

PERMISSION TO FEEL

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Questions for Discussion and Reflection

Part 1: Permission to Feel

1. The book opens with a discussion about the title. What was your first impression of the concept “permission to feel?” What does it mean to give ourselves and others “permission to feel?” How has your understanding of the title changed since reading the book?
2. In Chapter 1, while describing his own emotional challenges and those of the current generation, the author mentions his Uncle Marvin as someone who really cared, listened, and allowed him to open up about his feelings and circumstances. When in your life have you been denied or granted the permission to feel? Who in your life has been an “Uncle Marvin?” How would you describe this person?
3. In Chapter 2, the author makes the case that “emotions are information,” influencing our attention, memory, learning, decision making, relationships, health, and creativity. How do emotions affect each of these areas in your life, in both good and bad ways?
4. Chapter 3 focuses on becoming an “emotion scientist.” What do you see as the value in this? How could becoming more of an emotion scientist versus an emotion judge make your life different? Are you an emotion scientist with some people and an emotion judge with others? Why might that be the case? What aspects of your thinking or behavior could you change to be more scientific about your own emotions and the emotions of others?
5. The author states, “You could be brilliant, with an IQ that Einstein would envy, but if you’re unable recognize your emotions and see how they’re affecting your behavior, all that cognitive firepower won’t do you as much good as you might imagine.” Do you agree or disagree with that quote? Why or why not?

Part II: The RULER Skills

6. In Chapter 5, while introducing the first skill of emotional intelligence, *recognizing emotion*, the author discusses typical reactions to being asked how we are feeling. How do you typically respond when asked that question? Do you tend to ask people how they feel? Why or why not? What do you usually get in response when you ask others how they’re feeling? Why do you think that is? What might be the implications?
7. The author shares several stories that illustrate how common and easy it is to misinterpret others’ emotions, even confidently, and the effects that can have. Can you think of times when you have

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wrongly assumed what someone else was feeling? What about times when your own feelings have been misinterpreted? What could each of you have done differently to prevent that from happening?

8. In Chapter 5, the author makes the case that the skill of understanding emotion may be the hardest to acquire. Why is that? He encourages us to explore the causes of our own and others' emotions like a detective. Where in your life could you use this the most? How might it help?
9. In Chapter 6, the author describes the skill of labeling emotion as having a nuanced vocabulary for communicating about our emotions in precise ways. How extensive is your emotion vocabulary? How much do you use the range of words you know when you're communicating with others about your own and their emotions? How might you enhance your emotion vocabulary?
10. In Chapter 6, the author mentions two common mistakes around labeling emotions: assuming everything is just stress when it's usually more specific, and waiting too long to try to figure out our feelings. Can you think of a time you've made either of these mistakes? What did that look like? What can you do to avoid these mistakes in the future?
11. In Chapter 7, the author states "the inability to express emotion was at the center of all my childhood trauma." How does this statement relate to anything you have experienced—personally or that you have witnessed in others? How can you push yourself and others to be more comfortable expressing how you feel?
12. Chapter 7 explains how most people hide their unhappy or unpleasant emotions and pretend to be happy when they are not. What emotions are you most comfortable expressing? The least comfortable expressing? What obstacles stand in the way from you and others expressing the full range of emotions? What can we do to remove these obstacles?
13. The author introduces the term, *emotion labor*, to describe "the effort required to manage the way we express our feelings." When in your life are you engaged in emotion labor? How is that emotion labor helpful to you? What negative impact does it have on you?
14. In discussing emotion expression, the author introduces another term, *display rules*, as the "unwritten but widely agreed-upon guidelines for how, where, when, and in whose presence we may express our feelings." He explains that these rules are dependent on culture, gender, race, age, social status, and power. What are some of these rules that influence the way you and those around you express your emotions?
15. In Chapter 8, the author quotes Stanford professor, James Gross, to define the fifth skill of emotional intelligence. He says emotion regulation is "the process by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions." Given this definition, what are some of the helpful and unhelpful emotion regulation strategies you use? How are each of those working for you?

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16. In Chapter 8, the author discusses forward-looking strategies, when we can anticipate a situation when we will feel an unwanted emotion and then avoid or modify the situation. When in your life could you use this type of strategy more effectively? What could you do differently?
17. The author also describes attention-shifting strategies, such as distraction, procrastination, self-talk, and cognitive reframing. Which of these do you already use? Which of those you use are healthy/helpful versus unhealthy/unhelpful? What is your current self-talk? What is the story you tell yourself when you're struggling? How could you make your self-talk more positive or reframe the story?
18. The author introduces the Meta-Moment as a way to pause to picture our best selves and respond accordingly. What adjectives would you use to describe your *best self*? How does your *best self* look and act?
19. When in your life could you use a Meta-Moment? What are your triggers? How might taking a Meta-Moment support you in dealing with these triggers more effectively?
20. To conclude the chapter on emotion regulation, the author explains a healthy diet, physical activity, proper sleep, doing things we love, and mindful breathing as important factors in helping us to better manage our emotions. How do each of these factors affect your ability to regulate your emotions? Which of these do you already incorporate regularly into your life? Which of these would you like to do more of?

Part III: Applying Emotion Skills for Optimum Well-Being and Success

21. In Chapter 9, the author explains how both our biological hardwiring and our surroundings affect how our emotions and emotional intelligence develop. What was your emotional upbringing like? Did you have permission to feel? What were the display rules and lessons on emotions and emotional intelligence you learned from your caregivers? How do these rules and lessons show up in your current life?
22. Again, think about the home you grew up in. What's one word you might use to describe the emotional environment in the home you were raised in? Why?
23. The author introduces the idea of a "Family Charter." The Charter asks families to discuss how they want to feel at home and what each person can do so everyone can experience more of these feelings. Can you set a goal of creating a Family Charter? What might be challenging about doing this activity with your family? How might it make a difference in the emotional climate in your home?
24. Chapter 10 focuses on emotions at school. What did you learn about emotions when you were in school? How do you think this compares to what students learn nowadays about emotions from preschool through college? What do you think students need in school to foster their emotional development and emotional intelligence? If you have children, how much are they learning in school about their emotions/emotional intelligence?

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25. In Chapter 11, the author shares research on the gap between how people feel at work most of the time (stressed, frustrated, overwhelmed) and how they want to feel (happy). Is this surprising? Why do you think this gap exists? What do you think organizations can do or should do to close this gap and help their employees with their emotions and emotional intelligence?
26. How do you feel when you are at work? What do you think influences this? Which emotions would you like to experience more at work? Which would you like to experience less? What needs to happen for you to feel these ways?
27. The author introduces the term, *emotional contagion*, to refer to the way emotions and moods transfer from one person to another. When have you noticed emotional contagion in your workplace or another area of your life? Does knowing that emotions are contagious affect your approach to your own emotional expression? How so?
28. In the closing of the book, the author asks us to imagine a world where everyone is taught emotion skills, trained to value emotional intelligence, and coached on how to be an emotion scientist. What does that world look like to you? What would be different? How do we get there?
29. Finally, how has reading this book changed the way you think about your own and others' emotions, emotional development, and/or emotional intelligence? What's your biggest takeaway? What commitments can you make today to enhance your own and other emotional intelligence?