

Twelve warning signs of Emotional Health

1. **Persistent presence of support networks**
2. **Chronic positive expectations; tendency to frame events in a constructive light**
3. **Episodic peak experiences**
4. **Sense of spiritual involvement**
5. **Increased sensitivity to others and self**
6. **Tendency to adapt to changing circumstances**
7. **Rapid response and recovery of adrenaline system due to repeated challenges**
8. **Increased appetite for physical activity**
9. **Tendency to identify and communicate feelings**
10. **Repeated episodes of gratitude, generosity or related emotions**
11. **Compulsion to contribute to society**
12. **Persistent sense of humour**

1. Persistent presence of support networks

So the first of the twelve is about a sense of humility and appreciation. However assured we may believe we are, all of us are just a tiny part of a larger whole. And if we are emotionally healthy, we will know this, deep in our bones ... and we will give thanks.

So ponder this for a moment - those in your life now, the close and the not so close who support you, emotionally and who stretch you and comfort you.

It will be a long list if you do this pondering properly.

2. Chronic positive expectations; tendency to frame events in a constructive light

I have now been practicing as a therapist for more than seven years and if I was to point to just one factor that I cultivate and I believe successfully too, it is positive expectancy. I do expect all my clients to get something from their therapy and full recovery is the default. And I know that I convey this expectancy. I can do this because I genuinely believe it and it is not a fraudulent and easily to be disputed expectation. If it were how could I genuinely believe it?

But what it means is that I can convey this expectation to my clients and so we can both then go on a search for what needs to change. And what you search for you find – if it is anywhere there at all.

To cultivate positive expectancy in any or all aspects of your life, it means looking in the right place. And then you will find it.

3. Episodic peak experiences

This requires, but just as a necessary condition that we are curious and open and present. For if you are, then you can fully engage in what is NOW and when you are least expecting it, realise that something is happening.

Are episodic peak experiences the same as being in the flow? I would say yes. According to Csikszentmihalyi, (yes he first used this term) flow represents the ultimate experience in harnessing the emotions in the service of performing a task. It can be pure joy. But also, such a deep focus on the activity – that there is nothing else.

Of course you cannot go searching for flow. It just happens when you least expect it.

4. Sense of spiritual involvement

I have pondered this for a little while. I do this from a starting point that I would judge my spiritual involvement right now as pretty low. Not that it was always thus.

This is my answer – for me mainly but I hope for some who will read this. It is that we are able to give one's attention calmly and curiously to as wide a set of circumstances, spaces, ideas, performance, people and nature as we can. As this opens us to spirit - which is beyond the every day and it is spirit that lifts us all.

5. Increased sensitivity to others and self

Sensitivity to others and self should not be mutually exclusive. In fact they go together as night and day, black and white and good and bad. This is a very important understanding. In order to take care of yourself properly requires an understanding and sensitivity to your own essential human needs and your emotional resources and signals. And if you are aware of self then of course you will be aware of others. Indeed, how can you really help others if you have no healthy awareness of self?

The Enneagram personality typing system has nine types, one of which is “The helper”. This person believes he/she has no needs and just exists to help others. His/her sin is pride, because of course he/she has needs. And the lesson The Helper must learn is humility. To receive as well as to give.

6. Tendency to adapt to changing circumstances

I am back on familiar territory here – for, we are talking of resilience and unquestionably that is the focus, even if somewhat hidden, of much of my work as a therapist.

Change is part of life and so to be able to adapt to change and in fact welcome it is the absolute key to our emotional wellbeing. To be able to bounce and not break, to sway in the wind because your roots are deep and not buckle and indeed know that there are opportunities and learnings to be found everywhere as you observe what is changing – in what presents to you and how you find you are reacting to it.

It is often a useful exercise to think back a few years and to note what has changed for you and the manner of the change – in circumstances, friends, health, opportunities and roads apparently closed off and indeed how the external – economy, political, social, fashion and technological – has changed.

Be aware also of how much of this change could not and definitely was not anticipated by you ahead of time. Does that realisation scare you or empower you? Your answer will tell you a lot about yourself.

7. Rapid response and recovery of adrenaline system due to repeated challenges

You could say that this is the heart of resilience – our recovery time. It is the time that we find we need to recover our cool, when we experience a shock, which by definition is a surprise. Do we dwell on the shock and find that we remain aroused and stressed and ruminating unproductively and incessantly and so cannot make a sensible decision about what we should do. Or even better how we can make sense of the shock and so we then incorporate the shock into our life story?

Our life story is so important for us and it should have great shocks in it where we do adjust, learn and move on - such that the shocks fit in to the story and we are reminded that we can welcome them however unpleasant they may superficially appear to be.

8. Increased appetite for physical activity

As some of my readers may know, I am now quite disabled with Multiple Sclerosis. My legs do not work very well, though the rest of me – mind and body still seem in pretty good shape. What this does mean is that physical activity is hard and is a small part of my life. And being so sedentary, I am putting on weight which further generates physical inactivity and indeed indolence.

But like us all, I adapt and make do. And the more mentally and emotionally stronger I find myself, then the busier I am. That of course creates a virtuous circle and when it is not working, a significant susceptibility to a vicious circle.

For me action is about projects born out of curiosity and love and finding an engagement with the outside world that allows me to sustain a status and so is not physical at all. And of course my clients stretch and challenge me always.

Action always is what humans are about but we find so many ways.

9. Tendency to identify and communicate feelings

This one really speaks to me. This is because as I understand and experience it, emotional health means being in tune with your emotions. These will be communicating to you all the time, like incessant background chatter, occasionally interspersed with something much louder and so difficult to ignore. And the prompting for this chatter will come a lot of the time from what is happening “out there”.

It follows that as it is easy for you to notice these emotions and indeed actually enjoy and are be curious about them, that you might also wish to communicate them to those around you.

10. Repeated episodes of gratitude, generosity or related emotions

If you are in a good place, then naturally you will want to share it with others and you will not be judging. Indeed you will be seeing all who cross your path as having what you have or open to having what you have – namely balance and peace and a true appreciation of what is there and possible.

Surely it is that simple. And that is why the tenth of these warning signs will be flowing naturally.

11. Compulsion to contribute to society

The instinct to connect to our group or community and to find fulfillment in making a contribution is basic to being human – of that there is no doubt. So when we have spare capacity, we will use that to spread our wings. And the more spare capacity we have, which means being more in control of our lives and our emotions, then the more we will be sensitive to our connection to our society – however we may see that and however we may discharge that.

12. Persistent sense of humour

What strikes me as interesting about this is the word persistent. It hints at irrepressibility, like a spring always bubbling up out of the ground. And try as we might, we just cannot but be seeing the lighter side and this light shines out. It does not necessarily mean that we are all stand up comics or practical jokers. But that we do laugh a lot and smile with our eyes.

And there are times when we just cannot stop and we find that we bring all with us