

## It is Okay to Manage Another Person's Feelings

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### Opinion

I am working on a book<sup>1</sup> themed on when it is okay for you to influence another person's feelings. Popular press would tell us we can't control another person's emotions or how a person is feeling<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, in such literature, it encourages just managing your own feelings is likely, the best way to go. By taking this approach, you can avoid getting your own feelings hurt because you have enough confidence and self-esteem not to care how others think about you. These articles in popular press missed the fundamental point; they make managing other people's feelings about your own feelings. In that, if you were to help another person manage what they are feeling, you are trying to change their feelings about you. The example I will give, you have a colleague at work whom you do not think likes you very much because they never speak to you by saying good morning, good afternoon, or have a nice day. Though you go out of your way to talk to them using these same pleasantries mentioned previously. You have heard when you ask others at work why he is that way. Most share, he is only like that with you. You have also heard this colleague that you believe does not care for you because they believe you are not humble. Instead of the two of you trying to discuss the matter as these articles could encourage. The approach you will find in the most popular press on the topic is why should you care? You can't control another person's feelings. You can only control your own feelings. You cannot manage another person's feelings.

This is not sound advice from my personal experience and professional perspective. Managing another person's feelings is about the interpersonal relationship we have and those we wish to have with others. People pick us specifically to help them with their feelings, and we decide if we can help and whether we want to engage. The fundamental point is that managing another person's feelings is about what that person feel they need and what they believe they can get from you. Managing emotions with others is interpersonal and a person's feelings are much deeper than the example. Or whether you think this person does or does not like you or why you should have an I do not care attitude towards another person. Therefore, you will not be nice in a way that helps to soothe their feelings. What I am describing is much more than for you to be an emotionally intelligent person where your outward reactions change to motivate the other person's motivation towards you. What I am describing are situations in which you find yourself whereby a friend, family, acquaintance, or colleague comes specifically

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<sup>1</sup>Donta S Harper, EdD, Book is in the draft, tentatively titled: Let Me Help U When it's okay for U to influence another person's feelings. The benefit of intervening is how we intervene as family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances.

<sup>2</sup>Conduct a Google search using the terms "managing other people's feelings" the top of the search is about how we should not manage another person's feelings, or how we can only control our own feelings. Little attention is given to the relational nature of humans in societies that already manage emotions with others and through other people.

to you for help with a problem that is an emotional experience for them. This emotional experience is disruptive to them, and they cannot manage their feeling for themselves. More than ninety-six percent of the time, people manage their own emotions with the involvement of other people<sup>3</sup>. This indicates the likelihood that you have been positioned to help a person manage their feelings or you have had your feelings managed by others. We help people when we believe we can make them feel better about their situations or bring different perspectives. We help clients work with the process of what they are feeling and why they feel a certain way. Let me be clear, I am not saying that we should be getting outside our professional roles if our professional roles are not that of caring professionals, e.g., psychologist, psychiatrists, therapists, or mental health professionals. We should always refer people to these professionals when it is appropriate for us to do so. I am saying however, is that people choose who they want to get to help them with their emotional management, and we decide whether or not we can support them in the way they need. By deciding it is okay for you to help the person, you agree to evaluate their problem and formulate a suitable plan for them and their situation. An example I will use that I hope crystalized this for you in this article. I have suffered from colon cancer that proceeded with surgery and chemotherapies. I am now in remission. So, I have some insight into the experience. I know my experience is not exactly like others, but I have some understanding of it, having coped with it. My brother got the same disease years later, and he came to me during that time on one of those bad days of the disease. He was upset and crying, and scared. He said he did not know what to do, he was working hard to beat the disease, but it was taking its toll on him. My brother

selected me to help him at that moment. My brother coming to me at that moment for his emotional situation describes emotionship, individuals can identify and choose the person they want to achieve their emotional desires with<sup>4</sup>. May be my brother knows me well enough to know how I could help him in that moment as to why he selected me.

I had to determine if it was okay for me to help my brother with his feelings at that moment after knowing what the emotional experience was about. You, likely, have also been faced with having to make a similar determination. Whether it is helping a person through their grief or with an experience they shared with you and they asked you for advice and support. They likely came to you because of what they believe you may offer to them by way of emotional management support. As I stated, managing feelings with others and through others is about our interpersonal relationships. It is about you not just being emotionally intelligent about outwardly expressions of others but your use of information from the shared experience in an emotionally intelligent way to help the person. It is about being confident in yourself and your own abilities to understand the person and their situation to know how you can help them or defer them to others better suited than yourself. Finally, it is about deciding on the emotional management strategy for the person and implementing that strategy with the person. It is about determining what is most appropriate for them at that moment so that they can manage what they are feeling and experiencing. It is okay for you and me to manage another person's feelings when we have the skill, ability, and willingness to engage on an interpersonal level<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>Bernard Rimé of the University of Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, is a leading researcher of social regulation and suggests that we manage our emotions with another person about ninety-six percent of the time.

<sup>4</sup>Eliane O Cheung of Northwestern University and colleagues describe this behavior as a person seeking another out to get their emotional desires met as emotions. See their publication, "Emotionships: Examining people's emotion-regulation relationships and their consequences for well-being." *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 6.4 (2015): 407-414.

<sup>5</sup>See article, Harper DS (2021) How to influence positive change? Managers' involvement as emotional architects in the solution for relieving forensic examiners' workplace stress. *Forensic Science International: Synergy*, 100214 for the Emotion Regulation Skills-Abilities Model (ERSA).