

## 4 Dealing with Stress in Healthy Ways

### 4A1 Lesson—Obstacles to Healthier Mind Development

This lesson highlights five major reasons why it is difficult for us to develop a healthier, more intelligent psychological aptitude and stable well-being. Without considering the subtle identity of these obstacles, we can too easily fail to realize the inhibiting roles that they play as the obstacles distort our reasoning and add stress to our life experiences.

Studying this lesson should help students more easily identify these obstacles in everyday life. By increasing our attention to these obstacles, we can practice fortifying our minds intelligently to deal with the stress they cause us in healthier ways.

#### The Importance of Recognizing and Understanding Our Obstacles

In the eighteenth century, a philosopher named Thomas Reid stressed the difficulties involved in understanding and attending to the human mind in his *“Inquiry into the Human Mind”*. It reads:

“To attend accurately to the operation of our minds and make *them* object of thought is no easy matter, even to the contemplative, and to the bulk of humankind is next to impossible...”

Yet, if we do not question the quality of our mind’s operation and know what to look for, it is close to impossible to recognize that there may be something wrong with our thinking and/or that we could attend to our minds more healthfully. Even when it causes us problems, we can be *susceptible* to continue thinking the way we have grown habit to think.

Questioning the quality of our mind’s operation helps develop a greater depth by which we can learn to apply the thinking process. As Reid implied three centuries ago, accurately attending to our mind’s operation is not a consciously applied natural standard. This tells us that without training, our thinking processing is psychologically, more naturally applied superficially and elementarily. New, exciting knowledge reveals that with increased effort and understanding how and why to practice, we can learn to attend to the operation of our minds more healthfully. With such direction, we can become more master-minded.

When we recognize that there are *complexities* and *susceptibilities* interfering with our ability to operate our minds in a healthful manner and try to understand such problems, we can increase our chances to improve. *“Complexities and Susceptibilities”* are two of the five major categories of obstacles we identify in this lesson, which make it difficult for us to attain a healthier, more intelligent psychological aptitude and stable well-being.

At the end of the last lesson (4A), we compared the importance of recognizing and understanding our obstacles with Superman®, the movie/comic book character, and kryptonite. If you recall, Superman's® super human strength, senses and abilities can shut down when he is exposed to the rock-like substance called kryptonite.

In Lesson4A we pointed out that for Superman's® protection, he needs to know a lot about kryptonite! He needs to know what it is, what it looks like, how it could hurt him, where it is most predominantly found, and most importantly, how to fortify himself against it and avoid it if he can! The purpose of this comparison was to point out that it is no less important or easier for us to understand the obstacles that reduce our strengths, senses and abilities, and thus interfere with our ability to protect ourselves and reach a healthier human potential.

Unfortunately, our obstacles require a lot more investigation than just being able to recognize and harness a single, crippling substance like kryptonite. Without considering their subtle identity, we can too easily fail to realize the roles they play as they stifle our power to ward-off potential problems; physically, emotionally, cognitively, morally, legally and financially, as well as our relationship and more worldly troubles.

The more aware we are of psychological barriers and other obstacles that jeopardize our well-being, the better chance we have of managing and/or overcoming them. Thus, teaching our minds to consider such obstacles can help us become more aware of their influence.

The following obstacles contribute to many of the frustrations, errors, and endangerments that we deal with in life. They cause major interference with healthy mind development. They compromise our thinking process, standards of conduct, and well-being:

- 1. Deficiencies**—the lack of enough important information, tools, skills, practice, and support.
- 2. Complexities**—the inability to understand complicated, yet important knowledge, skills, and approaches, as well as subtle/obscure causes and their effects.
- 3. Internal Susceptibilities**—the natural weaknesses, assumptions, biases, and other ill habits we form that allow us to misguide, misjudge, and mishandle our lives.
- 4. External Vulnerabilities**—the potential external threats, misinformation, accidents, disasters, predators, outside related diseases, as well as depleting critical resources that endanger us.
- 5. Actual Mind Limitations**—the inability to do certain things with our minds naturally, easily, or instantly, nor place into our memories anywhere near what most computers can save or store.

These obstacles inhibit us tremendously from directing ourselves healthfully. Often, more than one is involved in distorting our thoughts, our expressions, actions and reactions. They weaken our reasoning ability and thus contribute to poor judgment and other common errors. They reduce our ability to do important things in the best and/or healthiest manner. As we deal with the trouble these obstacles create, they can leave us feeling awkward and frustrated. They amount to being our own personal kryptonite!

In the balance of Part 1 of this lesson, the first category of obstacles, *Deficiencies*, will be further explained. The other categories, as well as many “how, what, where, when, and why’s” of each one, will be further addressed in parts two, three, and later lessons. (Please be aware that this lesson is quite lengthy and detailed. Once completely on-line, it will most likely be divided into a group of lessons.)

## **OBSTACLES TO MORE EMOTIONALLY ENRICHED LIVES**

Inhibiting Healthier Mind Development and Improving Our Well-being

### **1. Deficiencies—the lack of enough important information, tools, skills, practice, and support**

Deficiencies can be viewed as the critical educational elements that we missed in our youth or did not have enough “know how” to utilize. These kinds of deficiencies can cause or have caused us serious problems. They include the psychological elements that we miss in our education that would help us understand our minds better, improve our well-being, and enhance our relationship with the outside world. Deficiencies in our psychological education can adversely affect our quality of life, perhaps just as much or even more than limited conventional education.

Similar to learning to ride a bicycle, it is not that the competencies involved are so difficult to learn. Some deficiencies can be overcome by just being brought to our attention. Others are easily apprehensible but not nearly so easily applied in action.

The psychological deficiencies in our emotional health are comparable to historical vitamins and other nutritional deficiencies in our physical health. Once the existence of these nutritional deficiencies were discovered, some became much easier to prevent or diagnose and cure. Similarly, we have certain deficiencies of information, tools, skills, practice, and support that will help us function more healthfully. Once we discover the existence of these elements and understand how crucial they are, we can begin to more clearly learn how to apply their usefulness.

To understand deficiencies from a different perspective, compare particular information that a child misses when moved from one school to another within a school year. In such a transition, a child may fail to learn part of his/her multiplication tables. The lack of this particular knowledge becomes evident to the new teacher when the student struggles to solve problems requiring the knowledge. However, the student does not realize *what* she or he does not know--only how difficult the task is to perform.

Thus, lacking psychologically related pieces of information can adversely affect our emotional growth and cause us to experience life itself from an emotionally deficient standpoint. Deficiencies can cause excessive struggles without our realizing what we do not know---only our difficulties in performance.

Like the child’s problems with multiplication, it is not easy to consider what we might not know without help from someone else. We might go through some sort of educational program, wonder enough to research self-development materials or search the Internet on our own, or we may have an enlightening experience that helps us discover what we missed.

Unless brought to our attention somehow, our minds will most likely remain oblivious to the educational elements we are missing—and our emotional growth becomes compromised by our deficiencies.

As mentioned in previous lessons, from an emotional stability standpoint, there is much new knowledge researchers have uncovered that we need to be aware of and learn to apply. Without this knowledge, how many people do you think are operating their minds and going through life with deficiencies in related education? By understanding our obstacles and allowing emotional intelligence to become the main architect of our minds, we can build our more master-minded EQ potential.

From the other extreme emotional instability standpoint, having a serious deficiency in emotional intelligence defines a condition called Alexthymia. It is characterized by:

- Difficulty in identifying and communicating feelings
- Difficulty in distinguishing between feelings and bodily sensations
- Impaired symbolization, as evidenced by imaginative activity
- A preference for focusing on external events, rather than inner experiences

For the healthier and more proficient function of our minds, it is important that a quality degree of education about our deficiencies be defined and structured. Major competencies can then more easily be measured as focal points (similar to vitamins) for parents, mentors, and instructors to learn and teach. The more we study and understand those things that influence our thoughts and behaviors, both healthy and unhealthy, the better chance we have to reduce related problems.

Without enough quality direction, we can have less interest in what merits health. When we are unknowing or are not concerned about applying enough caution, it is much easier to under-estimate what needs our attention. Without quality direction and healthful regard, we can over-step important limits and boundaries. When we do not realize that we need stronger intentions and emphasis on effort, healthful regard can too easily fizzle. Thus, deficiencies regarding the things that really matter become detrimental to us in every area of our lives and can result in damaging consequences.

As with other educational subjects, learning important EQ competencies can require us to use *optional enhancements* that we can learn to apply with our minds, such as increasing our effort, reflection, and attention toward improving the quality of our own thoughts and behavior. (By optional we mean that we can learn and choose to strengthen our degree of effort, reflection, and attention toward improving most anything—or instead choose our natural less regulated, less pressured tendencies.)

To help students further understand deficiencies, six major competencies are singled out in this lesson as examples. Each of them facilitates quality behavior and is in critical need of better human understanding. These particular competencies contribute significantly toward improving our emotional intelligence, as well as our health and well-being. With better understanding, deficiencies in these competencies are easier to identify, acknowledge, and overcome.

As mentioned, without better understanding, deficiencies in these competencies can cause us serious problems! Their scope encompasses several particular criteria that influence quality behavior. We need to become more familiar with their characteristics to apply them more knowledgeably and appreciatively.

The six examples of major competencies that influence quality behavior and we need to understand better are:

- 1. Quality Guidance from Others**— When parents, teachers, spiritual leaders, and other mentors do not themselves have high enough levels of understanding, skill, priority and authority to teach children what they need to know to improve their EQ, it is much more difficult for children to learn and apply such knowledge on their own. Quality guidance in this century requires educators to better balance the number of conventional lessons with a broad scope of knowledge that students need to learn about healthy mind development and improving human behavior.
- 2. Healthy Thought Processing**— Having a low reign over our thinking can handicap us in just about every realm of our lives. With better understanding, training, and practice, we can learn to more productively apply this powerful resource—the mind—both psychologically and functionally. With interest and appreciation, we can develop healthier thinking practices and reduce reasoning distortions. Learning how to navigate our thoughts more keenly is among the most rewarding results of healthy mind development efforts.
- 3. Insightful Behavioral Knowledge**— When we do not realize that there is a mass of knowledge important to learn about behavior, we can be less concerned about teaching or studying it. With better understanding, training, and practice, we can learn to promote higher standards of emotional and intellectual conduct. It involves learning important rules and other optional enhancements of healthy conduct and how to recognize dysfunctions. By understanding that the quality of behavior is the number one consideration of a civilized society, it helps us realize the importance of furthering behavioral education.
- 4. Intentional Emotional Control**— Low reign on our emotions can cause us to react to them inappropriately. However, with better understanding, training, and practice, it's easier to realize that we can control emotions. It involves improving our ability to rationally rethink, when at the same time the mind is susceptible to adverse emotional influence. Intentional emotional control plays a crucial role in healthy mind development. It helps improve how well we structure our attitudes, motivate ourselves, and qualify healthy behavior, which in turn improves our EQ and empowers us in just about every realm of our lives.
- 5. Responsible Self-Supervision**— When we don't learn enough about such care, we can neglect important priorities too easily. With better understanding, training, and practice, we can learn to organize ourselves better. Similar to business, self-supervision requires enterprisingly tackling our responsibilities and following necessary rules, guidelines, and helpful disciplines. Such due-care is an important part of healthy mind development and improving our EQ. It plays a critical role in maintaining our safety and a civilized well-being.
- 6. Responsible Social-Ecological Kinship**— When we don't learn enough about this subject, we are inclined to be more self-centered. With better understanding, training, and practice, we can reduce costly impacts of wastefulness, careless disinterest, manipulations, crimes, and other self-centered negative behavior. Healthy mind development and improving our EQ require that we appreciate our kinship with the outside world. Such understanding plays a critical role in our ability to improve our relationships and create a safer, healthier world.

## **In Conclusion of Part 1**

When we can identify and acknowledge deficiencies in understanding about these kinds of competencies, it is easier to recognize how deficiencies contribute to ill-behaviors and particular problems that we face. The more we understand our deficiencies and study related subjects, the more we can enhance healthier, more productive thoughts, communications, and behavior.

The six deficiencies are outlined in graphic card/charts that accompany this lesson. On the card/charts of each deficiency, we have listed a number of valuable points about them. Such a structure is intended to help you identify problems and healthier options more easily. As the balance of this lesson arrives on-line and explains the other four obstacles, it should enhance your ability to improve performance.

*To use the charts: The sets of 3 card/charts for each deficiency can be separated on the dotted lines and studied individually and/or if you prefer, they can be left intact. The card graphic layout reminded us of Monopoly ® game playing cards implications of wealth. Similarly, if we gained the understanding and healthy practices listed on all the 18 cards, we would be very wealthy, emotionally! For best grasp and absorption, read just one card/chart a day for six days, rather than all at once. Then review 1 of the 18 individual card/charts daily.*

Please note: The six influential criteria listed here and on the card/charts are not considered our only criteria with deficiencies. They are just major ones we have chosen to illustrate the point.

**To be continued: The next obstacle, “Complexities” and balance of this lesson are not yet on line.**

At this point, please read the rainbow colored *Six Inhibiting Deficiencies Chart* that lists all deficiencies given and then just the first deficiency card/chart.