

## EMOTIONAL MATURITY: YOUR PERSONAL STRENGTH

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### Meaning of Emotional Maturity

Emotional maturity means, in essence, controlling your emotions rather than allowing your emotions to control you. That does not mean we should hide or repress our emotions, though we can use muscle relaxation, yoga, guided imagery and other relaxation tools to reduce their intensity. As a cognitive-behavioral therapist, I believe our thoughts, in conjunction with our environment, create our emotions. Fortunately, we can control our thoughts by becoming aware of our negative and inaccurate beliefs and ideas.

Dr. Martha Starks (Modes of Therapeutic Action) defines psychological maturity as "being able to accept the reality of people and things as they are, without needing them to be other than that."

Our brains will believe anything we tell them. If you tell your brain that you are in danger (physically, emotionally or psychologically), it reacts as if you are sliding face first down a mountain. If you replace negative, irrational, self-limiting thoughts with accurate, empowering and more adaptive thoughts, your emotional control will improve dramatically. What does that mean? It means that your relationships improve, you feel in control and happy, you like yourself more, and you are more likely to reach your life goals.

### Characteristics of Emotional Mature person

An emotionally mature person will have many of the following traits:

- knowing what one wants and making it happen
  - Thinking before acting and having control over one's behavior
  - Self-reliance and the ability to take responsibility for one's life and actions
  - Patience
  - The ability to connect with others in a cooperative and positive way

- Genuinely caring about others and demonstrating that ability
- Honesty and living by one's principles
- Having moderation and balance in all things
- Having the ability to follow through, even when it is difficult
- Humility and the ability to say, "I was wrong. I am sorry." (Inspired by the Swedish Medical Center, www.Swedis <sup>^</sup> Wechsler, David (1950).

	Emotional Immaturity	Emotional Maturity
Love	Love is need. Demands affection and love but avoids any sign of weakness. Has difficulty showing and accepting love.	Love is sharing. Fosters a sense of security which allows vulnerability and strength. Can express love and accept expressions of love.
Emotions	Cannot handle frustration or criticism; jealous, unwilling to forgive, fluctuating moods. Temper tantrums. Fears change.	Uses emotions as energy sources. When frustrated, sets goals and seeks solutions.
Reality	Avoids and denies money and relationship problems which demand integrity. Seeks people to blame.	Confronts and analyzes problems promptly. Seeks many solutions and chooses the best. Accepts responsibility.
Give & Take	May be willing to give, but not take; or willing to take, but not give.	Helps enhance the quality of life of beloved people. Accepts help from others.
Feedback	Does not learn from experience. Good or bad experiences are caused by luck, or fate. Little personal responsibility.	Life is a learning experience. Accepts responsibility and learns from feedback. Looks for opportunities. Moves on.
Stress	Avoids reality, pessimistic, angry, attacks people when frustrated. Often anxious.	Relaxed and confident in their ability to plan and achieve what they want.
Relating	Dependent, easily influenced, indecisive, or impulsive. Avoids responsibility for own actions or deficiencies. Sensitive to criticism, but insensitive to others' feelings.	Independent, team-worker or manager as required. Cooperative. Experiences empathy, and compassion. A good friend, partner, parent and teamworker.

### The Mature Personality

Starks defines psychological maturity as "being able to accept the reality of people and things as they are, without needing them to be other than that." To paraphrase a Native American adage: "The art of living in peace with that which we cannot change, the courage to change that which should be changed, no matter what it takes, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Along with this realistic attitude toward life, mature people also possess these healthy character traits:

Ability to know what you want and the capacity to make it happen

- Self-control and thinking before you act
- Self-reliance and the ability to take responsibility for your life and actions
- Patience

- The ability to sustain intimate relationships and establish positive connections with others
- Generosity and the desire to give and be there for others
- Integrity
- A sense of balance and equanimity in dealing with stress
- Perseverance
- Decisiveness
- Humility and the ability to admit when you're wrong

### **Maturity Begins at Home**

If many of us fall short of these noble attributes, it is because we grew up in less than ideal circumstances. No one is born mature. Our emotional development is shaped by our parents and life experiences. Mature parents who recognize, validate, love, and accept their children and are fulfilled in their own lives rear mature children. "I think parents who have been able to find and realize their own dreams are the best parents of all, as long as their dream includes understanding and loving their own children," says Stark.

A child who successfully struggles with failures, disappointments, and heartaches will develop greater maturity than one who is pampered and indulged. Throughout childhood, there are development tasks to be mastered, like making friends and developing autonomy. By completing most tasks without undue stress, conflict, or difficulty, a child can develop into a mature adult

### **Greater Maturity**

If you feel maturity-challenged, it's never too late to cultivate the mature qualities you may lack. Therapy, new activities, and volunteer work are three ways to do it.

### **Therapy**

Psychotherapy or group therapy can be very helpful in resolving childhood issues and gaining greater acceptance of your parents and yourself. By making peace with your past you "move to a place of inner serenity and acceptance and no longer spend so much time fighting, suffering, and struggling," says Stark.

Stark provides an example of one of her patients. "Maria" came to therapy in her 30s feeling miserable with her life. She hated her job as a psychiatric nurse, had few friends, no romantic relationships, money problems, and chronic health problems. Needless to say, she was depressed and angry.

Maria had a tormented relationship with her parents whom she saw often, still seeking the approval she'd never gotten as a child. In the course of therapy, she worked a great deal on this relationship and gradually recognized her parents' limits, accepting the fact that they couldn't meet her needs and in doing so, developed greater autonomy. Today Maria could certainly be considered a mature, self-actualized adult. She has a successful career as a financial analyst, many friends, a social life, and a gentler, more caring nature.

### **Activities**

Life experiences are also valuable in developing maturity, says Stark. Group and community activities that foster creativity, collaboration, and empowerment can be very transforming. Being involved in sports or a theatre company, for example, can help you gain confidence, develop new skills, and learn to work cooperatively with others.

### **Volunteer Work**

Helping others is a time-honored way to transcend your own difficulties and experience the satisfaction of service. Being a Big Brother or Sister or hospice volunteer can be valuable growth experiences. So can any situation where you pitch in and help or assume responsibility. Getting beyond yourself is a step towards gaining the perspective that leads to the accepting attitude of a mature adult

### **How We Develop Emotional Maturity.**

**Step 1: Be present.** You can't choose better responses to your key moments if you're asleep at the wheel. You have to wake up and become fully conscious and present to what is happening both within and around you. If not alert and aware, you'll quickly slip into old, habitual, negative ways of reacting. Being present does not make responding easy. But it does put you in the driver's seat. It makes it possible. So, thinking about your key moment, what was the triggering event? What, specifically, about the event triggered your reaction? What were your thoughts? Feelings? What did you do? What were the consequences?

By being present you begin to take your power back. In fact, do you realize that this moment is all you have? When can you be happy (or miserable)? When can you be confident? When can you make choices? It all happens in this moment, not the past or future. Being present to this moment is the gateway to change and emotional maturity.

### **Step 2: Embrace Reality.**

Reality is “what is” or “the way things are.” It exists independently of your opinions about it. Embrace it and find peace. Resist it and experience pain and frustration. Some of your realities you chose (career, who you married) and others were thrust upon you by your heritage (your stature, age) or other factors outside your control. Nevertheless, they form the boundaries or parameters within which you live and make choices daily. This is not to say that you can’t change some realities. Some you can. Some you can’t. But at this moment (which is the only moment that is real), what is, is. To be happy and effective, you must acknowledge and respect rather than fight against the realities of your life.

Denying, avoiding, complaining, or refusing to think about uncomfortable realities gives those very things incredible power over your life. If you are worried about your finances, sit down and take stock of exactly where you are — how much you owe, for example, and exactly how you will pay it off. Fun? No. Wildly uncomfortable? Words can’t express it! But by taking ownership of the reality, you’ve now equipped yourself to change it.

### **Step 3: Exercise Responsibility.**

Responsibility has to do with the choices you make about how to think, feel and act about reality. The quality of your life depends on your ability to make good choices—choices consistent with your best self and long-term best-interest—in spite of what happens to you. Your personal experience and the results you get in life are influenced, not determined, by circumstances, events, and other people. Between an event and your response is a moment, however fleeting, when you decide whether to surrender control and react automatically, or to interrupt a negative pattern and search out responses more in alignment with your long-term self-interest.



So again, think about your key moment. What choices did you make? What were the consequences? What other choices might you have made? How would they have led to a different outcome?

**Step 4: Clarify Your Vision.**

What do you really want? What is most important to you? Being clear about your vision gives you the motivation or incentive to make good choices when in a key moment. It is easy to follow the path of least resistance or act out negative emotions. But, if you've thought about what you want, if you have a clear vision of the outcomes you desire for yourself and others, then it becomes easier to delay immediate gratification and exercise the discipline to make a positive and strengthening choice. A clear vision allows you to be ruled by something other than impulse and circumstance. Define what you want. Deepen it so that it becomes more important than what you're currently getting.

**Step 5: Act from Integrity.**

This is where the rubber meets the road. No excuses. No whining. Acting from integrity is bringing what you say and do into alignment with what you really want. It is acting consistently with your higher vision. It is living by commitment rather than ease, discipline rather than convenience. Acting from integrity requires that you give up short-term payoffs (immediate gratification, escape, avoidance, self-indulgence, revenge, etc.) for something that is bigger or more fulfilling in the long-run. It requires that you pay a price (delay of gratification, quieting your tongue, facing a problem, entering into a difficult conversation, etc.). The price you pay is like your admission into the world of emotional maturity. You've earned it.

## Characteristics of the Maturity levels



American Psychological Association

## Ways to Help College Students to Manage stress

According to statistical data from the National College Health Association, stress is the number one impediment to academic performance among college students. College life can be stressful, to be sure, but there are a number of resources available to help student's combat stress. By taking advantage of these resources and developing effective stress-alleviating techniques on their own, students can lead happier, more productive college lives.

## Socializing

Beginning College usually involves adapting to a whole new lifestyle, which can be very stressful if you're not adept at dealing with change. Developing fulfilling relationships is a great way to acclimate yourself to the college environment and reduce some of this stress.

When you find yourself in a new environment with new people, it can be easy to feel overwhelmed and alone. It is important to recognize that incoming freshmen are all in the same boat in this regard, and though you may feel lonely, you share this condition with many of your peers.

If you are having trouble finding friends in college, try getting involved in student organizations that share your interests. Most colleges and universities offer a number of associations, from sports clubs to social justice organizations, which cater to a wide variety of interests and passions. Finding peers with similar interests is made much easier by the existence of these organizations.

### **Studying**

College asks you to manage your work in a way that is new to many students. To reduce your stress level, it may help to make yourself a daily or weekly schedule so you can focus on assignments as they become due. It's a good idea to cross-reference the syllabi for your classes so you know which weeks will be particularly busy. Procrastination can lead to stress if you let your work build up too much, so try to complete tasks as you've scheduled them to avoid getting behind.

### **Relaxing**

College involves a great deal of work, but it's important to be able to relax, too. Be clear on what relaxes you and schedule time for that. Some students relieve stress through exercising, socializing, attending films or plays, or playing games. Not everyone relaxes in the same way, so find what works for you.

If you're feeling extremely overwhelmed by stress, you could easily become depressed. If you find that you are having trouble motivating yourself or functioning day to day, schedule an appointment with the school mental health center. Counselors are usually free for students, and it's important to note that while there's plenty you can do to alleviate stress, there are also many cases that benefit from counseling.

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