

15 PRACTICAL WAYS TO GAIN GREATER EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN RECOVERY

- 1. Learn to identify your emotions and discern what is underneath what you are feeling.** If you are feeling angry, ask what is underneath that feeling? Perhaps your angry feeling is covering up feelings of inadequacy or feelings of distrust. When you are engaged in a snarky exchange with someone, stop and ask yourself why you are feeling snarky. Are you annoyed by their demand? Would you prefer they asked you in a nicer tone? When we identify the emotion we are feeling it raises our self-awareness which gives us the ability to manage it better. We could choose to say, "When you ask that in a demanding tone, it's hard to hear" rather than responding in a snarky tone which only perpetuates the negative encounter.
- 2. Practice just hearing others without needing to respond.** Reflect back to them what they are saying. So often when someone is talking to us we are generating our response rather than truly listening to them. Reflect on how often you hear the message they are intending to send. Do you often attribute a negative motive to what they are saying? Sometimes a loved one will ask an innocent question but we assign a negative intent to their message which can cause conflict.
- 3. Evaluate how often you are telling yourself truths rather than perceptions.** We can believe strongly about something and be wrong so it is important to test everything we tell ourselves by asking if it is a truth or a perception. If you say, "I don't have any friends" it can be a depressing thought but if you ask yourself if that is a truth or a perception, you will usually learn it is simply a perception. We can manage our emotions. A good first step is to be sure we are saying and thinking truths.
- 4. When faced with conflict, begin with only wanting to understand their side of the conflict.** Practice not responding to the conflict but merely saying, "So you are saying..." By doing so, you will enhance your listening skills and give those you love a greater sense of being understood.
- 5. Recognize what causes you stress.** Literally list the times when you feel stressed and keep track of those feelings. There is healthy stress and unhealthy stress. If you are pushing yourself outside your comfort zone to reach a goal, that can be stressful but it is a healthy type of stress. If you are consistently arguing with a friend, it may be a stress that you need to eliminate. First we need to be aware of the situations that cause stress and talk with a trusted person about what type of stress it is and what could be done to manage it.
- 6. Practice multiple ways of managing your stress.** Some people dislike meditation. That's okay. There are many, many ways to relax your mind and body. Some people find exercise is best for them. Other people find sitting by the lake or a walk in the woods is best. Other people get lost in drawing, flower arranging, working on cars, building something, etc. When you begin feeling stressed have a personal mantra to use such as, "Is this going to matter in 5 years?" Or say, "It is what it is. Or, "I choose not to overreact" or use the well-known phrase "Let go and let God."
- 7. Identify what your top five values are in life.** When we live according to our values we experience joy and a greater sense of integrity. Yet many people go through life never really pausing long enough to take stock in how their life is going, what they value, and how they would like to see their future be - so take a time out to reflect on these essential

elements of life. If you are not currently living a values-based life, begin slowly to make changes. It doesn't have to change overnight. We want progress not perfection.

8. **Enhance your surroundings by having things that reflect who you are, what you like, what you want to be, and what inspires you to keep striving.** Inspirational sayings in simple picture frames can be decorative and help to keep your mind on the things that are truly important. If you love flowers, have one small flower on your bedside table every day. If you want to eat healthier, have a picture of fruits and vegetables in your kitchen with an inspirational saying. Our surroundings matter.
9. **Associate with people who are living the life you want to live.** We become like those we associate with so if you are trying to become healthier, hang around people who are exercise and eat healthy. Read books and magazines that inspire you. Turn from your old way of doing things. Maybe that means not hanging out with the same old friends or watching television all night. Change your behaviors and the habits will change, too.
10. **Have a plan.** Invest in your future by hiring a therapist or coach to help you intentionally work on improving your character defects. Take classes on conflict resolution, living according to your values, or achieving goals.
11. **Get in the habit of choosing well.** When you want something that you probably shouldn't have, tell yourself "no" and then get your mind off of it by doing something. Practice withholding or delaying gratification so you can combat the years of impulsive decision making. Begin to change the way you think and your behaviors will follow.
12. **Be intentional about improving upon your character defects.** Knowing what your character defects are is important but they are not going to improve unless you work on them. For instance, if you want to change how judgmental you are, ask for God's help in changing and then be intentional about catching yourself. Use incentives to cause yourself to change.
13. **Identify hobbies you want to try in this quest to develop a joy-filled life.**
Take time to review your life and whether you are truly joy-filled. Sometimes work, children or other responsibilities take over our lives leaving little time left for personal hobbies. Or you may be bored with your current hobbies and be ready to try new things.
14. **Own the responsibility to change your self-talk.** We are solely responsible for taking control of our thoughts and breaking the cycle of destructive self-talk. Sometimes it's helpful to jot down the things you repeatedly say to yourself and then prove them right or wrong. Many times the thoughts we allow to stick with us are not even true! If someone has hurt you in the past, take back your power by not letting what they said stick with you any longer!
15. **It's not all about you.** When we take the focus off ourselves and start being more other-centered, we experience so many blessings. Opening the door for someone, smiling at the clerk in the store, stopping to help someone carry groceries, listening to someone who is hurting, helping someone move, giving away some of your no longer needed items, serving at church or in the community, or writing a letter can help you get outside of yourself. When we begin to see others first, we learn gratitude and we become more joyful.