

Emotional Maturity Is a Conscious Choice

By Edward E. Morler, M.B.A., Ph.D.

Emotional maturity just doesn't happen because you reached a certain age, finished school, started a job, got married, had children, made lots of money, or attained high social position. None of those in themselves make you emotionally mature.

Children and adolescents are driven by genes and hormones. However, beyond adolescence, an individual has to choose maturity. While emotional intelligence can be learned, emotional maturity is a choice. If it is not consciously made, the individual will not move beyond the emotional immaturity of an adolescent despite any and all trappings of material "success."

Self-centeredness and self-importance are characteristics of children and adolescents. They demand special treatment, make little real contributions themselves, and complain that life isn't meeting their demands. This does not make them "bad." This is part of the maturation process.

However, these behaviors are not characteristics of the emotionally mature. When those characteristics manifest chronically in a "grown-up," they are indications that person is not in fact a mature, responsive adult, but rather still reacting out of their self-centered child or self-important adolescent.

In fact, there are a great many people who "look grown up" and "appear" to be successful by contemporary standards, but emotionally are like children and adolescents. They emotionally never "grew up."

Perhaps it was because they saw how their parents modeled "adulthood" and "responsibility" and said, "If that's what it is, I don't want it." If the only models of "adults" they were exposed to were reactive ones, it is likely that they will model the same behavior or its reactive counterpart.

Regardless of the why or the what, they are caught in reactive, not responsive behavior and tend to erroneously view maturity and responsibility as "burdensome" things to be avoided. In this avoidance, the adolescent can be incredibly adaptive in creating images and behavior that "pass" for grownup. However, emotionally they are not adults and they never will be until they consciously choose to be.

Truly growing up, becoming emotionally mature, is about being in the NOW and letting go of the past. Hanging onto the past becomes a convenient way to scapegoat parents for our relationship problems and rationalize our loneliness and lack of love.

Our parents may not have been ideal and they did have a significant impact. But, that was then and this is NOW! We have to honestly look at, "Who's recreating the issue NOW?"

A vital part of the route from adolescence to adult maturity is letting go of blaming others for our pain. A large part of that is about allowance and learning to forgive (ourselves as well as others). As blame is only about the past, growing up is about responsibly taking charge of our lives NOW. Not tomorrow, for tomorrow is always tomorrow. We either do that NOW or we continue to act like children or adolescents waiting for "it" to happen, blaming others when it doesn't, and reacting to and being controlled by dysfunctional actions of the past.

Until that conscious choice is made, the person *will* manifest all the fears, insecurities, pretense and limitations of a child or an adolescent. Once past teenager, each individual, unless they are brain damaged or have a chemical imbalance, can choose to be adult. Each has a choice to be emotionally mature, with all the power and freedom it provides. (See article: *From Blame To Responsibility—The Key To Power and Empowerment.*) ♦

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