

CANADIAN HOME CARE ASSOCIATION



Emotional Intelligence Learning Program

MODULE 4: Use Emotions and Decision-Making

USE EMOTIONS

Learning Objectives

Welcome to Module 4 of the Canadian Home Care Association's emotional intelligence learning modules. This module is designed to help health care providers **build their skills in using emotions**. As you complete this module, you will learn about the important **competency of decision-making**, as well as the behaviour of `.

After completing this module, you should be able to:

- Define decision-making and explain its role in emotional intelligence
- Discuss the need for decision-making in supporting caregivers' experiences
- Explain the effect emotions have on decision-making
- Distinguish between the rational brain and the emotional brain
- Describe the elements of decision-making and the five-step decision-making process
- Identify strategies for improving decision-making
- Define the behaviour of collaborative thinking
- Describe the collaborative thinking process

Terms and Definitions

These are the terms introduced in this module. You can also download a PDF that includes all the terms used in the EI Learning Modules.

EI Domain: Use Emotions

As you learned in the EI Learning Module preview, the fourth domain of emotional intelligence is concerned with how to use emotions.

Using emotions is the ability to realize and make use of changing emotions and moods to best fit the task at hand.

By learning how to use our emotions in a positive way, we can refocus our thinking and prioritize our thoughts based on our feelings. We can improve our judgement, appreciate different points of view, and use our emotional states to improve our problem-solving skills and creativity.

In this module, we will explore how to increase our decision-making competency and practice the behaviour of collaborative thinking so that we can use our emotions in the most effective way.

What is Decision-Making?

Decision-making is the process of choosing a particular course of action. It is a complex cognitive practice that takes time and can be improved.

Decision-making usually includes

- Gathering information;
- Seeking input from others;
- Identifying different options;
- Assessing and evaluating the options;
- Selecting the option that best balances risk and reward; and
- Committing to the selected course of action.

Benefits of Good Decision-Making

Health care providers make decisions every day. These decisions, while difficult at times, can influence many things such as well-being and the quality and cost of care.

Decisions made by health care providers on behalf of patients, and shared decisions between patients, caregivers and providers all have big impact. Taking the time to make the best possible decision is vital.

Decision-making in health care is complicated. Because health outcomes are uncertain, we are often faced with decisions that appear to have equally “good” options and it is hard to make a choice. This is why improving your decision-making is beneficial.

Good decision-making:

- Increases productivity by finding solutions faster;
- Improves effectiveness by choosing well;
- Builds partnerships; and
- Enhances person- and family-centred care.

Decision-Making and Emotional Intelligence

As we have learned so far, once you can *perceive* and *understand* emotions, you will be able to *manage* them. The fourth domain of emotional intelligence involves the ability to *use* emotions in a productive way.

One valuable use of emotional intelligence is improved decision-making.

In this module, we will explore the competency of decision-making and the practice of collaborative thinking.

Many decisions require careful thought and may generate conflict, which makes emotional intelligence a critical part of making good decisions.

Decision Making and Caregivers' Experiences

Caregiver's experiences are shaped by what they think (head), feel (heart) and do (hands). We use this lens to help us better recognize the unique situations that caregivers may face and to understand their emotions and reactions.

The head represents what caregivers think: their knowledge, familiarity, and understanding.

The heart represents what caregivers feel: their emotions, reactions, and feelings.

The hands represent what caregivers do: their roles, tasks, and responsibilities.

Knowing how to effectively use emotions in decision-making can help patients and caregivers make good choices as they face new challenges and experiences in what they think, feel and do.

To learn more about how health care providers can practice decision-making to support what caregivers think, feel and do, hover the hotspots on the photos.

Supporting Caregivers through Change

Caregivers go through a series of changes as they adjust to their new role and circumstances. These changes impact every aspect of their life and influence their caregiving experience—what they think, feel and do.

It is important that health care providers recognize and understand the emotional cycles of change that patients and caregivers are experiencing.

When experiencing change—big or small—all patients and their caregivers go through the cycles in different ways. Some people move through the stages quickly, while others may spend time in each stage, or get stuck and have to move back before they move forward.

Using decision-making to support caregivers through the emotional cycles of change is an important emotional intelligence skill for all health care providers.

To learn more about using decision-making to support caregivers' experiences through the emotional cycles of change, hover over the hotspots on the exhibit.

DECISION-MAKING

Emotions, the Brain, and Decisions

In the introductory module, we learned about the difference between emotions and feelings. Emotions are physical and instinctual.

They are responses that occur in the subcortical regions of the brain, specifically the amygdala, which is part of the limbic system. The amygdala plays a key role in emotional arousal.

When we experience stimulus, the amygdala produces the emotional response. The neocortical region helps to regulate or process that response—those are “feelings.”

Review the illustration to see how the different regions of the brain come together.

When the stimulus is threatening or stressful in some way—like an emotional trigger—the amygdala reacts

quickly, telling our bodies to release the hormones adrenaline and cortisol before the neocortex engages. This is where the “flight or fight” response to danger comes from. It is the source of our strong emotional responses.

Strong emotions can flood our brains with neuro-chemicals. When this happens we often struggle to make decisions.

Consider the following statements. Do they sound familiar to you?

- When I’m really upset, I can’t decide what to do.
- I often react hastily when I’m upset.
- I make rash decisions when I’m emotional.
- I let my emotions get in the way when making decisions.

We can use emotional intelligence skills to compensate for the affect emotions have on our ability to make decisions.

Emotional intelligence skills can help us balance our emotional brain with our thinking or rational brain.

Rational Brain vs. Emotional Brain

Scientists used to believe that our rational brain made all of our decisions; but research shows that our emotional brain begins the process and then the rational brain kicks in to balance our decision-making.

Our rational brain is analytical and logical. It engages in reflection and maintains our beliefs and rules. The rational brain also makes decisions and can override intuition. But the rational brain is not always engaged.

Our emotional brain is the home of our emotions and intuition. It inspires our habits and craving, but also stores our memories. The emotional brain responds automatically and is the source of our “gut feelings.” And the emotional brain is always engaged.

In a state of calmness, our rational brain is able to consider all the information or data we have and help us reach a logical decision.

But there are times when the emotional brain makes uses our intuition or “gut feeling” to make decisions. When stress of any kind occurs, our emotional brain takes over.

Intuition vs. Reason

Our rational brain allows us to use reasoning to make decisions.

Reasoning means gathering all relevant information, studying that information, examining the reality of the situation, and making a decision based on the facts.

Most people use reasoning when making decisions because it is based on logic, factual information and practicality and usually leads to safe and sensible decisions and outcomes.

Our emotional brain is the source of our intuition.

Intuition combines your life learnings and your personal values to determine a possible course of action. Your intuition is based on your perceptions of the situation and is not always supported by evidence or “reality.”

People generally use intuition to make quick and simple decisions when there is little information available.

The best approach to decision-making is to be flexible and use both reasoning and intuition depending upon the situation and type of decisions we need to make.

Health care decisions are often highly complex. In these situations, we need to use more than just our rational brain and reasoning for decision-making.

When decisions are centred on people and changes happen quickly with limited access to data, we need to also use our emotional brain and intuition to guide our thinking.

It is the combination of rational and emotional brain power, using reasoning and intuition that is powerful!

We can improve our decision-making process by learning when we need intuition and when to rely on reasoning. Enhancing our emotional intelligence skills and practicing new behaviours can help us better understand and use our intuition as we make decisions.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING 4.1

Check Your Understanding

To check your understanding so far, take a moment to answer these questions about decision-making. If you don't get the correct answers, you can go back and review the content again before going to the next section.

MAKING BETTER DECISIONS

The Elements of Decision-Making

The decision-making competency of emotional intelligence is made up of three elements that work together to help us make better decisions.

By understanding how each element impacts our decision-making process we can use our thinking, emotions and behaviour to make good decisions.

The first element is Problem Solving.

Problem solving is the process of finding solutions to problems.

Problem solving is a complex process that begins with recognizing and defining a problem, generating a solution, and implementing the plan.

In the context of emotional intelligence, problem solving includes understanding the impact emotions have on this process and using those emotions effectively.

The appropriate application of emotional information can help us identify solutions by reframing the problem.

The second element is Reality Testing.

Reality testing is the practice of remaining objective by seeing things as they really are. It involves recognizing when emotions or personal bias can get in the way of objectivity.

In reality testing, we actively search for objective information to confirm, support, justify, and validate our feelings, perceptions, and thoughts.

Strong reality testing skills allow us to keep things in perspective and experience things as they really are, without fantasizing, daydreaming, or attaching wants, desires, and ideals to a context.

Reality testing also involves the ability to concentrate and remain focused when presented with emotional situations.

The third element is impulse control.

Impulse control is the act of resisting or delaying an impulse, drive, or temptation to act. It involves avoiding rash behavior and decision-making.

Impulse control includes the ability to recognize and accept our desire to react without becoming a servant to that desire.

People who lack impulse control often have trouble managing their emotions and engage in unpredictable behaviour.

To make good decisions, we must first control our impulses to react emotionally. We then practice objectivity through reality testing, and employ our problem solving skills.

Five Steps to Decision-Making

Many people rely only on past life experiences when making decisions. This approach can be costly and ineffective and can lead to more bad habits than good. Also, because the situation may change, relying on experience is not the best way to make good decisions.

Instead, we can use a simple five-step decision-making process to help guide our decisions.

Step 1 is to identify the goal.

- Ask yourself: What is the problem that needs to be solved and why does it need to be solved?

Step 2 is to gather information for evaluating options

- Gather as many resources as possible.
- Information increases your understanding and helps generate possible solutions.
- You should also seek opinions from knowledgeable people.

Step 3 is to consider the consequences

- Review the pros and cons of the different options.
- Consider the results of your decision both now and in the future.

Step 4 is to make your decision

- Make your choice and put it into action.
- Consider how the decision makes you feel.

Step 5 is to evaluate your decision

- After some time has passed, consider whether the outcome was successful.
- Evaluating your decision will help improve your decision-making skills.
- Next time, you may need to make changes to your process.

Six Ways to Improve Decision-Making

You can improve your decision-making skills by thinking about the choices you make every day.

If you are conscious of the choices you make out of habit, you can become more self-aware and reflect on how you think about and make decisions.

We can learn valuable lessons from results of bad decisions, but it is much better to reduce the negative consequences of bad decisions by improving our decision-making skills.

First, recognize areas of over-confidence

- People tend to overestimate their performance. Think about your decisions and be honest about the results.
- Draw upon your flexibility skills and be open-minded. Know that you can change your mind when faced with new information.
- Do a quick reality test to validate your ideas and feelings and adjust accordingly.

Second, reframe your problem

- As you learned in Module 2, reframing a problem can help use generate new options.
- Sometimes this is as easy as changing the wording of an issue to adjust how we see the problem.
- Reframing helps you look at a situation with new eyes and in a more positive light.

Third, take your mind off the problem

- Overthinking the options can get in the way of decisions making. Considering our options for too long can increases the stress level to the point of paralysis!
- Practice mindfulness, clear your head and just be being present in the moment.
- Taking a break from the process can give you the perspective you need.

Fourth, reflect on your decisions

- Always take the time to review the decision or choices you make daily, whether the decisions are good or bad.
- Asking yourself “What went right?” or “What went wrong?” will help you identity the lessons learned.

Fifth, label your emotions

- Be aware of how you are feeling when making decisions. Are you happy, sad, angry, or afraid?
- Think about the intensity of your emotions and how this could impact your decisions.
- Recognize your emotions and consider how they could influence your decisions and actions.

And finally, sixth, acknowledge your biases

- It is impossible to be completely objective when making decisions.
- Recognize the assumptions you make on a daily basis about people, actions, and events. This will help you improve your ability to remain objective when facing important decisions.
- A high degree of self-awareness helps you recognize your biases.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING 4.2

Check Your Understanding

To check your understanding so far, take a moment to answer these questions about making better decisions. If you don't get the correct answers, you can go back and review the content again before going to the next section.

COLLABORATIVE THINKING

What is Collaborative Thinking?

Collaborative thinking builds upon shared decision-making by including the understanding, management and use of emotions in health care decisions. It draws upon the knowledge, experiences, and emotions of all participants.

Collaborative thinking is the ability to use emotional intelligence skills in decision-making—to understand emotions and include multiple points of view to create a holistic solution to often complex challenges.

Shared decision-making is a process whereby health care providers support individuals in making decisions informed by the best available evidence and what matters most to them.

Collaborative thinking occurs when you apply emotional intelligence skills to shared decision-making.

The Collaborative Thinking Process

The collaborative thinking process brings emotional intelligence to the practice of shared decision-making.

To fully use collaborative thinking, a health care provider must understand a patient's or caregiver's preferences, help them recognize the impact of their emotions and integrate these with their own professional clinical knowledge.

Let's review four key steps.

Step 1: Understand experiences and emotions impacting decisions

- Recognize the patient's and caregiver's experiences (that is, what they think, feel, and do).
- Be self-aware and help the patient and caregiver think about their emotions and how they impact decisions
- Know there is no "best choice" and ensure the patient and caregiver understands this.

Step 2: Present all the options

- Reframe the problem from the patient's and caregiver's perspective.
- Use empathy to reinforce the value and benefits of various care options
- Recognize that a person's reluctance to make decisions is often due to emotions and limited understanding, rather than a lack of desire.

Step 3: Discuss the benefits and risks of each option

- Help the patient and caregiver manage their emotions by being flexible and adapting solutions based a shared understanding of risk and benefits

- Observe body language and practice mindful listening when discussing risks and benefits.
- Help the patient and caregiver do a reality check and manage impulses when making decisions.

Step 4: Communicate openly and reinforce decisions

- Recognize verbal and non-verbal cues when discussing options and choosing solutions.
- Guide the patient and caregiver by asking guiding questions and respecting feelings.
- Plan “coaching moments” to help the patient and caregiver understand the impact of changes and providing feedback.

Using Collaborative Thinking

Being able to successfully practice collaborative thinking requires you to apply all your emotional intelligence skills to a shared decision-making process.

This approach can effectively support patients and caregivers throughout their emotional cycles of change during their care journey.

Review the table, which outlines how emotional intelligence skills can apply to different aspects of patient and caregiver decision-making to result in collaborative thinking.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING 4.3

Check Your Understanding

To check your understanding so far, take a moment to answer these questions about collaborative thinking. If you don't get the correct answers, you can go back and review the content again before going to the next section.

SUMMARY

Module Summary

This module covered the emotional intelligence domain “use emotions”, the competency of decision-making and the behaviour of collaborative thinking.

The key points to remember are:

- Caregivers' experiences are impacted by what they think (head), feel (heart) and do (hands). These experiences impact the decisions they make through their emotional cycles of change.
- When our brain is stimulated by strong emotions it releases neuro-chemicals that can interfere with our ability to make good decisions.
- We use both sides of our brain to make decisions:
 - Our rational brain is analytical and logical. We use this part for reasoning and making decisions based on facts.
 - Our emotional brain is where our habits, and cravings come from. We use this part for intuition and making decisions based on feelings.

- The best approach to decision-making is to be flexible and use both reasoning and intuition depending upon the situation and type of decisions we need to make.
- Decision-making is the process of choosing a particular course of action. Decisions require careful thought and may generate conflict, which makes emotional intelligence a critical part of making good decisions.
- Good decision-making consists of three main elements: problem solving, reality testing, and impulse control. The five steps of the decision-making process include
 1. Identify the goal
 2. Gather information for evaluating options
 3. Consider the consequences
 4. Make your decision
 5. Evaluate your decision
- There are six strategies for improving your decisions:
 1. Recognize areas of over-confidence
 2. Reframe your problems
 3. Take your mind off the problem
 4. Reflect on your decisions
 5. Label your emotions
 6. Acknowledge your biases
- Collaborative thinking is the ability to use emotional intelligence skills in decision-making—to understand emotions and include multiple points of view to create a holistic solution to often complex challenges.
- Collaborative thinking occurs when you apply emotional intelligence skills to shared decision-making.
- The collaborative thinking process brings emotional intelligence to the practice of shared decision-making.
- The collaborative thinking process includes 4 steps:
 1. Understand experiences and emotions impacting decisions
 2. Present all the options
 3. Discuss the benefits and risks of each option
 4. Communicate openly and reinforce decisions

Reflection

Consider what you have learned in this module and respond to the following reflection questions.

Think about a time when your emotions hampered your ability to make a decision. [pause]

Why did you get side tracked?

Were emotions involved in your decision?

What's Next?

In the next module, we will learn more about the domain of use emotions, and explore the competency of coaching, and behaviour of guiding by asking the right questions.

The **Canadian Home Care Association (CHCA)** is a national non-profit association dedicated to strengthening integrated community-based care. Launched in 2021, the CHCA Learning Centre offers a range of flexible and well-designed courses for home and community care providers. Using a blended learning model that leverages technology and instructional design our micro-training courses maximize participant choice and engagement.

Partners in Restorative Care (PiRC) is an innovative capacity-building initiative for health care providers (regulated and non-regulated) to enhance their abilities to recognize, understand and address challenges experienced by caregivers when they are supporting a loved-one who is receiving care in their home.

CHCA Emotional Intelligence Learning Program increases health care providers emotional intelligence skills through a 3 step process: (1) self-directed e-learning modules, (2) facilitated group learning and (3) practical field application through a structured mentoring process.

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