

AMAN KWATRA, LADISLAV TIMULAK,
SHARON LU HUIXIAN, CIARA JOYCE
AND MARY CREANER

TRANSFORMING EMOTIONAL PAIN

An Emotion-Focused Workbook

Transforming Emotional Pain

Transforming Emotional Pain presents an accessible self-help approach to mental health based on Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT).

Based on the principles of EFT, and developed by clinicians and researchers, this client-focused workbook is designed to supplement psychotherapy and can also serve as a self-help book. It will help readers learn how to regulate feelings that are unpleasant and transform painful feelings, so that they can fulfil their needs and feel more connected and empowered in their lives. Providing a step-by-step sequential guide to exploring, embracing, and transforming emotions, the various chapters guide the reader to help overcome emotional avoidance, with sections on: transforming the emotional self-interrupter; transforming the inner self-worrier; transforming the self-critic; and healing from emotional injury.

This workbook can be used by trained therapists, mental health professionals, psychology professionals, and trainees as supplementary to their therapeutic interventions with clients. It can also be used by general readers with an interest in self-help literature and resources or anyone wanting to explore, embrace, and transform their emotions.

Aman Kwatra, DCounsPsych, is Consultant Psychologist and Research Associate at Spectrum.Life. His main professional and research interests are in leveraging digital technologies for the provision and advancement of mental health services.

Ladislav Timulak, PhD, is Professor in Counselling Psychology at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. His main research interest is psychotherapy research, particularly the development of emotion-focused therapy.

Sharon Lu Huixian, DClinPsych, is a Principal Clinical Psychologist at the Institute of Mental Health, Singapore. Her main research interests are in the implementation and dissemination of internet-delivered interventions and psychotherapy outcomes research.

Ciara Joyce, DClinPsych, is a Clinical Psychologist at the Student Counselling Service in Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. She is interested in the promotion of mental health and social change.

Mary Creaner, DPsych, is an Assistant Professor with the Doctorate in Counselling Psychology and Director of the MSc in Clinical Supervision, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland.



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Contents

<i>About the Authors</i>	vi
<i>Disclaimer</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Glossary</i>	x
Introduction to the Transforming Emotional Pain Workbook	1
1 The Role of Emotions in Our Lives	8
2 Optimal Use of Emotions	29
3 Overcoming Emotional Avoidance (The Self-Interrupter)	51
4 Overcoming Emotional Avoidance (The Self-Worrier)	67
5 Transforming the Self-Critic	84
6 Transforming Interpersonal Emotional Injury (Unfinished Business)	102
7 Summary and Conclusion	129
<i>References</i>	132
<i>Appendix I</i>	133
<i>Appendix II</i>	159
<i>Appendix III</i>	162
<i>Appendix IV</i>	165
<i>Appendix V</i>	168
<i>Appendix VI</i>	172
<i>Index</i>	176

About the Authors

Aman Kwatra, DCounsPsych, is a Consultant Psychologist and Research Associate at Spectrum.Life. His main professional and research interests are in leveraging digital technologies for the provision and advancement of mental health services and in recovery from complex trauma. Aman completed his MSc in Psychology at University of St. Andrews, Scotland, and attained his Doctorate in Counselling Psychology at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. He has previously worked with the Irish Prison Service and has a background in Post-War Recovery Studies (University of York) and International Relations (University of Bristol).

Ladislav Timulak, PhD, is Professor in Counselling Psychology at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. Ladislav (or short Laco; read Latso) is involved in the training of counselling psychologists and various psychotherapy trainings in Ireland and internationally. His main research interest is psychotherapy research, particularly the development of emotion-focused therapy. He is currently developing this form of therapy as a transdiagnostic treatment for depression, anxiety, and related disorders. He has written eight books, over 100 peer reviewed papers and chapters in both his native language, Slovak, and in English. His most recent books include *Transforming Emotional Pain in Psychotherapy: An Emotion-Focused Approach* (Routledge, 2015), *Transforming Generalized Anxiety: An Emotion-Focused Approach* (with co-author James McElvaney; Routledge, 2017), and *Essentials of Descriptive-Interpretive Qualitative Research* (with Robert Elliott) and *Transdiagnostic Emotion-Focused Therapy* (with co-author Daragh Keogh) both published by the American Psychological Association (2021). He serves on various editorial boards. He maintains a part-time private practice.

Sharon Lu Huixian, DClinPsych, is a Principal Clinical Psychologist at the Institute of Mental Health, Singapore. She completed her clinical training in Macquarie University, Sydney. She has over a decade of experience in providing outpatient and inpatient psychological services to a wide range of clinical disorders ranging from depression, anxiety to schizophrenia and those with interpersonal conflicts. She regularly conducts clinical supervision, clinical training and research. She also worked as an Adjunct Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology in the National University of Singapore. Sharon has a keen interest in the delivery of internet-based treatments to reduce treatment barriers, deliberate practice to improve therapeutic expertise in therapists and maternal mental health. Her recent publication (with colleagues) includes: 'A Randomised Controlled Trial of Clinician-Guided Internet-Based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Depressed

Patients in Singapore’, *Frontiers in Psychology* (2021). She is also a co-editor of a book on Mind This Voice Series: *The Write to Recovery*, which is a collection of clients’ narratives through the road of struggles and recovery.

Ciara Joyce, DClinPsych, is a Clinical Psychologist and Student Counsellor at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. She completed her clinical training in the United Kingdom at Lancaster University with the National Health Service (NHS), and she is a chartered member of the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI). Ciara has experience working therapeutically across the lifespan, using an integrative perspective of person-centered, compassion, and emotion-focused approaches. Her research interests include better understanding the collective power structures that affect mental health and exploring the use of particular therapeutic modalities to improve individual wellbeing. Her professional interests involve working therapeutically with individuals and groups, providing training and supervision, and disseminating knowledge to empower social change. Publications include: ‘Beyond the Revolving Door: A Narrative Enquiry Into the Long-Term Lived Experience of Eating Disorders’, *Qualitative Health Research* (2019) and a co-authored chapter on ‘Modelling Imperfection and Developing the Imperfect Self’ in Parry, S. (Eds) *Sharing Compassion: Self-Care and Resilience in Clinical Practice* (2017). Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Mary Creaner, DPsych, is an Assistant Professor and Research Coordinator with the Doctorate in Counselling Psychology and Director of the M.Sc. in Clinical Supervision, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. Having commenced her career in education, Mary subsequently qualified as a psychotherapist and clinical supervisor and has been involved in developing and delivering a variety of adult education courses and professional development training in this area for over 25 years. She is an accredited therapist and clinical supervisor with the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP), and a member of the American Psychological Association (APA). Among her recent publications is a chapter on the *Role of Social Media in Counselling and Psychotherapy* in R. Tribe and J. Morrissey (Eds.) *Handbook of Professional and Ethical Issues for Psychologists, Counsellors, and Psychotherapists* (3rd ed., Routledge, 2020). Mary’s research interests include clinical supervision, adult learning, and psychotherapy research and she presents her research nationally and internationally.

Disclaimer

This workbook is based on Emotion-Focused Therapy, which is an evidence-based psychological approach. However, please note that none of the authors take responsibility for any possible consequences from any treatment, procedure, task, exercise, or action taken by any person reading or following the information in this book. The publication of this book does not constitute the practice of medicine or psychotherapy. This workbook does not attempt to replace or substitute for medical or professional advice, diagnosis, treatment, or any other instructions from your doctor, qualified psychological or other health professional. The authors advise the reader to check with a doctor, psychologist, or other qualified professional before undertaking any course of treatment regarding any matters related to your own health or situation or if you have specific questions in this regard.

Please note that the guidance and strategies are intended as self-help and may not be suitable for your situation. You should, where necessary, consult with an appropriate qualified professional. The authors shall not be liable for any loss or profit or any commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages. Case examples referred in this book are generic and based on collective representation. No relation to any specific person is either implied or intended.

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Glossary

Experiencer This is a part of ourselves impacted by our self-critic, self-worrier, or self-interrupter, etc. We referred to this part of ourselves in the chair dialogue tasks (such as Self-Critic, Self-Worrier, Self-Interrupter). It is the part where we feel the cost of the problematic (self) treatment and it is the part where we articulate what we need.

Real-Play This is the term we use for describing the tasks that we are suggesting for you to engage in. We call them real-play rather than role-play as you are bringing to them your real experiences.

Self-Critic This is a part of us that is critical of ourselves by highlighting our shortcomings, and evaluating ourselves very harshly. In an adaptive form it is a part of us that wants to better us (self-adjust), wants us to meet our standards. Unfortunately, this process often turns out to be less adaptive and turns into problematic self-criticism.

Self-Interrupter This is a part of us that wants to stop us from feeling (painful) emotions, or wants us to stop expressing feelings, the expression of which is scary for us, or it is a part of us that stops us from getting into situations that could evoke painful emotions in us. The interruption protects us but it also cuts us off from important and valuable experiences.

Self-Worrier This is a part of us that produces worries. We self-worry by mentally engaging with potential scenarios that could evoke painful feelings. In this way, we want to prepare ourselves for those potential scenarios, however, it leaves us feeling anxious.

Introduction to the Transforming Emotional Pain Workbook

Learning Goals

- 1 To gain an overview of the background, purpose, and structure of the workbook and gain insights into how the course presented in this workbook can be used for helping you to tolerate and transform painful emotions.
- 2 To introduce the various chapters of the workbook and highlight important things to remember before beginning the course.

Introduction

Welcome to the *Transforming Emotional Pain* workbook. This workbook is designed to support people who want to be more in touch with their emotions, who want to be informed by their emotions, who want to be able to stay with their emotions, and who want to transform particularly painful emotions into new more fulfilling and enriching emotional experiences. By picking up this book you have already made a commitment to your overall wellbeing and have taken an important step in learning how to ‘connect with’, ‘be informed by’, and if needed, ‘transform’ your emotions.

This workbook is based on the theoretical principles of Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT). EFT is an evidence-based psychological intervention that has been developed and derived from a long history and tradition of humanistic therapies (e.g., person-centred therapy and Gestalt therapy). Since its development (for instance, see the works of Greenberg et al., 1993; Elliott et al. 2004; [Greenberg, 2015](#); Greenberg, 2017), EFT has been extensively researched and has gained a strong body of evidence supporting its effectiveness. It has also become very popular amongst practitioners. This programme is based on the work of EFT theorists stated already (e.g., [Greenberg et al. 1993](#); [Elliott et al. 2004](#)) and specifically on the principles conceptualized and presented in the works of [Timulak \(2015\)](#), [Timulak and McElvane \(2018\)](#), and [Timulak and Keogh \(2022\)](#). It has been developed by clinicians and researchers to ensure you have access to the most up-to-date, evidence-based approaches to learning more about the value and role of emotions in our lives.

The purpose of this workbook is to provide you with important psychological experiences and knowledge that can empower you to better understand the role that emotions play in your life, so that you can *be informed by what they are trying to say to you* and *transform them if necessary*. Emotions tell us whether our needs (for closeness, connection, recognition, validation, safety) are being met in our life. Emotions thus contain important information about our wellbeing in the world, particularly in the

interaction with other people around us. Therefore, *instead of avoiding* emotions or trying to get rid of them, we hope that you will be able to embrace them and *use them to inform and guide* your choices and actions in life.

To this end, the workbook offers information as well as various experiential tasks that you can use to strengthen your capacity to attend to emotions, differentiate between them, articulate the needs to which the emotions point, and eventually transform the emotions that keep you stuck in the pain that is too much or too difficult to be with. These tasks are self-explorative in nature and can be undertaken with minimal additional resources. Essentially, all you need to work through this workbook is a pen and a notebook, two empty chairs, and a quiet place where you can work through the tasks without being interrupted. You can go through this workbook on your own or as a supplement to emotion-focused therapy. [To find qualified EFT therapists in your country, please see the list on the website of the International Society for Emotion-Focused Therapy (www.iseft.org).]

An Emotion-Focused Approach

Emotions tell us what is important for us and whether our emotional needs are being fulfilled. They tell us whether we feel connected with our close ones, whether we are valued by the people whose opinions matter to us, or whether we feel safe in the world. We all want to have pleasant feelings and avoid unpleasant feelings. However, avoiding or disconnecting from unpleasant feelings can lead to more distress down the line as we are no longer in a position to listen to what these important feelings have to tell us. The main goal of EFT is to get a sense about what emotions are telling us in terms of our needs. Thereafter, we can start to find ways of intentionally meeting those needs within ourselves, in the relationships with people around us, and in pursuing our life projects. Therefore, the key focus of this workbook is to help you learn how to *access* your emotions, how to be able to *stay* with and *transform* them if needed so that you can carry on with things that feel difficult and live your life safely, fully, and connected to people around you.

About this Workbook

This workbook is designed to be followed over at least eight weeks duration but can be followed for a much longer period or you can return to it as needed once you finish it. It is a practical and experiential tasks-based workbook. As you progress through this workbook, you will be encouraged to work through each chapter within a guided but flexible time period. Some chapters may also recommend repeated practice of certain important tasks. Additionally, each chapter will contain content and tools that have been designed to help you engage with the materials learnt and to reflect on their specific relevance for your own life. To make this workbook as easy to follow as possible, we have provided you with examples of how to complete the tasks, by tracing the journey of two composite participants (i.e., hypothetical examples that are based on our experiences of people with various difficulties), as they progress through this workbook alongside your own journey. Examples of how these two participants (we call them **Timothy** and **Alice**) engage with the various activities offered in this workbook are contained in the appropriate chapter appendices. The first example follows the experience of Timothy and the second follows the experience of Alice. See [Boxes 0.1](#) and [0.2](#). for more information about the two examples.

Box 0.1**Case Example: Timothy**

Timothy is a 27-year-old gym instructor who shares a house with three of his friends. He recently broke up with his girlfriend of two years because she wanted him to move in with her, which he didn't feel ready for. Timothy has been feeling quite low since the break-up. His friend who he works with in the gym has expressed concern for him after he showed up late for work on a couple of occasions. Timothy values his job at the gym as it is a role that he feels he is good at, and somewhere he feels he belongs. He found not working during the Covid-19 pandemic to be especially difficult and ended up putting on some weight. He is frustrated that his mood has started to impact this aspect of his life. He worries about having hurt his ex-girlfriend's feelings and that he is letting the gym down.

Timothy would describe himself as quite a shy person. He has also struggled with his confidence over the years having experienced bullying from a young age in school. Timothy's mother is Black, and his father is White, and there were no other students of similar background in the primary school he attended. Halfway through primary school, when Timothy was 7, his dad moved away for work and his parents separated shortly afterwards. This was a real blow for Timothy and although he still saw his father every second weekend, he felt hurt and confused by his decision to leave. He wondered if it was his fault that his parents had separated. Timothy has always been very close to his mother and enjoys spending time with her. Growing up she worked long hours as a nurse and it was important for him to help her out around the house. He moved out after finishing college but still lives nearby.

Timothy tried to work hard throughout his time in school, but he struggled with dyslexia, so by the time Timothy started secondary school he felt like a bit of a failure and was a loner. There were a few multicultural and multi-ethnic students in the school he attended but none had separated parents like him. He has always felt like he has stood out for all the wrong reasons, and still feels like he doesn't belong. When he travels to visit his mother's extended family he feels like the outsider. Even when he spends time with his dad, he continues to feel like an outsider. This makes him even worry that people will think he is adopted. Timothy's mum encouraged him to get involved in sports at school and that is where Timothy started to excel and make friends. He met his ex-girlfriend, Rachel, on a night out. She was his first girlfriend, and he cares about her a lot, but he is scared to commit to being with her forever. He felt that they were too different and that he would only end up holding her back.

Course Overview and Summary

An emotion-focused approach may be different from other therapeutic approaches that you may have previously tried. However, the experiential tasks that you will find in this workbook are quite straightforward and with some regular practice, you can quickly get familiar with them. The course itself is divided into seven chapters. A description of each of the chapters and their main aims are included in the following sections, and a brief overview and summary is also provided in [Table 0.1](#). The chapters in this workbook have been designed to be reviewed in the order they are presented here, however, if there is a particular chapter that captures your attention, feel free to review it out of turn.

Box 0.2**Case Example: Alice**

Alice is a 47-year-old part-time sales manager who lives with her husband of 16 years, her 12-year-old son and her mother-in-law. She decided to speak to her family doctor about her mood after talking to her husband who shared with her that he noticed that her mood has been more irritable and would often snap at him and their son over trivial issues. For example, she raised her voice when her son forgot to bring his wallet to school and she felt very guilty about it afterwards. Alice also reported that she has difficulties going to sleep at night and often wakes up at 4 or 5 am in the mornings and cannot return to sleep again. During the Covid-19 pandemic, she avoided social gatherings due to her fear of the virus and it has been difficult for her to rekindle her interest in social activities since. She also lost interest in her hobbies such as yoga and having meals with her friends.

Alice described herself as a perfectionistic person who tends to drive herself quite hard to excel in whatever she does. She switched to part-time work two years ago, so that she could spend more time tutoring her son who is struggling in school. She is stressed about preparing her son for his primary school leaving examinations this year. She struggles with self-critical thoughts such as, *“I am so weak and can’t handle stress as well as the other working moms”*. Additionally, her mother-in-law had a fall last year and her husband decided to move her to their house so that he can take care of her. Tensions with her mother-in-law mainly arise from Alice perceiving her mother-in-law to be critical of her parenting practices.

Alice grew up in a family where her parents were not emotionally expressive and mainly showed their love through providing for their children’s physical needs. Alice has one younger brother, and she often thinks that her parents loved him more than her because males were traditionally favoured over females in her extended family/community. Her parents were also very strict with her and held high expectations of her to take care of her younger brother and to be a good role model to him.

Table 0.1 Overview of the Workbook

Chapter 1: The Role of Emotions in Our Lives

This chapter focuses on how our emotions provide information about our relationships, and our emotional needs.

Chapter 2: Optimal Use of Emotions

This chapter focuses on how to connect with your emotions and how to tolerate them when they feel overwhelming.

Chapter 3: Overcoming Emotional Avoidance (The Self-Interrupter)

This chapter looks at the main ways in which we try and protect ourselves from difficult feelings by stopping them or avoiding situations that could trigger them.

Chapter 4: Overcoming Emotional Avoidance (The Self-Worrier)

This chapter builds on the progress made in the previous chapter and focuses on how we worry about potential situations that could trigger emotional pain.

Chapter 5: Transforming the Self-Critic

This chapter aims at making us more aware of the ways in which we often criticize ourselves unhelpfully, particularly in the context of emotionally demanding situations.

Chapter 6: Transforming Interpersonal Emotional Injury (Unfinished Business)

This chapter focuses on how to transform and heal interpersonal emotional injuries.

Chapter 7: Summary and Conclusion

This chapter focuses on consolidating the learning from this workbook. It also provides you with additional resources that could be helpful for you in your journey ahead.

Chapter 1: The Role of Emotions in Our Lives

You will begin the course presented in this workbook with the first chapter focusing on how our emotions act as messengers that provide us with important information about our relationships, and our emotional needs. This chapter presents the concept of emotional pain. In this chapter you will look at the relationship of symptoms of anxiety and depression and more central emotional vulnerability we may experience that we refer to as core emotional pain (or core pain). You will learn about the core painful emotions that tend to be at the centre of human emotional suffering and emotional needs embedded in those painful emotions. You will be invited to reflect on the kinds of situations that often trigger painful emotions and take a closer look at how you treat yourself in the context of those triggering situations.

Several short tasks will be presented in this chapter for you to learn how to differentiate between your emotions, between the more symptomatic ones (like depression and anxiety) and the more underlying ones which are central and at the core of your experiences, like loneliness/sadness, shame, and fear. The tasks will be focused on recognizing the triggers of emotional pain as well as the problematic ways of how you may relate to yourself in the context of those triggers.

Chapter 2: Optimal Use of Emotions

This chapter will introduce you to important ways to connect with and stay with your emotions when they feel overwhelming. It will offer two experiential tasks, the Clearing a Space task and the Compassionate Self-Soothing task. Both tasks can be quite useful at times when you are feeling particularly upset or overwhelmed by an emotional experience. This chapter will form the foundation for your subsequent experiential work on the course (in the later chapters), and you can always return to the two tasks introduced in this chapter to regulate your emotions if upset or if your emotions feel too intense.

Chapter 3: Overcoming Emotional Avoidance (The Self-Interrupter)

This chapter will build on the previous chapter and will focus on helping you become more aware of how we can be emotionally avoidant. The chapter will offer an experiential task focused on emotional *interruption* (or *self-interruption*) (i.e., the ways we (a) stop ourselves from feeling painful or uncomfortable emotions, (b) stop expression of certain emotions in certain contexts, and (c) how we avoid situations that could trigger painful emotions). The task and the overall chapter should be able to assist you to feel and express important emotional experiences that inform your actions and behaviour.

Chapter 4: Overcoming Emotional Avoidance (The Self-Worrier)

In this chapter we will investigate how we try to protect ourselves from difficult feelings by engaging with potential scenarios in our thinking which may evoke anxiety. Our main focus in this chapter will be on assessing how *self-worrying* prepares us for potentially emotionally difficult situations, but how at the same time it triggers anxiety and keeps us on edge and tired. We will introduce an experiential task called

Overcoming the Self-Worrier that should help you to be more aware of how you worry yourself and consider the cost of that worrying. It will also help you to rebalance the worrying in such a way that it brings less anxiety.

Chapter 5: Transforming the Self-Critic

Chapter 5 will focus on helping you become more aware of the many ways we criticize ourselves and the adverse impact such criticism has on us. We often criticize ourselves in unhelpful ways, particularly when we face emotionally demanding situations which can further compound our experience of such situations. The core aim of this chapter is to introduce a transformational experiential task that will assist you in transforming your experience of *self-criticism* by being more aware of it, being able to see its impact, and being able to articulate what you may need in the face of such criticism. In doing so you will learn how to look after yourself when you are being impacted by the self-criticism and learn to set boundaries with the Self-Critic.

Chapter 6: Transforming Interpersonal Emotional Injury (Unfinished Business)

This chapter focuses on how to transform and heal the interpersonal emotional injuries that you may have experienced in relationships. It explores how many triggers of our core emotional pain often stem from previous difficult or challenging interactions with other people, especially when such interactions happened during developmentally sensitive times, but also at any time if they are particularly painful. Repeated or prolonged painful experiences often result in deeply entrenched emotional injuries that adversely affect many aspects of our present lives. In this chapter, we will gradually learn to work through such *emotional injuries*, so you can stay with vulnerable and painful feelings, be able to articulate what you need from yourself or from others, and learn how to have these needs or vulnerabilities responded to and recognized.

Chapter 7: Summary and Conclusion

This final chapter focuses on consolidating your learning by summarizing the key ideas and concepts from all chapters. It also provides you with additional resources that could be helpful for you in your journey ahead.

Before You Begin: II Key Points to Remember

- 1 Please remember that it is important to take your time when working through the chapters and undertaking the tasks. Don't feel rushed to do all the tasks together or to complete a full chapter in one sitting. Each chapter suggests the amount of time that would be required to work through the tasks, but this is only for guidance and is flexible. Please feel free to adjust the time to suit your own needs.
- 2 As the course focuses on working through your emotions, slight hesitation/uncertainty when undertaking some of the more emotionally intense tasks is normal. Please go at your own pace and feel free to select only those situations to work on that you are comfortable with.

- 3 When undertaking the tasks remember to focus on your feelings and don't worry about the thoughts. Remember, this course focuses on emotions, so try not to get too caught up with thoughts or judgements.
- 4 The workbook introduces tasks that will require you to have conversations with different parts of an imagined self or with another imagined person. You will be seated on one chair and the imagined other will be thought of as sitting on another chair, facing you. Some people may find such tasks awkward and '*a bit weird*' (e.g., when talking to an imagined self on another chair). This is normal and the feeling usually goes away when there is more familiarity with the tasks.
- 5 Redoing the experiential tasks is beneficial, so feel free to undertake any of them several times, as per your own comfort and need. Such repeated experience can go a long way in helping you internalize the process, and this can lead to optimizing the overall benefits that can be gained from the course. Also, each doing of the task brings a new learning.
- 6 The tasks listed in [Chapter 2](#) (i.e., Clearing a Space and Compassionate Self-Soothing) have all been designed to help in soothing distressing emotions. Remember to return to these tasks whenever you need to.
- 7 The tasks are generally short in the amount of time required to complete them. However, since they deal with your emotions and working through potentially challenging past experiences, it is important to provide yourself with some private time and safe surroundings. Please ensure that you can undertake the tasks with minimal distractions and interruptions.
- 8 The key to the course is to proceed through it gently and gradually. Begin working with emotional situations that are not too painful or overwhelming; especially while you are still familiarizing yourself with the chapters and tasks. Thereafter, based on your own comfort, readiness, and desire, you can proceed to using the tasks to work through more challenging emotional experiences.
- 9 Please remember, as we mentioned, you can go through this workbook on your own or as a supplement to emotion-focused therapy. To find EFT therapists in your country, please see the list on the website of the International Society for Emotion-Focused Therapy (www.iseft.org). You may also decide to reach out to a friend for support. While you can undertake the tasks on your own or with an accredited therapist you might also find it helpful to talk to about the general process with a friend, perhaps even one who is following the workbook themselves!
- 10 Remember that there are completed examples of all tasks that you can refer to in the appendices. These can be helpful in providing more information about what you are required to do in the tasks, especially if anything seems unclear.
- 11 Finally, please note that you can download copies of all Task Worksheets and Guidance Sheets from the Support Material at: www.routledge.com/9781032063393.

We are very pleased that you have chosen to take this emotion-focused step in learning to effectively befriend and (if needed) transform your emotional experiences. We sincerely hope that this workbook supports you in this journey and guides you in your quest to enhance your life.

The Role of Emotions in Our Lives

Learning Goals

- 1 To learn about the role of emotions in our lives.
- 2 To understand how emotions tell us whether our needs are being met.
- 3 To explore various situations that trigger different types of emotional responses and understand how we may treat ourselves in the context of such triggers.

Suggested duration: Two weeks

Introduction

Emotions tell us how we are when we go about our day to day lives. Emotions tell us whether our needs are being met or not, and help us clarify what is important for us to focus on. Essentially, emotions provide us with information about how well we are getting on in our relationships and our pursuits. Emotions are also the means by which we communicate quickly and directly with others, wherein our expressions, our body language, and our emotionally driven behaviours promptly convey to others what is going on for us and how we are feeling in any given situation.

This chapter will inform you about the different types of typical painful chronic emotions that we may experience and will also outline the *needs* embedded in those emotions. The chapter will also explore the various kinds of situations that often trigger painful emotional responses within us and then take a look at how we treat ourselves in the context of those triggers/situations. In doing so, the chapter will help you begin your journey in learning about how to *befriend the feelings* that are too intense and how to *transform* feelings that are too painful to lead to constructive actions.

Understanding Emotions and Emotional Pain

Emotions are diverse internal experiences that we all go through every day. They can vary in the intensity of their impact on people and can be experienced as pleasant or unpleasant. In this way, *emotional pain* can be described as an unpleasant, intense, overwhelming, and upsetting internal experience.