

Developing emotional literacy and an emotionally engaged life

Development of a working level of emotional literacy, whereby someone is emotionally aware and has tools to handle a wide range of emotions, is useful for everyone. Developing a working level of emotional literacy is particularly important for men, in that they are likely to confront a range of sometimes confusing and intense emotions. It is useful to note:

- An emotion is our physiological response to a stimuli, event or thought. Essentially, it is invisible.
- What we label emotions influences how we respond to them.
- Some emotions are not easily identified.
- Emotions are not discrete—sometimes you can feel a range of emotions at the same time.
- Sometimes you can feel a range of ‘competing’ emotions at the same time: for example, if you are about to do a bungee jump, you might be feeling both intense fear and incredible excitement (to the extent that you might feel completely overwhelmed and start to think you are going to die).
- Going in search of what he is ‘really feeling’, or identifying the ‘core feeling’, can limit rather than expand options.
- Emotions are not facts!
- There are no right or wrong emotions. No feelings are negative, just difficult.
- People’s responses to emotions are different and can change. What is difficult for one man may be ok for another, and what is difficult in one context may not be in another.
- ‘Good’, ‘okay’, or ‘bad’ are not emotional states—they are judgements or evaluations of feeling states.

Males and females are born with an equal capacity to experience and express a wide range of emotions. However, in our culture, men and women are typically taught and learn to recognise, understand, relate to, express, and seek to manage emotions differently. These gendered ways of relating and responding to emotions can produce particular challenges for men who have experienced childhood sexual abuse.