

Emotions and feelings important signposts

- 1. Emotions are signposts. They are an important source of information for us.** Thanks to them we are able to better understand the world, ourselves, others. They have an important function in communication between us.
- 2. Emotions cannot be escaped.** By pretending that they are not there, we will not be able to avoid their influence on us – it may even be stronger.
- 3. Noticing, understanding, naming** what we experience, the emotion we feel, is the first step to looking for a constructive strategy for coping with what we feel. Just naming the emotion can already reduce its intensity.
- 4. Emotions inform us about our needs,** if they are satisfied or not. It is important to notice the needs we have and to look for advantageous strategies to meet them available at the moment, which will be best for us.
- 5. Mindfulness** – it is important to learn to notice emotions as soon as they appear, e.g. the first signs of distress, and not the moment when we become overwhelmed by panic or flooded with emotions, emotionally hijacked.

6. **Body response** – it is important to notice the emerging emotion in the body, where we feel it (e.g. tightness in the throat, clenching and sweating in the hands, tightness in the stomach) and, if it serves us, use body-centred behavioural techniques. For many people, calming the body, is the quickest and easiest way to deal with stress or difficult emotions. For most people, breathing techniques are very helpful. When we are stressed or anxious, our breathing becomes shallower and faster, so consciously slowing down the breathing calms us.

- **Breathing in a square:** the person imagines a square while breathing and counts in the following way: inhaling to 4, stopping to 4, exhaling to 4, stopping to 4.
- **Exhalation lengthening:** inhalation through the nose at 3, exhalation through the mouth at 6.
- **Alternate breathing through one nostril and the other:** plug one nostril and inhale, then plug the other and exhale.
- **Other body-oriented techniques:** walking, jumping, dancing to a song, shouting into an empty space – if we can afford it, other behaviours to help us release excessive energy from the body.

7. **Noticing thoughts**, in regulating emotions it is important to 'catch' the thoughts that occur when feeling stress or other strong emotions. We have no control over the initial thoughts, they are automatic. It is important to notice them and see if they are helpful or if they are hindering our action. In anxiety, thoughts sometimes spiral like a snowball, there is catastrophising, imagining the worst. It is worth stopping such a thought and turning it into another one that favours us (preferably one that we have prepared for ourselves calmly beforehand). It can be helpful to use the camera test, to check that it is just a thought and not a fact.

When our spiralling thoughts get in the way, two methods can be useful:

- The first: **catching the first thought and, if it is not beneficial, replacing it with one that helps us**, preferably if we have written down and prepared such helpful sentences for ourselves on a piece of paper beforehand.
- The second is to try to **'get out of our heads'**, e.g. to concentrate on our breathing or on where we are (where I am, what are the blue objects in the room, what exactly is the colour of the leaf).

8. It is very helpful to **talk to loved ones**, to share what you are experiencing.

9. It is important to cultivate **good habits**, rhythm of the day, getting enough sleep, regularity, etc. Such habits help to keep calm.

10. **Practice gratitude**, every day you can find small things to be grateful for (and our brains really like it when we do this – the human body produces happiness hormones not only when pleasant events happen, but also when we remember them).