

# EMOTIONAL BALANCE

Fall, 2002 EAP/EFAP Newsletter



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By Dr. Paul Johnston, Registered Psychologist

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Let's face it; in our busy lives we all occasionally feel out of balance. Some of us at times might even feel that we are on the edge of losing control. More commonly and for most of us however, we simply lose some perspective on our lives after a particularly busy or difficult day. Consider for instance a situation in which a co-worker snaps at us and we feel unreasonably angry about it. Or we read of the passing away of an old classmate in the newspaper and are overwhelmed with nostalgia and sadness. Or we come home after a long day at work and find that almost everything our family members do annoys us.

By themselves, days like these are upsetting but actually pretty normal. However, days like these can also build upon one another until we realize that we feel overwhelmed, stressed and out of whack and in fact suspect that we may have been this way for a while. And then we wonder how we got that way. The truth is we likely got that way because we weren't looking after ourselves.

The idea of obtaining emotional balance isn't simply about getting rid of negative emotions, but instead learning how to experience them, cope with them and keep them somewhat moderated. Emotions, whether they're positive or negative, are meaningful responses to internal or external events that convey information to us as well as to others, about who we are and what we're dealing with. Although the loss of a loved one *will* remain a painful experience, we can learn for instance that while we "feel" a particular emotion, we don't need to "become" that emotion.

One of the first steps in obtaining the capacity to experience emotions in a balanced manner is to reduce our vulnerability to emotional extremes. We do this by looking after ourselves. First and foremost we must keep in mind that not only are emotions physical responses in our bodies to life events, but whether or not we feel healthy determines how much control we feel that we have over these events. And this in turn influences how much emotion we experience. Consequently, healthy emotions depend upon a healthy body. So remember,

Avoid or minimize the influence of mood altering drugs, including caffeine and alcohol that you ingest.

Get enough sleep. Maintain a routine (ie. go to bed at roughly the same time every night), begin to relax at least an hour before going to bed, and maintain a relaxing environment to sleep in. Whether we awaken feeling rested or fatigued influences how we cope with life that day.

Get some aerobic exercise of some type, every day. This does NOT mean that you should immediately begin attending the fitness class run by the perky 18-year-old aerobics instructor with virtually no body fat. The exercise must be relative to your personal capacity.

Healthy eating is extremely important as certain foods (eg. high fat, caffeine) can actually stress the body, making it more likely to overreact to emotional stimulation.

We also need to take care of our psychological selves. So, to continue;

Time management. Set your priorities and break larger tasks into more manageable pieces. Just as important however as work, is to set aside time to rest, relax, have some fun, and enjoy your family.

Build a sense of MASTERY. Do at least one thing a day that builds your feeling of competence and personal control. Set goals that are manageable AND attainable, but still a challenge.

Build the amount of positive experience in your life. Plan and schedule activities that you enjoy and can look forward to.

Learn to express your emotions. This builds our sense of interpersonal relatedness, which is vital to healthy and balanced.

Learn to think in a healthier manner. Stay away from “AWFULIZING” (“This is the worst”), “I CAN'T STAND IT-IS” (“I can't stand this situation”) and “MUSTURBATION” (“This situation must change immediately”). While a situation may be difficult and even painful, it's likely that the situation could be worse, and that you already ARE tolerating it.

These suggestions, when taken together, will assist you in approaching life events in a calmer and more confident manner. Not only will they help you to cope with these situations better but, they can actually change the emotional responses themselves.

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