

Emotionally Healthy Behavior

Traditionally, accepted norms of behavior have been dictated by religious mores or rules of law and usually expressed in terms of a very limited dualist perspective: good/bad, strong/weak, rational/irrational, loving/hateful, evil-doer/saint, criminal/law-abider. However, reality is much more complex than this. Desirable behavior often encompasses widely divergent extremes, as the chart below shows. “Good” behavior includes being both bold and gentle, realistic and hopeful, logical and passionate.

In fact, a model that characterizes behavior in terms of one’s emotional health appears better able to distinguish what we generally consider “good” behavior from “bad.” Emotionally healthy behavior is rational, life-affirming, responsible, and loving while emotionally unhealthy behavior is irrational, nasty, irresponsible, dysfunctional, and uncaring. This kind of psychological model has gained wider acceptance over the last century and has been espe-

cially developed and promoted by the human potential movement over the last fifty years.

The way to change someone’s behavior from “bad” to “good” must then go beyond the traditional exhortations to act good and threats not to act bad. Many tools have been developed to help people notice, understand, and overcome their emotional injuries and to change their behavior. These include: Assertiveness Training, Parent Effectiveness Training, Transactional Analysis (and Radical Therapy), Re-evaluation Counseling (co-counseling), 12-Step Programs like Alcoholics Anonymous, Principled Negotiation (see the Harvard Negotiation Project’s *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*), nonviolent direct action (see for example, Joan Bondurant’s *Conquest of Violence*), and consensus decision-making.

Not Only This:	But This Too:	But Not This:	Nor This Either:
Bold, assertive, courageous, determined, insistent, strong, powerful, daring, energetic	Gentle, loving, empathetic, compassionate, understanding, forgiving, magnanimous, nonviolent, confident, relaxed	Aggressive, nasty, surly, rude, violent, pushy, flippant, dogmatic, obsessive, compulsive, greedy, malicious	Passive, naïve, indifferent, docile, timid, meek, cowardly, complacent, indecisive, sentimental, insipid
Responsible, stable, reliable, honorable, accountable, honest, principled, fair, trustworthy, noble	Playful, lively, witty, clever, humorous, friendly, sociable, easy-going, joyful, happy	Grim, severe, dour, stern, callous, unbending, depressed, withdrawn	Irresponsible, brash, capricious, foolish, frivolous, volatile, devious, dishonest
Realistic, practical, sensible, discerning, skeptical, cautious, careful, patient, frugal	Hopeful, optimistic, visionary, open-minded, tolerant, receptive, versatile, curious, imaginative, eager, generous	Cynical, contemptuous, sarcastic, scornful, close-minded, intolerant, judgmental, divisive, secretive, stingy	Naïve, gullible, starry-eyed, impulsive, reckless, extravagant
Logical, rational, sensible, sober, thoughtful, rigorous, intelligent	Tender, emotional, humane, passionate, affectionate, nurturing, humane, creative, flexible	Rigid, inflexible, picky, fastidious, austere, prudish, inhibited	Irrational, confused, rambling, hypersensitive, infatuated, careless, thoughtless, salacious, addicted
Visible, prominent, inspirational, proud, ambitious, confident, sure, tenacious, self-reliant	Humble, selfless, modest, co-operative, responsive, helpful, appreciative and supportive of others, willing to guide and teach others	Arrogant, boastful, pretentious, vain, showy, smug, self-centered, egotistical, individualistic, condescending, self-righteous, obstinate	Shy, embarrassed, shamefaced, dependent, submissive, fawning, fickle

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