

Coping with Strong Emotions



During uncertain times the power of raw emotions can be overwhelming for many of us. And let's face it, 2020 has been quite a year of uncertainty. If we are not careful, those emotions can drive us to do and say things that we're sorry for later, whether it's an impulsive reply in a work meeting, or with a loved one, or acting out in unhealthy ways.

All too often, when feeling raw emotion, we feel justified in lashing out. And by doing that we believe that we are addressing the problem. Most of the time this can only create more conflict and cause any situation to become increasingly heated and difficult to resolve. People may get defensive and may be offended by our reactions.

So, should we internalize our strong emotions? No. When we repress feelings instead of acknowledging them, we carry them around and eventually this causes us more stress. Over time, this has the potential to create an even greater emotion explosion that can damage anyone around us, not to mention ourselves, in the process.

The secret is this: Allow yourself to feel all the emotion, but resist acting on them while you are upset!

- 1. Feelings are Fluid:** Recognize that feelings are always changing, they come and go. When we react strongly when we're feeling angry, slighted, or defensive, we tend to respond in a way that we later regret. Stop and be intentional when feeling any strong emotion that it is only temporary & resist initial reactions.
- 2. Don't Take it Personally:** Be mindful that others around you likely also feel strong emotions and may end up lashing out at you. Don't take it personally. Try and be aware that they are seeing their own reality through a different lens of experience and history. Refrain as best you can from adding fuel to their fire.
- 3. Hurt People Hurt People:** When someone is angry, often times that's the surface emotion with deeper sadness, disappointment or expectation lying underneath. When we act out in anger it can indicate a vulnerability that is causing the individual to respond with defense mechanisms, with anger and frustration being common reactions. Trying to see through that and to the deeper human part of what causes the reaction by listening and being civil usually brings about positive outcomes.
- 4. Feelings Aren't Always Real:** When something out of control happens, we tend to believe everything our feelings tell us: "I'm a terrible parent." Or, "I knew that they wouldn't invite me to lunch. I must not be that fun to be around." These are all thoughts that can take place in milliseconds and have long term impact. The notion that you feel it must mean it's true is blatantly false when in the heat of the moment.
- 5. Breathe Through the Rollercoaster:** Not enough can be said about centered breathing. When feeling strong emotion, allow yourself to feel whatever you feel, accept it and breath deeply for several minutes. Focus on your breathing and relax your body with each exhale. This tends to evaporate the strong emotion and replaces it by more lucid, calm thoughts and reactions.



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