

# Building Emotional Intelligence (EQ)



By Paige Abbott, Registered Psychologist

Sana Psychological

[www.sanapsychological.com](http://www.sanapsychological.com)

[sanapsyc@gmail.com](mailto:sanapsyc@gmail.com)

## Introduction

This e-book has been created as my second gift to you all (the first was my [other e-book on self-care](#)). During my years as a Registered Psychologist, I have found that Emotional Intelligence (EQ) and all of the skills contained within that do not come naturally, nor are they modelled or taught to most people. Therefore, many are lacking in EQ and their relationships, mental health, and overall quality of life suffers. This resource is designed to give you an introduction to EQ and some tips and strategies to build these skills. I hope you will find value in this.

A quick disclaimer: This e-book is intended to be used as a self-help and personal development tool in conjunction with other supports, including professional therapy. If you have been experiencing mental health and/or addiction symptoms that are chronic, debilitating, and/or concerning to you, I would encourage you to consult with a healthcare provider for proper assessment, diagnosis and/or treatment. Self-help tools alone may not be enough to support you in your journey of wellness and that is okay. Remember, books and strategies are not a substitute for professional support.

Now that we have laid some initial groundwork, let us jump into the topic at hand.

Sincerely,

*Paige Abbott*

## What is Emotional Intelligence (EQ)?

Emotional Intelligence (EQ) was originally coined by Daniel Goleman. Just as there is an Intellectual Quotient (IQ) that has been developed and tested to measure people's cognitive abilities, various researchers have played around with the idea that there may be other forms of intelligence too. When it comes to relationships and communication, EQ is definitely more important than IQ.

EQ has a variety of components, including: Self-awareness, self-regulation (which we will combine into 'Emotional Skills' for the purposes of the e-book), motivation, empathy, and social skills. These will form the foundation of the coming sections of this e-book. EQ, at core, is how we identify, communicate, and handle our own and others' emotions.

Throughout this e-book there will be questions for reflection. These can be typed out if you have that capability in PDF, or written out. I do encourage you to write out your answers rather than reflecting on them, as there is added benefit to writing or typing.

As we get going, I would like you to do a quick self-assessment of your EQ. Rate each response on a scale from 1 (poor, no skills) to 10 (excellent, great skills).

**How are you at knowing how you feel?** (*Emotional skills*)

**How well do you communicate your feelings to others?** (*Emotional skills*)

**How well are you at motivating yourself to do something without much external motivation or reward?** (*Motivation*)

**How well do you handle other people's uncomfortable feelings or pain?**  
(*Empathy*)

**How well are you at identifying other people's feelings?** (*Empathy*)

**How comfortable are you at navigating conflict?** (*Emotional skills, social skills*)

**How capable do you feel of making new connections?** (*Social skills*)

**How capable do you feel of maintaining long-lasting connections?** (*Social skills*)

Based on your self-assessment, you will now have some idea of what e-book sections will be more pertinent to you than others. If you rated yourself low in multiple or all areas, have no fear, these are all skills that can be developed with awareness and action.

# Emotional Skills

Emotional skills comprise the elements of EQ referred to as self-awareness (knowing one's emotions and reactions) and self-regulation (being able to handle these emotions and reactions in a healthy way).

Self-awareness is when we can experience a situation, observe a reaction within ourselves, and be able to identify what that reaction is, how it is impacting us, and where it is coming from. For example, you find yourself being short-tempered with a colleague and are able to identify that it is because you are feeling overwhelmed by the workload, down on yourself because your boss was critical earlier, and are projecting that onto your colleague. You may simply acknowledge this to yourself or you may own up to this to your colleague to take accountability for your reaction.

People who struggle with self-awareness can benefit from:

- Building their emotional language (using a [Feelings Wheel](#) can help)
- Doing mindfulness work (here is an [intro](#) to help)
- Somatic therapies to work on mind-body connection
- Taking time daily for self-reflection and/or journaling

All of these tools improve awareness on how external stimuli and thoughts are impacting our internal experience.

**Exercise: Do a daily feelings record for two weeks. Notice how many feelings there are each day, how we can hold seemingly competing feelings at the same time, and what it is like for you to keep this journal.**

Self-regulation is the ability to navigate our emotional reactions. Rather than exploding because we are irritated about something or hurting ourselves because

we are feeling shame, self-regulation allows us to know how to look after ourselves with compassion. Some important components of self-regulation include:

- Taking breaks and pauses
- Having a toolkit for when emotions arise
- Employing the senses for grounding
- Processing
- Feeling the feelings rather than avoiding them
- Remembering that we can hold multiple feelings at the same time

**Exercise: When you notice a strong emotional or behavioural response over the next two weeks, take time to record situation(s), thoughts, feelings, and behaviours connected to this emotion. What can you learn? How can you handle these experiences differently in future?**

You may find [this booklet on emotional regulation](#) helpful, as well as specific therapies that provide tools and strategies for navigating the tricky world of emotions, such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT).

This emotional skills work forms the foundation for other skills, including empathy and social skills, and is an asset in professional settings as well as therapy. It is impossible to explore trauma, for example, without being able to take care of yourself emotionally in the process. Emotional health matters and contributes to health at all other levels, including physically.

## **Motivation**

Intrinsic motivation is being able to be motivated to do something with minimal to no external reward or validation. In other words, finding an internal

sense of purpose and drive rather than being motivated for money, power, success, validation, or something else provided by the external environment.

**Question: What generally motivates you at work? Around the house? In relationships? For personal growth and development?**

**Question: Brainstorm what reasons you might have to do work, chores, hard personal or relational work, if not for external validation or reward?**

**Question: How do you know when you have ‘succeeded’ at something? Is it because of how you feel inside or someone highlighting that success in some way? Write more about that here.**

**Question: What benefit(s) do you think being motivated for your own reasons rather than external reward would have for you?**

These are questions for reflection that will have you start shifting your perspective around motivation. Now, rather than doing something for a big promotion (and then feeling resentful and unmotivated if you don't get that), perhaps you will start to take action to feel an internal sense of success, joy, or accomplishment. Can we be our own barometer of success? This is the goal with intrinsic motivation. External motivators are unpredictable and inconsistent, whereas our inside experience is available anytime.

## Empathy

Empathy is critical when it comes to EQ. It is our ability to convey understanding, validation, and support to someone else. Generally, empathy is used when someone is experiencing a difficult time and/or having emotions that are uncomfortable for them.

Some key points when it comes to empathy:

- Empathy does not require agreement
- Empathy is not sympathy. You do not need to feel the same feelings as the other person
- Empathy is a skill that can be learned and built
- Empathy fosters intimacy in relationships as people feel validated

Empathy is about listening to understand, though we may not end up agreeing with what the other person is saying. For example, we may understand that someone is upset about a political situation, though we have a different political opinion. This is okay. Empathy is about validating another people's feelings, not their beliefs or perspective. People can be very upset and moved by something that is factually non-existent or untrue, but this does not invalidate the feelings they are experiencing. *Empathy is about attuning to the emotional part of a person's experience, not the factual part.*

Empathy is important to relationships because it creates closeness, intimacy, and depth of connection. A relationship without empathy will end up being superficial and can feel quite hollow, empty, and dissatisfying.

What are key ingredients for empathy?

- Understanding



- Identification of feelings (in self and others)
- Checking in
- Listening
- Acknowledgment

With empathy, we want to listen to understand. *We want to know not just what is happening but how the person is experiencing that situation.* In this, we can start to understand them and their experience. We want to check this in, of course, rather than make assumptions, and we want to acknowledge those feelings.

For example, as we are listening, we may want to check in by saying something like, “It sounds like you are angry about that,” or, “Are you saying that upset you?” This gives the person an opportunity to clarify if we have misunderstood. They may say, “No, I’m actually really hurt by this,” or, “I was extremely upset!”

Acknowledgement can sound similar, something like, “I hear you’re angry,” or “I can understand how that would be upsetting.” People value being heard.

Here are some case scenarios to help you continue building empathy skills. For each one, I want you to practice writing out what feelings the other person seems to be experiencing, two empathetic reflections, and how you would feel being around someone in this emotional state.

### **Example 1: Alia**

Alia sits across from you at the coffee shop. Her eyes won’t focus on you for long, her leg is jiggling under the table, and you notice her picking at her fingernails. She tells you that she has been under a lot of pressure at school recently and is not sure if she will be able to complete the year. She has a test coming up that week that is worth 50% of her final grade for a course she is not doing well in.

**What emotion(s) might Alia be experiencing?**

**What are two empathetic reflections you could make to Alia about any part of her experience?**

- 1.
- 2.

**How would you feel being around someone in this emotional state?**

**Example 2: Fred**

Fred narrows his eyes; his face is red and he seems to be taking up a lot of physical space as he stands in front of you. He speaks in a raised voice as he talks about how unfair and unjust it was for his boss to call him out on being late yesterday in front of the entire working group. He explains how he was late because he was at the hospital dropping off clothes to his father who had to be admitted for emergency surgery.

**What emotion(s) might Fred be experiencing?**

**What are two empathetic reflections you could make to Fred about any part of his experience?**

- 1.
- 2.

**How would you feel being around someone in this emotional state?**

### **Example 3: River**

River smiles as they walk over to you. They share about an upcoming event that they have been invited to participate in. The event is meaningful to them and something they have wanted to do for a long time. They share all of the information and details with you and invite you to come along.

**What emotion(s) might River be experiencing?**

**What are two empathetic reflections you could make to River about any part of their experience?**

- 1.
- 2.

**How would you feel being around someone in this emotional state?**

Although there are truly no right or wrong answers when it comes to this exercise, as I do not know Alia, Fred, or River any better than you do, my best guesses would be that Alia is experiencing some fear, anticipation, dread, stress, and possible anxiety about school; that Fred is angry on the surface, but underneath is worried, stressed, concerned, stressed, and possibly overwhelmed about what is happening with his father; and River seems excited, joyful, eager, happy, accomplished, proud, jubilant, and enthusiastic about the event they are participating in. While it would be weird in normal conversation to reflect all of these emotions back to the person we are listening to, it is appropriate to pick one and reflect it to them. This is a key empathy building skill as we are working to

listen for feelings, reflect those back, and carry on the conversation from there.

***Remember, people are generally looking to be seen and heard in relationships.***

Acknowledging and validating their experience, including feelings, builds this intimacy.

## **Social Skills**

In this section of the e-book, we explore social skills, which is a person's ability to interact with others in a variety of environments, such as work, school, intimate relationships, and with family or friends.

Key components of social skills include:

- Empathy (discussed earlier in the e-book)
- Non-verbal communication
- Verbal communication
- Attunement (otherwise known as your ability to 'read the room')

### ***Non-verbal Communication***

When it comes to our non-verbal communication, it is important to remember that it is not just the words coming out of our mouths that matter, but how we are saying them. Elements of non-verbal communication include:

- Eye contact (standards on this vary from culture to culture so it would be important to be aware and familiar with the general etiquette in your region and to be respectful of individual differences when it comes to this)
- Openness of posture (e.g., arms crossed versus comfortably at the sides, which shows that you are energetically open to the person and conversation)

- Tone of voice (being calm and respectful, not sarcastic, sharp, or diminutive)
- Volume of voice (clear, steady, able to be heard but not yelling)
- Facial expressions (e.g., eye rolling, looking away, and/or being distracted convey disrespect and that you are not paying attention whereas a smile with eye contact conveys openness and engagement)
- Listening (truly listening to what they are saying and trying to understand their perspective and feelings, not formulating your response in your head)
- Demonstrating listening through nodding, eye contact, subtle head tilt, and/or small verbal articulations like, “Mhmm,” or, “I see.”
- Facing and subtly leaning towards the person talking to show openness and engagement

Non-verbal communication is more integral to effective communication than the words coming out of our mouth. Estimates are that 70-93% of our overall message is delivered non-verbally, so I would say that makes our non-verbal cues essential when it comes to communication.

**Exercise: Either sit/stand in front of a mirror and pretend you are having a conversation with someone or record yourself having a conversation with a friend or family member for 2-5 minutes to learn more about your non-verbal communication. It can be any type of dialogue (e.g., a conflict, happy event, celebration, or daily update). After you have done the recording, I want you to watch it back (I know, awkward), paying attention to what you were doing with your tone, face, and body during the conversation.**

**What did you notice about your non-verbal communication? What did you do well? What did you notice did not work well?**

**Did your non-verbal cues demonstrate that you were listening and engaged with the other person? How so?**

**How weird was it to focus on yourself having a conversation? How often do you pay attention to your non-verbal communication cues?**

**What is one thing that you are willing to work on changing and improving with your non-verbal communication?**

**Write out any other goals with non-verbal communication that you would like to explore in future:**

**What will help you stay accountable to these changes?**

**How do you envision these changes helping you in your interactions?**

I remember when I was doing practice counselling sessions with my fellow students during my training that it was painful to watch back the videos, yet I learned a lot from it. For instance, what on earth was I doing with my hands? My

feet? It helped me become much more aware of thoughtful body placement during interactions, as well as my verbal style (some funny verbal tics get picked up when you observe yourself!).

### ***Verbal Communication***

Although it is technically not as important as our non-verbal communication, what we say and how we say it to others does matter. When it comes to verbal communication, it is recommended that people aim for an assertiveness style, which is when you are clearly and respectfully sharing your needs, preferences, and/or perspective with another person. This is opposed to passive communication, which is when someone holds back their own perspective and feelings and often resorts to sarcasm or indirect rude comments to convey their true feelings; or aggressive communication, which is when someone is attempting to convey their message with hostility, abruptness, rudeness, and/or anger. Passive-aggressiveness is a hybrid of the two where the person oscillates back and forth between holding back on their perspective and exploding in aggression. None of these strategies (passive, aggressive, or passive-aggressive) are effective when it comes to communication, as people become more focused on how the message is being delivered than what is being said (Do you hear what someone is actually trying to say when they are yelling at you?). These communication strategies tend to lead to isolation, misunderstanding, conflict, and resentment. Assertiveness helps with clarity and intimacy and is based on a foundation of respect and openness. To help with assertive communication, there are many workbooks, online courses, and possibly workshops in your area that will support practice and skill building in this area. Most people were not raised with assertive communication modelled to them so it is a trainable and teachable skill that many people need to learn in their later youth or adult years.

**What communication style is your default? Passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive or assertive?**

**What did you learn about communicating feelings and stress growing up?**

**How have these lessons served you? How have they limited you?**

**What are two changes you would like to make to your communication (whether verbal or non-verbal)?**

### *Attunement*

Another component of social skills is attunement, or ‘reading the room.’ Sharing a joke when somebody is somber and crying or talking about your busy work schedule when someone was sharing about being laid off or discussing something superficial after an emotional disclosure are all examples of someone who is not matching the tone and sensitivities of the situation. This is where empathy is helpful in identifying what is going on in the people around you and adjusting your behavior and sharing accordingly. Now, this is not to say that you cannot be happy when someone else is sad or feel grateful even though someone else is experiencing hardship, but there is a way of owning your reality while being attuned and sensitive to another person’s. You may employ segues such as, “I understand this is a serious conversation, would you be okay if I focus on something lighter right now?” or, “I appreciate you sharing about your hardships with me. Are you comfortable if I share about some things that are happening in



my life?” You are being responsive to the situation but not ignoring your needs and reality in the process.

Another aspect of social skills is having things to talk about. In a situation like work or a group activity, some of this structure is already provided and this can be very helpful to people, especially those with social anxiety. In environments where there is no structure or points of commonality, this can create more uncertainty. ***Being social does not have to mean being extroverted, it means being connected with others while true to yourself.*** For example, it might look like having a one-on-one conversation with someone that you notice is wearing a sports jersey of a team you favour at a big event, or having some pre-determined conversation starters to get to know people or perhaps a notable piece of clothing or jewelry.

Attunement is about communication (being an active listener, assertive speaker, and engaging in healthy non-verbals), and your ability to engage with others in an appropriate way. For parents, being attuned to their child’s feelings and needs is essential in cultivating their emotional intelligence at a young age. Being able to sit with your child while they are experiencing feelings, helping them find ways to appropriately express themselves, and modelling healthy communication become part of the way that parents can support mental health in future generations.

## Conclusion

This e-book was designed to give you a brief overview of some key concepts in the development and maintenance of Emotional Intelligence (EQ). These skills are integral for healthy, long-term relationships. Many people who struggle with Addiction or Mental Health issues feel like outsiders and may have specific social phobias or anxiety that promote isolation. While EQ cannot directly remedy these underlying conditions, it is an important component of recovery for those experiencing Addiction or Mental Health challenges. It is a set of tools and skills that can promote social confidence and lessen isolation, which improves health outcomes.

Key components of EQ include emotional skills, empathy, communication, and social skills. Each of these are rich areas with a lot of literature, teachers, and tools out there. It is easy to get overwhelmed when stepping into something new or unfamiliar, so take it one step at a time, break it down into realistic action steps, and enjoy the journey.

## References

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<https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-develop-empathy-in-relationships-1717547>

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## About the Author

Paige Abbott is a Registered Psychologist in the province of Alberta since 2009. She works primarily with adult individuals struggling with Addiction. From her perspective, this means exploring where the brain has become obsessive, compulsive, and overly and easily attached in its pursuit of dopamine. This may be with substances, like drugs or alcohol, but also happens with other behaviours, including food, relationships, sex, gambling, shopping/spending, work, and more. Paige helps people to understand themselves and what their brain is doing so they can learn to work with this, rather than fighting against it.

Paige began her private practice, Sana Psychological, in 2019. This has been a career long dream that she took some detours to along the way. She is happy she made it here.

In her personal life, Paige is married to her long-term partner and has one daughter. She has enjoyed journaling on and off since she was 6 years old and also loves physical activity, one-on-one time with friends, laughter, meditation, home decor, and quiet time for herself. She is a Myers-Briggs INFJ and identifies as a Highly Sensitive Person or HSP (you can look these up to learn more if you are curious).

