

Emotions
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Upbeat
V.2, n. 7-8, 1969

Do you become angry when your father tells you you can't have the car or that you have to be in at midnight? Do you get nervous when you're asked to answer a question in class or do you hesitate in volunteering an answer because you're afraid your answer might be wrong; do you feel happy when someone you like asks you out? If your answer is yes to any of these questions, then you have experienced some of the quite normal emotions that all human beings experience: anger, anxiety, fear, happiness.

But have you ever wondered what causes emotions or why you react in a particular way to a situation? Or have you ever wished that you could control your emotions better or understand them more fully? Perhaps an examination of human emotions in general may help you understand your own responses better; and perhaps through understanding your own responses, you can control them or at least not feel so confused when you're beset by emotions. Perhaps you may even learn to understand other people better.

To begin at the beginning, everyone has needs; and everyone is motivated to fill the needs he has. Almost everyone is aware of some basic needs: the need for food, for shelter, for clothing – those things that are needed to keep alive. Psychologists, however, have classified other needs that human beings have: the need for love and acceptance, the need for prestige, the need for sexual satisfaction, the need to be creative and the need to learn new things. All of these are needs which human beings try to fill. When the needs they have are filled, people usually are happy and contented.

All needs, however, can't be filled. The needs of one individual may conflict with those of another. Economic and social circumstances might prevent the fulfillment of needs. Or personal traits of an individual may make it impossible for him to fill his needs. For example, a young man may wish for the prestige of being a football player, yet he may lack the skill to become a good football player. When needs are frustrated or not satisfied, people usually become angry or hostile or worried or anxious.

Emotions, then, are the reactions people have to the fulfillment or frustrations of needs or drives. Emotional responses and needs, however, change with age, a fact that accounts, in part, for a certain lack of understanding between age groups. Babies and very young children are most interested in having their physical needs tended to; teenagers, on the other hand, are more concerned with social success: their acceptance by other people, their ability to do their school work well, and so on.

Sometimes it is difficult for members of one group to understand how important the needs of another group are. Emotional responses also change as individuals grow. A young child may find a practical joke, such as pulling a chair away from someone about to sit down, very funny; an older girl or boy might become angry at such childish behavior.

What, then, are the chief causes of emotional responses in teenagers? Frustrated plans and loss of prestige are the most common causes of angry responses in teenagers. The teenager becomes angry at his father not so much because of the restrictions placed on the use of the family car but more because such restrictions often frustrate his plans. Loss of prestige is another cause of anger. If one is embarrassed or ridiculed or if one fails in some endeavor, one often responds with aggressive behavior, such as anger, hostility, hatred.

The causes of worry and fear, emotions quite different from anger, are many. The teenager worries about this social status, sex, his success in school, his desire to be independent, and his future life plans. Another set of emotions – love, affection, happiness, and pleasure – can also be caused by many people and things; and the people and things that evoke such responses change, too, as the child develops into a teenager and then into an adult. As the world of the individual expands from childhood to adulthood, the number of people he loves and the center of his love and affections also change. He also finds his pleasures in different activities.

The baby's world is his home, and he loves his parents. He is happy when he feels secure, and he finds his pleasures in simple games and in the toys he has. As his world enlarges into the school, he meets new people and usually forms the closest relationship with children of the same age and sex. He, of course, still loves his parents; but his world has grown larger and now holds more people and he feels more at home with members of his own age and sex than he does with his parents. His interests broaden, and so do the sources of his happiness and pleasure. In his early years, the teenager becomes more aware of the opposite sex; as he grows older and dates many people, he eventually finds a mate and marries. His interests change, and again the sources of his happiness and pleasure change.

Needs change as people grow. Responses change as people grow. Unfortunately not all people grow. And the ability to change and grow is one of the most evident marks of maturity. When a small child is angry, he may throw a tantrum; however, eventually the child is expected to substitute more acceptable behavior. He is expected to learn to control his emotions. This does not mean that he is to surrender himself to society, to do only those things which are socially acceptable. It does mean, however, that he must learn to find ways to fill his needs that will be acceptable to him and will not interfere too drastically with the needs of others. And it means that he must learn how to deal with the frustrations of finding that some of his needs can't be filled.

Part of growing is understanding how you respond to situations and why. The reward for this kind of understanding is freedom. Once you understand how and why you respond as you do, you have a choice. And choice allows control. You can decide if you will continue to respond by being angry or fearful, or you make look for another means of response. Most people know how to react to fulfillment of needs; not everyone can deal very well with frustrations. It is impossible to avoid frustrations or worries or fear or anger, but is possible to handle these troublesome emotions if one understands them. In other words, you may not be able to choose initial responses, but you can exercise some choice in the matter of how to deal with them. It isn't always easy, but it has its rewards.