Interpersonal Skills for STEM and Medical Sciences:

Emotional Intelligence

**Objectives**

* Define the four components of emotional intelligence
* Demonstrate several strategies to improve emotional intelligence

**Lecture Notes**

1. **Rationale –** Learning about interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence is crucial in the STEM and medical fields for several key reasons.
   1. Effective communication through our interpersonal exchanges is essential for both STEM professionals and the medical field. For example, in STEM, people may need to articulate complex ideas to diverse audiences, while medical professionals need to clearly explain diagnoses and treatments to patients and families.
   2. Collaboration and teamwork are also vital as many projects require collaborative efforts across disciplines. In STEM, multidisciplinary projects rely on strong interpersonal skills to drive innovation and problem-solving, whereas in healthcare, coordinated efforts among various professionals are necessary for optimal patient care.
   3. Leadership and management in both fields benefit from emotional intelligence, as it aids in managing teams, resolving conflicts, and making strategic decisions.
   4. Adaptability and stress management are critical in the STEM landscape and high-pressure medical environment as highly emotional intelligent people can stay resilient and cope effectively.
2. **What are emotions?** 
   1. **Emotions** are“the body’s multidimensional response to any event that enhances or inhibits one’s goals” (Floyd, 2021). You might have multiple goals at work, for example. Most people want to appear competent in front of their boss (goal 1) and want to be seen as friendly by coworkers (goal 2).
   2. Research tells us that emotions are a **response to a specific event**, they are **triggered by some stimuli** or situation. So, when things get in the way of our goals, we experience emotions.
      1. Let’s say you are working on a team project, and you finish your part of the work on time, but your coworker has not (*frustration* ensues). The deadline comes around and you must make a tough decision. Do you:
         1. Present your portion of the work without your coworker and thereby highlighting their tardiness (feel *guilt*) but look good for yourself in front of the boss (*pride*), or,
         2. Ask for more time to finish the project and thereby support your coworker relationship (feel increased *bondedness*) but potentially looking bad in front of the boss (*sad* or *ashamed*).
            1. In either case, your response to this event will either enhance or inhibit your goals and thus prompt you to experience multiple emotions. One of the ways that we can handle difficult situations like this is to improve our emotional intelligence.
3. **Emotional intelligence**: is defined as the *ability to perceive and understand emotions, use emotions to facilitate thought, and manage emotions constructively*. There are four major domains of emotional intelligence; the first two domains relate to our intrapersonal skills, and the second two related to our interpersonal skills:
   1. **Emotional awareness in the self (*intra*personal)** – the ability to accurately perceive and express emotion in the self.
   2. **Emotional management in the self (*intra*personal)** – the ability to regulate emotion in the self, enabling a more rapid recovery from psychological distress. This includes working on your resilience, bouncing back from negative emotions.
   3. **Social emotional awareness** **(*inter*personal)** – the ability to recognize and appraise emotions *in others.* Can you accurately detect what others are feeling?
   4. **Relationship management (*inter*personal)** – the ability to use emotions to facilitate relationship bonding. Thinking about how emotions can build a rapport between you and your patient.

**HANDOUT & ACTIVITY** – Let’s determine our own emotional intelligence scores! Give the emotional intelligence assessment handout to students, review instructions with them, and ask them to fill it out (5-minutes). Alternatively, give them the assessment before the class begins and ask students to bring their results to class.

Instruct students to turn to a partner in class (or small group of three) and (1) share one aspect of your emotional intelligence assessment that you found insightful or surprising and (2) discuss how you can apply this knowledge to your chosen field of study (5-minutes).

Encourage students to set personal goals based on their assessment results and to seek opportunities for growth in their daily interactions.

Summarize the importance of understanding and improving emotional intelligence: you will undoubtedly experience many emotions during the day. Your ability to manage your emotions will not only benefit your interpersonal professional exchanges, but it’ll help you personally. Let’s discuss ways that we can enhance each of these domains.

1. **Improving Your Emotional awareness** – emotional awareness is our ability to accurately perceive and express emotion in the self. To enhance this domain, you will have to really know yourself, your typical emotional reactions, and know areas that you can improve.
   1. **Identify the emotion** – the ability to recognize and identify the emotion you’re experiencing is perhaps the most important emotional communication skill you can develop. Research indicates that people who can accurately identify which emotion they’re feeling are best equipped to manage them in productive ways. To identify your emotion:
      1. **Listen to your body** – emotions cause physiological change. What is your body doing? When have you experienced those sensations in the past?
      2. **Pay attention to your thoughts** – your thoughts may help give you clues to the emotion you are experiencing. E.g., if you feel like lashing out at someone, you are probably experiencing anger.
      3. **Take stock of the situation** – every emotion has a cause (recall the definition of emotions). What are you reacting to? What might be interfering with your goals?
2. **Improving Your Emotional management** – emotional management is our ability to regulate emotion in the self, enabling a more rapid recovery from psychological distress. In this domain, we really want to be able to manage our *negative emotions* (anger, stress, anxiety, fear, sadness)*.* To do this, you will need to locate your triggers; that is, what is “setting you off”?
   1. **Reappraise negative emotions** – emotional reappraisal involves changing the way you think about the situation that gave rise to the negative emotion so that the effect of the emotion is reduced.
   2. **Accepting responsibility for emotions** – accepting responsibility for our emotions is challenging because emotions are reactions to events that affect you. But by naming your emotions and taking responsibility for how you behave after an emotion is an important step to the self-management of your emotions.
   3. **Separating emotions from actions** – experiencing an emotion doesn’t mean you have to act on it. Before you act on your emotions, it’s generally best to stop and think about the possible effects of your actions. E.g., take three deep breaths before engaging in an interpersonal exchange that you know is going to be triggering for you.
3. **Improving Your Social Emotional Awareness** – social emotional awareness is our ability to recognize and appraise emotions *in others.* Those with high emotional intelligence know how to identify when others are experiencing emotions and attempt to eliminate bias in interpreting them. One such bias that we all fall prey to is the fundamental attribution error.
   1. **Fundamental attribution error** occurs when we attribute other people’s behaviors to internal rather than external causes. For example, if someone pushes past us and bumps our shoulder, the fundamental attribution error predicts that we attribute that behavior to internal causes (that is a *rude* person) rather than external causes (they are experiencing an emergency and needed to rush by). This type of automatic thinking is something we should try to actively avoid.
      1. **This tendency is very strong**. One study indicates that even when people are told that a person is acting negatively because they were instructed to do so, people will still assign poor behavior to an internal cause (she’s not a nice person). **Q: How can we challenge ourselves to let go of this more?** Give the benefit of the doubt—assume that most people are generally nice and don’t wish to harm others.
   2. **Reduce uncertainty** – when people are faced with a difficult situation, they are usually riddled with uncertainty. The experience of uncertainty may lead to a host of negative emotions (e.g., fear, anger, guilt, sadness). Thus, when you see someone experiencing uncertainty, you might help them reduce their uncertainty by offering your assistance, providing information, or simply reassuring them that you will work together to find an answer. Reducing uncertainty can help us, as well as others, feel more positive states.
      1. Here is a help acronym for helping someone feel like they’ve been heard, understood, and cared for: NURS (naming, understanding, respecting, and supporting).
      2. You don’t have to use all four elements of NURS every single time an emotion presents itself, but it’s a good skill to practice, even using 1-2 of these things can help you nurture the expression of emotions during an interpersonal exchange.
         1. **Naming the emotion** – you have heard their feelings, observed their emotions/behaviors; signals that their feelings are acknowledged.
         2. **Understanding the emotion** – shows you understand where they are coming from, why they would feel that way.
         3. **Respecting** –appreciating patients for sharing their feelings and praising their efforts/resilience.
         4. **Supporting** –signal your ongoing support.
            1. Let’s look at [an example](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdhjztWMnVw) where some of the NURS elements are being used.Named the emotion (sad), understood the emotion (described why it would be sad), supported them (hug).
4. **Improving Your Relationship Management** – relationship management is our ability to use emotions to facilitate relationship bonding.
   1. **Generate and maintain positivity** – having a good rapport with your colleagues will make the world of difference. You can do this by keeping a mental note of personal details of a coworker as you get to know them (e.g., dog name, hobbies, activities) and ask about them occasionally. Sharing positive stories and showing genuine interest in another person’s life promotes positivity.
   2. **If you need to give criticism to someone,** use *The Sandwich Method*.
      1. **Praise** – compliment effort and ability.
      2. **Criticize** – give constructive criticism (encourage recommendations, ask questions, give specific examples).
      3. **Praise** – compliment future potential/ability.