

Essential Update

Emotional Intelligence : A Paradigm Shift

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Among the emerging health concerns for the physical and mental well-being of children, adolescents multiple biological, psychological, social, cultural, environmental and economic factors have a potential influence for the attainment of the health and well-being on an individual. Since renowned psychologist Daniel Goleman published his pioneering book 'Emotional Intelligence' in 1995, interest continues to grow in what is considered to be an indispensable component not only of achieving one's potential but life satisfaction and success too.¹ While the focus had earlier remained on the academic achievement during the growing years of childhood, emotional regulation was largely ignored. Not only the intelligence quotient (IQ) but emotional intelligence (EI) is considered twice as a strong predictor of than IQ of later success. In Goleman's own words, emotional intelligence is the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in us and in our relationships.² Emotional intelligence describes abilities distinct from, but complementary to, academic intelligence or purely cognitive capacities measured by the intelligence quotient. It is the ability to notice and understand the emotions and channelize the action on those emotions in an effective direction¹.

During the last few years, Emotional intelligence (EI) gained further attention as it has a promise to be applied as an intervention for the set of skills that can be taught to enhance coping resources and promote the well-being. When the child or an older person appreciates the steps in thinking and learning processes, EI is akin to Global Positioning System (GPS) which assists him/her to navigate the way around the potential/real obstacles and find a right path towards the destination/goal. These set of perceptions and skills can be learnt right from early childhood to the grown-ups.

The five components of emotional intelligence as

identified by Goleman are: self-awareness, self-regulation, internal motivation, empathy and social skills. The self-awareness is about knowing one's own feelings at a particular time and how those feelings and moods can affect others. Once the possible consequences of acting on an impulse are considered beforehand, it's a manifestation of responses to the emotions (self-regulation). Motivation is another step which helps one to accomplish tasks/goals in spite of distractive or negative which may be there in a given situation. Understanding the others' feelings from their perspective and making a sincere effort to put oneself in other's shoes is what Empathy about. But it is not just about understanding the emotions of others but also a timely ability to express the reciprocal sensitivity to them, too. Social skills are an integral part of healthy relationships in the sphere of family, community and society¹.

A recent study of 912 high school students in Spain (2020) on relationship between emotional intelligence, social skills and peer harassment observed a positive relationship between EI and social skills. In turn, social skills reflected a negative relationship with respect to bullying ($p < 0.001$). The authors recommended the need to implement the educational programs focused on the development of emotional intelligence in the classroom, as a means to try to stop bullying behaviors in the classroom³. Further, the connection between EI and a range of positive outcomes across the academic, social, psychological and career domains among adolescents has been well-documented in several research studies in the past decade. A recent study of adolescents in 2015 found that yoga, which can increase mindfulness, helped improve student's emotional regulation capacity.⁴

Emotional intelligence isn't set into a particular frame and can be a part of learning over a period of time with help from others. As the child grows, the capacity for emotional self-regulation can improve thereby helping to learn the strategies to eliminate or avoid disturbing situations and thus solve the problem. The parents and family members are most suited to help learn their children learn emotional intelligence skills as the kids grow, develop and mature. While all the emotions are acceptable, all the behaviors and

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reactions are not and that is why awareness of the child's feelings and having a label for them (such as upset, disturbed, distressed, shy or joyous, hopeful, excited) makes a good beginning. Empathy makes them understand and validate their feelings to be open to listening, reasoning and help them in finding a solution. As children continue to grow, new challenges are a part of learning and hence healthy coping and problem-solving skills need to become a part of ongoing process. Parents consistently need to have mandatory family talk time and sharing their own experiences and limitations with children, praising them for their sincere efforts and creating a supportive environment without over reaction and guilt tripping to build up EI.

During the last few years, the concept of EI has extended beyond childhood and adolescents to youths including medical undergraduates. A descriptive Study on emotional intelligence, perceived stress and academic performance of Sri Lankan medical undergraduates was conducted in the University of Colombo. It concluded that higher EI was associated with better academic performance amongst final year medical students. In addition, a higher EI was observed in those who had a higher level of self-satisfaction and self-perceived stress was lower in those with a higher EI. Enhancing the EI might help to improve academic performance among final year medical students and also help to reduce the stress levels and cultivate better coping during professional life in the future⁵. With a paradigm shift medical educators have been among the many advocates for developing EI as a leadership competency for physicians. They have endorsed a need for emotional intelligence in physician leadership development,

mentoring and advancement within academic medicine, and developing effective social networks within the healthcare field. *Several studies from India and abroad have perceived* stress and burnout as by-products of residency programs and stressful schedules thereof of resident doctors⁶. In such settings EI works as an adapting and coping tool and can become an explicit part of medical education and training programs. Besides EI has a potential to be a strong foundation to maintain and foster well-being, health and performances in challenging work environments even in the years ahead. Time has come to acknowledge emotional intelligence as a mainstream skill!

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The reward for work well done is the opportunity to do more.

— **Jonas Salk, American Physician who developed the Polio Vaccine**