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## Healthy Practices for Greater Emotional Intelligence

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## Healthy Practices for Greater Emotional Intelligence

by Jessica Cinco



With university English language programs in flux due to health, political, and economic factors, educators are more likely to feel anxious and depressed than ever. These emotions affect how we show up at work and in our personal lives. To address how to navigate our way through these difficult times with greater emotional intelligence, Dr. Marc Brackett, founder and director of the Yale Center of Emotional Intelligence and author of *Permission to Feel*, hosted the Emotional Intelligence 2020 virtual conference on August 11 and 12.

Many of the ideas Brackett and other presenters offered can be implemented into our daily lives as language professionals to best serve our students, colleagues, and, more importantly, ourselves. If we don't practice kindness, patience, respect, and compassion with ourselves, we cannot effectively extend graces to those we interact with. To show up as our best selves for others, we can implement the seven strategies offered by Dr. Marc Brackett and Dr. Robyn Stern in their presentation, "Emotional Regulation in the time of COVID." By incorporating these strategies into our daily practices, we can be better prepared to meet the needs of our English language students, our colleagues, our departments, and ourselves.

These are Brackett and Stern's seven strategies for promoting emotional intelligence from the perspective of an English language educator:

### 1. Permission to Feel

Give ourselves "permission to feel" and get curious about our emotions instead of judging them. Rather than having emotions about our emotions, for example, "I'm embarrassed that I'm always irritated with my students," try to simply feel and be open to

each emotion as it emerges. View these emotions as information and ask ourselves why we're feeling them. Openness to our emotions leads to resilience and a growth mindset, rather than criticizing ourselves. When we judge our own feelings less, we also reduce our judgement of our students and colleagues.

### 2. Breathe

Practice mindful breathing by pausing for a few moments to slowly, deeply inhale and exhale. Mindful breathing lowers anxiety and helps improve focus and awareness. It slows down our bodies and brains allowing us to be fully present in the moment. For example, if a colleague makes a comment that doesn't sit well, we can excuse ourselves from that conversation, find a quiet place to breathe, calm ourselves, and center our thoughts and emotions before re-engaging with that colleague.

### 3. Biological Self Care

Be conscious of nutrition: hydrate, eat healthy, and avoid getting "hangry." Practicing each allows us to maintain focus, have lighter moods, and heightens critical thinking. Also, sleeping seven to eight hours each night helps our minds and bodies perform at their best. During stressful, uncertain situations, like a pandemic, flexibility, patience, and quick critical thinking skills are useful, like when Zoom malfunctions or a student can't comprehend an idea that seems basic to us. When we have inadequate sleep, we experience anxiety, fatigue, depression, and hostility, which are unhelpful in stressful situations with students. Finally, exercising regularly decreases anxiety, stress and depression, while increasing self-esteem. Endorphins are released which help us relax and experience more pleasant emotions. This, in turn, leads to better moods to engage with others and greater energy to perform our jobs.

### 4. Psychological Self Care

Be intentional about our actions. Remember to limit social media and news intake. Set healthy boundaries around consuming content that upsets us, leaving time to engage in activities that calm our minds and lift our spirits. We can also intentionally carve out

some downtime each day. Some suggestions: singing while making the bed, reflecting with gratitude on our life, journaling, cooking, or painting. By engaging our minds in enjoyable activities, we give our minds a much-needed break, which offers greater mental flexibility at work.

### **5. Maintain Healthy Relationships**

Forge relationships with those who can listen to us, see the real us, and accept us, mess and all. Engage with empathy. Identify others' emotions and support those feelings instead of judging their feelings and behaviors and they will reciprocate. Find a colleague who we can talk and listen to and who can talk and listen to us.

### **6. Manage Our Thoughts**

Become aware of how we think of ourselves. "I am a failure. I never get it right." are not healthy thoughts and they don't allow us to grow and thrive. Instead, engage in positive self-talk. Rather than saying, "I'm a failure," try "That didn't go how I expected. What happened? How can I do that differently next time?" Shifting thinking patterns like this leads to personal growth. Another technique is taking a step back and asking ourselves, "What would I say to my best friend in this situation?" We typically talk more kindly to our friends than to ourselves. When we identify how we'd support and encourage our friends in the same situation, and apply this advice to our own situations, our self-talk improves. These techniques result in higher motivation and resilience at work.

### **7. Manage Our Lives Smartly**

Establish daily routines. Be consistent with the times we wake up, exercise, eat meals, start and finish work, enjoy free time, and go to bed. Adjusting our minds and bodies to a regular schedule reduces stress. Another strategy is to spend time with people who are calming. Identify a coworker or boss who seems collected and unflappable. Eat lunch with them or stop by their desk to talk through work situations. Emotions can be contagious: just as spending time with anxious people can heighten our own anxiety, spending time with

calming people, in turn, calms us. We lead, work, and make effective decisions when we are calm and focused.

Remember, we don't need to do all of these at once. Choose one or two strategies and set an intention to work on those areas. Practicing each heightens our emotional intelligence, which is helpful in these uncertain, constantly shifting times. By implementing these practices in our daily lives, we can show up to work ready to solve problems and be kinder to ourselves and others.

### **Reference**

Brackett, M., & Stern, R. (2020, August 11). Emotional regulation in the time of COVID. *Emotional Intelligence 2020 Virtual Conference*. <https://app.runtheworld.today/dashboard/4212/talks>

*Jessica is a Senior Global Educator at Arizona State University, with more than 17 years of instructing language learners and language educators, both in the U.S. and abroad. Her current areas of interest are instructional design and the role emotions and emotional awareness play in language education.*