

Understanding Our Emotions

"Peace cannot be kept by force.
It can only be achieved by understanding."
-Albert Einstein

~The Importance of Understanding Our Emotions~

The emotional brain directs our attention and affects our thinking. When threatened by mistrust or misunderstanding, the emotional brain downshifts. This prevents further rational thought and communication. Conversely, supportive social interaction increases creative thought and improved communication. Supportive social interaction predicts improved health and resilience in many areas of our lives. Ironically, ignoring emotions doesn't diminish their control over our thinking processes. However, indulging our emotions is often worse, taking a toll on our personal and professional relationships. When we indulge our anger, we are allowing our obstacles or conflicts to control our lives.

Emotions can inform and inspire us or they may blind us. Fortunately, decades of research in many cultures throughout the world have shown us that there are universal emotional expressions that we all exhibit and we can learn to recognize. Although emotional display rules differ in every culture and community, understanding our universal emotions is essential to a meaningful life- as the quotes below illustrate.

"... another observation by Darwin has been corroborated: children who are blind and deaf from birth display virtually the full gamut of emotions on their faces."

- Pinker, 1997.

Emotional expressions and patterns of expression are often determined by our family display patterns:

"Individuals tend to adopt the expressive styles of their families."

-Kennedy, Moore, and Watson; 1999.

Emotional expression is also impacted by our cultural rules:

"Ekman has shown that cultures differ the most in how the emotions are expressed in public. He secretly filmed the expressions of American and Japanese students as they watched gruesome footage of a primitive puberty rite. If a white-coated experimenter was in the room interviewing them, the Japanese students smiled politely during scenes that made the Americans recoil in horror. But when the subjects were alone, the Japanese and American faces were equally horrified."

-Pinker, 1997.