

EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION

Introduction

Emotions need to be experienced fully, completely and unreservedly.

But how exactly do we do that?

Unfortunately, we're educated to try and think our way through our feelings. The intellectually focused environment we are raised in teaches us to believe we can figure our feelings out. For example, instead of feeling monumental grief when our mother dies, we are encouraged to *'think about what a great life she had.'* Well, maybe she did, but you'll probably be feeling sadness, loss and/or grief. Not to express these feelings (when they are the truth) is to dishonour both our mother and ourselves.

While it may feel like it (especially when they are up and active), the reality is we are not our emotions – we experience them. It helps to understand that like our body and our thoughts, our emotions are real enough, but they are transitory. Therefore it must hold true that they don't necessarily have to hijack us, despite the fact that they may have done exactly that for many years.

The best way to begin exploring emotions (it will probably last a lifetime) is to see if we can turn towards them. Let me be clear – that is not to face them down. Only a close, compassionate and non-aggressive exploration of our feelings (with a view to expressing them) will provide enlightenment about them.

Doing so will allow you to harness the strength of your emotions rather than be hijacked by them.

Anger

We all need to make places in which it is safe for us to express our anger.

In a safe situation, such as home or a circle of people who know what's happening and are prepared to help by facilitating the flow of your anger, rather than by shutting you down, you can tap deeply into the pool we referred to in unit one – healing yourself in the process. This may sound like weird stuff, but in reality it's taking control of your own life.

Would you rather let the anger rip in a safe place where it will be respected, or run the risk that it will turn up at work with you one day, where the recipient will be the boss or a customer?

For many people, anger has too often been the forerunner of violence. Therefore, avoiding or damping down anger is intended to stop the onset of the physical danger.

The problem there is not the anger itself, but a lack of knowledge about how to express anger in a healthy and safe manner. We suppress our anger for too long and then it explodes, as described in unit one, over some trivial event.

Sadly, that 'held-backness' causes it to come out (when it eventually does) with a twist on it. The twist will turn up as vindictiveness, bitchiness, sarcasm, nastiness or a host of other 'dirties.' This unsavoury aspect of anger is what appalls us about it. Most people have said something in anger that they wish they could take back.

The ferocity of built up anger convinces many people that they really would kill someone if they didn't keep it under (pushed down, suppressed) very tight control. The world is quite rightly disgusted by the ugly (but very common) nasty version.

But it really is quite beautiful to go right into anger - deeply and safely.

In short - get into it. You need it. If you think you don't have any, you've probably got a deep reservoir full of it. You will probably have to fake it to get started but sure enough if you do, it will start to flow and gain its own momentum.

Here's what to do...

The way we normally do this is with a **punching bag**. If you don't have one, we suggest you invest in one.

- ¥ Lay the punching bag on its side on the floor. Kneel in front of it and relax down so that while you are still on your knees your bottom sits on your heels.
- ¥ Breathe deeply in and out several times. You're ready to start.
- ¥ Make a fist. Rise up off your ankles, open your chest and raise your arm back above your head.
- ¥ Come down and connect with the punching bag. Do not punch the bag with your knuckles. It should be the fleshy side of your palm that makes contact with the bag.
- ¥ When you rise up and draw back, breathe in, and when you come down and connect with the punching bag exhale forcefully and fully to make a 'huh' noise.
- ¥ Swap to the other arm – so that you are now alternating arms with each hit to the bag.
- ¥ Let yourself warm up with the above so that you don't pull any muscles – you should be working at about 30% intensity. Do this until you get a bit red in the face and perhaps even a little breathless. Then start to work faster and louder. The 'huh' noise you started with should now be a yell, and you should be working at about 70% intensity. Do this for a while, perhaps five minutes, and then take it up another notch.
- ¥ In the final phase, you should be firing on all cylinders physically and vocally. Pound the bag with as much force as you can and yell as loudly as you can. In this stage, the vocal component often becomes one long yell rather than a separate one for each punch. This is just what you want. Do this until you completely run out of steam.
- ¥ Sit back on your heels and breathe deeply for at least five minutes.

When doing anger work, it is critical that you really go for it – halfway will not do it. Many people say things like, "But I don't feel angry right now." That's perfectly natural, and is actually the point of the exercise. We need to become proactive with anger rather than reactive. If you start anyway – the anger will come when you let go and let fly at the punching bag.

It's also important that you get the vocal component in. The healing for you will only come if you 'let it out', which is what the yelling is about. The physical expression will not be enough, so get yelling!

Obviously, if you live in a city you will need to play loud music while you do this. You could also warn your neighbours if you feel comfortable doing so.

If you cannot afford to buy a punching bag, or this theory doesn't work for you, there are several other options. You can use a pillow – though you might need a couple if they aren't very thick. You can also scream underwater, or if you live on a property you could even chop wood. Some people like to smash plates – but this option can get expensive and messy.

Don't be surprised if once you have expressed some anger sadness shows up. Just move on to the next exercise.