

14: Understanding and Diffusing Strong Emotion

We have studied many different angles of Self Work but it is now time to use the learning in a practical way and to focus on important aspects of emotional health. The purpose is to enable you to easily and quickly recognise where you are in the moment, how you are feeling, and with awareness, diffuse strong emotion safely and effectively.

This is a process that may re-awaken feelings of shame, hurt, fear, depression, anger, etc. as you move through past trauma. However, appropriately expressed emotion is better than suppressed (hidden) feelings, which create so much stress it literally makes one sick.

Powerful emotion does not have to be negative. In fact, if correctly managed, it can be our friend. When we feel strongly about anything, we usually have our needs met. However, when we do not get what we want or need, there is frequently a negative emotional spin off. Note: Appropriate behaviour as a result of strong emotion is critically important!

- You have already worked out who your inner support people are. This is a good time to begin working **with them** in a ‘buddy’ system as you learn to work through conflict and emotional pain.
- Secondly, you have a journal to record your progress.
- Thirdly, we have discussed the necessity to listen to others objectively, without interruption, in Communication skills. Let us now look at ‘needs’.

What are Needs?

A Need is something that we require as an individual, to feed, fulfil and sustain our lives in a state of harmony and balance.

It may be something we needed to hear from a parent, (e.g. a message of love and acceptance). It may be something we desire to look at to regain our equilibrium e.g. to get out into nature if you live in a dirty, polluted environment. A need may be a requirement to get through a cold winter, such as warm clothing. If our needs are met, we feel we belong and are part of a community of humanity on earth.

The most fundamental needs are as follows:

- Self-Actualisation.
- Self-esteem.
- Love and Belonging.
- Safety.
- Survival.

The emotional behaviour for each of the above headings is different, depending on our reaction to the need not being met. On one hand, we may become angry and over energised, or alternatively, we become apathetic and under energised.

Choice is the key word. To resolve any issue we need balanced energy to motivate us to resolve the situation satisfactorily.

There is a 'Need' to stop here for a moment! Before going any further, let us look at the words, 'Choice', and 'No Choice', and what this really means.

Sometimes there is a stress of **choice**. For example, in sky diving and bungee jumping, a person has made a conscious decision to do something terrifying but they love the experience. There is action behind the decision and it makes them feel alive and excited. They are in tune with their needs/desires and respond joyfully.

We can choose who we want to be with, what activity we're drawn to or what to wear each day. It is something we do that satisfies our need to be independent, to put our ideas into action, and live as a happy, well adjusted, satisfied person.

No choice situations look very different. This time the person is stuck in a reaction mode and is either fighting to survive with a high degree of stress energy (imagine a car in high gear) or gives in to the situation and becomes stuck in a type of 'low gear' energy which often results in depression. Few, if any of their Needs are being met.

Now to continue: To expand your understanding, let us look at the above headings in relation to prison life. There are many identifiable general emotions that are almost a 'standard condition' whilst living in confinement. Let's try to identify these in relation to personal 'Needs' not being met.

The most common emotions are aggression, apathy, loneliness, hopelessness, depression, stress, rejection, disappointment, guilt, hypersensitive, angry, bitter, forgotten, exhausted, drained, no focus or concentration, frustration, worried, self-hate, intolerant, claustrophobic, desperate to be free, numbness and indifference. Can you identify with these?

1. Self-Actualisation:

To reach your best, your basic needs may be to feel appreciated, loved and to feel worthy. Additional needs may include ambition, focus, determination, and independence. Any of these emotions would most likely lead to qualification achievement and the ability to recognise opportunities to be explored. Life becomes an adventure.

If these needs are not met?

The result is an implosion of hopes and dreams. Anger, frustration, depression, exhaustion, apathy and stagnation result.

2. Self-Esteem:

Needs:

Self-confidence, recognition, assurance, and an ability to lead. This includes an ability to express oneself and communicate well. To be outgoing, social and to know what you want. To be free to make choices and

be your own person. You know in your heart you are more than good enough.

When these needs are not met?

Disappointment, no choice, and insecurity result, which could then lead to becoming introverted or aggressive; rude and unhappy. There may be a feeling of rejection, or being forgotten. Once again depression and apathy, or worse, self-hate could creep in.

3. Love and Belonging:

There is a need to feel accepted. This provides a sense of belonging where you feel secure, connected and understood. You are socially outgoing and participate in activities. In addition, you are able to have healthy, intimate relationships.

When these Needs are not met:

One feels alienated, argumentative, rejected, abandoned, and there is little or no real communication. In a nutshell worthless! This could lead to aggression, insecurity, and an emotional numbness where it is possible to hide all emotion.

4. Safety:

Words such as: Stability, safety, protection, boundaries, routine, discipline and order are positive Needs.

When these are not met?

Fear, chaos, uncertainty and confusion could result. In turn these lead to stress, hiding away, worry, anger, inflexibility and again, aggression.

5. Survival:

Our basic needs for survival are warmth, shelter, food, touch, fresh air, love and sleep. When these fundamental needs are not fulfilled, we become needy, feel deserted and deprived which often leads to panic. We may start to have cravings; to be self punishing or to behave irrationally.

If you recognise any of the above negative emotions as regular visitors that undermine your emotional wellbeing, be aware a need is not being met and is, perhaps, a trigger for strong emotion.

Exercise:

- What do you think basic Needs are? Think about it and write down your ideas. This list applies to all people.
- Now write a list of your own Needs. This list will help you fulfil your own Life Path, according to your highest good.
- Now you know what your Needs are, how are you going to put them into practice on a daily basis?
- Write a plan for this. What do you need to do?
- Write an example on each of the five Basic Needs not being met, from your own life experience.

‘High energy stress’ and ‘low energy stress’ were mentioned earlier. Let us explore this further:

There are times in life when both are appropriate but the concern is if you become STUCK in one or the other for any length of time. This often occurs when a need is not being met. An example of this is a man becoming a workaholic because he “needs to be rich to be somebody.”

Imagine a car revving and travelling in first gear all the time! A person would be in a state of high energy, high tension, but a body cannot remain in overdrive forever and this is when one may become accident prone, have headaches, be unable to sleep, become a workaholic, feel “I have to.....NOW.” Usually the person will seem very irritable. This type of person is likely to have high blood pressure, cholesterol problems, and allergies and may end up having a heart attack or stroke. They are literally STUCK in first gear, continually fighting to survive and such a person would react strongly to everything.

Alternatively, continual unresolved stress may make a person go into overwhelm. Life is too much to handle and they start to withdraw. This type of person is always anxious, fearful and mentally exhausted. They feel stuck and the expression often used by such a person is “I can’t”. Apathy and sleeping too much is their way out in order to escape from their problems. There is loss of hope and effort. The result is depression, which means too little or minimal movement in the energy system. Depressed people think, think and think some more, but do nothing. Again, movement is the key word to drive such a person out of inertia into action. This type of person is STUCK in low energy. They would not even have enough energy to think about their Needs, let alone addressing them!

The examples above are two extremes. Balance between the two restores harmony, peace and joy. Addressing Needs brings balance back into life.

Unfulfilled Needs can lead to Anger so let us look at that, next:

Anger:

“Anger is a response to a perceived threat – past, present or future”

Roger Koester

In his book *Beating Anger*, Mike Fisher gives five “*faces of anger*”:

1. **“The Caring Face of Anger”**

A common trigger for anger is injustice. One’s reaction to circumstance depends on the strength of their ability to care for and feel passion for a situation or person. When one cannot protect self, loved ones or the world, the feeling they experience is outrage. They are angry because they care. E.g. I become angry when I see litter thrown all over the place. My first thought is “How dare they? Who do they think is going to pick it all up?”