Basic Concepts Emotion Theory


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art by Jana Binon
Emotions involve both

- Cognition, in the form of evaluations
- Motivation, in the form of needs

They are therefore higher level experiences than either cognition or motivation alone (p. 12)
Emotional wisdom involves

**Knowing**

- when to be changed by emotions and
- when to change emotions

**Learning**

- which emotions to trust and follow
- which to bypass to get to something deeper
- which to regulate or transform

And when to do which of those
Distinguishing among varieties of emotional expression

Ultimately people need to evaluate whether the emotion they are experiencing is

• **Adaptive** and healthy and can be used as a *guide to live* a full life
or whether it is

• **Maladaptive** and damaging and should *not be followed*  (p.32)
Primary Emotions
are the person’s most fundamental, direct initial reactions to a situation, such as
- fight, flight, or freeze for survival
- anger at violation
- sadness at loss
- fear at threat
- also complex emotions such as jealousy or appreciation
Maladaptive Emotions
Unhealthy, chronic bad feelings
Malfunctioning of people’s emotional system

Fight, flight, or freeze that interferes with survival as in PostTraumaticStressDisorder

Unresolved grief

Destructive rage

Debilitating fear

Also complex emotions as empty isolation or alienation
Secondary Emotions
Reactive or defensive emotions
Obscure primary feelings

Secondary Emotions are responses to or defences against primary feelings rather than to the situation.

- Depression may be covering anger
- Anger may obscure feeling sad or hurt
- Coolness may obscure original fear
Instrumental Emotions
To influence or to manipulate the environment.
People use these emotions to get something they want

Often people may not be aware that they have learned to use instrumental emotions for the gain they bring (p.49)

- Crying in order to avoid expected punishment or to evoke sympathy
- Getting angry is likely to intimidate people
For successful emotion processing the person needs to ...

- become aware of emotions
- identify and name their emotions
- express emotions, especially primary emotions and unexpressed emotions
- regulate emotions, being in touch without being overwhelmed (finding the ‘right distance’)
- make sense of emotions
- transform problem emotions
Emotion Regulation

• Part of emotional intelligence is the ability to regulate emotionality so that one is guided by it but not compelled by it (p.33)

• The first level of emotion regulation involves the capacity to symbolize

• Rather than concentrating on toning down or suppressing emotions, people need to guide their emotions toward constructive action or transform them into ones that are more favourable and more helpful to problem solving (p.25)