

# **RULER: Yale's Emotional Intelligence Training Tool**

From <https://characterlab.org/playbooks/emotional-intelligence/emotional-intelligence-endnotes/>

And <http://ei.yale.edu/ruler/how-ruler-works/>

The Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence uses the acronym RULER to remember the five skills of emotional intelligence (Brackett, Bailey, Hoffmann, & Simmons, 2019; Mayer & Salovey, 1997):

## ***Recognizing emotions***

You recognize emotions by noticing changes in facial expressions, vocal tones, body language, words, or behaviors—in yourself and others. Within yourself, you can recognize emotions by thinking about what is happening in your body—for instance, your heart rate, breathing, tension, and temperature. Practicing this skill builds your self-awareness and social awareness as you gather information about your own and others' emotions. To practice this skill, you may ask questions such as:

- How am I feeling? What kinds of thoughts are going through my head? What is happening to my body?
- How may someone else be feeling? What about what they are saying or doing can help me to know? What about their face, body, or voice can I use as clues?

Another way to best recognize how someone else is feeling is to simply ask them.

## ***Understanding emotions***

You understand emotions by considering both their causes and consequences. You may find that engaging in an activity or interaction causes you to consistently experience a certain emotion. You also may find that experiencing that emotion leads to specific consequences. For example, you may notice that one friend makes you feel nervous or on edge (cause). You may also notice that you tend to bite your fingernails when you feel nervous (consequence). Building awareness of these

patterns can help you create healthier relationships, and to express and regulate your emotions effectively.

To practice this skill, as you begin to feel a certain emotion or witness an emotion in others, you may ask:

- What may have caused this emotion?
- What people or events preceded the change in my own or another's feelings?
- What tends to happen when this emotion is experienced by myself or others?

### ***Labeling emotions***

Giving accurate names to emotions with a nuanced vocabulary can lead to a deeper understanding of how you can most effectively deal with those emotions (Cole, Armstrong, & Pemberton, 2010). When you find the exact word that captures a specific feeling, it's easier to find ways to express and regulate it. You also become better at articulating your emotional needs—as well as understanding the feelings and needs of others (Feldman-Barrett, Lindquist, & Gendron, 2007).

To practice this skill, you may consider:

- What is going on inside my body and mind? What happened to get me to this point? Given this, what is the most specific word to describe how I am feeling right now?
- What can I observe from another's face, body, voice, words, and actions? What is the most specific word to describe how that person may be feeling right now?

### ***Expressing emotions***

You express emotions effectively when you consider what's most appropriate in a given situation. The setting, people, and your goals in the moment can all affect what you do. For instance, most people express emotions more openly at home with family than they do in public with strangers. And sometimes you might work

to conceal your emotions rather than express them to preserve your reputation or maintain your relationships.

To practice this skill, you may consider:

- How do I tend to express my emotions differently in various situations and with various people?
- How do others around me vary in their expression of emotions across situations?
- What clues can I find in a given situation to help me know the most helpful way to express my emotions?

### ***Regulating emotions***

Emotion regulation involves managing your own emotions and helping others to manage theirs. Arguably, this is the most important skill of emotional intelligence, because it really affects how you feel from day to day and how you show up in the world. To regulate an emotion, you can first establish a goal—to feel more, less, or the same amount of the emotion, or to shift to another emotion. Once you have the goal in mind, you can identify a strategy—something to think about or something to say or do to regulate that emotion. For instance, if you are feeling anxious about an upcoming test, you can try to feel less anxious and calmer (goal) by taking deep breaths and reminding yourself how well you prepared for the test (strategies).

To practice this skill, you may ask:

- What is my goal for a particular feeling? Do I want to feel more or less of the emotion?
- What can I think about, do, or say to feel the way I want to feel (or to help someone else feel how they want to feel)?

You also may reflect on strategies you tend to use or notice others using, evaluate their helpfulness, and try new strategies that may work better.

### **Why these skills matter**

The skills of emotional intelligence are the building blocks for what we all need to succeed in life (Brackett, 2019; Brenner & Salovey, 1997; Saarni, 1999), including the abilities to persist in the face of challenges (Ivcevic & Brackett, 2015), think clearly and make good decisions (Clare & Huntsinger, 2007), manage our stress (Ciarrochi, Deane, & Anderson, 2002), and interact well with others (Fitness, 2015).

Brackett, M. A., Bailey, C. S., Hoffmann, J. D. & Simmons, D. N. (2019). RULER: A theory-driven, systemic approach to social, emotional, and academic learning. *Educational Psychologist*. doi:10.1080/00461520.2019.1614447