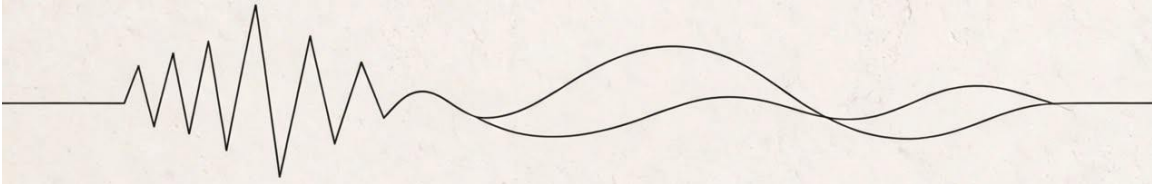
FROM TRIGGERED TO BALANCED



A Practical Guide to Emotional Intelligence, Self-Regulation, and Resilience for Adults

Trevor Stephenson

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Dedication

For everyone who has ever felt too much, reacted in ways they later regretted, and still kept trying to show up with more kindness and clarity.

This is for your becoming.

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Introduction: Welcome to Your Journey from Triggered to Balanced



If you picked up this book because you sometimes feel hijacked by your own emotions, you are in the right place. Perhaps you snap at people you love and feel guilty afterward. Perhaps anxiety keeps you awake at night looping through what-ifs. Perhaps you go quiet and withdraw

when you feel hurt, or you feel overwhelmed by the demands of work, family, and life and wonder why you can't just stay calm.

You are not broken. You are human, with a nervous system that learned early how to protect you, and that protection sometimes works overtime.

I wrote this book because emotional intelligence is not something we are simply born with - it is something we can learn, practice, and grow at any age. And it changes everything. When you understand your emotions, you stop being controlled by them. When you can regulate your nervous system, you gain choice. When you can choose in line with your values, you build a life that feels more balanced, resilient, and connected.

This book was written for adults who want practical tools, not just theory. You will find science explained in plain language, real-life examples, and tools you can use in the next five minutes, not just someday. This is

not about never feeling triggered - that is not realistic. It is about feeling triggered and being able to pause, steady yourself, understand what is happening, and respond in a way you respect.

We will walk through three parts together. In Part I, we build understanding - what emotions are, what happens in your brain and body, how to name and decode what you feel, and why we get triggered so easily. In Part II, we build your core regulation system - the pause, the 4-part Body, Breath, Mind, Action framework, and specific tools for anxiety, anger, shame, guilt, sadness and fear. In Part III, we focus on transformation - rewiring old patterns, building daily resilience, bringing emotional intelligence into your relationships, and creating a personalized plan you can live by.

You don't need to read this perfectly or do every exercise perfectly. Read at your own pace. Try what resonates. Come back to

what you need. Small, consistent practice matters more than intensity.

One gentle invitation before we begin: As you read, try to bring curiosity and self-compassion. You learned to cope the way you did for good reasons. We will honor those reasons while learning new ways that serve you better now.

Thank you for trusting me with part of your journey. Let's begin.

- Trevor Stephenson

How to Use This Book



Visual Guide: Icons Used in This Book

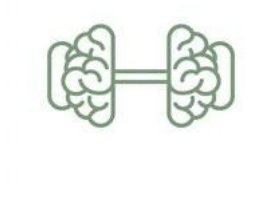
Warning / Gentle Caution: Signals for sensitive content, common pitfalls, or when to seek extra support.



Important Information: Key insights, research findings, and essential takeaways to remember.



Exercises: Practical activities and prompts to practice skills and build new habits.



Case Study: Deep dives into real-life examples to illustrate key concepts in action.



Read sequentially for the first time: Chapters build on each other. The early chapters give you language and understanding that make later tools more effective.

Practice as you go: At the end of each section, pause and try one small practice. Even 60 seconds of grounding or naming an emotion counts.

Keep a notebook or use the journals in the back: Tracking triggers, tools, and wins helps you see progress that is otherwise invisible.

Start tiny: Choose 2-3 tools that resonate most rather than trying to do everything. Mastery comes from repetition, not variety.

Return as a reference: After your first read, use this book as a toolkit.

- Feeling anxious? Go to Chapter 6.
- Feeling angry? Go to Chapter 7.
- Having a hard day?

Go to your Difficult Day Menu in Chapter 10.

Seek support when needed: This book is a guide, not a replacement for therapy. If you notice persistent distress or trauma responses, please reach out to a qualified professional. Seeking help is a resilient act.

Chapter 1 - What Emotions Really Are and Why They Matter



Section 1 - The Myths and Truths About Emotions

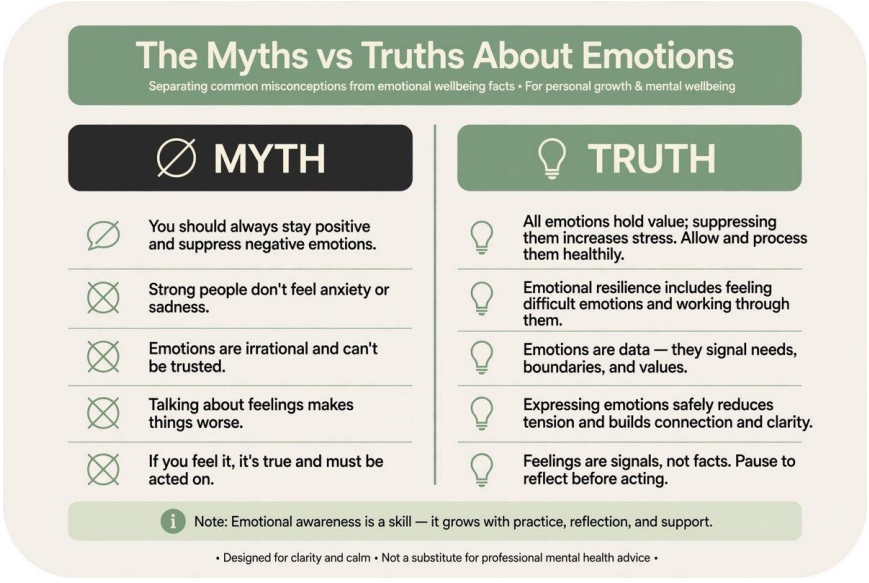


Figure 1: The Myths and Truths About Emotions – This comparison shows common myths (emotions are weakness, should be suppressed) versus truths (emotions are data, intelligent signals). It helps readers reframe emotions as messengers, not enemies.

If you grew up like most of us did, you probably learned a lot about emotions without ever being directly taught about them. You learned by watching how the adults around you handled their anger,

whether it was safe to cry, whether anxiety was something to talk about or something to hide. And from all of those little moments, you likely picked up some rules that felt true at the time but might be quietly making life harder now.

One of the most common myths is that there are good emotions and bad emotions. Happy, calm, confident - those are good. Angry, anxious, sad, jealous - those are bad. We should feel more of the first and less of the second. If we were really mature, really healed, really together, we would mostly feel the good ones. This sounds reasonable, but it creates a hidden war inside. When you believe anger is bad, you don't just feel anger - you feel shame about feeling anger. When you believe anxiety is a weakness, you feel anxious about being anxious. Suddenly you have two layers of emotion to carry instead of one.

The truth is, emotions aren't good or bad. They are information. Every single one of them evolved for a reason. Anger tells you

about a boundary that has been crossed or a value that matters to you. Anxiety tells you that your brain has detected uncertainty and is trying to keep you safe, even if it is a bit overprotective. Sadness tells you about loss and what you care about. Even emotions we label as messy, like jealousy or shame, are trying to tell us something about belonging, about our standards, about our place in a group. When we stop sorting emotions into good and bad and start asking, what is this trying to tell me, the whole dynamic changes.

Another myth is that emotionally intelligent people don't feel strong emotions, or that they can control them completely. You might imagine someone who is always calm, always measured, never rattled. That's not emotional regulation. That's suppression with a nice outfit on. Real emotional intelligence looks very different. It looks like someone who feels anger rise hot in their chest, notices it, and says internally, okay, there's anger, that's important, let me pause

before I respond. It looks like someone who feels anxiety before a presentation and doesn't pretend it's not there, but breathes, grounds, and speaks anyway. The goal was never to feel less. The goal is to feel clearly and respond wisely.

There is also the myth that emotions are irrational and get in the way of logical decisions. We often hear, don't be so emotional, as if being emotional means being illogical.

But neuroscience has shown us something fascinating: without emotion, you can't actually make good decisions at all. People who have lost access to emotional signals due to brain injury struggle enormously to make even simple choices, like what to have for lunch or which appointment to book. That's because emotions are the body's way of summarizing what matters. Your gut feeling isn't mystical; it's your brain rapidly integrating past experience, values, and predicted outcomes. Logic and emotion were never enemies. They are partners.

And perhaps the most damaging myth of all: that if you feel something uncomfortable, you should fix it immediately. We live in a world that offers endless quick fixes for uncomfortable feelings. Scroll, snack, shop, hustle, numb, optimize. But emotions aren't problems to be fixed on the spot. They are experiences to be understood and moved through. When you try to fix anxiety by immediately trying to make it disappear, you teach your nervous system that anxiety is dangerous. When you allow anxiety to be present, get curious about it, and support your body through it, you teach your nervous system that you can handle it. That is how regulation is built - not by elimination, but by relationship.

So let's lay down some truer foundations as we begin. Emotions are normal. All of them. Emotions are temporary - even when they feel endless, they move in waves, typically peaking and passing within 90 seconds to 20 minutes if we don't feed them with

additional story. Emotions are bodily - you feel them in your body before you have words for them. Emotions are learned and adaptable - the way you respond to anger today is not fixed for life. And perhaps most importantly, emotions are workable. You can learn their language.

If you have spent years believing you are too emotional, or not emotional enough, or that there is something wrong with how you feel, this first reframe is essential: there is nothing wrong with you. You have a sensitive, responsive emotional system that has been trying to protect you, guide you, and connect you, often with outdated tools. Our work together is not to get rid of that system, but to update it.

Section 2 - The Purpose and Intelligence Behind Every Emotion

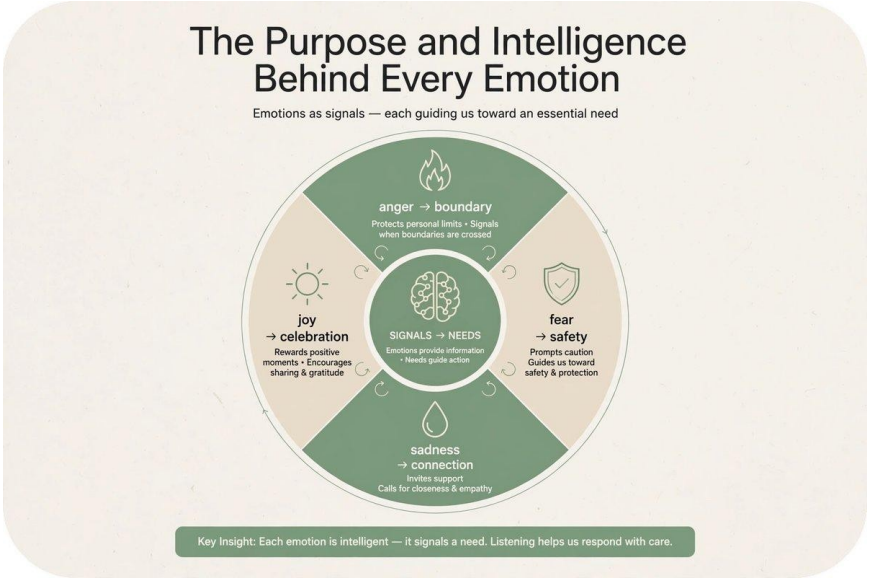


Figure 2: The Purpose and Intelligence Behind Every Emotion – Circular map linking each core emotion to its adaptive purpose: anger signals boundary violations, fear signals safety needs, sadness signals need for connection, joy signals alignment with values.

To understand why emotions matter, it helps to understand why they exist in the first place. From an evolutionary perspective, emotions are shortcuts. They evolved long before language, long before

rational analysis, to help humans survive, belong, and make fast decisions.

Think of fear. If your ancestors were walking through tall grass and heard a rustle, they didn't have time to conduct a full risk assessment. The brain that felt a flash of fear, sent adrenaline through the body, and moved quickly was the brain that survived. Fear's job is to detect threat and mobilize you for protection. Today, that same system might fire when you get a terse email from your boss or when someone doesn't text back.

The context has changed, but the purpose is the same: alert to potential threat.

Anger's purpose is equally important. Anger arises when a boundary has been crossed, when something unfair has happened, when a goal is blocked. It floods your body with energy to assert, to protect, to act. Without anger, you would struggle to say no, to stand up for yourself or others, to fight for what matters. The problem is never anger

itself. The problem is when anger is the only tool we have, or when it comes out sideways because we never learned how to use it directly and respectfully.

Sadness signals loss. It slows you down, turns your attention inward, and often calls for support from others. In cultures that value constant productivity and positivity, sadness can feel like a failure. But sadness is how we process that something or someone mattered. It is how we grieve, how we let go, how we make space for what is next. Without sadness, we wouldn't know what we love.

Even anxiety, which so many of us wish we could delete, has intelligence. Anxiety is your brain's way of scanning for uncertainty. It says, there might be something important here that needs attention.

- Will I be okay?
- Will they accept me?
- What if this goes wrong?

Anxiety becomes overwhelming not because it is broken, but because it is overactive - often trying to protect you from the possibility of future pain by making you worry now.

Shame and guilt, which feel particularly uncomfortable, are social emotions. Guilt says, I did something that conflicts with my values. Shame says, I worry I am not enough as I am. Both evolved to keep us connected to the group, because for humans, belonging was survival. When we understand them this way, we can approach them with curiosity instead of judgment.

- What value of mine feels compromised?
- What part of me is longing to feel accepted?

Joy, gratitude, love, excitement, curiosity - these tell you what energizes you, what to move toward, what to nurture and repeat. They broaden your attention, build resilience, and deepen connection. We often

rush past these, chasing the next achievement, without letting them land. But noticing and savoring positive emotions is a core part of emotional regulation too.

When you start to see emotions as messengers rather than masters, your relationship with them shifts. Instead of asking, how do I stop feeling this, you begin to ask, what is this emotion trying to help me understand?

That question alone changes your nervous system. It moves you from threat mode into curiosity mode. It activates the prefrontal cortex - the part of your brain that can observe, reason, and choose - instead of staying locked in the amygdala's alarm system.

Let's try a small practice you can use this week. Pick one emotion that has come up recently - maybe irritation at your partner, nervousness before a meeting, disappointment about something that didn't work out.

Pause and ask yourself gently: If this emotion had a positive intention.

- What might it be?
- What is it trying to protect?
- What value is underneath it?

You don't need to solve it. Just listen. That act of listening is the beginning of emotional intelligence. It tells your internal system, I hear you. I'm not going to push you away or be run by you. I'm going to learn from you.

This is the intelligence we are cultivating together - not the intelligence of never feeling, but the intelligence of feeling with awareness, with compassion, and with choice.

Section 3 - Why Understanding Emotions Changes Everything

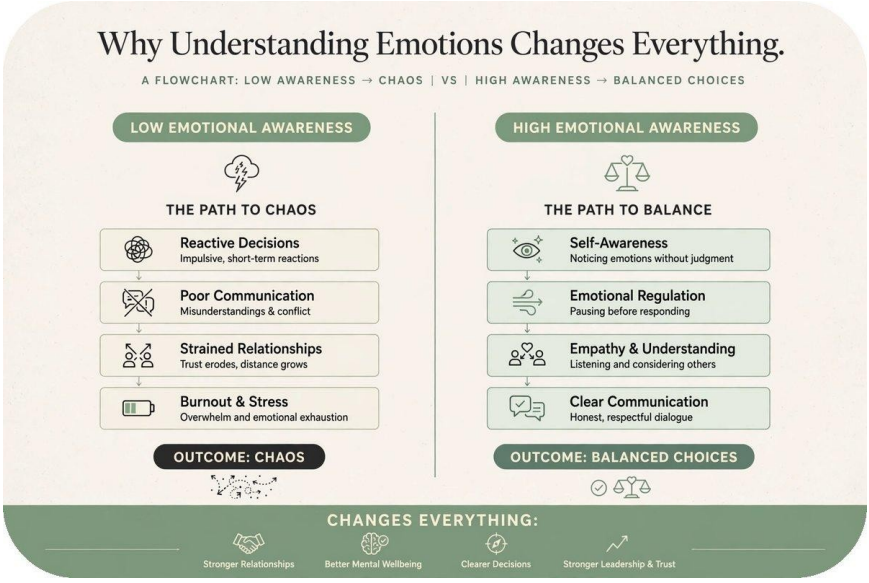


Figure 3: Why Understanding Emotions Changes Everything – Before/after flowchart: low emotional awareness leads to impulsive reaction and regret, while high awareness creates pause, choice, and balanced outcomes.

- So why spend an entire book on this?
- Why does understanding emotions matter so much for your everyday life?

Because emotions are underneath everything. The decision to speak up or stay silent in a meeting is emotional. The way you

respond when your teenager slams the door is emotional. Whether you reach for connection or withdrawal when you feel hurt is emotional. Your relationship with money, with food, with rest, with ambition - all of it is filtered through your emotional world.

When you don't understand your emotions, life can feel confusing and reactive. You might find yourself saying things you don't mean and regretting them later. You might feel anxious for no clear reason and spend hours trying to figure out why. You might shut down when you most want to connect. You might feel fine one moment and overwhelmed the next, without a clear thread. It's exhausting to live that way, and it can quietly erode your confidence. You start to wonder, why can't I handle this better?

When you begin to understand your emotions, the fog lifts. You start to notice the early signs - the tightness in your chest before anger, the buzzing in your stomach before anxiety, the heaviness before

sadness. That early noticing gives you choice. You can intervene earlier, more gently, more effectively. Instead of going from zero to sixty, you catch yourself at twenty and say, oh, I'm getting activated, let me take a breath, let me ground.

Understanding emotions also changes your relationships. So much conflict is not really about the dishes or the text or the tone of voice. It's about unspoken emotions underneath. When you can say, I felt hurt when that happened because I value feeling included, rather than, you always ignore me, the entire conversation changes. You move from blame to vulnerability, from attack to invitation. People can meet vulnerability. They struggle to meet accusation. Emotional literacy gives you language that creates connection instead of distance.

It changes how you parent too. When your child has a big feeling, and you understand that their prefrontal cortex is still developing, that their tantrum is not manipulation but dysregulation, you can

respond with more patience and co-regulation rather than punishment. And perhaps most powerfully, when you understand your own triggers from your own childhood, you can stop passing them on automatically. You can pause and choose a different response.

It changes your work. Leadership research consistently shows that emotional intelligence is one of the strongest predictors of effective leadership, more so than IQ or technical skill. Why?

Because work is made of people, and people are emotional. The ability to stay calm under pressure, to navigate difficult feedback, to motivate, to handle disappointment without collapsing or blaming - that's emotional regulation in action. Teams feel safe when their leader can regulate. Creativity emerges when people feel emotionally safe enough to take risks.

And it changes your relationship with yourself. Many of us carry an internal critic that says we shouldn't feel this way, we should be over this by now, what's wrong with me. Understanding emotions brings self-compassion. You begin to see that your anxiety makes sense given your history. Your anger makes sense given your boundaries. Your sadness makes sense given your losses. When you approach yourself with compassion instead of criticism, your nervous system calms. You become someone you can rely on, not someone you have to fight.

This book is built on a simple but powerful framework that we will return to again and again: Understand → Name → Regulate → Transform → Apply. First, we understand how emotions are made. Then we learn to name and decode them accurately. Then we develop real-time tools to regulate them. Then we do the deeper work of rewiring old patterns. Then we apply all of this to resilience, relationships and

everyday life. Each chapter builds on the last, so by the end, you don't just have information - you have a lived system.

You don't need to be perfect at this. You don't need to get it right every time. Emotional intelligence is not a destination you arrive at; it is a practice you return to. Some days you will navigate emotions beautifully. Other days you will get hooked, reactive, overwhelmed. That is human. The difference is that with understanding, you can repair faster, learn more quickly, and treat yourself with more kindness along the way.

As we close this first chapter, I invite you to consider one question to carry with you: What would change if you approached your emotions not as problems to be fixed, but as messengers to be understood?

You don't need to answer it fully now. Just let it sit. In the next chapter, we will explore exactly how emotions are made - in your brain, in your body, and in the stories you

tell - so you can begin to work with them, not against them.

Case Study - Chapter 1:

Maya, 42, London. Maya grew up in a home where anger was punished and sadness was met with 'cheer up'.

She learned the myth that good people only feel happy and calm.

As a manager, she suppressed irritation with her team until she exploded in meetings, then felt intense shame.

Working with Chapter 1, Maya began tracking emotions as information, not good or bad.

She noticed irritation meant her value of respect was touched, anxiety meant uncertainty about a deadline, and sadness meant loss of

connection with her team.

By reframing emotions as messengers, she stopped adding shame on top of anger and could address the underlying need directly.

Within three weeks, her team reported feeling more able to raise issues early.

End of Chapter Exercise - Chapter 1:

Emotion Myths Audit. For 7 days, carry a small notebook.

Each time you feel an uncomfortable emotion, write the emotion, the automatic judgment about it for example bad, weak, too much, and then reframe as information using What might this be trying to tell me about my need, value, boundary, or

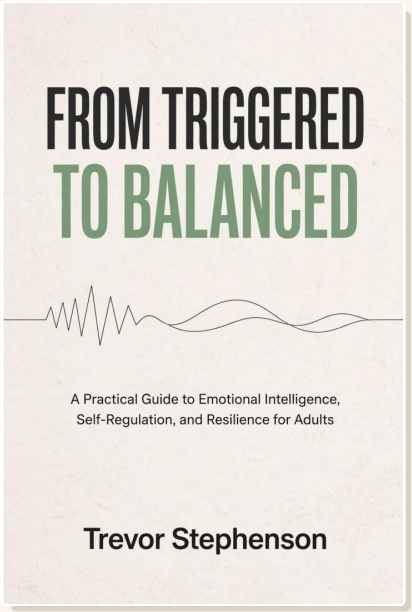
care?

At day 7, review patterns:

- Which myths showed up most?
- Which reframe reduced secondary shame?

Choose one myth to consciously replace with truth.

Emotions are normal and temporary messengers and practise the reframe daily.



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Loved this sample?

Keep reading. Chapter 2 is how emotions are made, in brain, body and mind.

When you understand your emotions, you stop being controlled by them.

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