



What does it mean to truly express your emotions in a healthy way? In this episode, Eddie Reece and Bill Courtright unpack the concept of emotional expression in both therapy and everyday behavior. Eddie defines it as “the right emotion at the right time to the right degree, without beating yourself up,” and explores how suppression, misrepresentation, and poor timing often get in the way. Together, they discuss how therapists help clients connect with their true emotions through the body, why emotional maturity doesn’t mean being unemotional, and how curiosity and kindness toward oneself can foster growth. With honesty and vulnerability, Eddie shares his own journey of emotional work, offering insights that encourage listeners to embrace authenticity, reduce stigma, and live more fully.

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From Suppression To Emotional Expression: Finding Your True Voice

Decoding Emotional Expression: An Introduction To Self-Awareness

Welcome back, ladies and gentlemen, to this episode of The Couch Trip, therapy for everyday life. That's Eddie Reece. My name is Bill Courtright. We have another outstanding episode/conversation in store for you. What's nice about the conversation we have for you is that I have no clue where it's going. Eddie and I just spoke a little bit about a topic that I was not familiar with. I'm very much interested in finding out what it is that we're going to talk about. All I have for you, ladies and gentlemen, is a simple question which will hopefully have a long and detailed response. Eddie, when it comes to psychotherapy and individual behavior in general, what the heck is emotional expression? What does it have to do with us?

I'm glad you asked. How did you know to ask me that? First of all, emotional expression is a topic that is constant in my work, whether folks are crying in my office or being very stoic. Both are emotional expressions. They look different because they are different. One way to think about emotional expression is, "How do I do it? How am I supposed to do it?" That's what most people do because we always want this formula.

There's a part of us that makes us crazy that says, "There is one right answer. I must find it and implement it immediately, perfectly, and permanently, or I suck." If you can relate to that, you know what I'm talking about. How do you do it? What's the way to do it? Healthy emotional expression is four things. One is that you're expressing the true emotion. It's the right emotion. You're expressing it at a good time. What's the right time? You're expressing it to a healthy degree. What's the right degree? Not too much, not too little.

To make it all even more complicated, to be able to do that without beating yourself up before, during, or after you do it. It takes all of those elements. That's just for the expression. We talked a good bit in the other episode about communication. "I'm going to express this to you and communicate this to you. You'll listen in a way that you get it," and all of that, but we're talking about just the expression right now. To make it real simple, the right emotion at the right time to the right degree, without beating yourself up.

The Manipulation Of Tears: When Crying Hides Anger

Immediately, the question is, according to whom?

According to me. You're going to get some feedback from the other person, but that's generally not helpful unless they're fairly emotionally healthy, too. That's what we're shooting for here. We're shooting for how to be more emotionally healthy. If you take a look at the first part of this, the right emotion, even though most of us think we're expressing what it is we're expressing, "I'm mad, I'm hurt, I'm sad," much of the time that's not what we're expressing.

An easy example is somebody is crying and saying, "I'm angry." The physical, the crying, doesn't match the verbal. You don't look angry. I've done this with clients. They express one emotion. I go, "You don't look that." "What do you mean? I'm angry." I go, "Angry looks like this." It's a push for something to be different. If you're crying to express your anger, you're not expressing anger. You're not angry in that moment.

Tweets: Crying to express anger isn't true anger, nor are you truly angry in that moment.

You might be angry about this because we don't have just one emotion generally, but you're not expressing that. In this example of crying instead of expressing anger, what's going on is they're being manipulative in that, "I'm angry, which means I don't like the way things are going. I want them to be different." Instead of expressing that directly, they'll cry because they do want things to be different. They're going to manipulate the other person into responding to the crying to get them to promise to behave differently. That's not healthy. That's an example of the right emotion. If you're angry, you express anger. If you're sad, you express sadness.

Misdiagnosing Emotions: An Honest Mistake Or Something Else?

How often do people misdiagnose, for lack of a better term, whatever they're feeling? Maybe they're saying anger, resentment, or bitterness, as they're expressing sadness, remorse, or regret. Is it just an honest mistake, or is there something else going on there?

It's an honest mistake. To answer your question, it happens all the time, more often than not, that the perceived expression that they have, or even the perceived reception of that expression, isn't what's really going on because they're not able to, first of all, really know. To know what's going on, you have to be in your body, feel, notice what's going on in there, and be able to go, "This thing that's happening is sad." That's what sadness is.

Tweets: To know what's going on, you have to be in your body and notice what's in there.

We're taught not to express particular emotions. A kid will naturally be sad. You don't have to teach them how to be sad. They start crying because they lost their toy. What we might hear is, "Stop your crying. You're being silly. If you keep crying, I'm going to give you something to cry about." We learn, "Don't cry," but we still want our toy, and we still want to express what we're feeling. We're going to have to make something up. That might be another emotion that would be more readily accepted. It could be, "I got nothing. I lost my toy. It's a toy." You don't express that.

The Doorknob Dilemma: Timing Your Emotional Release

When it comes to healthy emotional expression, or what you would deem as a professional, I'm using the word healthy, but maybe that's misplaced.

No, healthy is a good choice.

Help me to understand using the quantifying language you used in the beginning, right amount, right degree, right time, right emotion. Immediately, I sensed that I needed to learn about this in order to apply the correct emotion to the correct degree, without beating myself up. Those were your words. Help me and the audience to understand, either through story or example, or where we could start to understand and internalize. I'm feeling something. I'd like to express it correctly. It seems judgmental,

but in the most healthy way I can. As a therapist, how do you work with your clients to help them do that?

Back to being in your body, pay attention to what's going on in your body. Generally, when I start that, I'm saying, "Exhale for me." I did this with a client. I go, "Exhale for me. Do it like that." This guy is fairly pent up, and then it'll all come out. He can't exhale. He can't let go. "I can't let go." That's where it starts. I go, "What do you notice as you are exhaling," which he's not doing, "or attempting to exhale?" "I'm exhaling." "Does it look or sound like this?" "Not quite." "Because you're not doing it."

There's a disconnect between your thinking brain up here and your body. You don't really know what's happening in your body. You're not able to be in it. The language for this is terrible. To be in your body means experiencing what your body experiences, what you see, what you hear, what you smell, what you touch, and what's going on in here. A client could say, "I'm noticing a real sinking feeling in my belly. It's a quivering thing." That's what you're looking for. That sounds to me like probably some version of fear.

I can see him beginning to tear up. I'll say, "What do you notice is happening in your face?" "Nothing." That's generally the answer I get. I go, "Do you notice that there's a slight bit of watering on the bottom eyelid?" Sometimes, just doing that will cause them to cry, or it'll cause them to start to suck it up. Either way, I'm like, "Do you notice what's happening now?" "I did notice that there's here. I think that's about." That's a thought. Come back into your body. You'll usually get, if it's like, "What do you think you're feeling? If you don't even talk about the body, what are you feeling right now?" "I think I'm just." "No. That's a thought."

"What are you feeling?" "I'm feeling like they just don't understand that." "No. It's a thought." That's when I can introduce that a feeling is something in your body, something going on there as some version of happy, mad, glad, or sad, some version like that. It's a word. It's not a sentence. Most people have no idea that's the way it works. "I told her what I felt." "What'd you tell her?" "I told her I feel like she's being a bit." That's not a feeling. That's a thought. "I told her I was mad. I told her I wasn't happy with that." No, it's a thought.

As we talk about emotional expression, where does the term 'emotionally unavailable' fall in the spectrum of expression? It's a term I'm familiar with.

It comes up all the time. I could go a long time just on that. Somebody says, "My partner is emotionally unavailable." I go, "That's because you are." They're like, "What do you mean? I can express my emotions." I go, "I'm sure you can emote, which means feelings come up and out, but it might not be the right emotion at the right time to the right degree. The reason I know you're emotionally available is that you're with somebody else who is. If you weren't emotionally available, if you were a very emotionally mature person, and you come across somebody who is a very emotionally immature person, you're not going to want to be with them. Why would you want to? You are. Let's talk about your emotional unavailability."

What that term means is, "I can't do any of this stuff we're talking about today. I don't really know what I'm feeling. I don't know how to express it. I don't know when I should, at the right time." That comes up a lot in couples' work. You got something you want to say, but it's way too scary to make an appointment, have a conversation, and do it in that therapeutic, constructive way. The very last thing before you leave for work, it comes out. This is a phenomenon I remember learning about early on in school. Therapists call it the doorknob moment. What that means is the client has their hand on the

doorknob to leave. They let out this giant, big issue. When we do that, what we're saying is, "I want this out in the open, but only for a few seconds. It's just too big. It's too scary."

That's not the right time when you're just going to be, "I got to go now." If you're a morning person, they're a night person, you get up in the morning, they're still groggy from trying to wake up, and you make your announcement, that's not the way to do it. Don't do it the other way. They're nodding and falling asleep. You're wide awake, and you dump it on them. It's not the right time. What are you really feeling? When is a good time, which is also a good way? What's a good way? If it's a big deal and it's going to be difficult to talk about it, then you make an appointment and you follow that kindness dialogue that we talked about in the other episode. You go through this scripted method to, first of all, make it safe enough to talk about it.

If clients are having a hard time, they say, "I want to tell you about something, but it's hard to do." I go, "Don't tell me. Whatever you do, don't tell me." I'm serious about that. "Don't tell me. What I want you to talk about is what makes it so difficult to tell me. What are you afraid of?" You want to handle that before you handle the news. You don't go, "I want to say this, but I don't want to. I'm so scared," and it comes out, because then you're going to be terrified. You're not going to be able to think straight. It's not going to go well.

The Unveiling Truth: Honesty As A Mental Health Benefit

I hear you talk about emotional expression. I'm wondering if it would be better understood by some folks, me, maybe, as emotional expression was said, emotional explanation. In my mind, as I hear you talk, I'm thinking about the feelings that I felt or why I felt them. You're saying express. Yes, it's one thing to express your emotions or display your emotions. Speaking of how I'd like my emotions to be understood by my wife, it's an expression, but in the context of safety, your word, so that I can explain how I'm feeling in hopes that I'm going to be better off for doing so.

What is it that you're after?

That's exactly the question. What is the benefit of healthy emotional expression?

That's not what you're asking. You're asking, "How do I express my emotions in a way that she's going to say, 'Good. I'm not mad about that. You're not in trouble at all. Thank you. You're a good boy.'" It means you're not interested in emotional expression at all. You're interested in getting what you want out of her, getting a particular response.

Let me ask it this way. If I'm uncomfortable talking about my emotions and we're talking about expressing our emotions, am I wrong to think that the ability to express one's emotions has some mental health benefit?

Absolutely, because you're now being honest. Honesty means telling the truth. If you're crying when you're angry, you're not telling the truth. This is where people struggle. Part of what you're struggling with is that if it's only emotional expression, there's not a lot you're going to say. You're going to emote. If you're sad, you're going to cry. You're going to be in some degree of shock if it's news.

If you're thinking about the news you heard and you're sad, you're going to cry. There's nothing to talk about. You don't want to be talking when the emotion is enough to where you feel it, you recognize it, and you allow it to come out. You're not going to beat yourself up. You're going to cry. For most people,

that's close to impossible for them. Even when a client does cry in a session or any other emotion, it's easy to see and to help them begin to see how they're also trying to shut it down at the same time.

The Illusion Of Hiding Emotions

I was thinking the same thing. I don't think I would be manipulating tears to get a response. If anything, I'm covering it up, hiding it, or disguising it.

It expresses different emotions.

Same thing, different direction.

You could feel the sadness, but you don't express it. You're expressing something else.

The closest thing to nothing I can.

It looks like nothing, but if you really look. That's when you get the standard, "What's wrong?" There's an energy that you're going to have going on. The more closed off you are to emotional expression, the more emotionally unavailable you are to yourself, and the more you're not going to realize that everybody can see what's going on. We don't fool people that well. We can fool people who aren't very adept at reading emotions and hearing what people say.

Tweets: The more closed off you are to emotional expression, the more emotionally unavailable you are. You may not realize it, but everybody can see what's going on.

One of the real skills I have as a therapist is helping people hear what I term as 'underneath what you're saying.' "I'm afraid that I'm losing control." In their mind, the problem is, "I'm losing control. That's a problem because I believe that to live a good life and be happy and a good person, I have to stay in control. It means I have to have particular ways I do, say things, move, breathe, and think." I'm working with a client, talking about this. He says, "Why would I do that?" I go, "Because you're scared. The only reason you want to do all this is because something is scaring you. I'm curious as to what that is." We never did get there in that session.

I'm curious. Is fear an emotion?

Yes. That's one of the biggest ones.

Unmasking Fear: Is It An Emotion Or A Reaction?

Maybe that's elementary to you or some, but in my mind, as you were saying that, I'm like, "Wait a minute. Is that the result of an emotion, or is that actually an emotion itself?"

That's an emotion. I'm scared. Fight, flight, flock, freeze. Any of those, I'm scared. The way you typically get to that in a session is you think you're losing control, and you're trying to regain control. Apparently, being in control is important. What happens if you're not? They honestly don't have an answer. Something might come up with, "If I lose control, then I might snap at my partner." Why is that a problem? It may take hours of me saying, "Why is that a problem?" You're going to come up with something else.

"If I snap out, they're going to be mad." Why is that a problem? It'll always come down to some version of, "I don't want to get in trouble. I don't want to be a bad guy. I don't want them mad at me, not like

me, not talk to me, talk bad about me, leave me, hurt me, and all the things that equal codependency. I have to restrict my emotions so that none of those things happen.” That’s staying in control. We lose sight of what we’re actually feeling.

We’re stuck at step one, being able to know what it is you’re feeling. What is it? When is the right time and to the right degree? It’s common as anything that when you’re afraid to express something or generally share something or say something, you’re not expressing it to the proper degree. You’re keeping it all inside, or you are all over the place. Now, it’s way too much. Either way, you’re not expressing what you’re really feeling.

That happens because again, back to, “I’m crying.” “What are you crying about? I’ll give you something to cry about. Stop crying.” We learned that the crying me is not accepted, so I either have to block it off and go, “No, I’m not going to cry, or I’ve got to cry to get somebody to pay attention.” I can’t even know what the proper level is. This comes up with anger a lot in our discussions of anger and rage, that clients don’t know how to be irritated.

They’ll say they’re irritated all the time. I go, “What do you mean?” What they’ll display is, “I can’t believe that.” I go, “That’s not irritated. Irritated is, ‘Damn.’ That’s irritated. There’s nothing in between.” Don’t express blow up. That’s rage. It’s not anger. If you learn to be mildly annoyed and if you learn to be put off and slightly irritated, there are probably countless things between “That’s bugging me a bit” to “Launch the weapons.” It is a proper amount.

The last piece of it is you don’t beat yourself up, whether you’re doing it or not doing it. When folks begin to catch on that they’re not in tune with their emotional selves, they’re going to do what they do all the time, which is beat themselves up for it, and then demand that they learn how to do it. “What’s the answer? What do I do now? I’ve got to take action so that I can get back in control and be that person I’m supposed to be. I’m supposed to be emotionally expressive and healthy, and doing that, so tell me how to do that.” You’re not expressing the proper emotion right now. Why? Because you’re acting like you’re irritated and demanding. What you really are is scared.

Judgmental, for sure.

No, you’re afraid you don’t know something. It’s important to you to have the answer. You don’t have an answer. That’s bad news for this part of you, apparently.

From Rage To Annoyance: Mastering the Spectrum of Anger

I imagine this is a big deal for a lot of people.

Pretty much everybody. It’s constant.

Even before we’re talking about, “No, you’re not. That’s not a feeling. That’s a thought,” I’m sitting here listening and thinking about what you’re saying. I’m probably overthinking.

It means you’re not paying attention to how it feels to hear something. The problem is that we’re trained through shame to not feel. The only reason we’ve got to even talk about this is because we were trained by being shamed to handle our emotions in the way we handle them. It is to either try to compartmentalize them, put them over here, and pretend it’s not that big of a deal, or just blah and emotionally vomit all over people all the time. It’s going to be one way or the other.

We're not able to do what little children do. If you spend 30 minutes with a little kid who's playing, interacting, or whatever, you'll see all kinds of emotions moving through. Some of them are there for two or three seconds. Some of them are there for a minute or two, but it's always changing. When they have an emotion, they're not thinking about it. They're just having it.

It's not good, bad, right, or wrong. We're taught that this is a good emotion. This is a bad emotion. You can do this around me. You can't do this around me. We have to start getting these thoughts and shame ourselves to make sure we're in control so that we don't get in trouble. It means the way that I use it that I'm now going to be shamed, I'm bad and unlovable, and will be thrown out of the herd. We all know what happens to the lone zebra.

Childhood's Emotional Freedom: A Lesson For Adults

It's interesting because you used the example of a child. I was thinking a similar thought before. It's ironic that the kids who naturally express themselves without thought are viewed as less than mature or less than in some way. The term emotionally mature is, in my experience, describing someone who is non-emotional or in control to the degree they don't express it. I don't think emotional maturity as it's described as a synonym for non-emotional, as if being emotional is somehow inappropriate for an adult. It's fascinating. It calls into question, and it's building on your whole beating yourself up. It just calls into question what is appropriate as a society and as a man.

You're going to beat yourself up for not being able to make that determination. I'd say you just heard about it. How in the world are you supposed to already know how to do it? You're not being kind to yourself. You're not being curious to start with. Curiosity is where it starts.

I'm curious.

No, you're demanding to have an answer so that you're not in trouble. Curious is, "I don't know what it is that's going on in my body. That's interesting. It's a shock." There's no right. It's, "I want to explore this for a while." I often get the image when I'm saying this of the Cast Away movie. You wind up on an island somewhere. Your first thought is to get out of here. I don't know. I'll be curious. "Where am I? What's on this island? Let me walk around. I'm probably going to be here for a while," instead of, "How do I get out? There's probably not a way out of here right this moment. Walk around and see what's here."

Be curious. You want to explore. "I don't know what's in my body. I'll listen to what he's saying. I'll learn how to do that." There's no huge rush because I'm curious and I'm kind. I'm not going to beat myself up for not knowing something that there's no way in the world I could have known, which is common. That's emotional maturity. In a sense, you're slowing down. That's what it would feel like. You're very active. Curiosity is active. It's interesting. What do I feel? I don't know. I'm going to mess with that for a while.

Not to potentially blow smoke, but I would be remiss if I didn't say that in all the episodes that you and I have shared, in the time that we've been together talking about these things, I've always admired your willingness and ability to go places and reveal your emotions. It has always struck me as fascinating. I feel empathy. I've always felt like, "His ability to be vulnerable without sacrificing masculinity, status, or credibility is amazing." I have always admired that. I can't think of the episodes in my mind where it was hard for me not to follow you to where you were going, as in deep rapport and from a real empathic place.

As we talk about this emotional expression, the explanation of that expression, and whether or not it's correctly described as mature or immature, you are as entitled as anyone, based on my experience, to talk about this. From this layperson's perspective, you are as in tune with your emotions as anyone I've ever met. That's just my impression. I don't know what your therapist says. That's none of our business. I would imagine that you've worked through this or gotten a place where it makes sense.

The Therapist's Journey: Navigating The Neighborhood Of Emotions (00:40:53)

yeah, I mean The things the things I always talk about and and the realm

The things I always talk about in the realm of podcast or therapy are because I've been through it. I go through it. I'm in it. I experience it. The way I like to talk about it is that I know the neighborhood. I got that from a writer who was talking about being in therapy. She said that being in therapy is just like going to a bad neighborhood. You know it's a bad neighborhood, but you go with somebody who knows the street and who knows their way around. That's what I do. I appreciate the kind words.

I paid a lot of money to learn how to cry. I paid a lot of money to learn that I wasn't expressing my emotions the way I thought I did, that I didn't, that I didn't know the things I thought I knew, and all that. It's quite the process. There is no end to it. I'm going into my seventh decade. There is no freaking end to it. There's a saying, and I think this came out of Twelve Step, another fucking growth opportunity. They're there all the time. I appreciate you saying that. I'm glad I can. It certainly makes life fuller when I talk to my clients about the struggle with how to, in a sense, be who they are.

That's what it is. Be who you are. You're sad, be sad. You're happy, be happy. Most of us can't do that without a lot of questioning and trying to figure things out. You go back to the benefit you were looking for. It's a fuller life. I've probably said this before on a show. A terrific goal in life is that if you happen to have some time on your deathbed, you can look back and go, "What a ride. I've lived, which is better than experience, horrendous loss, and despair. I've lived amazing joy, happiness, and these wonderful moments. I did a lot of laundry, too."

Tweets: Most of us can't really be happy without a lot of questioning.

There's a Zen saying, "After ecstasy comes the laundry." I did that, too. I lived that part of my life. Most of life is laundry. It's not what people try to sell us. I remember the first time I saw an ESPN replay of a kickoff return. You see the guy catch the ball. He starts running, they speed it up for 70 yards, and then slow it down when he goes in the end zone. I'm like, "We don't even have the patience to watch a guy run 100 yards." This is where this is going. This is not good.

I appreciate that. I do put a lot of effort into it still, and always will, because there are always things inside me and inside all of us that we don't throw out there. That's about as heartbreaking as anything I know. I've said this before. I'm sure that what we want more than anything is to be known, seen, heard, and felt by another, for them to feed back to us a picture of our world that they see that looks exactly like our picture. It means they're not trying to turn it into anything else.

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**What we want most is to be
known, seen, or felt by another.
We can't get that if we don't
put ourselves out there.**



They really see it. That's the thing we all want more than anything else. I believe that. We can't get that if we don't put ourselves out there. The reality for most of us is that it's hard to find a safe place to do that. It is. That's one reason I love the job that I have, because I create that for people, and I get to experience them being more and more of themselves. I get to be myself. I'm a smart ass with my clients sometimes. I'm very challenging. I justify that by saying, "I don't want you to waste your time and money. I want to get down to work here. I'm not going to treat you like somebody who can't handle it."

I get to be myself that way. I get to be silly. I get to crack jokes and say whatever I want. I don't hold back with a client. I'll tell them they're being a pain in the ass or whatever. That's a great joy in life. All that goes for me is that it feels good to hear you say that. I'm so grateful to all the therapy I've had and all the

work I put into it to be able to live my life, certainly way fuller than I was before therapy. I hope to live it as fully as I possibly can and to find people and places where I can do that. I hope the same for everybody who is tuning in.

Finding Your Authentic Self: The Joy Of Emotional Expression

You're a role model. It was because of your vision that we came together to share on a fairly regular basis and allow people to be a fly on the wall during a conversation about your passion for the therapy that you practice and receive. If you remember why we did it, it was in hopes that somebody would have the stigma of therapy lessened or removed to the degree that they would reach out to someone nearby in hopes that their life would be fuller.

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**We made this podcast hoping
it would help someone overcome
the stigma around therapy enough
to reach out to someone near them.**



I can't think of anything more gratifying, that I do professionally, than chit-chatting with you for an hour, seriously, because the reality is I'm better for it. You're an outstanding role model. We're talking about emotional expression, availability, or maturity. I'm perfect to be talking to about this because I have miles to go before we sleep. It feels comfortable. It feels safe. I know who I'm talking to. On behalf of the readership, the consumers, if not fans of this work we do, thank you. Keep coming back because this is important stuff.

Thanks, Billy. Doing this show with you turned into so much more than I even envisioned. I thought I had a pretty good vision of what it could be, but those of you who are tuning in to this episode, we don't

know where you are in our timeline. We're getting close to three years of doing this. We have yet to officially launch it. We don't have any idea if anybody is ever going to watch it.

They will.

It sounds hokey, but it is true. That's a good example of, "Sure, I'm doing it because I want people to watch it and I want people to learn things that I've learned," but doing it motivates me. I want to do it. I get a kick out of doing this. I have a lot of fun with you. We're a good team. We play off each other pretty well. It makes it fun. We're both putting a lot of effort into this. I certainly hope it touches some folks, and let us know.

It will. On behalf of those folks, thank you. This has been another episode of The Couch Trip, therapy for everyday life, brought to you in part by Bill Courtright and the one and only, outstanding, emotionally available, mature, and properly expressed Eddie Reece.

At times.

Folks, we'll see you in the next episode.

Bye.

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