



# Mental Wellbeing

We continue our series of articles by Dr Libby Artingstall and Dr Sile McDaid, Co-Founders and Directors of Team Mental Health.

## Emotional intelligence is of significant interest to many workplaces, but why is this?

In a nutshell, emotional intelligence is the ability to understand and manage our own emotions and to understand and manage the emotions of others. Emotional Intelligence forms the basis for key social and emotional competencies which are important for success in life and in work.<sup>1</sup>

We know that a high level of emotional intelligence promotes positive mental health and is linked to reduced anxiety and stress.<sup>2</sup> There is also evidence to suggest that emotional intelligence is linked to important work-related outcomes including our performance as individuals and the productivity of an organisation.<sup>1</sup> The good news is that EI is a skill that is flexible, and we can improve and develop it at any point in our life.

Emotions guide thought and move us towards certain kinds of action.<sup>3</sup> To better understand this, it is helpful to briefly consider the two areas of the brain that impact emotional intelligence, the frontal lobe and the limbic system. The frontal lobe is the 'logical', reasoning part of the brain. The limbic system, situated in the centre of the brain, contains the amygdala which is the 'emotional' part of the brain. These two parts of the brain work together to effect how we interpret and respond to situations.

When we receive information in the brain it is processed by the amygdala before entering the frontal lobe. Hence, we interpret things emotionally before we apply logic and reason. The ability to manage our emotional responses and to respond from our logical brain results from these two parts of the brain working together in a balanced way. As adults we are generally good at applying logic before we respond in situations. However, difficulties can arise when we are faced with stressful situations. At these times the amygdala can override the frontal lobe, the balance is lost, and we can react with an emotional response before applying logic.

Emotional intelligence can be considered the psychological link between the frontal lobe and the amygdala. People with high emotional intelligence are good at maintaining the balance between these and keeping the emotional brain contained, even at times of stress.

In his book "Emotional Intelligence", David Goleman sets out 5 key elements relevant to EI.

Self-awareness	The ability to recognise your own emotions and understand how these can impact on you and others around you
Self-regulation	The ability to manage your own emotions
Empathy	The ability to recognise and understand the emotions of others
Social skills	The ability to accept and manage the emotions of others in a positive way
Motivation	The ability to use emotions to drive behaviour and action productively

(Adapted from Goleman, 1995)

### Self-awareness

Our day to day experiences at home and at work are filled with emotion. To develop our self-awareness, we can take time to notice how we are feeling and consider how our body is responding. Do you feel tense? Is your heart racing? Are you shaking? We can also apply this principle to our mind. What are you thinking about? How might this determine your course of action? Through reflecting on our emotional responses and considering our own strengths and weaknesses, we can gain good insight and use our self-awareness to our advantage.

### Self-regulation

Through developing self-awareness, we can enhance our self-regulation and improve our ability to manage our feel-

ings, thoughts or actions in a positive way. This can impact on our ability to maintain focus, make decisions and engage well with others. Self-regulation can be supported in different ways. When challenging situations arise, try to pause and take stock. Deep breathing exercises can be a useful way to help us keep calm. By taking the time to step back for a moment we are more able to reframe the event in its context, remind ourselves that the way we feel is not permanent, and move forward in a positive direction. Some strategies to improve self-regulation require more practice but ensuring regular sleep, exercise, eating healthily and staying hydrated are all an important part of this.

### Empathy

It's not always easy to recognise other people's emotions but by being aware and taking notice of facial expressions, body language, and sounds of the voice, we can improve our ability to read the emotions of others. To understand the emotions of someone else, try to put yourself in their position and see things from their perspective. People's emotional responses are unique to them. Empathy doesn't mean you have to agree with their perspective, it means accepting that their point of view can be different. Listening to understand rather than listening to respond can help us do this.

### Social skills

Through understanding and accepting the emotions of others, and through self-regulation, we can interact and communicate in ways which can help us to problem solve, resolve conflict, provide constructive feedback and inspire. There is always room for improvement in these areas throughout our lives. In the words of the Greek Philosopher, Aristotle "Anybody can become angry – that is easy, but to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose, and in the right way – that is not within everybody's power and is not easy". When interacting with others, expressing appreciation and showing kindness shows humility and strength. It helps to build trust and respect, ultimately improving our social connections with others.

### Motivation

Through recognising our emotions and managing these effectively, we can continue to work towards our goals despite barriers to these being presented. Stress can be used to channel productivity and maintain passion. On days where negative feelings or thoughts are taking over, try to focus on finding three good things about your day and write them down. If you are struggling to find the positives, you can use these emotions to help drive positive change by setting new goals. To do this, allow yourself time to take pride in your achievements, focus on your values and what matters to you, and move forward to overcome the barriers.

Whilst developing your EI can have a significant positive impact in the workplace, more importantly it is essential in promoting positive mental health. As a skill that is learned and learnable, start today and commit to implementing some simple strategies into your everyday life. The small things can make a big a difference!

Contact Team Mental Health  
[www.teammentalhealth.co.uk](http://www.teammentalhealth.co.uk)  
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### References

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