

When I first began investigating the matter of emotional healing, I had no clue as to what an emotionally healthy individual might look like. Words such as *balance* came to mind, yet they did not really seem to make sense in this context. What does it mean to be emotionally balanced? Does it mean we are always happy, friendly, and in a good mood? Have feelings such as anger, sadness and fear simply vanished? Or is it such that they do appear but we are immune to them, like to an infectious disease? These are but a few of the many questions that occupied me.

On a physical level one could, to a certain extent, define *health* as the absence of disease and pain. But what does disease constitute on an emotional level? It was clear to me that this was not a matter of psychological illness in a pathological or psychiatric sense. But it was equally clear to me that emotional health would have to differ from what I observed in myself and the people around me. Disconcertingly, this held true for people I encountered in Europe, Asia, Australia, North, South, and Central America too. Phrases such as *emotional frigidity* and *lack of control* came to mind as conditions associated with emotional illness. But where were the lines to be drawn? What measure of feeling was I to be permitted? And most importantly, which feelings were healthy and which were not?

I noticed that our use of words like “I’m in a bad mood” was a way of expressing that we are angry, sad, scared and so forth, whereas the words “I am in a good mood” implied a joyful frame of mind. It is rare to find someone who thinks he feels fine if he is sad or scared. When we think of emotional balance, we usually think of a happy and content individual. People who are angry, sad, scared or ashamed don’t usually come to mind.

The difficulties on my journey of emotional self-healing began with the fact that I could not find a clearly delineated definition of *emotional health*, to say nothing of competence, which I could use for orientation. I had to find my own definition step by step, by figuring out what worked and what didn’t. I now define *emotional health* as the free, unfolding and appropriate application of each emotional power in daily life. For me, emotional competence encompasses quite a few other aspects too. The following definition is taken from my book *A Parent’s Guide to Emotional Intelligence*.

Emotional competence is the ability to...

- *perceive one’s own feelings*
- *recognize the feelings of others and empathize*
- *consciously produce and direct one’s own feelings so as to be able to adapt them to the given situation*
- *differentiate one’s own emotions and feelings from those of others*
- *discharge emotional baggage carefully without doing detriment to oneself or others*
- *help others discharge their emotional baggage accordingly*

When I use this definition as a reference point, it quickly becomes apparent that few people in our time can consider themselves emotionally healthy or competent.

I have discovered that satisfying relationships with our environment, others and ourselves rely directly on our ability to implement all feelings as powers. Contentment is as dependant on anger as it is on sadness, shame, fear and joy. Each of these feelings is an important part of us, with each serving a particular purpose in our system as a key to experiencing adverse circumstances as an innate part of life.

Over time, I have noticed that a number of factors can lead to disease and imbalance on the emotional level. There is no quick fix when it comes to emotional healing, though we might long for one and even find ourselves attracted by promises of the sort. Platitudes such as *"Love is always the answer"* and *"Forgive and your heart will heal"* grant us the illusion of simple solutions, yet they neglect the complex function our feelings perform. A thorough understanding of the factors and behaviors that contribute to emotional disease is helpful, for we have a tendency to find ourselves in descriptions of emotional disease rather than in those of emotional health or competence, the latter frequently seeming like a utopian notion compared to the reality we live in.

Needless to say, imbalances rarely appear in the singular ways delineated here. Individuals who lack feelings of all kinds are probably as rare as are those who create all five feelings excessively. In most people, we find a combination of the imbalances described above.

Certain feelings, such as fear, may not be created at all, whereas others, such as shame, may be created but simultaneously suppressed, with this resulting in accumulation into an emotion. Other feelings often appear in a helpless form, such as anger that is used too late and then

tends to spill over, causing pain to the people in our immediate surroundings. Sadness is sometimes only felt at the cinema, when we watch a film which culminates in a scene of romantic harmony. Joy only makes an appearance when something exceptionally beautiful happens, but even then, it only manifests itself in moderation. Apparently, one must be careful not to squander this precious feeling. When in doubt, it is still safer to criticize something than to proclaim the exquisiteness of life.

Almost no one would seriously argue that the characteristics charted here make a case for emotional disease. If we look at the potential of our emotional power that could unfold but gets wasted, abused, suppressed, or simply neglected, it becomes obvious that we face some kind of emotional imbalance in any case.

An Overview of Emotional Imbalance and Its Causes

To understand how we can heal emotionally, we need to start by grasping the mechanisms that make us emotionally ill. In this book, we will discuss six basic mechanisms which generate emotional disease. Different as they may seem, they all have one thing in common: they are all strategies for avoiding feeling.

Feelings want to be felt. But we usually do just about anything with our feelings except feel them. We will deal with the best-known strategies for avoiding feelings, namely numbing and suppressing, in the first two chapters of this section. The following chapter will

Causes of emotional imbalance at a glance:

1. *Numbing*
2. *Suppression*
3. *Failure to produce feelings*
4. *Getting rid of feelings*
5. *Swapping feelings*
6. *Absolutes*

deal with the refusal to create feelings in the first place and show how this mechanism is fundamentally different from the first two. The fourth chapter in this section will address a strategy for avoiding feelings that is rarely recognized as such: expression. Simply throwing our feelings out, as some forms of therapy advocate, can be another method we use to avoid feeling them. The fifth chapter deals with misapplied feelings — feelings that are used for purposes other than the intended one. In the sixth and last chapter in this section, we will look at the roots of emotional suffering, at our absolutes.