

Exercise: What's Your Emotional History?

On the next few pages you'll find a self-test designed to help you explore your emotional history. In it you'll see lots of questions about your childhood, your family, and the home in which you were raised. Some of the questions are rather general, encouraging you to think about the overall tenor of your childhood years. Did you, for example, feel loved, valued, and accepted as a child? You'll also find questions about the emotional behavior of the people closest to you. That's because kids take so many emotional cues from the words and actions of the people around them. Specific questions about the way your family expressed pride, love, anger, sadness, and fear may help you to uncover memories that provide insight into your current attitudes about emotional expression.

To take the self-test:

1. Complete each item, indicating the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement about yourself. For each item, circle the alternative that best fits:

SA = strongly agree

A = agree

N = neutral

D = disagree

SD = strongly disagree

2. Complete each item again, this time pretending to be somebody who is close to you, such as your spouse or a close friend or relative. (Or, if possible, ask that person to fill out the items. Then share your results and talk about them.)

1. My parents often showed me that they were proud of me.
SA A N D SD
2. When I was growing up, my family always attended the important events in which I participated (e.g., plays, concerts, sports events).
SA A N D SD
3. My parents helped me to feel proud of myself. **SA A N D SD**
4. My family taught me to believe in my talents. **SA A N D SD**
5. I learned from my past to feel good about what I have accomplished.
SA A N D SD
6. I learned from my parents that mastery is all about believing in yourself. **SA A N D SD**
7. My family taught that if I am failing at something, it usually has very little to do with bad luck. **SA A N D SD**
8. My past history makes it easy for me to feel proud of the achievements of those close to me. **SA A N D SD**
9. I easily express my pleasure in the achievements of others.
SA A N D SD
10. When I was growing up, there was lots of affection shown in my home. **SA A N D SD**
11. My parents often showed me that they loved me.
SA A N D SD
12. As a child, I felt really accepted by most of my peers.
SA A N D SD
13. My family touched, hugged, and kissed one another a lot.
SA A N D SD
14. I came from a very emotionally expressive family.
SA A N D SD
15. My parents often said "I love you" to me when I was a child.
SA A N D SD
16. I feel comfortable expressing affection to those I care about.
SA A N D SD
17. From their actions I always knew I was important to my parents.
SA A N D SD

18. As a child, my preferences and interests really mattered to my parents. **SA A N D SD**
19. My parents responded to my emotions when I was growing up. **SA A N D SD**
20. I feel comfortable receiving affection from those I care about. **SA A N D SD**
21. It's easy for me to say "I love you" when I feel it. **SA A N D SD**
22. I was afraid of my father's anger. **SA A N D SD**
23. It was hard for me to show my own anger to my parents. **SA A N D SD**
24. I feel highly uncomfortable when people are angry with me. **SA A N D SD**
25. I was taught as a child that anger is very similar to aggression. **SA A N D SD**
26. I was afraid of my mother's anger. **SA A N D SD**
27. I can't talk about my own anger with comfort. **SA A N D SD**
28. My family generally believed that anger was a destructive emotion. **SA A N D SD**
29. I try to avoid becoming angry. **SA A N D SD**
30. Not too many people can tell when I am angry. **SA A N D SD**
31. I will keep my anger controlled until I eventually blow up. **SA A N D SD**
32. I often feel that my anger is out of control. **SA A N D SD**
33. I've learned from my past that expressing anger is like throwing gasoline on an open flame. **SA A N D SD**
34. I keep my sadness to myself. **SA A N D SD**
35. Past experience has taught me that letting myself be sad is a waste of time. **SA A N D SD**
36. I'm rarely sad. **SA A N D SD**
37. My family taught me that feeling sadness was cowardly. **SA A N D SD**
38. I learned as a child that expressing sadness just brought everyone else down. **SA A N D SD**
39. I try to quickly get over being sad. **SA A N D SD**
40. I am impatient with other people's sad moods. **SA A N D SD**
41. When I was a child, my loneliness wasn't noticed by my parents. **SA A N D SD**
42. No one can tell when I am sad. **SA A N D SD**
43. I've learned through experience that there's very little point in talking to others when I'm downhearted. **SA A N D SD**

44. I hate being around sad people. **SA A N D SD**
45. I could never openly express my worries and fears to my parents.
SA A N D SD
46. My parents believed that I should just get over my fears and not dwell on them. **SA A N D SD**
47. As a child, I just wasn't allowed to be afraid. **SA A N D SD**
48. I was taught as a child to avoid thinking too much about my fears, because doing so could paralyze me into inaction.
SA A N D SD
49. I learned when I was young to keep going even when I was afraid.
SA A N D SD
50. My family taught me that exploring my fears would make me a wimp.
SA A N D SD

SCORING**SA** = 2 points**A** = 1 point**N** = 0 points**D** = -1 point**SD** = -2 points*Pride and Accomplishment*

Items 1–9 score: ____

If you scored 5 or above, your emotional history allows you to feel comfortable expressing emotions such as pride in your own accomplishments and the accomplishments of others.

If your score was below 5, then you have doubts about your own mastery, strivings, and accomplishments. You probably feel uncomfortable expressing pride in yourself and others.

Love and Affection

Items 10–21 score: ____

If you scored 10 or above, your emotional history allows you to feel comfortable in expressing love and affection, and in receiving expressions of those feelings from others.

If your score was below 10, then you sometimes have doubts about feeling loved. Also, you may feel uncomfortable in giving and receiving expressions of love and affection.

Anger

Items 22–33 score: ____

If you scored 6 or above, you're probably not comfortable with the expression and experience of anger, and you have some difficulty in becoming angry, and in experiencing other people's expressions of anger.

If you scored below 6, then anger is a comfortable emotion for you.

Sadness

Items 34–44 score: ____

If you scored 5 or above, you're probably not comfortable with the experience of sadness, and you may have some difficulty in being sad, and in experiencing other people's expressions of sadness.

If you scored below 5, then sadness is a comfortable emotion for you.

Fear

Items 45–50 score: ____

If you scored 3 or above, you're probably not comfortable with the experience of fear, and you may have some difficulty in being afraid or worried, and in experiencing other people's expressions of fear.

If you scored below 3, then fear is a comfortable emotion for you.