

Managing Emotional Insecurities

One of the functions of emotions is to direct our social behaviour. Given the great complexity of humans, our relationships, and the world we live in, our emotions can guide us in both positive and negative ways. Many communication breakdowns can be traced to the triggering of emotional insecurities or sensitivities for one or both parties. This is often why people tend to react unexpectedly defensively in interactions. When analyzing the other person's strong reactions, consider which aspect or aspects of their self that they may be defending and what it is about your own language or tone that may have triggered their response.

If your goal is to have a harmonious and constructive interaction with another person, it is important to be aware of any present or potential emotional insecurities or sensitivities that may exist for you or for them. Three core insecurities we arguably all carry to fluctuating degrees are feeling 1. Incompetent (hopeless, useless or stupid), 2. Bad (naughty or evil), and 3. Unlovable (unlikeable, unpopular or unattractive). Indeed, irrespective of how they are labelled, these insecurities are possibly part of what defines us as human. So there is a sense in which we are all insecure or sensitive to a certain all of the time to fluctuating degrees depending on company and context. I'm sure it's not hard to imagine the last time a difficult conversation triggered one or more of these insecurities for you or the person with whom you were interacting. The triggering of any of these could explain why you or the other party may have behaved regretfully.

So try to be more aware of both your own insecurities and those that may be present for the other person. Of course, dealing with them can be extremely challenging given the way they can destabilise us. Simply observing these insecurities non-judgmentally and in the moment (mindfully) can help us not to overreact to them and behave inappropriately or unhelpfully. Another possibly riskier (depending on the trust levels in the relationship) approach, but one that can be very effective for encouraging a good reaction from the other person, is to admit to them that your insecurities are present. For example:

Incompetent - "I'm sorry if I seem upset, but I just feel a bit out of my depth right now.

Bad - "Just letting you know that I do feel pretty awful about how I ended the conversation last time and I'll try to listen to you better this time."

Unlovable - "I know I haven't been very good company for you tonight, I think being around all these beautiful people is making me a bit self-conscious. I'll see if I can snap out of it."