



# Stonebridge

## INNER HEALING

### CERTIFICATE COURSE

#### Sample Pages

## MOTIVATION AND EMOTION

### Psychological Organisation

All emotions are seen to be, in essence, impulses to act. They might be defined as:

**‘...the instant plans for handling life that evolution has instilled in us.’**



**FACT FILE:** The very root of the word emotion is motere – the Latin verb “to move,” plus the prefix “e” to connote “move away,” suggesting that a tendency to act is implicit in every emotion.

That emotions lead to actions becomes most obvious if the student takes the time to observe animals or children. It is only in “civilised” adults we often find the great anomaly in the animal kingdom of emotions – root impulses to act – entirely divorced from obvious reaction. In our emotional repertoire each emotion plays a unique role, as revealed by their distinctive biological signatures. And with new methods to peer into the body and the brain, researchers are discovering more physiological details of how each emotion prepares the body for a very different kind of response.

### Anger

Causes blood to flow to the hands, making it easier to grasp a weapon or strike at an enemy, the heart rate increases, and a rush of hormones such as Adrenalin generates a pulse of energy strong enough for vigorous action.

## **Fear**

Causes blood to rush to the large skeletal muscles, such as in the legs, making it easier to flee and making the face blanch as blood is shunted away from it – creating the feeling a student might identify with, of the blood running cold? At the same time, the body freezes, albeit momentarily, perhaps allowing time to gauge whether hiding might be a better reaction.

Circuits in the brain's emotional centres trigger a flood of hormones that put the body on general alert, making it edgy and ready for action, and attention fixates on the threats at hand, the better to evaluate what response to make.

## **Happiness**

Amongst the main biological changes is an increased activity in the brain centre that inhibits negative feelings and fosters an increase in available energy, and a quieting of those that generate worrying and troublesome thought patterns. But there is no particular shift in the physiology save a quiescence, which makes the body recover more quickly from the biological arousal of upsetting emotions. This configuration offers the body a general rest, as well as readiness and enthusiasm for whatever task is at hand and for striving towards a great variety of goals.

## **Love**

Tender feelings are produced which, together with sexual satisfaction, entail parasympathetic arousal – the physiological opposite of the “fight or flight” mobilisation shared by fear and anger. The parasympathetic pattern, dubbed the “relaxation response,” is a bodywide set of reactions that generates a general state of calm and contentment, facilitating cooperation.

## **Surprise**

The lifting of the eyebrows allows the taking in of a larger visual sweep and also permits more light to strike the retina. This in turn offers more information about the unexpected event, making it easier to figure out exactly what is going on and concoct the best plan for action.

## **Disgust**

The universal expression of disgust is the same and sends the identical message, that something is offensive in taste or smell or metaphorically so. The facial expression of disgust, the upper lip curled to one side and the nose wrinkled slightly, suggests a primordial attempt (as Darwin observed), to close the nostrils against a noxious odour or to spit out poisonous food.

## Sadness

A main function of sadness is to help adjust to a significant loss, such as the death of someone close or a major disappointment. Sadness brings a drop in energy and enthusiasm for life's activities, particularly diversions and pleasures, and, as it deepens and approaches depression, slows the body's metabolism. This introspective withdrawal creates the opportunity to:

- a. mourn a loss or frustrated hope,
- b. grasp its consequences for one's life, and, as energy returns,
- c. plan new beginnings.

This loss of energy may well have kept saddened, and vulnerable, early humans closer to home, where they were safer.

Such biological propensities to act are shaped further by our life experience and our culture.



**TUTOR TALK:** For example Universally the loss of a loved one elicits sadness and grief. But how we show our grieving, how emotions are displayed or suppressed for private moments, is moulded by culture, as are which people in our lives fall into the category of “loved ones” to be mourned.

How often have we heard people say “It doesn't matter. I don't miss him anymore” – whilst at the same time the eyes momentarily fill up with tears? That moment of teary eyes could easily pass unnoted, but the empathic understanding that someone's watering eyes means that the person is sad despite his or her words to the contrary, is an act of comprehending just as surely as is distilling meaning from the words on the pages now in front of you. One is an act of the emotional mind, the other of the rational mind, one that thinks and one that feels.

It is these two fundamentally different ways of knowing that interact to construct our mental life.



**TUTOR TALK:** As the student is now aware, the rational mind, is the mode of comprehension we are typically conscious of, which is more prominent in awareness, thoughtful, able to ponder and reflect. Alongside it we have the emotional mind the ‘other system of knowing,’ which is impulsive and powerful, if sometimes illogical and whose characteristics we covered in some depth in Assignment One.

The emotional/rational dichotomy approximates the folk distinction between “heart” and “head” Knowing something is right “in your heart” is a different order of conviction – somehow a deeper kind of certainty – than thinking so with the rational mind. There is a steady gradient in the ratio of rational-to-emotional control over the mind:

**The more intense the feeling, the more dominant the emotional mind becomes and the more ineffectual the rational.**

This is an arrangement that seems to stem from eons of evolutionary advantage to having emotions and intuitions guide our instantaneous response in situations where our lives are in peril – and where pausing to think over what to do could cost us our lives.

These two minds, the emotional and the rational, operate in close harmony for the most part, intertwining their very different ways of knowing to guide us through our day-to-day lives.

Ordinarily there is a balance between emotional and rational minds, with emotion feeding into and informing the operations of the rational mind, and the rational mind refining and sometimes vetoing the inputs of the emotions. Still, the emotional and rational minds are semi-dependent faculties, each, as the student will become aware, reflecting the operation of distinct, but interconnected, circuitry in the brain. In many or most moments, these minds are exquisitely co-ordinated, as:

**Feelings are essential to thought and thought to feeling.**

But when passions surge the balance tips and it is the emotional mind that gains the upper hand, swamping the rational mind. In order that the student might better grasp the potent hold of the emotions on the thinking mind – and why feeling and reason are so readily at war.

Let us now consider how the brain evolved.

The human brain, with its three pounds or so of cells and neural fluids, is roughly triple the size of that of our nearest cousins in evolution, the non-human primates. Over millions of years of evolution, the brain has grown from the bottom up, with its highest centres developing as elaborations of lower, more ancient parts.



**TUTOR TALK:** The student with an added interest in child development might already be aware that the growth of the brain in the human embryo roughly retraces this evolutionary course.

The most primitive part of the brain is the brainstem surrounding the top of the spinal cord, and it is this root brain that regulates basic life functions of breathing and the metabolism of the body's other organs, as well as controlling stereotyped reactions and movements. This primitive brain cannot be said to think or learn, rather it is a set of programmed regulators that keep the body running as it should and reacting in a way that ensures survival.

From this most primitive root, the brainstem, emerged the emotional centres. A million of years later in evolution, from these emotional areas evolved the thinking brain or "neocortex," the great bulb of convoluted tissues that make up the top layers. The fact that the thinking brain grew from the emotional reveals much about the relationship of thought to feeling. There was an emotional brain long before there was a rational one.

The most ancient root of our emotional life is the sense of smell, or more precisely, in the olfactory lobe, the cells that take in and analyse smell. Every living entity, be it nutritious, poisonous, sexual partner, predator or prey, has a distinctive molecular signature that can be carried in the wind. In primitive times smell commended itself as a paramount sense for survival.

From this olfactory lobe the ancient centres for emotion began to evolve, eventually becoming large enough to encircle the top of the brainstem. In its rudimentary stages, the olfactory centre was composed of little more than thin layers of neurons gathered to analyse smell.

One layer of cells took in what was smelled and sorted it out into the relevant categories of edible or toxic, sexually available, enemy or meal. A second layer of cells sent reflexive messages throughout the nervous system telling the body what to do – bite, spit, approach, flee, chase.

With the arrival of the first mammals came new, key layers of the emotional brain and, because this part of the brain rings and borders the brainstem, it was called the "limbic system," from "limbus" – the Latin word for "ring." This new neural territory added emotions proper to the brain's repertoire.



**TUTOR TALK:** For example When a person is "head-over-heels in love," or "recoiling in dread," or feel that they are "swamped with craving or fury," then it is the limbic system that is taking charge.

As it evolved, the limbic system developed and refined two powerful tools – learning and memory. These revolutionary advances allowed an animal to be much smarter in its choices for survival, and to fine-tune responses to adapt to changing demands rather than having invariable and automatic reactions. If a food led to sickness, then it could be avoided the next time.