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## UNIT 5 EMOTIONS, SELF-CONTROL AND ASSERTIVENESS\*

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### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

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*A woman was living with her baby in a remote village. She had no one else with her. However, she had a pet mongoose with her which she was very fond of. The mongoose also liked the baby and was always around. The woman used to go to the well at a distance from her house to fetch water everyday. She would often request an elderly woman in her neighborhood to keep a watch over her baby while she was gone. One day, there was no one. So she left the baby alone and went to bring water thinking that she will come back quickly. When she was away, a snake came into the house from the backyard and went near the baby sleeping on the cot in the open area of the house. The mongoose who was nearby got alerted and put up a fierce fight with the snake. The snake also injured the mongoose severely and there was blood around. Though the mongoose killed the snake. After some time the woman returned hurriedly. As soon as she entered the main door, she was shocked to see the mongoose lying with blood-smeared mouth at the entrance. Immediately she feared that it had killed her baby and enraged, she dropped the pot filled with water on the already injured mongoose and it died instantly. Then she rushed inside the house to see her baby where she found him sleeping peacefully and a dead snake near the baby's cot. She realized her mistake immediately but it was too late. She cried a lot on losing her favourite pet who had put up a fight to save her baby.*

What comes to your mind with regard to the behaviour of the woman on seeing the mongoose with blood on its mouth? It can be said that the woman dropped the heavy pot on the mongoose in a fit of rage. The emotions overpowered the woman and she could not think in the moment. Intense emotions led the woman to behave the way she did without realizing a grave mistake she was going to commit. Had the woman paused and thought about the baby first and gone to see her, things would have been different.

You must have come across many situations in your life where you got carried away by your emotions, be it positive or negative emotions. For instance, when there is an argument with your friend or sibling, you may say things that you would not otherwise. Similarly, in the excitement of going out first time on a trip with friends, you may do things that may not have good consequence. So it is crucial to get in touch with our emotions in the first place, identify and recognize it. This will enable us to control our emotions so that we can think of proper ways of behaving.

Thus, being emotionally intelligent is important. Emotional intelligence as we have discussed in Unit 2, is an ability to be aware about our emotions and manage them. It is also understanding the emotions of others and learning to deal with them effectively. Mainly, we can describe emotional intelligence as consisting of intra-personal intelligence and inter-personal intelligence (refer Fig. 5.1). Intra personal intelligence consists of Self-awareness and Self-management. Inter personal intelligence includes Social awareness and Relationship management.

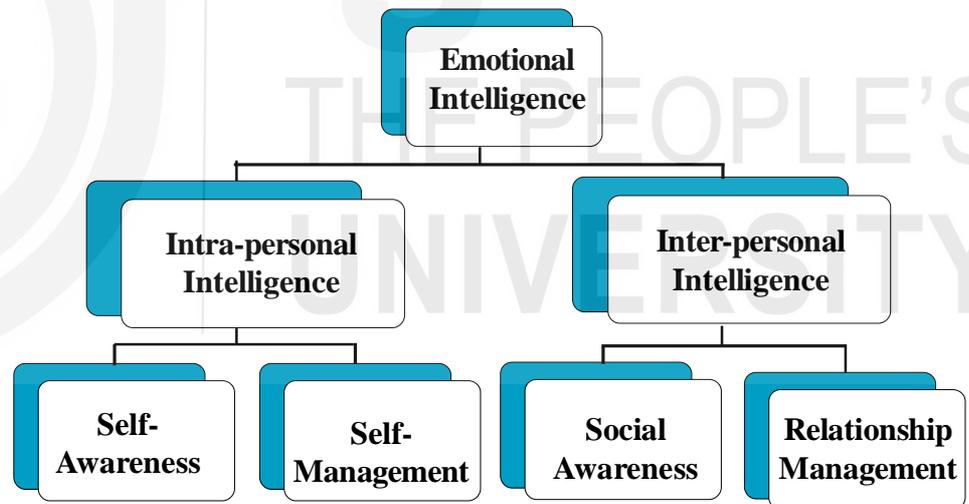


Fig. 5.1: Components of Emotional Intelligence

In the present Unit and the next, we will focus on the *intra-personal intelligence*. This is the first thing that one needs to start with which includes self-awareness and self-management – knowing about oneself and managing one’s emotions. Understanding of others and the world around you starts with understanding your own self. Self-understanding is the first step. As the Mother, the spiritual guru and founder of Auroville and Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Puducherry, India remarks, “First learn to know yourself perfectly and then to control yourself perfectly.” (Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 2001).

Self-awareness, as the term indicates, refers to knowing about oneself. It is getting connected to one's emotions in the moment. As Stein and Book (2006, p.57) put it, emotional self-awareness is the ability to recognize your feelings, differentiate between them, know why you are feeling these feelings, and recognize the impact your feelings have on others around you.

However, just knowing how you are feeling and how it is affecting others around you are not enough. You also need to learn how to manage it so that you become effective. Thus, self-management is an important component of emotional intelligence.

**Intra-personal management or self-management** refers to how do you handle your emotions, what strategies you adopt so that you become more effective in your interaction and dealings with other people and in different situations. It consists of different skills such as *emotional self-control, assertiveness, self-regard and self-actualization*. In this Unit we will focus on the first two whereas the latter two will be discussed in Unit 6.

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## 5.2 OBJECTIVES

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Thus, after going through this Unit, you would be able to:

- know the meaning of self-control;
- understand the importance of self-control in our life;
- learn the strategies to develop and improve self-control;
- know the meaning of assertiveness;
- understand the importance of assertiveness in our life; and
- learn the strategies to develop assertiveness

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## 5.3 EMOTIONS AND SELF-CONTROL

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Emotions are pervasive in all domains of our life. In fact, it can be called as the building blocks of our relationship, actions and success. Emotions make us who we are. Hence, we need to focus on our emotions - how do we recognize them, engage with them, express them and control them – which will make our life effective and happy. We need to first identify the emotions that we are experiencing, recognize how these are affecting our performance, our relationship and behavior. Once we do this, we would be in a position to bring in changes in our communication and behavior so that to create a positive impact. Emotional abilities impact our life in diverse spheres. They not only affect our personal life but also our workplace and other aspects. Recognizing the emotions, understanding them and managing them in an effective way affects our development, satisfaction, performance and relationships. Studies have found that emotional abilities predict life-satisfaction in an indirect way (Salami, 2011; Koydemir & Schutz, 2012).

If we take the analogy of Freud's iceberg, we can say that the upper part of iceberg floating on the water represents our Intelligence Quotient (IQ) – as reflected in our performance, decision-making, behavior and success. The crucial question here is what makes this possible. It is our Emotional Intelligence (EQ) that plays a significant role here. The submerged part of the iceberg under water represents our EQ – which is reflected in being aware about one's emotions,

recognizing others' emotions, having social skills, empathy, controlling one's emotions and managing of emotions in others. Thus, management of emotions is very crucial in order to achieve success and happiness in life. In this regard, self-control is one of the important skills in intra-personal management of emotions.

Now, let us know in detail the meaning of self-control and how it plays an important role in managing emotions.

### 5.3.1 Meaning and Importance of Self-control

Self-control, as the term indicates, refers to be in control of oneself. This means, mainly to be able to control one's emotions in the moment. It is being aware of one's emotions and putting a check on them so that one does not burst out as a result of one's emotions, but is able to assess the situation and others around, and then decide the course of action. Thus emotional self-control helps in restraining oneself and reducing impulsivity. Stein and Book (2006, p.204) have defined emotional self-control as "a capacity for identifying one's angry and aggressive impulses, being composed and putting the brakes on angry, aggressive, hostile and irresponsible behavior."

Thus, self-control enables us to be composed, understand our emotions and not act on an impulse. Self-control is required not only in situations of anger or aggression, but also in situations exhibiting intense joy, pleasure or excitement also. In the latter case also, we sometimes get so excited that our language and actions may affect others negatively, e.g., blurting out some insensible remarks about somebody. Thus, in both the scenarios whether we are experiencing positive or negative emotions, exercising self-control is very important. In Indian scriptures we have the term 'Sthitapragyan' that means one is calm and composed both in happy and sad times, thus referring to self-control. In ancient Indian Mythology, we have examples of sages also like Maharishi Durbasha who was known for his extreme instant anger because of which he himself also has faced troubles many times.

Mersino (2007, p.52) defines self-control as "the ability to control our emotions so that they do not control us. It includes techniques that help us to regulate our emotions, to identify and prevent emotional triggers, and to identify and prevent thinking that can lead to emotional breakdowns." Thus, emotional self-control is the ability to control or regulate our emotions to achieve desirable outcomes. It is an ability which uses understanding about one's emotions to deal with situations in a better way. When we are in the grip of emotions, we cannot think clearly. Using technique of self-control, we can pause, understand our emotions and its impact; and then accordingly think clearly and take actions. Learning to control oneself helps us to face any kind of situation without getting disturbed or distressed. Like water on the lotus petal does not stay, similarly, one stays composed and does not get affected by emotions.

Another definition by Mangal and Mangal (2015) states, "emotional self-control is an ability or skill belonging to the intra-personal management of one's EI that helps him to exercise desirable control over his emotions and provide a shield against the evil consequences of impulsive actions, emotional storms and breakdowns for enabling him to get along well with his self and others and attain desired success in his life."

Thus, analyzing all the above definitions, we can arrive at the following main points about emotional self-control.

- Emotional self-control is an ability and skill of emotional intelligence (EI)
- It relates to intrapersonal management component of EI
- It involves controlling or regulating or managing one's emotions
- Pre-requisite for self-control is awareness about one's own emotions
- Together with self awareness, managing oneself through self- control are said to be the gateway to EI
- Self awareness and self management are two crucial first things in developing EI
- Self-control involves learning to manage distressing and disruptive emotions
- It puts a check on such emotions, thus avoiding impulsive behavior and actions
- It allows for thinking about the situation, thereby enabling to take wise decisions and appropriate steps
- Self-control thus aids in self growth, managing ourselves well and brings success and achievement
- It also helps facilitate proper interpersonal relationship and communication

Thus an effective management of one's emotions, both positive and negative, can lead one onto growth, adjustment, good relations, achievement and success. As Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2002) point out, management of emotions refers to the ability to successfully regulate one's emotions such as stress, impulses and motivation, thoughts and behaviours in different situations. Controlling of one's emotions or self-control activates one's thinking, reasoning, analysis aspect that help one to put things in proper context and perspective. As the saying goes, 'look before you leap'. It always helps if instead of acting on an impulse, we pause, look, plan and then take a move.

### 5.3.2 Strategies to Develop Self-control

As we discussed above, self-control is a very fundamental and crucial skill to learn to achieve a balanced state of mind. It also helps one to take an informed decision. That is, equipped with the awareness of one's emotions, one can take stock of the situation and take desirable steps as per the requirements of the situation. Self-control as a part of self-regulation involves the ability to deliberately regulate one's emotions, thoughts and actions. It encompasses skills such as emotion regulation, control, and perseverance.

One of the strategies for self-regulation is self-distancing. It can help in controlling one's emotions. Self-distancing refers to the mental distance or psychological distance deliberately created by an individual between the self and a stimulus by having the individual think about their thoughts, feelings or actions from an outsider's perspective (Kross & Ayduk, 2011). Taking a distanced perspective helps adults focus on 'why' they are feeling what they are feeling instead of focusing on the negative emotions themselves and results in better coping when recalling these past negative emotions (Nigg, 2017). Three types of distancing conditions can be

created by using visual imagery or language or media characters: (i) visualizing the event/past negative emotions through their own eyes or using first person speech (non-distanced); (ii) visualizing or telling from an outsider's perspective using third-person speech (self-distanced); and (iii) using a media character like superman, batman, barbie etc. (exemplar). The first two conditions, non-distanced and self-distanced conditions are used in case of adults whereas all the three can be used in case of children, thus allowing them a greater degree of distance evidenced through the imagined character. Various studies (Kross & Ayduk, 2017; Kross & Ayduk, 2011; Nook, Schleider, & Somerville, 2017; and Dolcos & Albarracín, 2014) have reported higher task performance, better executive function, perseverance and improved ability to delay in gratification when taking a self-distanced perspective through either a third-person or exemplar condition than in the no distance condition, i.e., self-immersed condition.

Mangal and Mangal (2015) have indicated three stages in the development of self-control.

### 1. *Awareness about the present emotional state*

The first step required in the development of self-control is to be aware about one's emotional state. One needs to focus attention on the emotions one is experiencing at the moment, for instance, what are these emotions, nature of these emotions, positive or negative emotions, intensity of the emotions, duration and pattern of the emotions. Many a times by the time we become aware of our emotions, the action has already been done. This may lead to ineffective actions and decisions. Thus, to be connected with one's emotions, one needs to be mindful about the present moment experiences and emotions.

This emotional self awareness can be developed through different ways: (a) knowing about emotions, their nature, types and how they impact; (b) paying attention to the physical manifestations of the emotions; physiological changes like rapid heart beat, fast breathing, sweating, increased blood pressure, facial changes, laughing, smiling, feeling relaxed etc.; (c) meditation practices will help focus your attention inward on your inner self and understand yourself; (d) scanning the body for physical changes and the thought process to find out what thoughts are going on; (e) scanning others also with regard to changes in their body language and behavior due to our own emotional state.

### 2. *Determining underlying causes responsible for the present emotional state*

When we focus on the emotional state we are experiencing, the next step is to find out why we are experiencing these. It is like going backward or retracing the steps back to find out what caused the emotions.

### 3. *Adopting measures for getting control of the emotional state*

Once we know the reasons for our emotions, we are in a better position to control these. There are several ways that help us in emotional self-control: (a) take an immediate pause within yourself and outside yourself also, e.g., deep breathing, relaxation techniques, doing yoga and exercise, listening to music, talking to friends/family; (b) adopting an internal locus of control and not blaming the external factors as responsible for the emotional state of the

individual; (c) having a positive attitude, hope and optimism; (d) planning beforehand that helps you to anticipate the likely impact of your emotions and modify your behavior accordingly.

The above strategies can thus be followed in order to develop effective self-control.

### Self Assessment Questions 1

1. .... is pre-requisite for emotional self-control.
2. Being able to control one's emotions prevents us from acting on .....
3. .... locus of control will help us in getting control of our emotional state.
4. We can find the underlying causes responsible for our present emotional state by going ..... to find the causes.
5. Scanning the body for physical manifestations of the emotions will help us in developing .....

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## 5.4 EMOTIONS AND ASSERTIVENESS

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Assertiveness is another skill which has a very important role in connection with our emotions. In many situations, we hesitate to express our emotions for the fear of being understood wrong or apprehension that others will get angry or hurt, or it may not be taken in a positive light. We also do not express our emotions to avoid our weaknesses or limitations, for the fear and shame of looking inferior before others, or appearing incapable before others. All these results in suppressing of our emotions and if we engage in suppression most of the time, it may result in depression. For example, Nita is a class 8<sup>th</sup> girl who is always teased by her classmates as she is fat. She feels very upset and sad and this has affected her self esteem. All this affects negatively her studies as well as her participating in different school activities. The requirement here is being assertive in expressing one's emotions. This will help Nita to be firm and stand up for herself and at the same time make others realize the situation.

So, let us now discuss what do we mean by assertiveness and how it can be developed as it has a significant impact on the way we manage our emotions.

### 5.4.1 Meaning and Importance of Assertiveness

Assertiveness means to assert one's rights, to speak up for oneself what one thinks and feels. Thus it refers to exercising one's right to be respected. However, this is done in such a manner that it does not disregard the right of other person to be respected. As Stein and Book (2006) state, assertiveness refers to the skill of "being able to disagree with others without resorting to emotional sabotage or subterfuge, and being able to walk a fine line, defending their wishes while, at the same time, respecting another person's point of view and being sensitive to their needs."

Further, assertiveness is also described as standing up for yourself without violating the rights of others, getting what you want using fair and reasonable means (Dutt,

2012). Thus, assertiveness is an ability or interpersonal skill where you can as the saying goes, 'have the cake and eat it too'. That is, you can state your thoughts and desires and position firmly and clearly without offending anyone or making others feel bad or hurt in anyway.

This ability to consider and understand the emotions of oneself as well as others so as to take care of both while communicating leads to effective interpersonal interaction. Thus it can be said to include the following main points:

- Assertiveness is an important interpersonal skill related to emotional intelligence.
- It consists of five C's – Clear, Concise, Confidence, Courage and Controlled. The message is conveyed in a concise manner and clearly with courage, confidence and in a calm controlled manner.
- It respects the need of oneself as well as the need of others. It exemplifies the principle of 'Live and Let Live'. Thus, both are happy and without stress.
- Assertive people can fight for their rights and at the same time able to care for others also so as not to hurt their feelings or beliefs.
- They are able to express themselves without any anxiety, nervousness or boasting.
- They exhibit appropriate control over their impulses and emotions.

Thus, we can see that assertive behavior can help us communicate well with others and achieve success in life. In this context, you may note that assertiveness can be described as being on a continuum with passiveness on one end and aggressiveness on the other end. Many a times, assertiveness is confused as being aggressive though it is not. Passive behavior is a non-assertive way of communication that is characterized by shyness, anxiousness, fear and submissiveness. Such people lack confidence and feel inferior, and put others' needs and requirements at the forefront while neglecting or relegating their own needs, desires, thoughts and feelings. On the other hand, aggressive behavior puts one's own needs on the top and does not consider the rights of others. Such people do not consider the feelings and thoughts of other people. The middle path, being assertive, is an effective way of communication that takes care of the need to fulfill one's own wishes, consider one's emotions, and also recognize the needs and rights of other people. One is able to show assertiveness when one understands own emotions and other's emotions too and accordingly takes care of both with an aim to achieve the main objective. Such people will have self regard and build harmonious relationship with others. Since they exhibit a cool and calm stance, without getting agitated, it has positive impact on their physical and mental health also.

### **5.4.2 Strategies to Develop Assertiveness**

Assertiveness is an emotional competency that can be developed so as to successfully manage one's emotions and have a positive impact on others for success in life. Here one is able to express one's own thoughts, opinions, feelings and wishes honestly without any fear, hesitation or aggression because one is considerate of the rights of the other person also. This crucial ability can be developed through different ways:

1. *Being aware of one's emotions* is the first thing in the process of developing assertiveness. In the example of Nita given earlier, she needed to be aware about what emotions and feelings she was feeling and what she wanted for her. If I don't know what are my feelings and wishes, then what would I stand up for?
2. *Being aware of other's emotions* is the next step that is required on the way to be assertive. One cannot grow or achieve happiness by ignoring, humiliating or putting down others. One needs to give equal respect to the needs and desires of others also. This will help people to accept your stand without getting antagonized or showing resentment. Thus assertiveness involves striking a balance between the needs of self and others.
3. *Taking care/focusing on the C's of assertiveness*. Be clear about what do you want, say it confidently and maintain a controlled manner throughout. Thus one needs to know what one aims at in a given situation. Further, one needs to observe one's verbal as well as non-verbal language to be aware of what one is communicating to others. In order to be acceptable to others, one also needs to practice saying things in a confident and calm manner without getting emotional or agitated. Exercising control over one's emotions will also help one to think clearly leading to constructive steps.
4. *Practice your assertive dialogue*. Assertiveness is a way of communication that may not develop overnight. So one needs to practice how to say assertively without hurting others.
5. *Being mindful*. One needs to be mindful of one's emotions, feelings and behaviours. This will help in knowing what exactly one wants and how to express the things before others.

### Self Assessment Questions 2

1. The three C's of assertiveness are .....  
..... and .....
2. Assertive people tend to think only of their rights and wishes. (True/False)
3. Assertive people always disagree with others. (True/False)
4. If assertiveness is described on a continuum, what will be there on both the ends?

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## 5.5 LET US SUM UP

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In the present Unit, we focused on two important aspects or skills related to intrapersonal management of emotions, self-control and assertiveness. Meaning and importance of these in the context of managing one's emotions effectively were discussed. Thus, emotional self control is the first step or can be described as the gateway to achieving emotional competence. Assertiveness which ensures the rights of the self as well as the other person, thereby facilitating healthy interpersonal communication and success was differentiated from passiveness and aggressiveness. Various strategies to develop and improve self-control and assertive behavior were described.

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## 5.6 KEY WORDS

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- Self-control** : It refers to exercising control over one's emotions by paying attention to one's emotions and its' impact on self and others.
- Assertiveness** : It refers to expressing one's needs, views, thoughts and feelings clearly, confidently and calmly while taking care of the feelings and rights of others.

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## 5.7 ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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### Self Assessment Questions 1

1. awareness of emotions
2. impulse
3. internal
4. backward
5. emotional self-awareness.

### Self Assessment Questions 2

1. clear, confident and controlled
2. False
3. False
4. passiveness and aggressiveness

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## 5.8 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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1. Discuss the meaning and importance of emotional self-control in the success and achievement of people covering personal, social and professional life.
2. Describe the different ways to develop assertive communication.
3. Explain the role of assertiveness in managing one's emotions.
4. Differentiate between assertiveness, passiveness and aggressiveness with suitable examples.
5. What are the strategies to develop and improve emotional self control?

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