

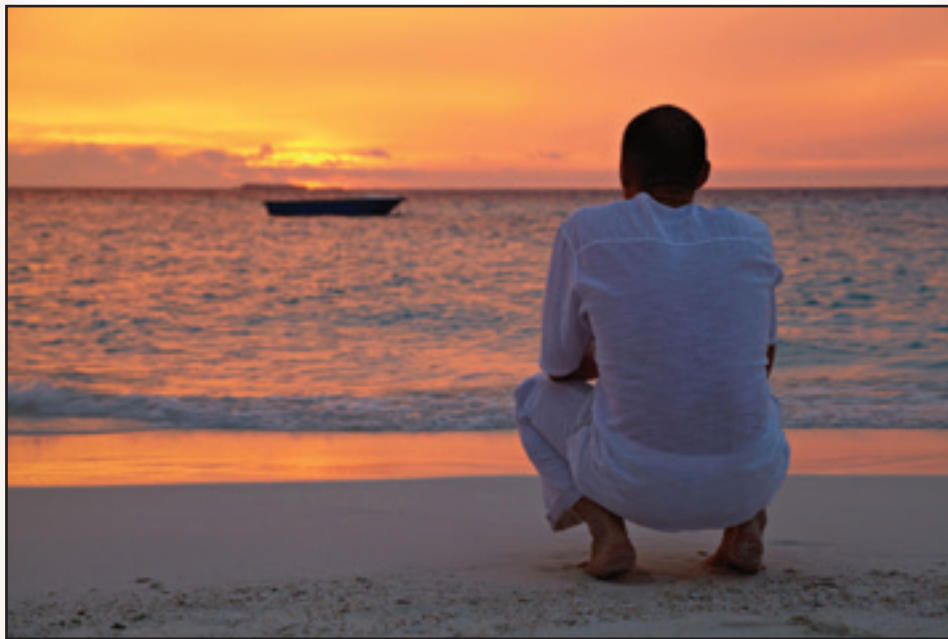
CHAPTER EIGHT

Our feelings color so much of how we behave and our relationships with others. For our own well-being, and the well-being of those around us—our loved ones and our communities— we must develop the skill of...

“As human beings we all want to be happy and free from misery... we have learned that the key to happiness is inner peace. The greatest obstacles to inner peace are disturbing emotions such as anger, attachment, fear and suspicion, while love and compassion and a sense of universal responsibility are the sources of peace and happiness.”

—Dalai Lama

PROCESSING EMOTIONS



WHEN IT'S SAID AND DONE

The examples and exercises in this chapter are designed to help build certain skills. By the end of the chapter, you will be able to say:

- I can reflect on my emotions and how they affect me.
- I can share my ideas around being emotionally intelligent.
- I can recognize emotions in others.
- I can understand my emotions and manage my reactions to my emotions.

ADWO, CALMNESS

The Adinkra symbol Adwo appears in carvings and on textiles throughout West Africa. It represents the spirit of peacefulness and calmness that allows us to be still and think clearly.¹ In order to navigate a world full of challenges, we need to connect with that spirit of peace. We need it to escape from stress, and we need it in the middle of stress so that we don't react in foolish anger.

This chapter focuses on connecting to our emotions in a way that is thoughtful, honest, and productive. We want to be able to name our emotions, express them, and fully feel them. We want to have the ability to read and respect other people's emotions and create a community where others can be themselves just like we want to be ourselves.

We can't do any of those things unless we find a peaceful center. Think about it this way; if you're constantly angry, how will you or anybody else know when something *really* bothers you?



(ah•dwoh)

WHAT ARE EMOTIONS?

We all feel them, but what are they? Psychology researchers describe emotions as a state of mind with three particular elements: your personal reaction to a situation, the way your body reacts to that situation, and the behavior you use to express those reactions. Emotions are personal because what terrifies one person might only scare another. Plus, our emotions rarely come one at a time. The mix of emotions isn't the same for everyone. Physically, our bodies are primed to react. Our automatic nervous system presses the fight or flight button without our control, leaving us face-sweating, heart-thumping, or tooth-grinding. Our responses make up the last component. The things that we do with emotions are the public mark of our feelings...and our character. We'll explore all of these ideas throughout this chapter. For now, see how well you can separate the personal, physical, and behavioral responses to emotions using the discussion below.

Discuss...

With the three elements of an emotion in mind, break down your emotional reaction to each of the following situations:

- You're on a date watching a horror movie. Something in the movie happens that really does scare you.
- You're watching your favorite team play the last seconds of a tie game. Just as it looks like they're about to score, the power goes out.

EMOTIONAL VOCABULARY

Take a look at the list of words below. Each one names an emotion. You'll recognize most of them, but some might be new. If you can define the word, place a check mark next to it. If you're unsure, or you know it but you can't quite explain it, leave the circle blank.

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agonized | <input type="checkbox"/> Sad | <input type="checkbox"/> Horrified |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Exhausted | <input type="checkbox"/> Confident | <input type="checkbox"/> Smug |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Confused | <input type="checkbox"/> Embarrassed | <input type="checkbox"/> Depressed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ecstatic | <input type="checkbox"/> Disappointed | <input type="checkbox"/> Blissful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apologetic | <input type="checkbox"/> Happy | <input type="checkbox"/> Regretful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guilty | <input type="checkbox"/> Paranoid | <input type="checkbox"/> Overwhelmed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Indifferent | <input type="checkbox"/> Mischievous | <input type="checkbox"/> Hopeful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Content | <input type="checkbox"/> Miserable | <input type="checkbox"/> Lonely |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prudish | <input type="checkbox"/> Grieving | <input type="checkbox"/> Lovestruck |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Suspicious | <input type="checkbox"/> Perplexed | <input type="checkbox"/> Jealous |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Angry | <input type="checkbox"/> Disgusted | <input type="checkbox"/> Bored |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Obstinate | <input type="checkbox"/> Frightened | <input type="checkbox"/> Surprised |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Demure | <input type="checkbox"/> Surly | <input type="checkbox"/> Anxious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hysterical | <input type="checkbox"/> Ashamed | <input type="checkbox"/> Shocked |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated | <input type="checkbox"/> Cautious | <input type="checkbox"/> Shy |

COMMUNITY DEFINITIONS

One of the keys to recognizing emotions, either in ourselves or in others, is to be able to name them. If you know all the emotions on the previous page, great! If not, great! Your mission is to make sure everyone in the class can explain each and every word. Find someone who knows a word that you don't, and learn from them. Find someone who doesn't know what you know, and teach them. If nobody knows a word, then ask your facilitator. Write your new definitions below, and if you need more space, use the blank journal page at the end of this chapter.

A grid of 12 colored sticky notes arranged in four rows and three columns. Each sticky note is a rounded rectangle with a thin black border and contains five horizontal lines for writing. A small icon of two interlocking gears is located in the bottom right corner of each sticky note. The colors of the sticky notes are: Row 1: Orange, Brown, Light Pink; Row 2: Light Pink, Yellow, Light Orange; Row 3: Light Brown, Light Orange, Red; Row 4: Red, Light Orange, Light Brown.

EMOTIONAL VOCABULARY

Discuss...

What emotions can you see in each picture? It's possible to see more than one at a time.

.....



Photos by Joel Clifton

“CONCENTRATION”

“Con•sin•tray•shun. Concentration is the game. Keep the rhythm or you’ll be out the game.”

1. Have the group arrange their seats in a circle.
2. One person makes up a beat that everybody can do. Clap, stomp, snap, slap your chest, whatever. Keep it simple so the whole combination happens in about three seconds.
3. The whole group performs the beat.
4. Every time the beat hits, one person has to name an emotion. Then the person to his left has to name a different emotion when the next beat hits, and so on.
5. If you can’t think of an emotion, or you say one that’s already been used in the current round, you’re out.
6. Once a person is out, the person to his left makes a new beat (or keeps the old one...), and starts by naming an emotion on rhythm.
7. Keep going until only one person—the winner—is left.

P.S. This game also helps you study other lists—state capitals, chemical symbols, multiples of twelve, anything.

SHOWING EMOTIONS

Take a few minutes to go over the emotions and definitions on the prior page. Form groups of three. One at a time, choose one of the emotions from the list and any of the situations listed below. Then act it out. The class will try to guess your selection. You may represent the emotion with your words, actions, charades, or mime. After a couple of rounds with your small group, answer the discussion questions below and prepare to share your ideas with the larger class.

- Your mom tells you that you’re going to spend the summer with relatives in another state.
- Just before she passes out the papers, your teacher tells the class that only three people passed last week’s test.
- According to the news, the lottery jackpot is up to \$230 million.
- You borrow one of your brother’s shirts. At lunch you accidentally spill some red punch on it.
- Your friends are teasing you because your favorite team got blown out in a playoff game.
- You’re the first one of your friends to show up at a party. You don’t know anybody else who’s there.

What emotions were your partners expressing?

What exactly let you know?

Were your assumptions always correct? If not, why?

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE?

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, control and evaluate emotions. People with high emotional intelligence can easily read other people's signals and react appropriately to them. Researchers Michael Akers and Grover Porter² have identified five dimensions of emotional intelligence. Exercising them can help us manage any situation better.

1. Self awareness - the ability to recognize an emotion as it happens
2. Self regulation - to say how long an emotion will last; "self control"
3. Motivation - to motivate yourself to have clear goals and positive attitude
4. Empathy - the ability to recognize how others feel
5. Social skills - to better understand and relate to a variety of individual emotions

Discuss...

1. Which of the five dimensions of emotional intelligence have we already discussed?
2. What do you suppose are the benefits of being emotionally intelligent?
3. Reflect on the emotions that you experience most often. Which of them make it hard for you to use your emotional intelligence? Why do you suppose that is?
4. What are positive ways of expressing negative emotions?

A SNAPSHOT OF YOUR E.I.

Everyone can build his or her emotional intelligence. Step one is to find out how well developed yours already is. The table on the next page is designed to do that. Here's how it works. If you can describe the situation each cell describes, circle the Y for *yes*. If not, circle N for *no*. For instance, if you can tell someone exactly what it looks like when you're in a good mood, circle Y in the top, left, light blue box. Only answer *yes* if you are sure.

Look for any patterns in your answers. Maybe you're strong at recognizing your emotions but weaker at seeing how others feel. Maybe you understand anger better than happiness. Maybe you know how emotions are played out but don't know how they will end. Talk with a partner about any patterns you see in your answers. Discuss what it might take for all of your answers to be "yes."

CULTURAL EMOTIONS

As Black people, our emotional expressions are part of a unique culture. Our joy can look unique. Our praise. Our anger. Our distrust. Our indifference.

Search youtube for “Dancing in the Rain” and you’ll find a dance video called “RIP Rich D” featuring the Turf Feinz from Oakland, California. Turf stands for “taking up room on the floor.” Yak Films made this video at the same location one of their big brothers known as “Rich D” died the night before. They took the negative emotions of that loss, and this is how they decided to express themselves.

What emotions did you see expressed in the video? Explain how you know.



Black folk have their own style to showing how they feel. Sometimes that gets us in trouble with others who don’t understand, or it might just confuse or scare them. Still, we have to hold on to our culture and cherish it. We’ll talk about when and where later, but for now, let’s recognize that our styles are a cultural treasure. Let’s celebrate what makes us unique.

*What are the unique ways Black people express their feelings where you live?
What are some other unique traditions of expressing emotions you know about?*

	It Looks Like	It Feels Like	It Sounds Like	The Effect on Others Is	It Will End When
When I am in a good mood...	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N
When I am frustrated...	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N
When I get depressed...	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N
When one of my parents gets angry...	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N
When my teacher is annoyed...	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N
When my best friend is excited...	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N

ANATOMY OF EMOTIONS

Let's break emotions down into their different parts. When an emotion surfaces, we don't just "feel" it; we also have a thinking response and a physical response. For example, let's say you're walking around your neighborhood and you see a big dog in front of you. A Rottweiler. It's loose. Nobody else is around. Your brain is going to send you some information—fast! You remember the last time you saw that dog. You remember whether or not you know that dog—you don't. And you remember the fastest way to get someplace safe! Physically, your eyes open wide. Your stomach drops. Your heart starts pumping. Your adrenaline kicks in. Your reaction isn't just the emotion of fear. It includes a set of thoughts and physical responses, too.

But what if we changed just one factor in that story? What if you did know the dog? It was your cousin's dog that you've known since it was a puppy. The same scary situation would bring a whole new set of emotions, thoughts, and physical responses.

Discuss: How would your reactions be different?

When we break down our reactions, we can find places to change them. We might not have to change everything we do, but, like the example with knowing the dog, we can find the one piece that shifts the entire episode. If you're likely to start a fight when you're offended, you don't have to change how you feel or what you think. Just make a physical change—put your hands in your pockets—and that might change the entire episode. If you're likely to be disappointed when your mom is late picking you up, you don't have to change everything about your reaction. Change your thought process—tell yourself she had to do something to help the family—and that might change your mood.

Practice breaking down each of the following situations by mapping out the physical, emotional, and thinking responses.

	You're walking home from school, and a group of ten guys is blocking your path.	Your grandma wants you to join her when she visits a new church next Sunday.
Emotional Response		
Thinking Response		
Physical Response		

MIND, BODY, HEART

Clearly, the way we react to our emotions helps to determine how we react to different situations. If we are more conscious and aware of how we react or what causes us to react in a certain fashion, we can properly respond to situations/events without sacrificing our values, professionalism, or integrity level. Displaying the proper type of reaction could keep you safe or put you in a better position to reach your goals. But none of that happens without practice. So let's practice.

Below are scenarios that could create an emotional response. In groups of three or four, choose the two you find most interesting. Each person should act out their response to the scenario, and once they do, the others should make notes about the emotional, physical, and thinking responses they observed. Easy right?

The challenge comes when your group members get to choose one aspect to change—either mind (thinking response), body (physical response), or heart (emotional response)—when you act out the scenario a second time.

- *Your favorite team makes it to the championship round.*
- *Your family decides to go on vacation.*
- *It's raining the day you have to carry your project to school.*
- *Someone behind you keeps talking through the sequel of your favorite movie.*
- *Your teacher sends you to the principal for something you didn't do.*
- *Your teacher sends you to the principal for something you did do.*
- *You drop your phone and crack the screen.*
- *You drop your phone and don't crack the screen.*
- *You get the highest score in the class on the final exam.*
- *You have to go grocery shopping with a step-parent.*

Discuss...

What were the differences you noticed in each performance?

Which type of changes had the most positive effect? Why?

Which type of changes had the most negative effect? Why?

REFLECTING ON EMOTIONS

Write a short answer for each of the following questions. When you finish think about the answers you would feel comfortable sharing with the class. We'll have a discussion about your responses in a minute.

Your friend always tells your secrets.

How might you feel? _____

What might you say? _____

What might you do? _____

Your brother ate all the cookies you were going to share with your friends.

How might you feel? _____

What might you say? _____

What might you do? _____

Your teacher keeps forgetting to give you the extra credit assignment he promised you.

How might you feel? _____

What might you say? _____

What might you do? _____

Name the emotions you're probably going to feel in each situation listed below. Go back to the list on page 108 if you need to.

When I enter a new group, I feel _____

When I talk with a stranger, I feel _____

When I hang out with my friends, I feel _____

When I need to learn something new, I feel _____

When my teacher calls on me, I feel _____

Draw an image or symbol of an emotion you are feeling.

The emotion is _____.

EMOTIONS INSIDE AND OUT

Sometimes our emotions control our actions before a second thought can interrupt. All of us have said things out of anger that we wouldn't even think otherwise, and sometimes really good news can make you act a fool in mixed company. That's normal—every now and then. But when we act out on a regular basis, that's a sign that it's time to manage our emotions better.

Sometimes our thoughts control our emotions so tightly that we feel dull. All of us have tried to act like we weren't hurt or embarrassed by something that happened in front of friends. When you find out that the person you like likes you back, you might try to play it off and stay casual. Inside, though, you're glowing. Standing tall. Maybe even doing back flips. Quieting your emotions is normal—every now and then. But when we act like *nothing* matters, that's a sign it's time to manage our emotions better.

We need to be clear on our internal and external reactions and check them for balance. We need to check that we are giving ourselves time and space to manage those reactions. To practice, discuss the following questions as a class:

What makes you happy?

When you're happy, how do the people around you know it?

When you're happy, what do you experience that no one else sees?

Ask the same questions for different emotions. For instance, what makes you angry? When you're disappointed, how do people around you know it? Then reflect on your answers.

Do your inner responses match your visible actions?

If not, why do you suppose that is?

It's not like the world needs to see each and every one of your emotions. In fact, there are many times and places when it's a good idea for us to hide them. But if you find that you're stuck with feelings that you just can't express, you're building a powerful internal conflict that could end up hurting you. Emotions need a release. We'll talk about some of the factors that get in the way of that, then we'll offer some strategies for how you can improve your well being by expressing your emotions.



Langston Hughes



From the 1920s until his death in 1967, many considered Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes to be the literary voice of African Americans. His use of Black cultural traditions like jazz, blues, and spirituals made his work stand out, and like all great poets, he was a master of sharing emotion.

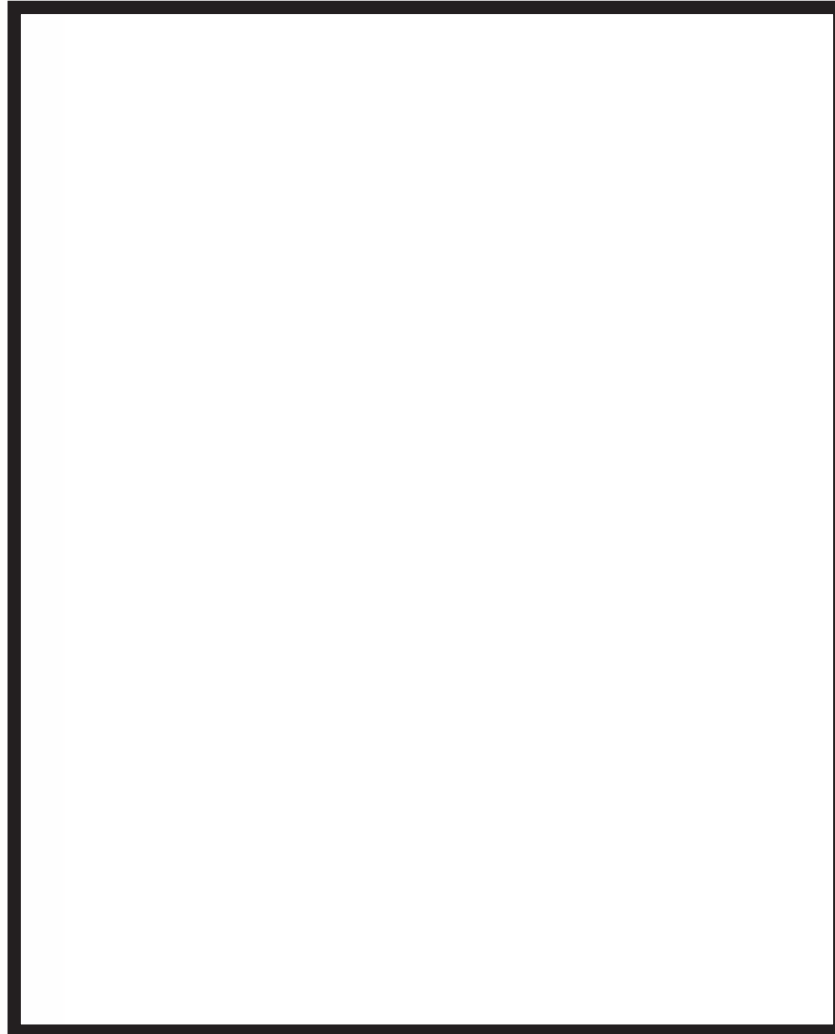
Following his high school graduation, he spent a brief and difficult time with his father who lived in Mexico. It was during this period that Hughes wrote about how his father hated Black people, even his own Blackness. As a type of response, several of Hughes early writings explored the dignity and beauty of Black identity.¹ An example is the poem named "My People," which compares the night, stars and sun to the faces, eyes, and soul of "my people."²

Emotion wasn't just in his writing, it also fueled it. He wrote, "We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If White people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too."³

THE MASCULINE EFFECT

For many young men, the differences between what we feel and what we express is rooted in masculinity—the idea of what it takes to be a “real man.” There are certain behaviors that are considered acceptable for and from men, and there are other behaviors that get our manhood questioned. For example, an athlete can suffer a horribly painful injury, but there is only one “acceptable” way to respond.

These reactions are learned throughout our childhoods and are patrolled even harder during our teenage years. In the box below, take a moment to brainstorm a list of message boys are given when they are told to “act like a man.” After a few minutes, share your list with the class. Add any ideas they thought of that you overlooked.



INSIDE THE BOX

Our group probably filled the box pretty easily. Take a moment to reflect on what's there. Discuss the following questions:

- *Who/what delivers these messages?*
- *When do we first start to get these messages?*
- *How are the messages different if the messenger is a man or if it's a woman?*

It's important to recognize that these messages come from many, many places. Some would argue that they are at the very center of US society. That means that we receive these messages and we *deliver* these messages. In small groups, create a short skit of how you delivered one of these messages. Maybe it was a big, public action. Maybe it was something hardly noticeable, but it sent the message anyway. There are many ways to reinforce masculinity.

When we look at the box, at the skits, at our experiences trying "to be men," we must reflect on not only the causes of masculinity, but also the effects. Take some time to discuss:

- *Who benefits from us acting "inside the box"? How?*
- *Who suffers from us acting "inside the box"? How?*



OUTSIDE THE BOX

If there are things we can do that can make us "more manly," there must be things that can make us "less manly." In the space outside the box on page 120, write the roles and behaviors that make a person "less manly." After a few minutes, share your ideas with the class and add any ideas they share with you.

Reflect on those ideas by discussing the following questions:

- *What are some of the overall differences between the ideas inside and outside the box?*
- *What's the most valuable thing missing from the box?*
- *What's the most valuable thing missing from outside the box?*
- *What are the costs of moving or living outside the box?*



FEELING DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW

There is an old saying about ways of viewing a situation; there's your side, my side, and the truth. Not everyone shares your point of view, nor are they supposed to. That is what makes us unique human beings. Our values and life experiences shape who we are and the point of view we take when examining a situation. With that being said, let's practice feeling other people's points of view. Take a moment and read the following scenario, try to understand the situation from each point of view and take notes on how different people can view the same situation so differently.

Michael's Night Out

It's a Friday night and Michael is taking the family car out for a football game. It's the family's only mode of transportation. Michael's mother reminds him to be back home in time because she has to work the graveyard shift and can't afford to be late. Michael is enjoying himself at the football game, and his crush Lisa asked him if he would like to go to grab a bite after the game. Michael knows he needs to get the car back to his mom, but he figures he has a few minutes to spare. He loses track of time and his mother is late for work. When he gets home, she doesn't even say two words to him. She grabs her keys and rushes out the door. When she gets home, she tells him that he will not be using the car for the next two weeks and he has to be in the house everyday right after school.

.....
Use the emotion work list to describe each person's point of view and how one person's decision affected the people around him or her
.....



Michael _____

Michael's mom _____

Mom's supervisor at work _____

DEALING WITH REGRET

Having regret means to feel sad or sorry about something that you did do or not do.¹ Regret is something that we all must learn to feel and move past. In life there will be times when you do something and feel like it was not the right decision or you fail to act on something and regret not being more proactive in that situation. This section deals with ways of dealing with regret and moving on with life. You never want to get stuck on a past decision, whether you choose to act on it or not. You want to recognize it, learn from it and move past it. The advice from lifescrpt.com will serve you well.²

Let go of a small regret first.

Be willing to not sweat the small stuff. Maybe you didn't get a passing grade because you didn't study. Acknowledge the fact that you didn't study and the outcome was a failing grade. Be able to let go of that small loss. That small mistake was not life altering. Put this regret into perspective and do away with it. Once you have learned how to start letting go of the small stuff, you can begin to heal from some of the more significant events in life that you regret.

Acknowledge your faults.

The first step in getting over or letting go of a situation is to acknowledge your fault or role in that situation. Whether you made a good or bad decision and the outcome may have been negative or positive. Acknowledge that it was your decision to make and take responsibility for the outcome. How can you healthfully move on if you won't acknowledge the reality of the role you played? Ask yourself what was your prime motivation, and how you may need to adjust your priorities.

Find meaning

There is a lesson to be learned in every move you make in life. Think of regret as a learning opportunity—it is the only way you'll ever find some value in it. To find the lesson, you must ask yourself, why do I need to let go of this? When you acknowledge the impact this regret has on your life, you'll probably find yourself embarrassed or ashamed, but it is the next step in being able to let go and move on.

Modify your expectations

Whether it's your personal expectation or other's expectations of you, ask yourself if you're being realistic about them. If your expectations are not realistic, you may discover the reasons for the outcome of your regret in the first place. It's a good thing to set your expectations high, just so long as they do not become so impractical that regrets become inevitable. Modify your expectations next time and minimize the opportunity to have regrets in the future.

Fix What You Broke

Next, if possible, take the steps necessary to make amends for our mistakes. For example, if you regret not telling someone how you felt about him or her before they passed away, make an effort to let those in your life now know how much you love and appreciate them. You may not be able to take something back, but you can use the lessons you have learned to help others and in turn, help yourself move on with life.

THERE'S A TIME AND A PLACE

So, you are feeling some type of way. It is time to use what you have learned so far to name that feeling so that you can resolve your issues and move on with life. You now know how to reflect on who you are, in terms of your values, attitudes, and behaviors. Now it's time to practice dealing with those feelings in an appropriate way. We all have moments when our feelings are intense, and we can't always control when and where these feelings come up. But we are in control of how we choose to act on those feelings. In other words, there is a time and a place for everything. In this section, we will examine some situations where feelings are on high, but a reaction based on those feelings can be counter-productive. We want you to look at each situation and think about an alternative response under stress.

Your mom has been telling you and your little brother that this Sunday will be different. This Sunday you will be ready for church *on time*. Church has never been your favorite place to go, especially during football season, but you know you'll never win this battle. So when she wakes you up at six a.m. for the eleven o'clock service, you do like you're supposed to. When she makes you shower while your little brother sleeps, okay. When she rushes you out of the bathroom before you can grab some lotion, when she fusses all through breakfast about how you best not embarrass her, when she makes you clean up the Cheerios your brother spilled, you put up with it because you don't want to be on punishment during kickoff. But when it's time to get in the car and you're sitting on the couch in your suit, she's still getting dressed. The question starts forming in your mind. When she's running around looking for the things that go in her purse for another ten minutes, the question gets louder. It's not until she finally goes to the door and says, "No matter how early we get started, you boys always make us late," that you just can't keep it to yourself. "Why do you always blame us for being late when you can't be ready on time?" And you thought you were gonna watch the Falcons play the Cowboys.

You have to use the bathroom badly and your teacher is busy working with a student. You are getting impatient because you are holding up your hand waiting to be recognized. She is not looking in your direction. So you decide to get up and walk out of the classroom without permission. Your teacher sees you motioning toward the door and asks you, "Where are you going?" You're so upset, you ignore her and continue to walk out. Upon your return to class there is a security guard waiting for you with a referral in hand. You are now being sent to the office.



CHECKING YOUR EMOTIONS

Developing strategies to manage your emotions will help you deal with situations more effectively. When you feel emotions run high, you should:

Stop

Don't let your emotion take control. Feel it. Recognize it. But don't run with it without deciding first.

Pause

Take a deep breath. Don't let your next action be thoughtless.

Reflect

What am I feeling?
Where did this feeling come from?
How is my body reacting to what I'm feeling?
How is my reaction going to affect me?
How will it affect people around me?
Is my reaction going to have a beneficial outcome?

CLOSING REFLECTION

Take a minute to reflect on a situation in which you were angry, you decided to act, and the outcome was not beneficial for you. Imagine how different your outcome would have been had you had practiced the above techniques in dealing with your emotion. Write your response in the space below.

JOURNAL

Throughout this work, you'll come across ideas that deserve more of your attention. Use this space to write your thoughts, ideas, questions, and discoveries from this chapter. How you use this space is up to you. Use it well.

