

Using Your Emotions *Wisely*

Key ideas from Dr. Marc Brackett of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence on why feelings matter and how to work with them, not against them.

What is emotional intelligence?

A set of learnable skills for using emotions wisely to reach your goals. Most of us never had an “emotion education,” so these skills can be learned at any age. Emotions are data: there are no bad emotions, and all of them pass.

Emotions add up like debt.

Strong, unpleasant feelings we don't process don't disappear. Eventually the debt comes due, often as denial, suppression, perfectionism, control, or shame. It starts with giving yourself *permission to feel*.

Five reasons emotions matter

Attention

A brain stuck in survival mode can't focus or learn well.

Judgment

Mood quietly shapes decisions. Naming a feeling and its cause loosens its hold.

Relationships

Face, tone, and body language signal others to come closer or stay away.

Health

Small feelings left unchecked grow: annoyed becomes angry; sad becomes hopeless.

Performance

Handling feedback, disappointment, and nerves matters as much as talent.

The five skills: RULER

R

Recognize

Notice emotion in your body and thoughts, and in others' faces, voices, and behavior.
Most of us are less accurate than we think. Check in rather than assume.

U

Understand

Know what causes an emotion and how it affects your thinking and actions.
Get curious: “What happened that brought this on?”

L

Label

Find the precise word for what you feel. Specific words point to specific solutions.
Swap “stressed” or “fine” for a more exact word (see page 2).

E

Express

Share feelings in ways that fit the setting and help you reach your goals.
Try: “I’m feeling _____. I’m curious how you’re feeling about this.”

R

Regulate

Use thoughts and actions to prevent, ease, or even savor and boost emotions.
Regulation isn't about erasing feelings; it's about choosing your response.



Putting It Into *Practice*

Name it precisely

IF YOU FEEL	IT OFTEN SIGNALS	WHAT TENDS TO HELP
Anxiety	Uncertainty about the future	Clarify what you can, plan, and accept what's unknown
Stress	Too many demands, not enough resources	Ask for help, delegate, or adjust expectations
Pressure	Something important depends on what I do	Prepare and focus on what's in your control
Fear	Danger feels close at hand	Check how real and immediate the threat is
Overwhelm	Flooded with more emotion than I can sort	Pause and calm your body first, then sort it out
Anger	Something feels unfair	Ask, "What feels unjust here?"
Disappointment	An expectation wasn't met	Ask, "What did I expect, and did I say it out loud?"
Envy	Comparing myself to others	Gratitude and kinder self-talk, not just relaxation

A deep breath helps with many feelings, but the right word points to the right fix. Anxiety can even be a clue: it often shows up around the things you care about most.

Go-tos that backfire

- **Avoiding** people or burying feelings
- **Eating or drinking** to cope
- **Negative self-talk**, often learned early from others
- **Venting or retaliating**, which can stir feelings up more

Strategies that help, in order

- 1. Permission to feel.** "It's okay. I'm feeling this."
- 2. Find the word.** Use the chart above.
- 3. Calm your body.** Breathe, walk, or take a short break.
- 4. Shift your thinking:** ask "How will I feel about this in a month?" Put a difficult person in a "picture frame" to *observe*, not *absorb*. Name three things going right. Remind yourself: it's a rainy day, not forever.
- 5. Savor the good.** Revisit and share pleasant moments.

Be an emotion ally

People who had a caring adult who asked how they felt tend to fare better later in life. Being that person for someone doesn't require fixing or advice. It looks like:

Warmth

No judgment

Listening

Compassion

Steady presence

You can offer these to yourself, too. Ask: *for whom can I be this person?*

Check in today

I'm feeling _____

because _____

One thing that would help: _____

Ideas summarized from Dr. Marc Brackett, founding director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, as discussed on *The Mel Robbins Podcast*. RULER is an approach developed at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. To learn more, see Dr. Brackett's books *Permission to Feel* and *Dealing with Feeling*.

