

Learn from the Wisdom of your Emotions Exercise

“Being stuck in emotional patterns can cause immense personal and collective suffering.”

We have been conditioned to think that having and showing emotions is weak or a sign of failure. Many of us were taught from an early age to be pleasant and cheerful and to bury emotions deep.

In fact, when we acknowledge and allow our emotions, they can be wise teachers. We can use our emotions as signals that help guide self-compassionate decision making. Becoming stuck in emotional patterns, however, can cause immense personal and collective suffering.

Here is an exercise to invite your emotions to be your wise guides, and not the enemy:

1. When you are feeling angry, resentful, sad, or an emotion you can't readily identify, pause. If possible, take a few minutes. Ideally, do this away from whatever is triggering you — perhaps walk into another room, step away from your computer, or put down your phone.
2. Take three full, deep breaths, with a focus on the exhale.
3. Tune in to which emotions you are feeling. Select the most prominent.
4. Take three more deep breaths. Allow that emotion to be there.
5. Ask yourself: What is the message this emotion has for me? Do I have a need that is not being met, by myself or someone else? Has someone crossed a boundary of mine? What might that need, or boundary, be?
6. Get clear on what your emotion is asking you to do. It might be that you need to comfort or reassure yourself. You might need to rest or go for a walk. Or perhaps, once the emotion has passed, you need to ask someone who has crossed a boundary of yours to change their behavior in future.

The more you tune in to your emotions, name them, and understand the underlying need or boundary, the easier it is to respond to whatever triggered the emotion from a healthy, authentic space. Again, if this is tricky to do by yourself, working with a coach or therapist can be rewarding.

With love

Sally