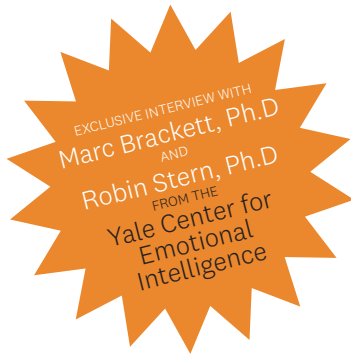




Oji Life Lab



# Coping with Corona

Applying Emotional Intelligence  
at Work and Home



# Coping With Corona

We wish this e-book wasn’t necessary, because we wish that the coronavirus, COVID-19, never existed. Unfortunately, coronavirus is here, and so we’re here to help you cope with the emotional challenges that come with it.

We can’t think of a more emotionally challenging moment in the last 50 years. Our health, our financial well-being, our work – all are at risk. For us and our families. And, while we all hope that corona’s long-term effects are minimal, we’re experiencing levels of uncertainty that are not a normal part of 21st century life. Few of us are pandemic experts.

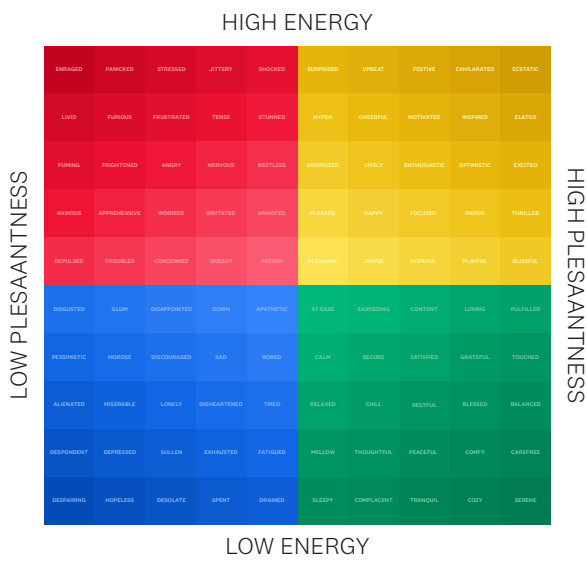
This e-book provides practical tools that will allow you to apply the skills of emotional intelligence to better navigate these chaotic days. Over the last several decades, researchers have completed 300,000 studies that show how emotions impact decision-making, attention and learning, creativity and performance, physical and mental health, and relationships. Right now, more than ever, these are areas of life where we want to succeed.

Our co-founders, Marc Brackett, Ph.D. and Robin Stern, Ph.D. – who run the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence – have developed a research-proven model that will help you recognize and regulate your emotions, and help your colleagues and family members do the same. In our emotional intelligence learning programs, we help learners...

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- know where they are emotionally (**recognize** their emotions)
- figure out which emotion best matches their current goals
- move to the desired emotion (**regulate** their emotions)

Research has shown that we can make sense of our emotions by mapping them on two dimensions: energy and pleasantness. We use the Mood Meter (see below) to talk about emotions and these dimensions. The four quadrants break down emotions based on energy and pleasantness. While emotions in every quadrant are useful in some situations, in challenging times like these people can find themselves stuck in the unpleasant red and blue quadrants.



See a full-page Mood Meter on the last page of this e-book.

This e-book will help you regulate, so if you're **angry** (in the red quadrant) because a key supplier hasn't returned a message for weeks, you'll know how to regulate so that you'll feel **energized** (yellow quadrant) before leading a team meeting. Or, if you're **exhausted** (blue quadrant) after a day of video calls, you can regulate to be **calm** (green quadrant) before sitting down to dinner with your family.

Making this recognize-and-regulate process second-nature takes practice, a project beyond the scope of this e-book. That said, we hope you'll find the enclosed tips and techniques can provide you a boost as you confront difficult emotions in this difficult time. We can tell you from experience: these skills work!

## The Corona Coaster

Imagine your "emotion roller coaster," a ride that on the best day can include lots of ups and downs. These days, this roller coaster can seem to be hurtling forward at top speed and with no breaks, often leading to motion sickness and whiplash. Fortunately, there are proven techniques that can help you smooth your ride during these challenging days. If you're feeling drained, you are not alone.

### WHY THIS E-BOOK?

We're in the business of helping people in business improve their emotional intelligence. As the coronavirus approached, we heard from our learners about the unique challenges they were facing and we realized that there are millions of people that could use some **EI** mojo. So, we created this free e-book.

Our Emotion Life Lab is a mobile-based learning program that helps people in business improve their emotional intelligence at work and at home. Developed with our co-founders who lead the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, the Life Lab includes 50 bite-sized learning steps combined with video coaching sessions delivered right on your phone. Top companies in tech, manufacturing, health care, construction, consumer products and more are using the Emotion Life Lab today. For details, see [www.ojilifelab.com](http://www.ojilifelab.com).

Emotions are a response to real and imagined stimuli, and there are plenty of daunting "stimuli" today. Because of coronavirus, we're experiencing changes and risks in areas that are fundamental to the human experience, like...

- **Health:** you hope that you, your family, friends, and colleagues will stay healthy
- **Wealth:** as the stock market and many businesses stumble, your financial well-being may be at risk
- **Business:** if you're a business leader/owner, you may be responsible for sustaining the business during a time of major economic upheaval
- **Relationships:** trying times can strain even the best relationships
- **Habits:** lifelong habits must be adapted or entirely discarded to address changed conditions
- **Exhaustion:** with everything going on, it can be hard to maintain the energy we need to move forward

On top of all of the changes we're experiencing, we're also contending with high uncertainty. It seems like every day, or every hour, the current situation shifts and the future forecast becomes even less clear. Most of us simply have no experience to draw on when trying to understand the road ahead. Uncertainty drives negative emotions.

As is common in times of uncertainty and change, the rise of coronavirus has many of us feeling intense and unpleasant emotions like anger, fear and anxiety. We can find ourselves swinging between periods when we're overwhelmed by big emotions and other periods when we feel numb or "shut down." When the roller coaster's big drops and corkscrews get to be too much, it's important to find our way back to balance to protect our mental and physical well-being.

## SO, HOW DO YOU FEEL?

If someone asked you what you were feeling right now, would you be able to answer? Or does it just feel like a stew of unpleasant, high energy emotions? Recent research indicates that when you can label what you are feeling, you start the process of reducing the intensity of those emotions. Marc Brackett, our co-founder and Director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, says people can “name it to tame it” to greatly improve their emotion regulation.

Which of these feelings are you experiencing now, in the time of coronavirus? Be sure to review the descriptions, so you can identify the right emotion. Remember that many feelings seem similar but making finer distinctions between them can be the key to regulating them effectively.

Feeling	Description	Corona Examples
Disappointment	The feeling of an unmet expectation	Family events postponed, business projects cancelled, quality time compressed or eliminated.
Stress	The experience of too many demands and not enough resources	Enormous challenges at work, too many balls to juggle at home.
Anger	A feeling of unfairness or injustice	Why am I - or my family - forced to deal with these difficulties?
Sympathy	Feeling sorrow for someone's misfortunes	I hear about other peoples' challenges and I feel awful.
Pressure	A force from outside that tells us something important is at stake and whether we succeed or fail depends on how we perform	My family and my colleagues at work are counting on me to deliver despite enormous difficulties.
Overwhelm	The feeling of being buried or drowned in tasks, responsibilities, and/or intense emotions	There's no way I can complete all of the tasks I have at work and at home.
Fear	A palpable sense of danger that lies just ahead	I'm afraid that someone in my family will get sick, or I will.
Anxiety	Worry and/or unease about future uncertainty and inability to control outcomes	There is so much uncertainty about the future and I'm afraid that things will go badly.
Compassion	Being moved by another's suffering and wanting to help	I see the problems that others are having and I'm committed to helping them.
Frustration	The feeling that progress toward a goal is blocked	The chaos at home is making it impossible to get anything done.
Despair	A complete loss of hope	This is not going to get better - everything will continue to get worse and I will lose everything.
Grief	Sorrow, anguish or heartache related to a loss	I have been laid off and find myself so sad, I can't function.

## REGULATING EMOTIONS

Our goal isn't simply to describe the twists and turns of our emotion roller coaster; we want to change the path of the track itself, to cultivate a smoother ride and — most importantly — get us where we want to be. Emotional intelligence is all about regulating emotions to help you meet your goals.

It's no surprise that being triggered 24/7 during this time will make it difficult to meet your professional and personal goals. The good news: there's a rich toolbox of emotional intelligence skills that can help you shape — what we call “regulate” — your emotions. You can divide regulation skills into two categories, “action” strategies that involve changing your behavior, and “thinking” strategies that rely on adjusting your thoughts.

As you consider your regulation strategies, try to find the root cause for each emotion. After you “name it,” ask yourself, “What might be causing this feeling?” Getting to the root of an emotion is an important step in the process of regulating emotions to improve outcomes. For example, if you feel frustrated, it's helpful to identify what goal has been blocked. That way, you'll be able to act or communicate in a way that restores your ability to progress towards the goal.

### Action strategies

You can try one or several of these action strategies to help address the emotions that are working against your goals right now.

Strategy	Builds Positive Energy	Reduces Unpleasant Emotions	Calming & Restorative
Take a conscious breath		●	●
Stretch in your chair			●
Listen to music	●	●	●
Make yourself a hot cup of tea			●
Sit with your pet	●	●	●
Go for a walk	●	●	●
Exercise	●	●	
Call a friend	●	●	●
Engage in a hobby	●	●	●
Take a nap			●
Keep a journal		●	●
Help a person in need	●	●	●
Dance in your living room	●	●	
Watch something that makes you laugh	●	●	
Stand outside for 2 minutes			●



## Thinking strategies

You can also consider these strategies as you navigate the difficult emotional terrain we're all experiencing now.

Strategy	How It Works	Example
<b>Self-talk</b>	When you notice negative or catastrophic thoughts, change the narrative by giving yourself a pep-talk.	Instead of thinking "I'm so worried that I'm going to get sick and get my family sick" try "I'm healthy now and I've taken all the precautions I can to keep my family healthy too. I can take some comfort in that all of our self-quarantining, hand-washing and cleaning is working to keep us safe." We know – it's not always easy to use positive self-talk, and it doesn't always work. But remember: fake it till you make it!
<b>Distancing</b>	See yourself as an observer in an intense situation that you are a part of.	When your 3rd grader has a meltdown, imagine a frame around them, like you're watching their angry words and tears on a tv show. This will allow you to stay present and supportive, and be less likely to take on their emotions or react in an unhelpful way.
<b>Reframing</b>	Look to see different perspectives other than your own.	If someone is rude and selfish, try reframing with questions like: Why might he be behaving that way? Was he scared? What's going on in his work and home life? How might the situation have triggered the strong response? Are there other perspectives you can take to see the situation differently?
<b>Distraction</b>	When you find yourself ruminating, disrupt the signal by doing something different for a short period of time.	When you find yourself in a spiral of "I'm so worried about what's going to happen next," temporarily distract yourself with a different activity: watch a funny clip on YouTube, text a friend, or eat a healthy snack. The goal is to do something that shifts your thinking to be more pleasant so you can get back on track with what matters.
<b>Labeling</b>	Keep a log of the emotions you experience. Naming what you feel is the gateway to reducing the intensity of high energy, unpleasant emotions.	Track your emotional roller coaster in real-time by writing down what you feel as you feel it, or use the Mood Meter app (on your app store). You'll be able to identify patterns where a little regulation could transform the unpleasant to pleasant and support better outcomes.

As you scan these strategies, you may be thinking "this is all easier said than done." True enough: these techniques take weeks to learn and years to master. Shameless plug: that's why we built our Emotion Life Lab! That said, in a pinch, it can make all the difference to pull out this list to remind yourself to breathe, to take a pause, or imagine your Best Self.

## TWISTS IN THE ROLLER COASTER

Whether we like it or not, the corona challenge will make each of our emotion roller coasters difficult for the foreseeable future. Fortunately, as you learn to identify your emotions and regulate them effectively, the ride will become more gentle and you'll find that you're able to take care of the tasks – and people – that matter most.

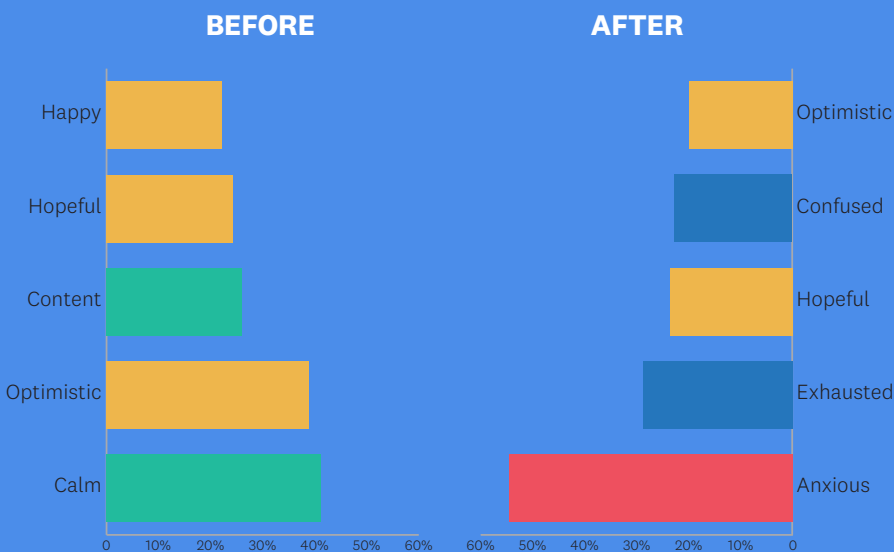
# How Are People Feeling?

We wanted to know: how are people feeling in this strange time? So, we surveyed 226 people across the country. We were surprised by the results!

The impact of coronavirus on people's emotional state is clear. Check out the #1 most common emotion, before and after the rise of COVID-19.



Here's what's really surprising: people are experiencing anxiety and exhaustion, but they're also experiencing a lot of hope these days. Or, at least they're working to regulate their emotions in that direction. We asked people to identify the three emotions they experience most often, before COVID-19 and now. Check out the contrasts in the chart below, with bar colors indicating the corresponding Mood Meter quadrant (see page 2 for reference)....



You can see that people have moved from the “pleasant” side of the Mood Meter (yellow and green) before the coronavirus towards the unpleasant side now (red and blue), with anxiety and exhaustion as the two most common emotions.

Interestingly, 20% of respondents told us that they're managing their feelings about the coronavirus “very skillfully.” For the 80% of folks who feel like they have a bit less skill, we hope you find this e-book helpful!

## HEALTHY ESSENTIALS

Always remember these essential practices that support your emotional, mental, and physical health.

**Sleep.** Get a good night's sleep, every night. The National Sleep Foundation recommends 7-9 hours nightly for ages 18-64.

**Nutrition.** Eat fresh and whole foods, avoiding foods that are high in sugar or fat or that are heavily processed.

**Exercise.** Despite all of the corona restrictions, it's important to stay active.

**Stay connected.** Social connection is key to maintaining well-being. Enjoy a Facetime/Zoom/Skype call today!



# Emotions at Home

Olivia, an HR manager for a software company, recently described her pre-coronavirus “re-entry” process when returning home from work. Despite her best efforts, Olivia often found it difficult to avoid carrying the stress of the day over the threshold and into her home.

As soon as she walked through the front door, the tension would often leak out. “Why is this backpack in the middle of the hallway? Who left their shoes in the middle of the kitchen? Why isn’t dinner ready?” she would bark. Her family learned to keep their distance in these moments, which was exactly the opposite of what Olivia wanted, and needed. With her training in EI, Olivia learned to apply her emotion regulation skills so that she could be more present and calm when she arrived home each day.

Fast forward to the COVID-19 era: Olivia’s “workplace” now includes her husband and two kids, 24/7. The challenge is no longer transitioning from the day’s stresses to family life. Instead, all the stressors are combined in a combustible cocktail, all day: work, the demands of having her kids at home (and making lunches every day), worries about COVID and related health and financial worries. High energy, very unpleasant emotions predominate.

So what can Olivia do to ease her stress, up her parenting game, manage her responsibilities and bond with her family? As is often the case, she needs to beef up her emotion regulation strategies. Here are some of the ‘action strategies’ Olivia has implemented – see which ones may work for you:

1. She’s in bed by 10pm every night. Rather than stay up after her kids go to sleep, she climbs in bed, reads for a few minutes and falls asleep. This helps her keep up her morning routine of waking up at 6am, a quiet time that she has come to cherish (more on this later: see #5 on the list).
2. Olivia noticed that frequently checking her go-to web sites and apps left her anxious and worried about the future. Now, she limits her social media and news outlet reading to two times a day, blocking time on her calendar. By creating time limits for herself, she stays connected but finds she is less likely to get caught up in online panic.
3. The family eats lunch together. It’s become a casual and important way for the family to reconnect before heading back to their respective tasks for the afternoon.
4. She does some form of exercise every day. On some days, she walks in the neighborhood. Others, she leverages online videos. She lets her emotions guide what she does that day; if she needs energy, she’ll find a hip-hop dance exercise class. If she needs to discharge stress, she’ll do a HIIT workout. When she needs to tap into some calm and grounded emotions, she’ll replay some of her favorite yoga sequences.
5. She spends time alone each day, reflecting, praying, meditating or reading texts that inspire her. She finds that she needs at least twenty minutes each day, though an hour is ideal. “It’s easiest to fit this in before the rest of the family wakes up, but in the evening, just after dinner, is another time that I can sequester myself. I’m always glad I took the time to do it.”



6. She also makes a point of connecting with friends and family via text or phone nearly every day. Or, better yet, she uses video tools like FaceTime, Skype or Zoom. She's learning that social distancing doesn't have to mean emotional distancing. She always feels better after she's talked to someone dear to her.

Olivia has noticed that when she is regular about these practices, she's much less likely to lose her patience, feel overwhelmed or snap at a family member. Now, she's working on adding some 'thinking strategies' to her daily routine that can help her in tough moments. Here are three research-proven techniques that help shift emotional states from undesirable (like anger or anxiety) to pleasant (or at least more manageable).

### **Distancing**

Get some emotional distance in a charged situation by viewing yourself as an observer that's watching a scene unfold. Marc Brackett from Yale likes to imagine a frame around the interaction, like he's watching it play out on TV. Olivia finds this especially helpful when her son has a meltdown over the math homework he doesn't understand. She can stay present with him and help him find the answers without having to emotionally take on his math distress.

### **Reframing**

Olivia has tried reframing – the practice of seeing a situation from a different, more constructive perspective – in several instances and reports that it's helped her feel closer to her husband. "Being in such close quarters, he can get grumpy, which I take personally. I've practiced reframing his bad mood by imagining what it's like for him to be grounded from his job, worried about our family's finances and not able to leave the house. This helps me realize that his mood isn't directed at me, which makes me feel better and lowers my emotional energy."

### **Best Self**

Practice visualizing and embodying the "best self" that you'd like to be, demonstrating the characteristics that would improve a situation and its outcome. After days at home together, it's no surprise that Olivia's kids are arguing, a perfect opportunity to use the Best Self technique. "I get impatient and I end up raising my voice more than I'd like to admit," Olivia said. So, in those moments of frustration, she's learning to take a moment to breathe, pause, and visualize the parent she aims to be: calm, positive, a good listener. Holding that vision helps her respond in a way that's more helpful to the situation. "When I imagine my Best Self, I calm down and tune in to my kids' needs in a different way. It's not just about getting them to stop, it's about shifting my own emotions so I can help them address their own issues and move to a more constructive emotional state. If I'm not calm, there's NO WAY they will be calm."

In these challenging days, it's more important than ever – and more difficult – to manage our emotions at home. Learning to recognize emotions as they emerge and then choosing the best regulation strategies can help make some difficult times more pleasant for everyone. By combining the action and thinking strategies that are best for you, your family and your emotional situation, you'll create an improved emotional climate that will help everyone meet their objectives. As Olivia notes, "My husband tells me that I'm easier to be around now that I'm applying my EI skills. I'm calmer and more productive, and the whole family just operates more smoothly." As you work to navigate new situations and emotions at home in the time of COVID, emotional intelligence might just be the boost you've been looking for.



# Cultivating Calm

Feeling tense these days? Experiencing more rapid mood changes than usual? Is your chest or neck feeling a bit tight? Or maybe you're not sleeping too well. You're not alone. Here's the good news: you can cultivate a sense of calm amidst the uncertainty of COVID-19.

Let's start. Pick a strategy below and let's see how it goes.

1 min	5 min	10 min	30 min+
<b>Breathe</b> Inhale (5 sec), Exhale (7 sec)  Repeat 3X	<b>Say Thank You</b> Text a friend, thank them for something they did for you.	<b>Journal</b> Write down 10 things you are thankful for.	<b>Phone a Friend</b> Ask them how they are feeling. Share your thoughts and experiences too.
<b>Recall</b> Who is someone that makes you smile?  Bring them to mind for a moment or two.	<b>Listen</b> Have a favorite song that you listen to when relaxing? Pick a favorite and press play!	<b>Sip. Savor.</b> Prepare and enjoy a cup of your favorite tea or other beverage.	<b>Sweat!</b> HIIT Run Weights You choose.
<b>Do Not Disturb</b> Set your phone to DND when you can. No more notifications! In fact, just leave it in the other room for awhile.	<b>Meditate</b> Find a free guided meditation online. Find a style that works for you.	<b>Walk it Out</b> Take a stroll around the block.	<b>Stretch it Out</b> Find a free yoga class online.
<b>Get Grounded</b> Pause. Feel your feet in your shoes. If seated, lightly push your feet against the floor.	<b>Tidy Up</b> Set your timer and take a 5 min break to tidy up your home office or desk.	<b>Dance</b> Have a favorite jam that makes you want to boogie? Press play. Repeat.	<b>Laugh!</b> Watch a funny movie, show or YouTube video.

Feeling a bit more calm? Can you identify any changes to your emotional state?

We all know what it's like to get triggered into anger or anxiety, especially now. Energy spikes in your body and your thoughts and attention start to narrow. One moment you are able to see and hear the room around you, the next you have tunnel vision and razor-sharp thinking.

Sometimes, stress can feel like a superpower that helps us perform. But over time, chronic stress damages our physical and mental health. The past few weeks of the COVID-19 news cycle have created the conditions for collective chronic stress. If you're struggling with how to cope, rest assured that you are having a very normal reaction to an abnormal situation.

Let's take a moment and think about what it feels like to be peaceful, calm and grateful. These are emotions with lower levels of energy compared to anxiety, and are more pleasant. What are your thoughts like when you feel peaceful? Or your breathing? Notice a difference? When we feel calm, our cognitive window is wider, our muscles are relaxed, and it's much easier to take in information around us.

If you'd like to have more calm in your life, make a plan and take active steps to get there. What strategies or techniques have you used in the past month to discharge excess energy? Check out the table above. What strategies help you feel more at-ease? Longer term, focus on the basics: sleep well, eat foods that nourish you, and make time for exercise. These simple priorities can keep you balanced over time so you can access calm more easily. It takes a little effort but with intention and practice, you can stay cool and collected, even during the COVID-19 era.

## Emotion Contagion: A Two Sided Coin

If you found yourself caught up in the global panic caused by toilet paper hoarding, you've experienced emotion contagion, the phenomena where you 'catch' the emotions of someone else, like a bad cold (yes, we recognize the irony of this metaphor). If you've been at a sporting event when your team scores to win, you'll know that feeling of "we won we won we won!" ripping through the crowd like wild fire. Or, perhaps you've recently exited a grocery store, with its panicked customers competing for the last loaf of bread, and noticed you felt more anxious than when you arrived. These are all examples of emotion contagion.

Studies show that emotion contagion in the workplace is associated with status and power. Can you remember a time when you joined a meeting while feeling positive, only to walk out angry, frustrated or disheartened because the meeting's leader was in a lousy mood. This is the unconscious way emotion contagion works its way through an organization, often from leaders to teams. At large scale, it can set the emotional tone for an entire organization.

### AVOIDING CONTAGION

Imagine having this inner dialog the next time you're dealing with an irritable boss...

**"Hmm, Carol is pretty abrasive today, and I can feel that I am becoming irritable myself. Do I want to feel that way? Actually, no.**

**What would be a more useful emotion right now? Yes, calm and grounded, that's it. I'll take a breath right now and listen for opportunities to move the conversation forward in a productive way."**

See if you can use this type of technique to avoid emotional contagion at work. It works at home, too!

Fortunately, emotion contagion works both ways, boosting peoples' moods as well as depressing them. You can exploit emotion contagion to inspire and build confidence in those around us as you grapple with today's uncertainty. When we consciously give off a contagion that supports better outcomes, we call this co-regulation. It occurs when your emotional state is pleasant and the emotional energy is well-calibrated for the occasion.

Running a kick-off meeting for your team (perhaps, awkwardly, via a video call)? To get your team excited and inspired by the new initiative, you'll likely want to exhibit a positive outlook and high energy. Checking in with your team after a tough week? Cultivating your own feelings of openness, patience and warmth will create an environment where your team feels safe sharing their trials and tribulations, all for the purpose of improving their circumstances and their performance.

Recognizing and using emotion contagion can become one of your super powers. First, you no longer have to take on the unwanted emotions given off by someone else. When you are aware that you are influenced by others' emotions, you can make a choice about whether you'd like to take that on emotion or not. Second, you can then use your own positive emotions as a helpful contagion for others. Enthusiasm, gratitude, hope, and optimism are infectious too!

# Create an Emotion Charter

Just as teams develop mission statements to provide a “true north” that can guide important decisions, we’ve seen many of them benefit from developing an Emotion Charter, a tool that’s used to cultivate a high performance emotional climate. Groups draft an Emotion Charter to capture their agreement about their emotion goals – how they want to feel – and how they want to manage emotions. By creating one, you’ll increase team engagement and nimbleness while lowering burnout, a bigger issue now than ever before.

Your goal is to capture your Emotion Charter in an easy-to-read written format that you can share with your team. Have a conversation with the entire team – or key leaders – and address the following questions.

1. “What emotions would you like to experience more often during your work day?” Brainstorm and capture all ideas that are offered. Vote to narrow the list to the top three. Or, go through successive rounds where each person captures and shares their list to the group, narrowing the list until you settle on three that the group supports.
2. Ask: “What can we do to experience this emotion more often in our workplace?” when considering each of the three emotions your team has chosen. Develop a list of three behaviors for each emotion, narrowing the list as described above for emotions.
3. “How will we handle situations when the Charter is not upheld?” To tee up this part of the conversation you might have the group think about the emotions they’d rather NOT experience. Discuss the consequences to relationships, decision-making and productivity. Brainstorm a list of things the team can do or say to get a meeting or a project back on track when those unwanted emotions turn into unhelpful behaviors. The ultimate goal is to have a list of top three behaviors that you and the team can use to prevent and manage conflict.

Capture your Emotion Charter in a document and, if possible, have each team member sign it (virtually or physically). Share it with the group electronically. As long as you’re working remotely, save the Charter in a place where you keep shared documents. (Once you’re working in the office again, consider posting it in meeting rooms, etc.) Find opportunities to discuss or refer to the Charter during team conversations. Some teams like to begin or end meetings by reviewing the Charter or asking “How are we doing today at upholding our Charter?”

Not surprisingly, people have had great success developing an Emotion Charter for their family, too, and you may find that worthwhile. Find a time when you’re gathered around the dinner table to walk your family through the questions above. You’ll gain important insights about what your family needs, particularly in this high-pressure period. At the same time, the exercise will show how much you care about how they’re feeling.

## Charter Action Plan

- Host an Emotion Charter Discussion
- Draft an Emotion Charter document
- Circulate for signatures
- Email/slack the Charter to the team
- Post in shared drive and eventually in meeting rooms, etc.
- Refer to the Charter in meetings, as appropriate.

# Tips from the Experts

**Andrea Hoban**, our Head of Learning, sat down – by video, of course! – with our co-founders, **Marc Brackett, Ph.D.** and **Robin Stern, Ph.D.**, to get their insights on the current emotional climate. Marc is the Director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, and Robin is Associate Director there. They’ve spent over twenty years developing, testing and teaching practical emotion skills around the world. Their RULER program has been taught to over one million students around the world. It also serves as the cornerstone of our Emotion Life Lab program.

**“When people are afraid, they’re not functioning at their best level.”**

– Robin

**Andrea:** Here we are in the middle of the COVID-19 crisis in our country. I was wondering if you could outline for us, as two people who have studied this for so long, why emotional intelligence might be particularly important at this time.

**Robin:** Simply put, people need skills. People are having intense emotions, they’re having emotions that make them uncomfortable, having emotions that they may not even recognize and are hard to deal with. And when people are uncomfortable, and they’re not skilled, there are consequences to that discomfort. They yell at other people, they don’t perform as well. When people are afraid, they’re not functioning at their best level. It impacts their relationships and impacts their attention, impacts their performance every day.

**Marc:** I think what you said is exactly right. The only thing I would add is that I think we know that the primary feeling is anxiety and stress right now. Feeling like events are unpredictable and uncontrollable and that it’s going to continue is extraordinarily difficult. And a lot of that comes from not having enough information about what’s happening and then your brain makes stories up about what’s happening and you drive yourself crazy. Or you do crazy things like spray people or buy all the toilet paper. So I think one of the goals for right now is to help people understand their feelings, and then find the strategies that will help them regulate them more effectively.



**Robin:** Yeah, I think that’s great. And one of the reasons that people need strategies is that we don’t have the experience of having dealt with something like this before. There hasn’t been a time, certainly in my lifetime, where schools are all closed for an undefined period of time. People have had other experiences where they’ve been able to build resilience, make meaning out of what happened and move

on, but not quite like this one. And so some of the uncertainties that you focused on are brand new for people.

**Andrea:** I wonder if you can share some of the strategies that are working for you, how you’re coping and where you’re using new strategies or really being disciplined about strategies that work for you.

**Robin:** I’m cooking. I’m cooking every day, lunch and dinner, and I find it to be a way to capture my focus. I’m watching TV in the morning, I actually enjoy watching the news. Sometimes I feel like I can’t get enough of it. And I need some way to focus my energy in a positive direction and also in a relational direction since I’m recently married. And we’re living together in a way that we didn’t expect to be on our honeymoon. And we’re cooking together, making the best of a situation that was forced on us that both of us have a lot of feelings about. I think we’re doing a great job.



**Andrea:** How about you, Marc?

**Marc:** You know, it's interesting. I'm not someone who likes to be at home all the time. I'm used to being on planes, trains and presenting and running around. And now I've spent more time in my home over the last two weeks than I have in 20 years. So it's a whole new life for me. You know, everywhere I go, there's somebody.

I'm used to having quiet time on a plane for five hours to do my writing and stuff like that. So for the first week, I was pretty unhappy. I was eating more than I would have liked, drinking more coffee than I would have liked. I was watching more television than I would have liked and the days would fly by but I wouldn't accomplish much. And I'm someone who is very achievement-oriented. So that couldn't last for more than a week for me. And essentially, I just had to figure out, what's this new life going to look like?

With all the things going on, whether it be the news that could make you nuts, or the stock market, which can make you nuts or whatever else...if you absorb yourself in the news all day, you're bound to go nuts. So I really started to limit my exposure. I want to know what's happening but I'm not going to know every minute of every day. Two or three times a day I go online, or I'm going to watch CNN or something. And that's enough.

**Robin:** One of the things that neither one of us mentioned and I think that both of us are conscious of is to regulate our own emotions by giving to others. Focusing on other people and what they may need at this time, whether we're actually reaching out beyond our own community or just within our families and our friends circle, is super helpful and makes me feel good. And it makes them feel good.

**Andrea:** Yeah, I can relate to that. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about what it means to be in close proximity with your loved ones, when this may have never been the case the entire time you've known each other. What advice would you have for those of us who are really trying to navigate how to be helpful family members?

**Marc:** Yeah, I think that number one is to find out what everybody's needs are. Like for me, I never had a home office because I would do most of my work out of the house. And then I would do email sitting on the couch at night watching television, but now I have to work from home. And so that was a major need. I need quiet space, no distractions. So that was a conversation and then we worked together to build this little makeshift office. And that was actually fun to do together... and now I lock the door. (laughs)

My partner and I both like yoga, so we found free online yoga classes and set up the computer in our bedroom and we just did an hour and a half class together. And so finding things that you enjoy to do together and making time for those things, I think could be really useful.

**Robin:** In general, the conversations with my husband have been more about our styles than about our needs. I know from my work as a therapist and my experience as a human that people negotiate closeness and distance all the time in relationships. And normally you have that ability because you're actually not even with the people you're married to or in family with all day long. Now you don't. So even if you want to negotiate closeness and distance, it's going to have to come more from what's actually happening between the two of you, rather than you being able to take a walk, or go to work all day long. And I find that to be very hard because my style is to approach for comfort when I'm anxious and his style is to withdraw and just be internal, and then we may be misunderstanding each others signals that we never even saw before. Because we're used to being able to deal with our anxieties and get some of those needs met outside the relationship.

**“If you absorb yourself in the news all day, you’re bound to go nuts.”**

– Marc



**“People negotiate closeness and distance all the time in relationships.”**

– Robin

**“Find out how people want to feel and then ask what they need to feel that way.”**

– Marc

**Andrea:** So if I wanted to build a charter with my family, how would I do that?

**Marc:** Essentially, it's two questions. The first question is: how do we want to feel? And then it's just a conversation where you can say “I want to feel respected” or “I want to feel valued” or “I have this real strong need for connection.” There's no judgement about the feelings. It just is whatever people want to feel. Then, second, you come up with your top three to five needs as a family and you have conversations. So what does that look like for me? What does that look like for you? So respect for me means, “I'm going to be doing these webinars and I need quiet time. Just know that I need space. And please don't blast the radio or bang on the door.” And for someone else, respect means “don't ask me so many questions,” because I'm a scientist and I like to ask everybody lots of questions. I'm like, why, why, why? And so I'm asking less “why” at home based on our family charter. So, just very simply, find out how people want to feel and then ask what they need to feel that way more.

**Andrea:** It also strikes me this has a place in our new virtual work world. How would you recommend implementing this idea when we're now working with teams that we only see virtually on screens or in teleconference calls?

**Marc:** I think it's the same thing. I'm a victim of attention problems. It's really hard for me to be on a webinar with my work teams. We have 65 people at our center and when we're doing a group thing, and if it's not 100% relevant to something I need to know, it's really hard for me to be present. So something that I've been doing is, if there's a meeting where we're checking in, I go for a walk, and I have the meeting while I'm walking so that way I get my movement in and I'm very present. So I think there are creative ways to think about it.

**Robin:** Yes, and think about what happens if you're not living the charter, when you're with your family or with your team. So if everyone (at Marc's Center) said that they feel respected when everyone is sitting in their seat and looking at the screen, and then they notice that you're going for a walk, what happens at that point? Does the person who is leading the meeting point it out or is it just an opportunity for a conversation? So maybe offline, that person sends you a text and says “Hey, you know what? It's really important to me. And I think we agreed as a team, we're all going to be sitting in our seats.” And I think that those conversations, when when you feel in some way that your expectations of behavior are not being met, or nobody listened to you, or nobody cared, or did it the way that we've had agreed. Those conversations are difficult, and really important to have.

**Marc:** One thing I would add is that you need to be aware of power dynamics, because as the director of the Center, if I'm not looking like I'm engaged or attentive, it really does give permission to other people to be multitasking. As leaders or as managers, I think we have to be the role model. So, think about what emotion regulation strategies work. Mine was taking a walk and it helped me be more present.

**Andrea:** It's also interesting how we interpret expression in our new virtual work world. Could you talk a little bit about how, when we're seeing people on a video conference screen, that it is different? What can we do to be better emotion scientists?

**Marc:** Again, it goes back to using all the tools of emotional intelligence that we build at Oji Life Lab. It's about checking in, going quickly around the circle to find out how people are doing. For example, we found out unfortunately, someone in our center has a uncle who is on a respirator right now. And because of the coronavirus, that is important information. Now we know that we have someone that we need to support and provide care to. And my expectations for that person over the next week might change as a result of that.





Some people are single, living alone, and they have more time on their hands than they've ever had and they are able to get a lot done. And then we have some parents who have young children, they have three or four kids (at home) and, guess what: reality is "family first." You have a two, a three year old and a five year old and you're both at home and trying to work and trying to raise kids and don't have the privilege of having a nanny, life is just going to be different. And so I think we have to just understand that these are different times, and learn about our teams so that we can provide them the best possible support.

**Robin:** I would add, don't jump to conclusions or take it personally. So if you're on screen with somebody and you're in a virtual room, and you see an expression flicker over somebody's face, it might have nothing to do with what you're saying. It might have to do with something that you can't even see, because it's not on camera, somebody in the back yelling at that person or something fell off the shelf. Or, it's about how they feel about being on the screen all the time.

**Andrea:** Another topic that comes to mind is emotion contagion, both the cultural contagion and contagion that might exist again in our own households right now. I'm curious about how we can regulate, after reading the headlines, as you've already talked a little bit about, and also regulate in such a way that it supports us using the foundation of contagion to become a co-regulating force for good.

**Robin:** So I would say that it's not just about stopping the unhelpful or unhealthy or unpleasant contagion. It's about lifting, the joyful contagion, it's about doing things that help people catch those warm fuzzies or experience happiness. It's about giving somebody a smile. Your smile will be contagious and they'll catch your smile and that just lifts the atmosphere completely.

**Marc:** I have one other thought, which is that it's important to be intentional about who you surround yourself with or who you communicate with. So if you know you have someone who generates anxiety, choose to spend less time with that person right now. For example, we had a family zoom meeting the other night and one of my relatives was like, "it's never gonna be over." And by the time we hung up the phone, I was ready to call it quits. And I'm thinking, I love my aunt, but we're going to limit the amount of time we spend now. And so you know, it's trying to find people who spread the positivity, who are a calming force, who make you feel more at ease. Intentionally surround yourself with people who are demonstrating the emotions that you want to feel more often.

**Robin:** Yeah, I like the way you said that. And I would add to that, if you can't do that because the people who are more morose right now or just more unpleasant are living with you, look for activities that you can engage in that will bring some calm or look for activities that you can do separately as well. So you're not just in the space, catching emotions.

**Andrea:** This is an very interesting and probably a tough time to be a leader. Marc, you're the leader of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. Robin, you've got your own practice. You've got leaders of government, institutions, leaders of companies, all forced to make very difficult decisions right now, that impact a lot of people. And I'm curious what advice you'd have for leaders who have to step up and make difficult choices.

**Robin:** It starts with you. Getting the education, building skills, managing emotions in a positive way, being that positive role model - it starts with you.

**Marc:** I couldn't agree more. And the thought that comes to my mind immediately is that it starts with you, but it's not about you. Make it about the people. You know the saying, "no one cares how much you know until they know how much you care," the Maya Angelou quote. I think it's important here. There are real life challenges that people are going to have to face, like budgets. But if you deliver the message in a way, with your heart, and it doesn't feel like you're benefiting in a weird way from their loss, I think it makes a huge difference.

**"It starts with  
you, but it's not  
about you."  
– Marc**

**Robin:** And they're watching you. And they're learning from your behavior, how you feel about (the crisis) and how you are going to deal with the challenges, and they'll emulate your behavior because you're the leader.

**Andrea:** So let's talk about leadership in our homes then. What advice do you have for parents right now?

**Robin:** Again, it starts with you. And I think that checking in with your kids to see how they're doing, letting them know that you're okay, letting them know – especially for young children, who are feeling the anxiety, the uncertainty and unpredictability – you're going to be okay. Are we going to have enough food? Yes. Reassuring them with facts, and reassuring them with love that you're going to love them, you're going to do everything possible to take care of them, to make sure they have enough to eat, do everything possible to make sure that you're all safe and you're not going to get sick and that you'll take care of them no matter what.

There's a strong message that parents and people who love each other can give: whatever is in my power to do, I'm going to do it for you. If you're delivering that message from a place where you have checked in with yourself and regulating your feelings, it's going to be easier for your kids to really digest it and feel comforted by it compared to if you're having a panic attack.

**Marc:** I would just reiterate, it's about being the role model. Your kids are not supposed to be taking care of you, you're supposed to be taking care of them. And so be mindful of the way you speak about things. Be mindful of the way you talk at the dinner table. The shows that you're watching with them, because it's all programming them to think a certain way. We want to guide people to being able to manage their feelings, not to be activated all the time. The activation levels right now are what really make our brains start going crazy around these things. And so the more you can do to co-regulate and support the feeling of calm and ease, the better able everyone will be to deal with their feelings

**Andrea:** Any last thoughts that we might not have talked about that you feel would be important for people to think about or invite them to engage in during these uncertain times?

**Robin:** One of the big messages that we talk about all the time, is that all feelings are okay. And you're going to be having a lot of feelings at this time, and they won't all be pleasant, but they won't all be unpleasant either.

**Marc:** It's this idea of you have the permission to feel, hence my book (Marc's book is "Permission to Feel"). But I also think that you don't want to tell your kid not to feel anxious, right? He's anxious. What you want to do is support your child in dealing with that anxiety effectively, and just letting him know that it's okay to be anxious is a relief. I'm reminded of a boy in a classroom many years ago that we worked with, who had a pet who had died. And he was so upset. And, you know, what am I going to tell him, not to be upset? He was feeling grief. And the question was, "what support do you need?" Not, "what do you need to get rid of your grief?" And so having that mindset, I think can be really helpful.

**Robin:** And included in that is that it doesn't work anyway. If you say, stop feeling. It's not going to work. So being very practical about it, what you can do is to support. What you can't do is to get rid of this emotion.

**Andrea:** Well, I feel reassured after talking with you. Thank you both very much!

**Marc:** It was fun to do this. I appreciate it.

**Robin:** I hope it's helpful. Thank you!

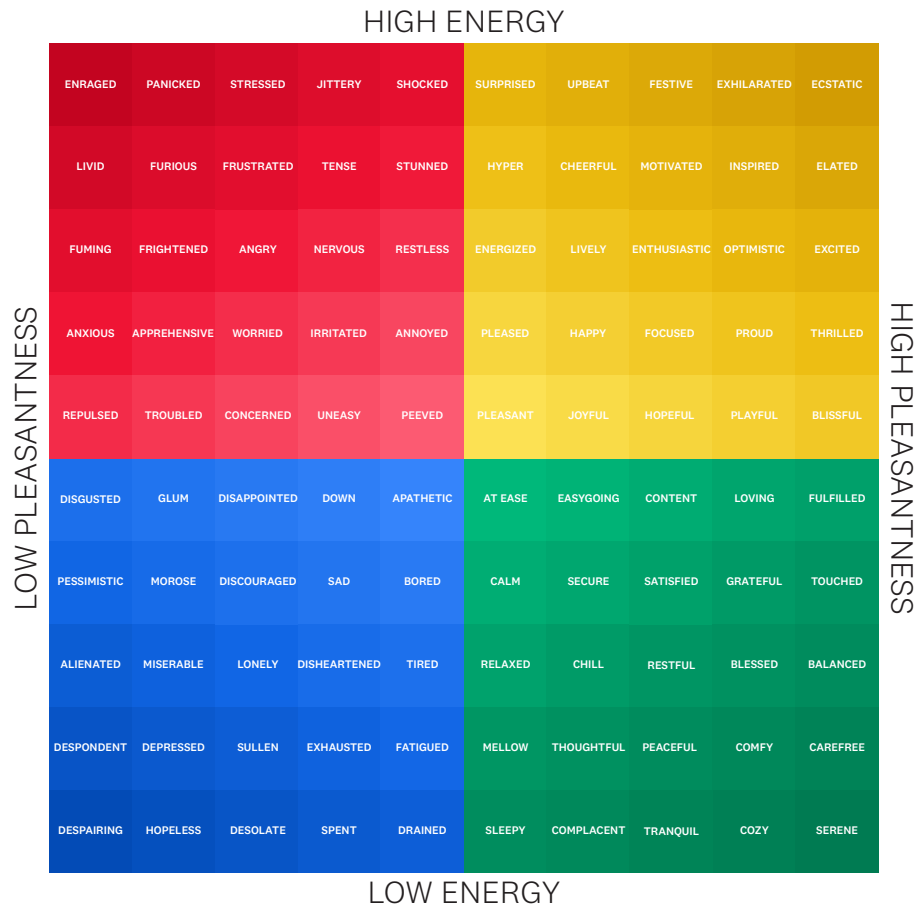
**"Whatever is in my power to do, I'm going to do it for you."**

– Robin

**"All feelings are okay."**

– Robin

# MOOD METER



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