

# TAPPING INTO EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN TIMES OF STRESS

Understanding yourself and those around you

**COVID-19 has changed the way we live.** For most, this has meant significant disruption to regular routines including changes to the way we work, the type of work we do, our social movements and our personal and family lives.

During times of increased pressure, it can be normal to experience increased levels of stress. Tapping into emotional intelligence during these times may assist you to better understand yourself and those around you, and equip you with the tools necessary to recognise, understand and manage stress effectively.

## STRESS

Stress is the body's way of responding to demand or pressures. It can be caused by both good and bad experiences. In many cases stress is a healthy reaction. It helps us cope with life's challenges. However too much stress, or prolonged stress can affect our physical and mental health. Taking steps to cope with situations we find stressful is important so we can function and live productive lives.

Stress is helpful when it increases our ability to be alert, energised, and switched on and resourceful in facing challenges we enjoy or have to deal with. But stress becomes unhelpful when it leaves us feeling fatigued, tense, and anxious, burnt out or overwhelmed. The tipping point between helpful and unhelpful stress is different for each of us and can also depend on what's happening in our lives.

Tapping into emotional intelligence may help with the identification and management of emotional responses to stressful situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.



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## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The ability to recognise and understand emotions in yourself and others, and [the] ability to use this awareness to manage your behaviour and relationships... It affects how we manage behaviours, navigate social complexities, and make personal decisions that achieve positive results.

”

*(Emotional Intelligence 2.0, p.17)*

Emotions are not random or chaotic.

They present in response to triggers and events, and follow logical processes. Emotions become apparent when working with others, regardless of efforts to hide them.

Emotions are essential to good decision making.

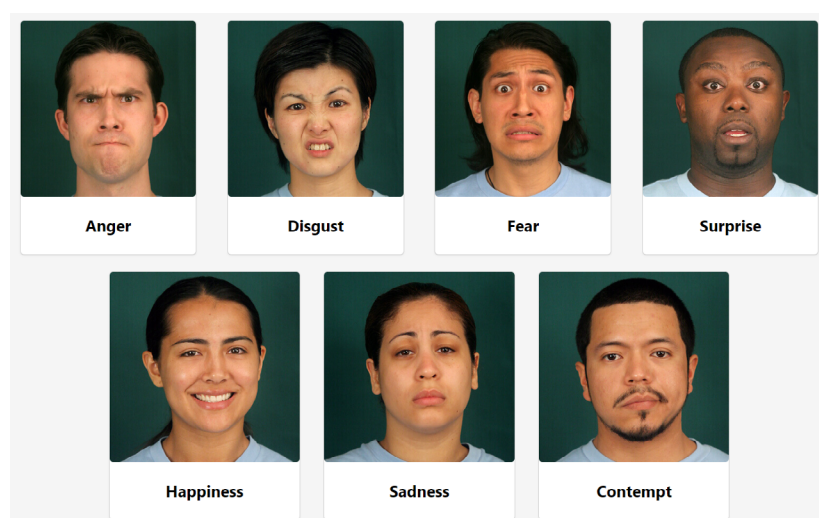
Every emotion can be useful under the right circumstances.

Emotional intelligence includes being aware of, effectively using, understanding and managing emotions.



## RECOGNISING AND PERCEIVING EMOTIONS

The ability to recognise emotions in yourself and others is important if we are to manage them effectively. Practically, there are ways to identify emotional reactions which may help identify emotional state.



### FACIAL CUES

Facial expressions are distinct, predictable, and easy to read for those who have studied them. Research has identified a number of universal facial expressions, each with distinctive visual cues which can be learnt (Elkman, 1970).

Image:

<https://www.paulekman.com/resources/universal-facial-expressions/>

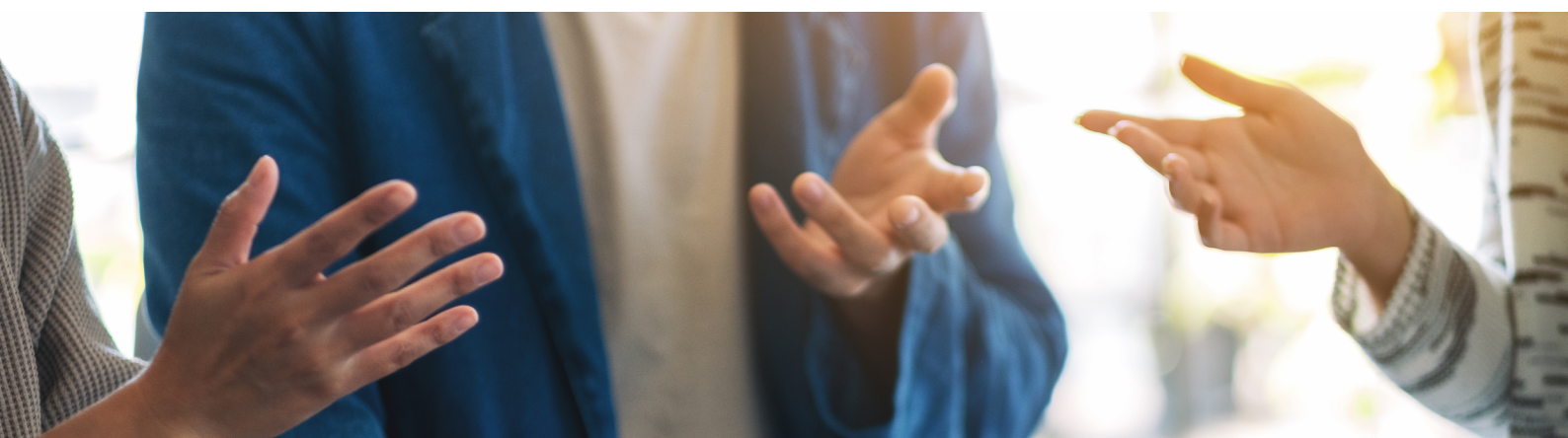
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## BODY LANGUAGE

Body language in the broadest sense can refer to any visual signals or physical movements/ positions. Some simple examples of display of body language are:

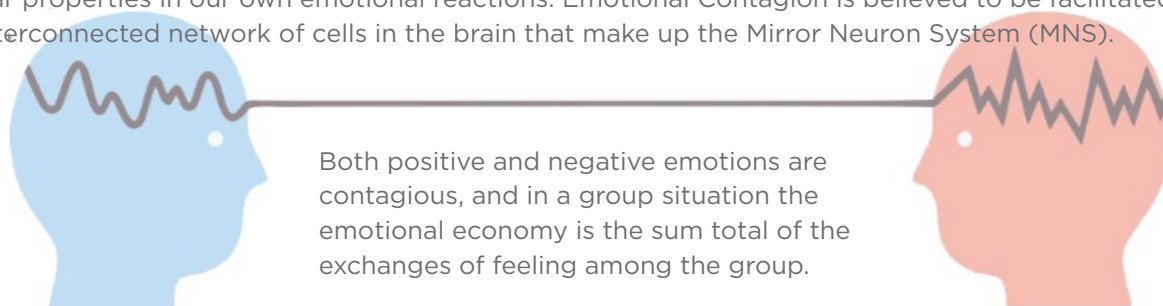
- Standing with your hands on your hips
- Putting your hands in your pockets
- Crossing your arms
- Clasping your hands behind your back
- Twiddling with your hair
- Looking at the floor
- Standing sideways while talking to them

**How aware are you of your own or other people's body language?**



## EMOTIONAL CONTAGION

When we observe another person experiencing an emotional state we subconsciously begin to take on similar properties in our own emotional reactions. Emotional Contagion is believed to be facilitated by an interconnected network of cells in the brain that make up the Mirror Neuron System (MNS).



## USING EMOTIONS

Part of emotional intelligence is being able to recognise when you feel emotions so they can be used effectively. People with high emotional intelligence often have highly developed and refined emotional vocabularies, enabling them to categorise and discuss emotions effectively.

In times of deep uncertainty such as the current pandemic, how we use our self awareness in the way we communicate with peers, patients and their carers will have a deep impact on the other's ability to manage their own fears and concerns.

Developing a wider emotional vocabulary can help you understand your own emotions and communicate these to others.

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## EMOTIONS MATRIX

The emotions matrix helps to name and understand emotional experiences. This matrix also sheds light on the way in which emotions can change along a spectrum over time or under certain circumstances.

INTENSITY OF FEELINGS	HAPPY	SAD	ANGRY	AFRAID	ASHAMED
<b>HIGH</b>	Elated Excited Overjoyed Thrilled Exuberant Ecstatic Fired up Passionate	Depressed Agonised Alone Hurt Dejected Hopeless Sorrowful Miserable	Furious Enraged Outraged Boiling Irrate Seething Loathsome Betrayed	Terrified Horrified Scared stiff Petrified Fearful Panicky Frantic Shocked	Sorrowful Remorseful Defamed Worthless Disgraced Dishonoured Mortified Admonished
<b>MEDIUM</b>	Cheerful Gratified Good Relieved Satisfied Glowing	Heartbroken Somber Lost Distressed Let down Melancholy	Upset Mad Defended Frustrated Agitated Disgusted	Apprehensive Frightened Threatened Insecure Uneasy Intimidated	Apologetic Unworthy Sneaky Guilty Embarrassed Secretive
<b>LOW</b>	Glad Content Pleasant Tender Pleased Mellow	Unhappy Moody Blue Upset Disappointed Dissatisfied	Perturbed Annoyed Uptight Resistant Irritated Touchy	Cautious Nervous Worried Timid Unsure Anxious	Bashful Ridiculous Regretful Uncomfortable Pitied Silly

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## EMOTIONAL SELF-CHECK TOOL

Use this tool to check-in with your emotional state.

### NAME IT

Identify which emotion you are feeling at the moment.

### ASK

What is the effect of this emotion on me? On others?

### CONSIDER

Is this emotion helpful?

### ACT

If the emotion is helpful at the moment, continue on!

If not, how can you change your emotional state?

## UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONS

Empathy is feeling *WITH* people.

Our ability to consider things from another person's point of view is crucial to displaying empathy. The ability to engage on an emotional level and with empathy is particularly important in the health context for understanding and supporting patients, families and carers in order to achieve quality patient outcomes and experiences.

Empathy is a skill which can be improved with practice and attention. According to Theresa Wiseman (1996), empathy requires the following qualities:



Brené Brown on Empathy - Click play to watch

Perspective taking - Ability to recognise someone else's truth

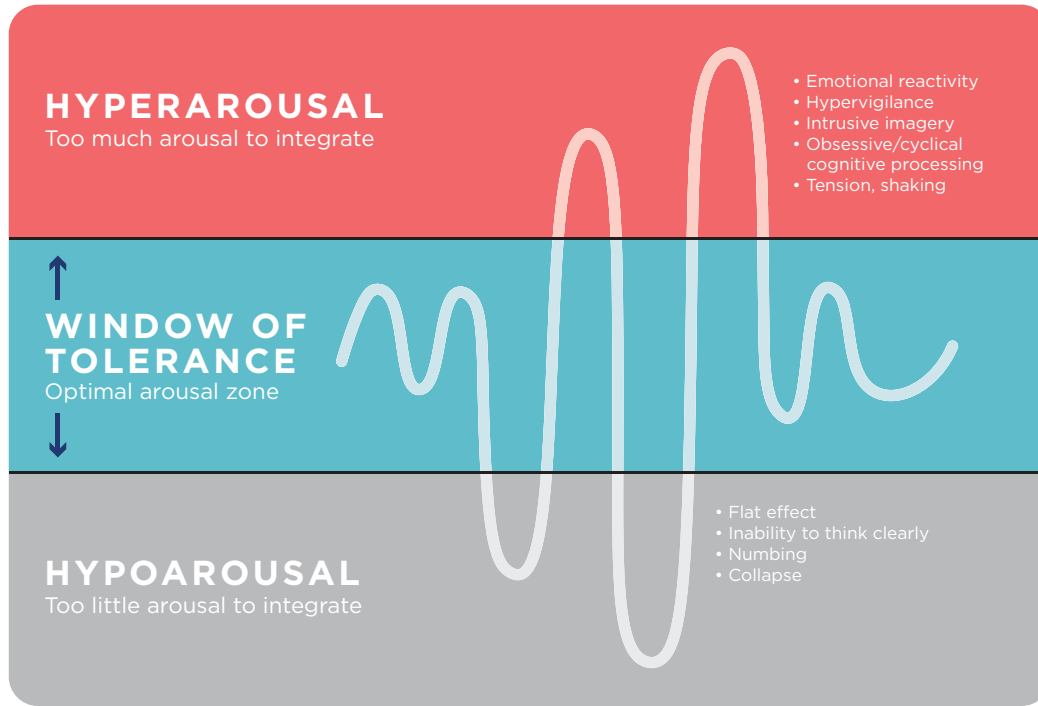
Staying out of judgement

Recognising emotion in others

Communicating effectively



## MANAGING EMOTIONS



*Window of Tolerance, Dan Siegel*

The Window of Tolerance is a term used to describe the level of emotional arousal someone has and where they need to be to function most effectively

When we are in our 'Window of Tolerance' we function most effectively.

In times of stress, we become hyper-aroused – our brain recognises the stress, engaging our sympathetic nervous system and fight or flight response. Higher-order thinking and reasoning capacity can become impacted during this time and we are no longer operating from within our Window of Tolerance.



[Click here to learn more](#)

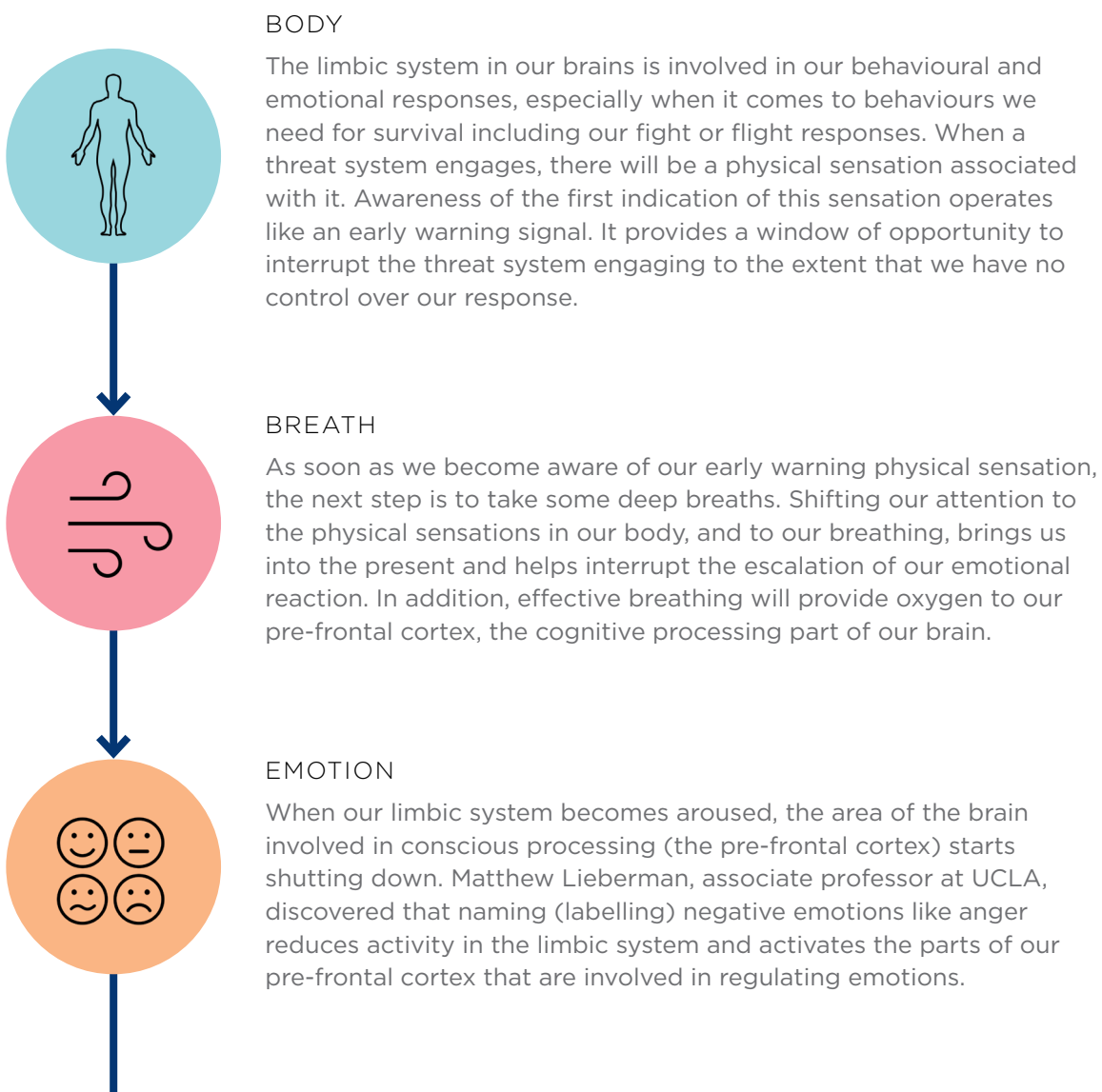
### RECOGNISING SIGNS OF STRESS (HYPERAROUSAL)

Hyperarousal can take on many forms depending on the person. The below lists some common symptoms of stress.

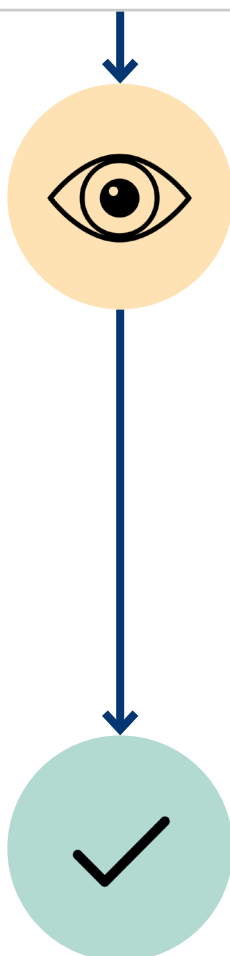
- Lack of motivation
- Sleeplessness or over sleeping
- Moodiness
- Headaches
- Lack of concentration
- Feeling overwhelmed or anxious
- Reliance on alcohol or other substances to cope
- Increase eating, drinking or nervous habits
- Not coping increased with demands or responsibilities

## PRACTICAL STEPS TO MANAGE STRESS ASSOCIATED EMOTION

Awareness of our automatic response patterns is the pre-requisite for more effective management of our emotional states when a threat response occurs. When one of our threat systems engages, what happens next will depend largely on our capacity to respond rather than automatically react. The following response process helps develop the capability to manage reactivity.



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## VIEWPOINT

The next step is to access our observer position – our wise counsellor. From this position we become curious about what is going on and are able to ask questions like:

- What is causing me to feel this way?
- What interpretations have I made? How accurate are they?
- What else could this mean?
- Am I experiencing separation, and if so what is causing it?
- Is the other person experiencing separation, and if so what is causing it?
- What do I need now?
- What might the other person need now?
- What can I do to help myself and/or the other person calm their emotions?
- How can we reconnect?

## CHOICE

Having regained our ability to think effectively we can now choose our reaction.

## MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us.

Mindfulness is available to us in every moment, whether through meditations and body scans, or mindful moment practices like taking time to pause and breathe when the phone rings instead of rushing to answer it.

The resources below will guide you towards incorporating mindfulness into your day and being able to recognise, regulate and manage emotions in yourself and others during this time.



# TAPPING INTO EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN TIMES OF STRESS

## PRACTICAL TECHNIQUES



[Box Breathing Technique](#)



[The Five Senses Exercise](#)



[Body Scan Meditation](#)



[The Three Minute Breathing Space](#)

## USEFUL RESOURCES



[Managing work-related stresses](#)



[Psychological Toolkit](#)



[Health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 outbreak](#)  
[Overcoming stress toolkit](#)



[Getting started with mindfulness](#)



HEADSPACE [Headspace](#)



[Nursewell App](#)



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