

'emotional colouring in' exercise instructions

The "*Emotion colouring In exercise*" is a deceptively simple 6-minute writing exercise where we practise identifying and describing our feelings. For important additional information about this process, see the "*Initial background for the colouring in exercise: assessment, maps, emotional intelligence & emotion differentiation*" and the "*Further background for the colouring in exercise: gratitude, expressive writing, emotion processing & taking it forward*" handouts.

introduction: Higher emotional intelligence is associated with benefits in at least four personal domains – better psychological and physical health, improved social relationships, and greater occupational effectiveness. There are also significant benefits for couples, for parenting, for friendships, and for groups & organizations. Emotional intelligence can usefully be seen as made up of five competencies, each of which is important both intra- and inter-personally. These emotional competencies are *identification, understanding, expression/listening, regulation & utilization*. There is good evidence to show that we can learn to increase our emotional intelligence with benefits in the multiple areas described above. The strengths and weaknesses of our emotional intelligence can be helpfully assessed & tracked using questionnaires like the "*Short profile of emotional competence*". The described '*emotional colouring in*' exercise below is a form of expressive writing that particularly trains emotional *identification & expression*. Interestingly it can also produce benefits for *regulation ('naming is taming')*, and to an extent for *understanding and utilization*. The linked "*Affect dyad*" exercise adds benefits for *listening & deepening relationships*.

exercise instructions: The exercise can be done writing on paper or on a keyboard. The standard instruction is to focus on the last 24 hours. Think of something you experienced that was difficult. Write about it emotionally for about 3 minutes. Briefly note what it is you're writing about but try to focus particularly on what you felt. This is an emotional colouring in exercise. What were your feelings? How did you experience this in your body? Really go in deeply. Were there associated thoughts, images or impulses? Feel free to use metaphors. Write as honestly and 'rawly' as you can about what you experienced.

After about 3 minutes, switch. Now choose something that you experienced in the last 24 hours that you're grateful for. Again, briefly describe what you're writing about but focus mainly on your feelings. How did this affect you? Where in your body did you feel the gratitude, joy, calmness or other welcomed emotions most strongly? How did you sense this physically? What were the emotions like? Were there thoughts, images or impulses associated with them? Again, try to write as colourfully, authentically & deeply as you can.

keeping a record: After this second 3 minutes of writing, stop. Look back over what you've written and using the "*Emotional colouring in exercise record*" or other convenient method, jot down a rough estimate of how deeply and fully you were able to experience the emotions, using a 1 to 10 scale of extremely low to extremely high emotional differentiation/intensity. You may find that sometimes it feels more accurate to give yourself a couple of scores here – one for emotional differentiation (how much you were able to perceive & describe the sometimes quite subtle mix of emotions you experienced) and one for intensity (how strongly & 'colourfully' you were able to feel the emotions).
