



# Resilient Living

STRENGTHENING THE MIND AND SPIRIT



ifopa

## FOP Community Educational Series

### Emotional Expressiveness



**Global Genes**<sup>®</sup>

Allies in Rare Disease

Program Funding Provided by  
Global Genes Rare Patient Impact Grant



# Emotions 101

- Research shows that all humans are born with 7 basic emotions:

**anger**, **sadness**, grief, **fear**, disgust, **love** and **joy**.

*(Emotions are a normal, natural and an inescapable part of being human.)*

- The emotional part of the brain automatically responds to events that affect us (i.e. emotions are not a choice)

90% of what we respond to is non-verbal (facial expressions, body language, “energy” of other people)

- Our default ways for expressing these unavoidable emotions can be a learned response.

*Example: A little boy grows up in a family where fear is not an acceptable emotion but anger is. Each time he expresses feelings of fear, someone in his family admonishes him. Eventually, he learns to automatically express his fear as anger- an emotion that is acceptable to his family.*

- Research also shows that when an emotion is not expressed it surfaces in a different form  
**-activates the body’s stress response/physiological arousal (flight or fight response)**

# How is emotional expressiveness effective?

- **Self expression** helps clarify our feelings about distressing events.
- **This ability to express feelings** helps diminish physical symptoms associated with traumatic experiences.
  - Emotional expression helps prevent prolonged fight or flight state (continuous physiological arousal)
- **Increases problem solving and ability to resolve conflicts (leads to effective self-calming)**
- **Helps us resolve anger, diminish anxiety, and ease depression**



# Emotional Intelligence:

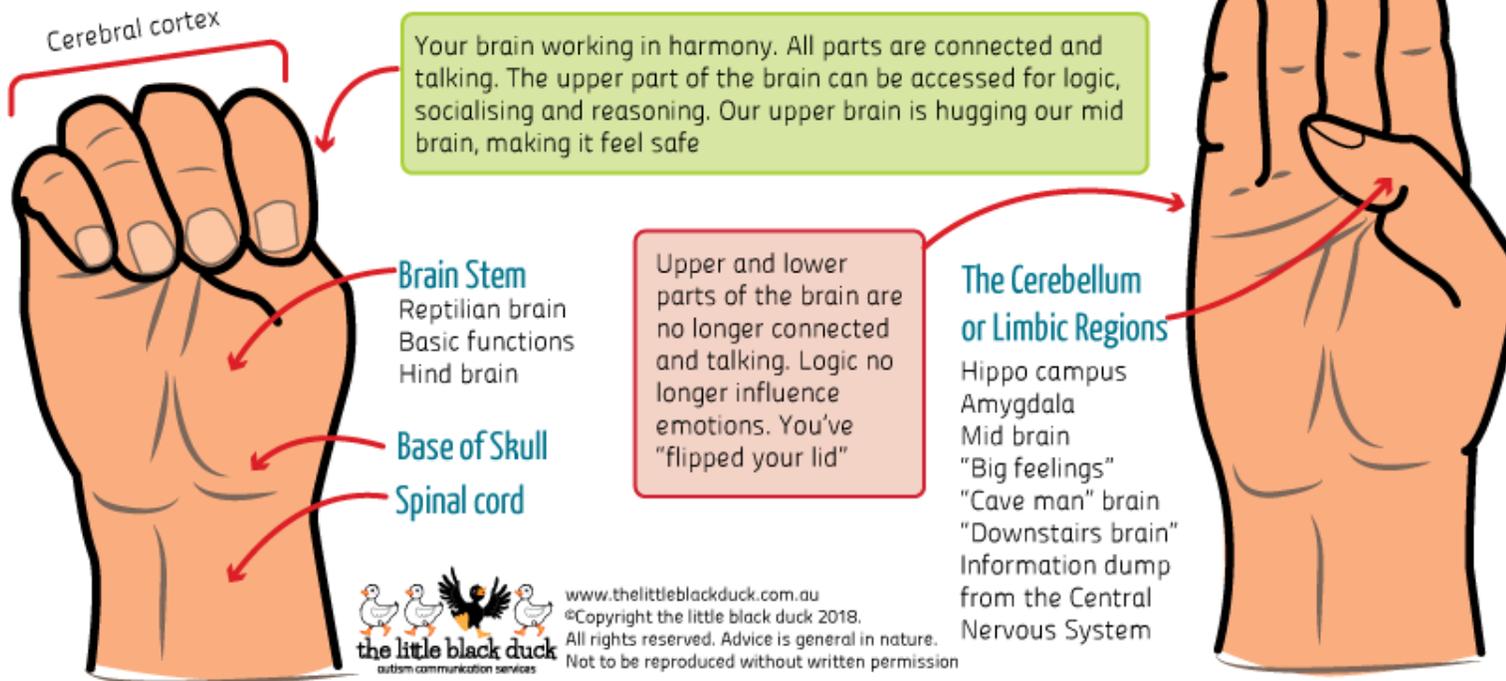
the awareness of feelings as they occur and the ability to process those feelings appropriately.

- When we understand how our brain is wired for emotions, we will have greater access and control of our emotional responses.
  - **The emotional brain** (limbic system) **can overpower the thinking brain** (frontal cortex.)
  - If we can't focus our attention and exit fight or flight our two brains (emotional and thinking) become disconnected.
    - The connection (and ability to think rationally) is lost. The emotional brain not the thinking brain takes over.
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# The Hand Model of the Brain

## What happens when we “flip our lid”

When our brain is working efficiently both the upper and mid brain are communicating effectively. Information comes in and is processed logically. Sometimes too much information is coming in for the Upper brain to process and it disconnects. We “flip our lid” and can no longer access the functions provided by the upper brain



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- Cerebral cortex (upstairs)
  - Problem solving
  - Reasoning
  - Rational thinking
  - Thinking before you act
- Limbic system (downstairs)
  - Instinctive
  - Reactive
  - Central regulator for bodily functions (breathing)

# Effectively Expressing Emotions

- Most people think that in order to “express” a feeling or emotion, you must do it outwardly. This is not true. You do not have to “wear your heart on your sleeve.” Instead, you can use an internal process known as emotional acknowledgement.
  - Emotional acknowledgment is the act of naming and feeling your true feelings on the inside, without judgement, trying to stuff, ignore or talk yourself out of your emotions.  
*For example, you can admit “I’m really mad and that’s ok.”*
- This takes the sting/power out of the emotion and allows you to more easily move through it vs. be overwhelmed by its intensity.
  - *It is possible to be aware of your emotions and feel them without letting them drive the bus (change your actions, how you treat people, how you think)*

# Effectively Expressing Emotions

- You cannot talk yourself or others out of strong emotions. Instead, think of yourself as a compassionate observer to emotions.

*Acknowledgment helps emotions pass.*

- When you do not acknowledge your emotions, the energy behind them gets stored and can come out later as anxiety or irritability. You might even find yourself snapping at others.

*When you acknowledge your emotions, you diffuse some of the energy behind them.* They start to feel less overwhelming and are less likely to come out in ways that hurt others.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2zLCCRT-nE>



# Harmful Ways of Dealing with Emotions

- **Stuffing** or **ignoring** our emotions leads to recycled emotions & emotional outburst, continued fight or flight and physiological arousal
- **Dumping vs. Venting:** A dumper does not consider how the way they share their emotions impacts their social support system.
- **Making ourselves feel guilty for having the emotion in the first place** (e.g., caretaker who feels guilty for being angry or frustrated with a loved one who is struggling)
- **Trying to talk ourselves out of having the emotion without naming/feeling it** or telling ourselves we don't deserve to have an emotional response: "I'm not going to let this ruin my day."
- **Getting stuck on your story** (or your perception of what's going on) and not allowing the emotion to pass "I'm so angry because I can't go to the party!"

# Best Practices for Emotional Acknowledgement

1. Notice when you start to feel overwhelmed.
2. Take a few deep breaths.
3. Name the emotions that are under the surface of your anxiety.
4. Focus on the emotion itself and where it shows up in your body.
5. Take a deep breath and give yourself permission to feel it on the inside without judgement.
6. Tell yourself something supportive like “It’s ok to have this feeling.” “I am not my emotions and have the power to feel them and let them go.”
7. Take another deep breath and picture the emotion lifting and letting go of its hold on you.

# 3 Steps to Emotional Expressiveness

Step 1: recognize our emotions (unedited)

Step 2: acknowledge and express them

Step 3: move forward with self-compassion



Sometimes you need help dealing with strong emotions and that is okay.  
**Do not suffer in silence.**

Seek help from a trusted friend, family member, professional counselor, or other health care provider.  
**It's okay and very normal to not be okay.**



# The End Goal!

*If you can allow yourself to focus on the raw feeling without any story attached "I'm really sad/mad/scared and that's okay." **then** you are taking the power out of that emotion, helping to break it's grip on you.*

***You may not have control over when and what you feel, but you do have control over how long it lasts and how you process it.***



"I don't let go of my thoughts...  
I meet them with understanding.  
Then, they let go of me."  
-Byron Katie

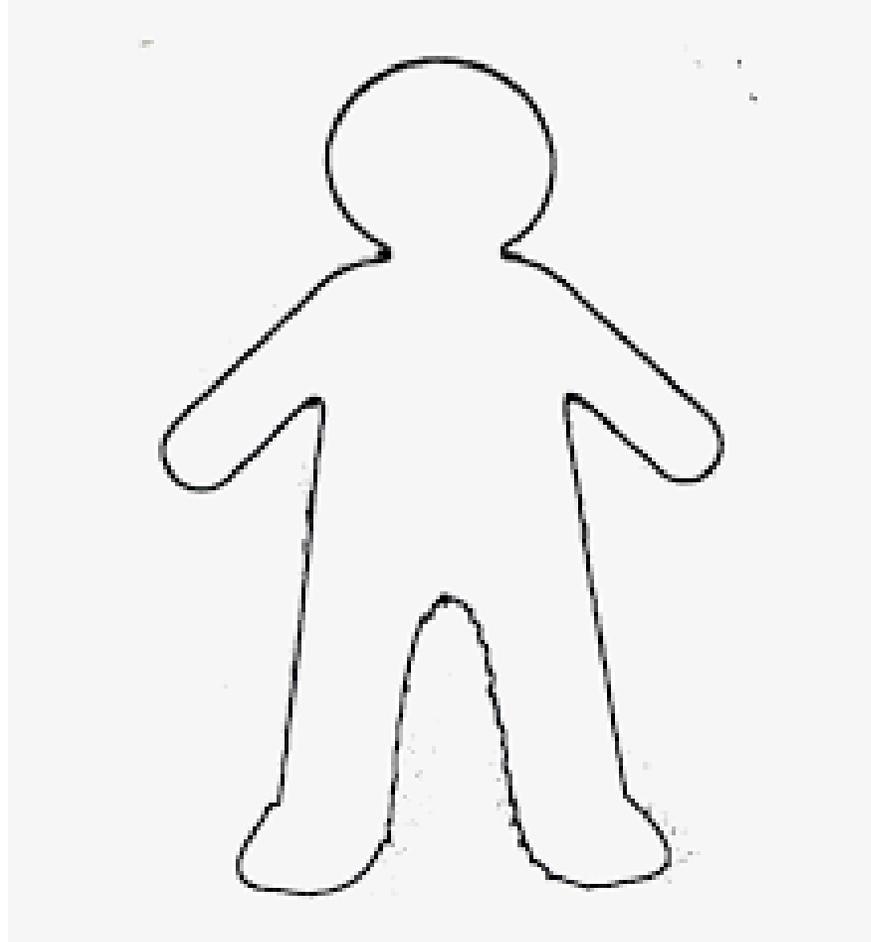


What do people normally do with their emotions?

Which emotions are most difficult to process?



# Body Mapping Emotions



# How do you achieve emotional expressiveness?

- **Use Thought-stopping techniques**

- Every time you start to focus on the reason for your feeling, say to yourself, “STOP” and then move on.
- Repeat as necessary
  - Stop
  - Take a few deep breaths
  - Observe your body and smile everywhere inside
  - Proceed with kindness and compassion

- **Challenge reflection: Do a nightly review of one major challenge from your day, paying special attention to how it made you feel.**

Take just a minute and get in tune with how that experience made you feel, noting how the emotions show up for you in your body (e.g., heaviness in chest, hotness in face, knot in stomach).

Allow yourself to feel the raw emotions without judgement and tell yourself some compassionate phrases (e.g., “That made me feel very sad/angry and it’s okay to feel that way. I am not my emotions”).

# Self-Compassion Break-Dr. Kristen Neff

available at <https://self-compassion.org/exercise-2-self-compassion-break/>

## Say to yourself:

- 1. This is a moment of suffering (acknowledge it):** This hurts. This is really hard. This is causing a lot of stress.
- 2. Suffering is a part of life (normalize it):** We all struggle in our lives. I'm not alone. It is normal to feel this way.
- 3. May I be kind to myself in this moment (give it some compassion):** You can also ask yourself, "What do I need to hear right now to comfort myself?" Then, offer yourself a kind and compassionate message like one of the following:  
*May I give myself the compassion that I need*  
*May I learn to accept myself as I am*  
*May I forgive myself*  
*May I be strong*  
*May I be patient*

# 5 Minute Writing Release



1. Think of a strong emotion that has been keeping you stuck lately.
2. Set a timer for five minutes.
3. Write whatever comes to mind for that emotion without worrying about what you are writing or going back to re-read what you are wrote. Just get it out on the page.
4. When the timer goes off, do not go back and read your writing.
5. Instead, immediately rip up the paper and tell yourself, “I have acknowledged my (anger, sadness, fear) and now I release it. It can no longer overwhelm me or keep me stuck.”
6. Throw away the ripped paper. As you do, feel the emotional energy leave with it.



# Situations, Options, Outcomes

Help prepare yourself to deal with a strong emotion or difficult situation, practice thinking things through before reacting.

1. What is the situation?
  2. What are your options for dealing with the situation?
  3. What are the possible outcomes for each option? (Outcomes can be positive or negative.)
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**Thank you for joining!**

**A recording of today's presentation portion and links to view slides with the activities we discussed will be available on the IFOPA website early next week.**

