

## **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE FOR THE PRACTICE TEAM**

**Jo Banks discusses how emotional intelligence can build stronger, more effective relationships with your patients.**

Until recently, the general consensus has been that emotions get in the way of making good decisions. In the last few decades, however, a growing body of research is proving just the opposite. Emotional Intelligence (EI) relates to our ability to understand and manage our feelings, so that we're better equipped to face life's pressures. By being aware of the way we react in certain circumstances and managing these reactions, we can create more effective outcomes to situations.

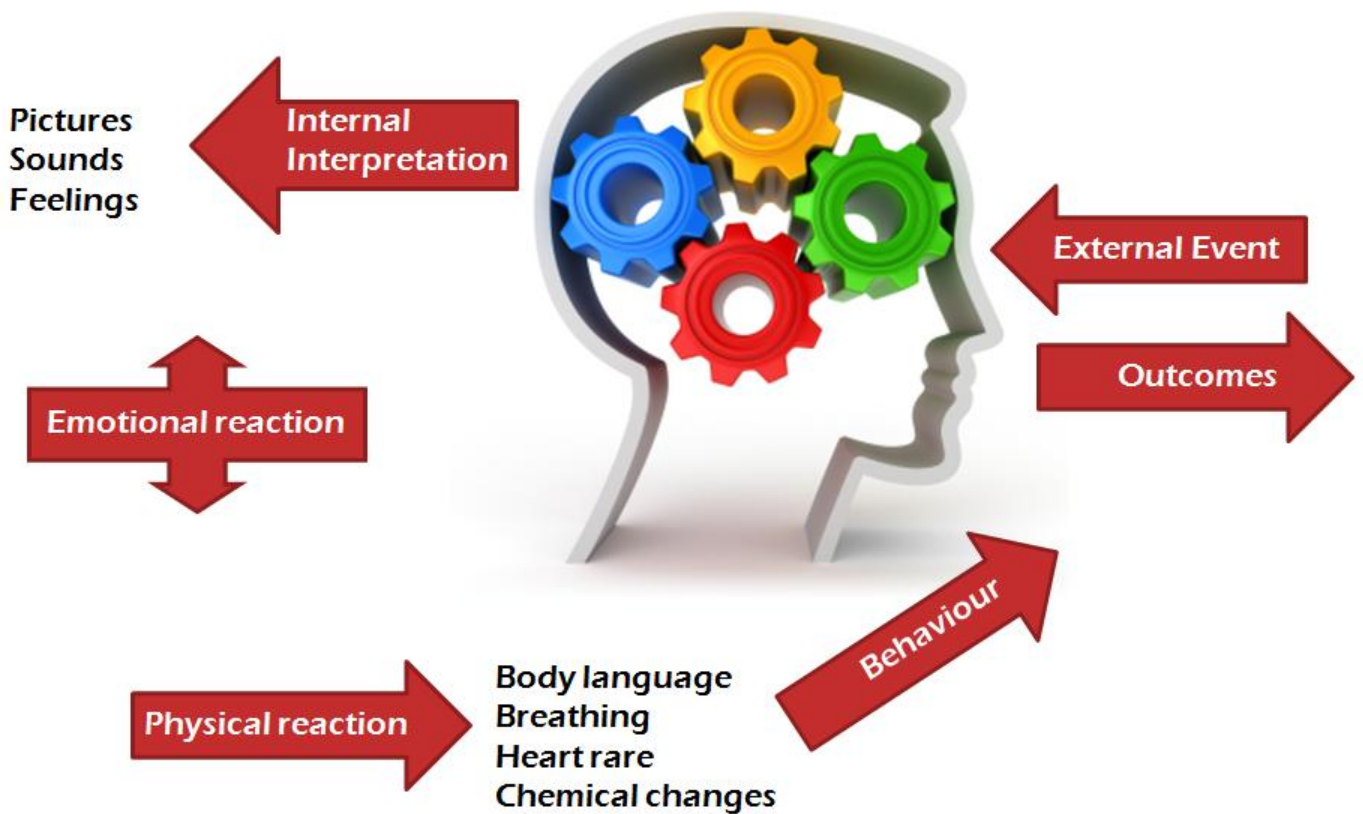
Individuals who demonstrate EI skills recognise and take advantage of opportunities as well as developing appropriate strategies for dealing with challenges. The following tips are designed to help you understand EI, to make you better able to cope with everyday stresses and build strong relationships with both your team and your patients.

### **Four key areas of emotional intelligence**

#### **Self-awareness:**

This is the ability to recognise and understand our strengths and weaknesses coupled with a drive to improve our skills. It's also the ability to realise the links between our feelings and what we think, do and say.

Information from an external event passes through filters, which delete, distort and generalise information dependent on our values and beliefs, attitudes, past experiences and memories. These filters are, therefore, different for everyone and will lead to an individual interpretation of the event. It can induce an emotional reaction, which in turn may create a physical reaction and a specific kind of behaviour; thus influencing the outcome of the situation. For example, an employer tells a member of their team that their work needs to be improved - one person may become angry with the feedback, while another person may become very upset.



Becoming aware of our filters and subsequent emotions and behaviour can help us modify and adapt in order to create a more positive outcome. It's only when you're aware, when you recognise the triggers that set off those emotions, that you can start managing them.

### **Self-management:**

Once we're able to recognise our emotions, we can then identify the behavioural patterns and manage their impact on other people; this is referred to as self-management.

Negative emotions, left unchecked can become habits, resulting in similar responses each time the emotion is triggered. Similarly we all have an internal dialogue, which more often than not, is negative. Rather than telling us how great we are, it searches out our faults, making us self-conscious and unconfident. This can become very de-motivating and self-limiting.

**Thought zapping:**

As habits are learned behaviour, 'thought zapping' is about interrupting that automatic behaviour or thought. Using something as simple as an elastic band on your wrist - lightly flicking the band every time the negative thought/emotion arises - the band acts as a trigger, which interrupts the habit. Once interrupted, you can consciously replace the negative thought/emotion with a positive one. After a while the trigger is needed less because your mind has learnt to interrupt it and slowly the physical stimulus becomes obsolete.

**Social awareness – empathy:**

It's only by recognising our own emotions and feelings that we're able to identify with the emotions and feelings of patients, colleagues, friends and family and therefore demonstrate empathy and build rapport. Empathy is identifying with the feelings, thoughts or attitudes of another person, demonstrating that you understand them and their situation in a way which builds rapport and relationships.

EI is an important skill when developing strong and productive relationships with your colleagues, but by adopting the above techniques you can also learn to encourage effective and mutually-beneficial interactions with your patients. Some payment plan specialists even offer tailor-made training days, which are specific to your practices needs and can incorporate modules focused on Emotional Intelligence. So all that's left is to put this new knowledge into action!!

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**About the author:**

Jo Banks is Denplan's Sales Trainer Manager, highly experienced in working with dental practice teams to ensure they feel confident in their ability to communicate with their patients and offer them best options for their oral health.