



# Emotional Awareness

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It is becoming apparent that emotional awareness is one of the most important aspects of The DOC Journey. What is also interesting is that letting yourself feel and share positive feelings is almost as much of a challenge as allowing in negative emotions. It is simply easier to maintain control and not feel. Suppressing and masking is a common default mechanism.

Why is there such a block to experiencing deep emotions? It lies in our evolution. Being vulnerable is not rewarded in nature. It really is survival of the fittest and being vulnerable is paramount to death. For example, in herds or packs of animals, the weaker ones are pushed to the edge of the pack, where they are vulnerable to predators. The stronger leaders are more protected. We know what happens to the weakest hen in a chicken coop. Humans are programmed with the same survival instincts, and in many situations, being vulnerable is not rewarded. We also have language, which means that mental threats are also problematic. They represent threat and repressed emotions are even more problematic.



## Anger/ Anxiety

Another issue is that we consider anxiety and anger as emotions. They are not. They represent your total body response to any mental or physical threat. They are simply physiological reactions and block connection to what you are really feeling. Anxiety/ anger is the result of threat, not the cause. Unpleasant thoughts and feelings may be sources of threat.

Since mental threat is processed in a similar manner in your brain as physical pain, it hurts. “You hurt my feelings,” is a classic statement and also characterizes the problem. You are programmed to be strong and it hurts to feel, so there doesn’t seem to be much incentive to change anything. But there is a powerful reason to consider training and allowing yourself to feel. Awareness and vulnerability is the essence of successful relationships in all aspects of your life. It requires being vulnerable with someone you trust. If that person breaks that trust, the outcome can be devastating.

## Breach of trust

It is also the reason that being raised in an abusive family situation is so damaging. The people that the planet entrusted to care for and nurture you broke that trust. How can you be vulnerable and feel if you never knew what it was like to feel safe. That was your parent's basic responsibility; to provide a safe haven and nurture you. Consider a feral cat that has to fend for itself from birth. Its reality is that it cannot relax and it is challenging to tame. If you are that child that doesn't ever know the feeling of being safe, life does not get easier and your hypervigilant alert will be maintained and progress. Your body is under constant attack from stress hormones and inflammatory cells that will make you sick. The data around a chaotic childhood is compelling; you not only have a higher chance of developing a serious illness or disease but life spans are shortened.



You can abort and reverse this process. It involves a stepwise learned skill of learning to feel and training your body to be less reactive. But you do have to know what is going on before you can change directions. If you can't connect with your true emotional state you will not be able to really embark on a journey of self-discovery. You can't see who you really are unless you commit to stepping outside of your mind and looking at yourself from a different perspective.

Ask yourself these questions: "Am I open?" "Am I coachable?" "Can I really listen and feel?" This is a starting point. Beyond that, active meditation is remarkably effective for self-discovery, as are the writing exercises I advocate in this book. Then there's external help, which can provide wisdom, perspective, and support.

Why don't more people pursue a path of self-discovery? It may be because in our culture, most of us spend a lot of emotional energy trying to look good to people around us as well as looking good to ourselves. Truly connecting with our emotions is an act of humility; it's also extremely rewarding, and it makes life so much easier in the end. What makes this more complicated is that it is normal to feel anxious and angry when you are trapped by anything – especially pain. Yet the anger blocks awareness and emotional pain. This situation is complex enough that I will only say the essence of healing and The DOC Journey is teaching you the skills to calm your body's neurochemical response and gradually allow you to be able to tolerate uncomfortable emotions and still feel safe. Every person's journey is unique.