The term *emotional intelligence* (EI) has gained popularity since the publication of Daniel Goldman’s bestseller in 1995, *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More Than IQ*. A relatively new area of psychological research, the definition of emotional intelligence continues to adapt, as researchers and educators explore its purpose and value. In this article, EI is defined as the ability to assess and supervise one’s emotions, thoughts, and self; to be aware of the emotions of others, and of groups; to discriminate among emotions, and to use this information to guide one’s future thinking and actions.

**OBSTACLES**

Management of the interpersonal communication in a therapist-client relationship, (handling the ethical issues related to safe touch, the need for clear boundary setting, and the ability to listen) are key to massage success and require high EI. Many students lack EI skills and struggle with these activities. Massage schools include some EI building in their curricula by encouraging students to acknowledge and discuss feelings, but all schools share some obstacles when adding EI education.

**GRADING.** Points and grades become the defining feature of a student’s sense of success or failure throughout his or her education. It is difficult to quantify a student’s emotional progress and so the accent remains on cognitive ability. Schools would need to find a way to shift some of the emphasis to personal growth.

**FOCUS ON THE INDIVIDUAL.** Education tends to focus on individual achievement placing little weight on how a student performs in a group. Some students who excel academically function poorly in groups. For example, they may try to lead a group by giving orders instead of recognizing and valuing the contribution of others and inspiring group cohesion. They may not be able to follow another leader and create conflicts in an otherwise functional group. Schools would need to find a way to evaluate an individual on group interaction, after teaching students how to cooperate in a group.

**ETHICS AND EMOTIONS.** Teachers do not often receive training in processing feelings with students, and processing feelings takes a teacher outside the scope of the classroom causing ethical dilemmas. How do schools teach emotional skills, value the emotional expression of their students, ensure the safety of the classroom, and set appropriate student-teacher boundaries while teaching EI? Schools would need clear policies around emotional processing, resources for students outside the school, and to provide some basic training to instructors.
WHAT SKILLS SHOULD BE TAUGHT?

The skills schools need to teach to build EI can be categorized into five primary areas that are closely related to one another.

**SELF-AWARENESS.** Students can learn to look at their thought processes and how the relationship between their thoughts and feelings influence their actions. Activities that teach students how to interrupt negative thoughts and solve problems empower them to make better choices in the future.

**SELF-EMPOWERMENT.** Students often hold limiting beliefs about themselves that influence their ability to achieve personal and professional goals. Activities that help students identify their beliefs, the history of beliefs, and the thoughts that arise in a situation based on beliefs are the first step to changing attitudes and improving self-responsibility. Self-empowerment requires emotional management. Students can learn how to soothe themselves when they are upset, how to take a step back from a situation when they are angry, how to allow sadness or fear and learn from it. Channeling emotions towards a positive end demonstrates the student’s increasing adaptability.

**COMMUNICATION.** Learning to listen carefully to verbal and non-verbal cues and take stock of a situation before reacting is important. An understanding of personal filters, the use of I-statements, how to encourage other people to share, and empathy for other people’s feelings and motivations develop communication skills and inter-personal relationships.

**GROUP INTERACTION.** Becoming skilled as both a leader and follower are equally valuable. Understanding the roles of each member of a group, their perspective and motivation, and knowing when personal emotions have been triggered support group interaction. The ability to recognize, encourage and value the contribution of others, while taking responsibility and following through on commitments are also essential skills.

**CONFLICT RESOLUTION.** Students can learn to step out of the emotional spiral of a conflict and understand the factors at play. Managing oneself in a conflict requires some degree of mastery of the previous skills.

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For more information on ABMP resources for schools, instructors, students and professionals contact your ABMP School Representative (next page).
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