

Emotional intelligence (EQ) skill 1: Rapidly reduce stress

High levels of stress can overwhelm the mind and body, getting in the way of your ability to accurately “read” a situation, hear what someone else is saying, be aware of your own feelings and needs, and communicate clearly.

Being able to quickly calm yourself down and diffuse stress helps you stay balanced, focused, and in control—no matter what challenges you face or how stressful a situation becomes.

Stress busting: functioning well in the heat of the moment

Develop your stress busting skills by working through the following three steps:

- **Realize when you’re stressed** – The first step to reducing stress is recognizing what stress feels like. How does your body feel when you’re stressed? Are your muscles or stomach tight or sore? Are your hands clenched? Is your breath shallow? Being aware of your physical response to stress will help regulate tension when it occurs.
- **Identify your stress response** – Everyone reacts differently to stress. If you tend to become angry or agitated under stress, you will respond best to stress relief activities that quiet you down. If you tend to become depressed or withdrawn, you will respond best to stress relief activities that are stimulating. If you tend to freeze—speeding up in some ways while slowing down in others—you need stress relief activities that provide both comfort and stimulation.
- **Discover the stress-busting techniques that work for you** – The best way to reduce stress quickly is by engaging one or more of your senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Each person responds differently to sensory input, so you need to find things that are soothing and/or energizing to you. For example, if you’re a visual person you can relieve stress by surrounding yourself with uplifting images. If you respond more to sound, you may find a wind chime, a favorite piece of music, or the sound of a water fountain helps to quickly reduce your stress levels.

Emotional intelligence (EQ) skill 2: Emotional awareness

Being able to connect to your emotions—having a moment-to-moment awareness of your emotions and how they influence your thoughts and actions—is the key to understanding yourself and others.

Many people are disconnected from their emotions—especially strong core emotions such as anger, sadness, fear, and joy. This may be the result of negative childhood experiences that taught you to try to shut off your feelings. But although we can distort, deny, or numb our feelings, we can’t eliminate them. They’re still there, whether we’re aware of them or not. Unfortunately, without emotional awareness, we are unable to fully understand our own motivations and needs, or to communicate effectively with others.

What kind of a relationship do you have with your emotions?

- **Do you experience feelings that flow**, encountering one emotion after another as your experiences change from moment to moment?
- **Are your emotions accompanied by physical sensations that you experience** in places like your stomach or chest?

- **Do you experience discrete feelings and emotions**, such as anger, sadness, fear, joy, each of which is evident in subtle facial expressions?
- **Can you experience intense feelings** that are strong enough to capture both your attention and that of others?
- **Do you pay attention to your emotions?** Do they factor into your decision making?

If any of these experiences are unfamiliar, your emotions may be turned down or turned off. In order to be emotionally healthy and emotionally intelligent, you must reconnect to your core emotions, accept them, and become comfortable with them.

Emotional intelligence skill (EQ) 3: Nonverbal communication

Being a good communicator requires more than just verbal skills. Often, *what* you say is less important than *how* you say it or the other nonverbal signals you send out—the gestures you make, the way you sit, how fast or how loud you talk, how close you stand, how much eye contact you make. In order to hold the attention of others and build connection and trust, you need to be aware of and in control of this body language. You also need to be able to accurately read and respond to the nonverbal cues that other people send you.

These messages don't stop when someone stops speaking. Even when you're silent, you're still communicating nonverbally. Think about what you are transmitting as well, and if what you say matches what you feel. If you insist "I'm fine", while clenching your teeth and looking away, your body is clearly signaling the opposite. Your nonverbal messages can produce a sense of interest, trust, excitement, and desire for connection—or they can generate fear, confusion, distrust, and disinterest.

Tips for improving nonverbal communication

Successful nonverbal communication depends on your ability to manage stress, recognize your own emotions, and understand the signals you're sending and receiving. When communicating:

- **Focus on the other person.** If you are planning what you're going to say next, daydreaming, or thinking about something else, you are almost certain to miss nonverbal cues and other subtleties in the conversation.
- **Make eye contact.** Eye contact can communicate interest, maintain the flow of a conversation, and help gauge the other person's response.
- **Pay attention to nonverbal cues** you're sending and receiving, such as facial expression, tone of voice, posture and gestures, touch, and the timing and pace of the conversation.

Emotional intelligence (EQ) skill 4: Use humor and play to deal with challenges

Humor, laughter, and play are natural antidotes to life's difficulties. They lighten your burdens and help you keep things in perspective. A good hearty laugh reduces stress, elevates mood, and brings your nervous system back into balance.

Playful communication broadens your emotional intelligence and helps you:

- **Take hardships in stride.** By allowing you to view your frustrations and disappointments from new perspectives, laughter and play enable you to survive annoyances, hard times, and setbacks.
- **Smooth over differences.** Using gentle humor often helps you say things that might be otherwise difficult to express without creating a flap.
- **Simultaneously relax and energize yourself.** Playful communication relieves fatigue and relaxes your body, which allows you to recharge and accomplish more.
- **Become more creative.** When you loosen up, you free yourself of rigid ways of thinking and being, allowing you to get creative and see things in new ways.

How to develop playful communication:

It's never too late to develop and embrace your playful, humorous side.

- Try setting aside regular, quality playtime. The more you joke, play, and laugh—the easier it becomes.
- Find enjoyable activities that loosen you up and help you embrace your playful nature.
- Practice by playing with animals, babies, young children, and outgoing people who appreciate playful banter.

Emotional intelligence (EQ) skill 5: Resolve conflict positively

Conflict and disagreements are inevitable in relationships. Two people can't possibly have the same needs, opinions, and expectations at all times. However, that needn't be a bad thing. Resolving conflict in healthy, constructive ways can strengthen trust between people. When conflict isn't perceived as threatening or punishing, it fosters freedom, creativity, and safety in relationships.

The ability to manage conflicts in a positive, trust-building way is supported by the previous four skills of emotional intelligence. Once you know how to manage stress, stay emotionally present and aware, communicate nonverbally, and use humor and play, you'll be better equipped to handle emotionally-charged situations and catch and defuse many issues before they escalate.

Tips for resolving conflict in a trust-building way:

- **Stay focused in the present.** When you are not holding on to old hurts and resentments, you can recognize the reality of a current situation and view it as a new opportunity for resolving old feelings about conflicts.
- **Choose your arguments.** Arguments take time and energy, especially if you want to resolve them in a positive way. Consider what is worth arguing about and what is not.
- **Forgive.** Other people's hurtful behavior is in the past. To resolve conflict, you need to give up the urge to punish or seek revenge.
- **End conflicts that can't be resolved.** It takes two people to keep an argument going. You can choose to disengage from a conflict, even if you still disagree.