

Rules You Need to Break to Become Emotionally Fit

Emotions are a way we experience, process and influence our environment and relationships. Unlike work done in classical education, you cannot memorize an emotion and then have it the rest of your life. You have to experience an emotion.

I do not know about your life, but when I look back into mine, I see moments—some more providential than others—when I was going through an experience but did not realize how powerful it was at the time or how it would impact my future. For me, that moment was high school.

In high school, I did a lot of acting in school plays: *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *Pillow Talk*. Along the way we had a drama coach who walked us through some really strange exercises.

One of those exercises involved improvisation. He would give us a character and a situation, and we would have a minute with our partner to create a believable scene.

Another was an exercise that had to do with emotions. Our teacher had us lie down on the stage and then told us to get really quiet so we could feel the stillness throughout our entire body. This was the first time I ever remember focusing on one emotion. I distinctly remember feeling still and calm. I am certain this was the first time I knew my whole body could actually feel an emotion.

Then the teacher led us in guided meditation. Two of my takeaways from this exercise would later revolutionize my life and lead me further down the path to emotional fitness.

Before I did the exercise of lying on that stage in my high school auditorium, I never thought I could *choose* to feel anything. Like so many others, I thought feelings or emotions

just happened. Lying there on that black stage floor, I realized I could choose to feel what someone was asking me to feel. Never in a thousand years would I have guessed that I could, on demand, choose an emotion and actually command emotions. For me, this was extremely outside my experiential comfort zone.

My second major takeaway from this experience was that my whole body could feel one feeling. Up to that point, if I became aware of a feeling, I would run it through my cognitive process to try to figure out what was going on with me emotionally.

I had no real access to identifying or feeling one specific emotion. I could only sense emotions cognitively. This lack of emotional connectivity kept me stunted for years.

When I could actually give myself permission to feel a feeling, I was at least 10 years older than I had been in high school. At that point, I was able to accelerate my emotional fitness significantly. Now I am able to feel an emotion emotionally as well as physically without fear or shame.

I say this because in the early stages of becoming emotionally fit, there are rules you are told or you create to manage your limited emotional life. As you do the next two body connecting exercises, you may remember one of these rules, and if so, you may have to break it cognitively and experientially.

Rules You Will Need to Break

1. Feelings are for girls.
2. You cannot trust your feelings.
3. Feelings are for the weak.
4. Do not feel.
5. People will take advantage of you.
6. You will look ridiculous.
7. Feelings do not change anything.
8. Feelings are for cowards.

9. If you feel, you will lose control.
10. You cannot express your feelings well, so do not express them. You might embarrass yourself.

There are probably hundreds of other similar “rules” you may come across as you do some of the emotional fitness exercises. As you think of these rules, make note of them. They will come to you as you are feeling or expanding your range of emotions.

These rules may try to convince you that you shouldn’t better yourself through these practices. If such a message surfaces in your mind, you have found a rule. That is good news. It means you are going further than you ever have emotionally. If you listen to the rule, you will retreat and thus limit yourself from living an emotionally fit lifestyle. Simply put: Do not listen to these rules.

To break a rule, you can do an exercise I have given to clients for decades. This exercise is simple and effective.

Thank You and Goodbye Letter

Once you identify a rule that is limiting you emotionally, do two things. First, write both a thank-you letter and goodbye letter to the rule. The rationale behind these two letters is the reality that your rule has been serving you in some way and helping you in your past or present world. You needed this rule to survive. However, things have changed. Now, you need to break this rule to live.

The things that help us survive often limit us from living.
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Doug Weiss, Ph.D., *is a nationally known author, speaker and licensed psychologist. He is the executive director of Heart to Heart Counseling Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and the author of several books, including Emotional Fitness. You may contact Dr. Weiss via his website, or on hisFacebook, by phone at 719-278-3708 or through email at heart2heart@.*