



Find the hidden message to gain emotional I.Q.

Intense emotions can be hard to manage, destructive and intimidating to say the least. Having strategies to work with these makes a huge difference in conflict situations and builds long-term emotional intelligence. We'll focus on anxiety for this article, but any intense emotion can benefit from these strategies.

What do you do with someone who is really anxious or panicked?

Contain it safely: First, minimise potential harm. If they are acting irrationally, then they may be in flight/fight/freeze mode and unable to think logically or communicate clearly. Agree on a future time to discuss the issue (make it at least 30 minutes away or more). Acknowledge that you understand it's important but will need to come back to it (buffering). This will give the other person a sense of being understood yet allow some space for emotions to settle and the rational brain to kick in. Suggesting a distracting exercise (art, music) while they're waiting to speak with you can help to discharge excess emotions and stress hormones (if it's appropriate).

Wonder...what's the purpose in the emotion?

Intense emotions have a purpose, which may be one of these: 1. **a message to share that feels unheard;** if you can listen through the emotion *without reacting to it defensively and be curious*, then it's possible to discern the hidden message contained within. Is the person raising their voice? Simply *reflecting back what they're feeling and saying, checking* that you've really understood, can quickly de-escalate anxiety that comes from feeling unheard. 2. **Feeling unsafe and in need of protection or new boundaries;** if someone is attacking because they feel threatened, acknowledge what they're saying and validate the feelings. Let them know you understand this is important for them. Ask, "*What could we do that would make a real difference to how you're feeling about this?*" It's possible to negotiate new behaviours and boundaries that will prevent the need for feeling this way. Arrive at an agreement that works for all concerned. Not only does it address the issue but it will also build on more positive skills for future conflicts and avoid the need for over-reactions. 3. **Needs not being met sufficiently;** imbalance builds anxiety. Help the person explore what balance is for them and brainstorm solutions. "*What would seem like a more fair situation for you? What do you need right now?*" These questions will help to bring someone into awareness about the real issues and allow the emotion to resolve effectively and naturally.

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- ✓ Intense emotions happen for a reason
- ✓ It's important to contain irrational reactions safely, i.e. exercise helps
- ✓ Explore 3 key areas: is there a hidden message, a need not being met or a threat?

"The feeling is often the deeper truth; opinion the more superficial one."

Augustus William O'Hare

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