, and life is not always fair.

It may be true that you are right, and they are wrong.

Perhaps they really did rotten, terrible things.

Now what? What is your intention?

Do you want to justify, defend and excuse your yelling, blaming, shaming, name calling and verbal abuse?

Continue your tantrums?

Do you intend to remain stuck in anger, blame and resentment? Become the hostage, ...waiting for *them* to change?

Or

Do you want to raise your emotional intelligence above the toddler tantrum level?

Would you like to improve your ability to calm down, think clearly and problem solve?

Would you rather use insight to transform your anger into a learning opportunity?



YOUR CHOICE