

Emotional Intelligence

The skill you need

Ajai Chawla



Image by Envato Elements

IN August 2021, a report titled “Student Suicides: An Epidemic Sweeping India,” based on National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, shows a concerning rise in student suicides, which are increasing at twice the rate of overall suicides in the country. This trend highlights the urgent need to address mental health challenges in educational institutions, especially by focusing on emotional well-being rather than just academic competition. The report suggests that enhancing counselling services and shifting attention away from competitive pressures can help prevent such tragedies.

Understanding emotions plays an important role in addressing these mental health challenges. Emotions are complex responses involving our bodies and minds, and they vary widely from person to person. Factors such as gender, personality, and life situations shape how we feel and respond emotionally. For example, while everyone experiences emotions like happiness, sadness, anger, or fear, the intensity and frequency can differ — women may feel certain emotions more intensely, while men may experience anger more frequently. Recognising and managing these emotions

effectively can help students handle stress, build resilience, and reduce the risk of mental health issues, including the risk of suicide.

Imagine having a superpower that helps you understand your feelings, manage them, and also understand what others feel. This superpower is called Emotional Intelligence (EI).

The term Emotional intelligence was first coined by Peter Salovey and John D Mayer in 1990. They defined it as “the ability to monitor one’s own and other people’s emotions, to discriminate between different emotions and label them appropriately, and to use emotional information to guide thinking and behaviour.” Simply put, EI is about being smart with your feelings.

Daniel Goleman (1995) later popularised the concept in his book, highlighting its importance for success. He explained that emotional intelligence is just as important as IQ (cognitive intelligence) and includes five main traits:

1. **Self-awareness** — Knowing what you’re feeling and why.
2. **Mood management** — Controlling your feelings so they don’t control you.
3. **Self-motivation** — Staying focused and pushing yourself towards your goals.
4. **Empathy** — Understanding what others are feeling.
5. **Interpersonal skills** — Building and maintaining healthy relationships.

Why is Emotional Intelligence Important?

Emotional intelligence is like a secret key that helps you do well in school, form strong friendships, and feel happier. For students, especially those with special needs, understanding and managing emotions can help them navigate the challenges of school life, reduce anxiety, and improve social skills. Research shows that people with high EI are often better at managing stress, staying motivated, and collaborating effectively with others.

What contributes to low Emotional Intelligence?

Your family environment, diet, and even the way your parents interact with you play a role in shaping your emotional intelligence. Understanding these factors can help you become