

## What Is Emotional Intelligence?

...There are many possible definitions of emotional intelligence, and many definitions can be found on the Internet. Many of these definitions stem from the popularizations of emotional intelligence found in the popular press and in popular books...

A clear and scientifically useful definition of emotional intelligence, however, is recognizable because it takes the terms emotion and intelligence seriously. That is, the meaning of emotional intelligence has something specific to do with the intelligent intersection of the emotions and thoughts. For example:

**Emotional intelligence** represents an ability to validly reason with emotions and to use emotions to enhance thought.

A more formal definition is...

We define EI as the capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions to enhance thinking. It includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth (p. 197 of [this article](#)).

Here is another definition my colleagues and I have employed:

Emotional intelligence refers to an ability to recognize the meanings of emotion and their relationships, and to reason and problem-solve on the basis of them. Emotional intelligence is involved in the capacity to perceive emotions, assimilate emotion-related feelings, understand the information of those emotions, and manage them. (p. 267 of [this article](#))

**Emotion.** In this model, *emotion* refers to a feeling state (including physiological responses and cognitions) that conveys information about relationships. For example, happiness is a feeling state that also conveys information about relationships -- typically, that one would like to join with others. Similarly, fear is a feeling state that corresponds to a relationship -- the urge to flee others.

**Intelligence.** In this model, *intelligence* refers to the capacity to reason validly about information.

This use of the term *emotional intelligence* in this fashion is consistent with scientific literature in the fields of intelligence, personality psychology, and emotions (for more, see the similar discussion in [this article](#)).

For example: *Verbal intelligence* concerns the mental ability to reason with and about verbal information, and of verbal knowledge to enhance thought. *Spatial intelligence* concerns the mental ability to reason with and about spatial information (i.e., the shape of objects and their orientation in space), and of spatial knowledge to enhance thought. ...and so on.

## The Four Branch Model of Emotional Intelligence

### What Are the Four Branches?

1. **PERCEIVING EMOTION.** The initial, most basic, area has to do with the nonverbal reception and expression of emotion. Evolutionary biologists and psychologists have pointed out that emotional expression evolved in animal species as a form of crucial social communication. Facial expressions such as happiness, sadness, anger, and fear, were universally recognizable in human beings. Emotions researchers, evolutionary biologists, specialists in nonverbal behavior, and others, have made tremendous inroads into understanding how human beings recognize and express emotions. The capacity to accurately perceive emotions in the face or voice of others provides a crucial starting point for more advanced understanding of emotions.

2. **USING EMOTIONS TO FACILITATE THOUGHT.** The second area appeared every bit as basic as the first. This was the capacity of the emotions to enter into and guide the cognitive system and promote thinking. For example, cognitive scientists pointed out that emotions prioritize thinking. In other words: something we respond to emotionally, is something that grabs our attention. Having a good system of emotional input, therefore, should help direct thinking toward matters that are truly important. As a second example, a number of researchers have suggested that emotions are important for certain kinds of creativity to emerge. For example, both mood swings, and positive moods, have been implicated in the capacity to carry out creative thought.

3. **UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONS.** Emotions convey information: Happiness usually indicates a desire to join with other people; anger indicates a desire to attack or harm others; fear indicates a desire to escape, and so forth. Each emotion conveys its own pattern of possible messages, and actions associated with those messages. A message of anger, for example, may mean that the individual feels treated unfairly. The anger, in turn, might be associated with specific sets of possible actions: peacemaking, attacking, retribution and revenge-seeking, or withdrawal to seek calmness. Understanding emotional messages and the actions associated with them is one important aspect of this area of skill.

Once a person can identify such messages and potential actions, the capacity to reason with and about those emotional messages and actions becomes of importance as well. Fully understanding emotions, in other words, involves the comprehension of the meaning of emotions, coupled with the capacity to reason about those meanings. It is central to this group of emotionally intelligent skills.

(For a more advanced discussion of emotional information, see the section, "Similarities and Differences Between Emotional and Cognitive Information" in [this article](#)).

4. **MANAGING EMOTIONS.** Finally, emotions often can be managed. A person needs to understand emotions convey information. To the extent that it is under voluntary control, a person may want to remain open to emotional signals so long as they are not too painful, and block out those that are overwhelming. In between, within the person's emotional comfort zone, it becomes possible to regulate and manage one's own and others' emotions so as to promote one's own and others' personal and social goals. The means and methods for emotional self-regulation has become a topic of increasing research in this decade.

[http://www.unh.edu/emotional\\_intelligence/ei%20What%20is%20EI/ei%20fourbranch.htm](http://www.unh.edu/emotional_intelligence/ei%20What%20is%20EI/ei%20fourbranch.htm)