

Improving Your Self-Awareness

Objective

To identify ways to improve your public and private self-awareness.

What to Know

Self-awareness begins in infancy, develops as you grow older, and includes public and private self-awareness. Your private (or internal) self-awareness refers to your awareness surrounding your values, choices, and goals and how they impact other people. Public (or external) self-awareness is an understanding about how others perceive you.

When you have high internal self-awareness, you react less and approach your feelings with curiosity. For example, when you are angry, you might get curious and try to understand why – instead of immediately lashing out. If you have high external self-awareness, you understand your interactions with others and what is required to deepen connections and adhere to social rules.

A high level of self-awareness has many benefits, including:

- the ability to positively control some outcomes.
- building thriving relationships.
- increasing overall happiness.
- reducing biases and assumptions.
- regulating emotions and reactions.
- decreasing stress and anxiety.

Lacking self-awareness can lead to struggling to view situations, actions, or choices objectively – often resulting in conflict at work or in your personal life. You may lack self-awareness if you fear:

- change.
- being wrong.
- the truth.
- sharing feelings or being vulnerable.

Self-awareness, closely linked with emotional intelligence, can be improved. But to gain emotional intelligence, you need greater awareness. There are five key components to consider.

1. Self-Concept. Your perception of yourself, derived from your experiences, beliefs about yourself, and life goals.

2. Thoughts. Your thoughts impact your feelings, so exploring why you have certain thoughts (and how you can change them) greatly improves self-awareness.

3. Feelings. When you feel a certain way, explore what thoughts you are having. Your feelings are real, but they do not always reflect the entire truth.

4. Body. You must be self-aware to recognize the physical sensations associated with your feelings and reactions – and connect them with *why* you are experiencing those feelings.

5. Emotional State. Before you enter a situation, take note of your emotional state to increase your awareness of your reactions and feelings.

So, what can you do to improve your self-awareness? It will take practice, but if you apply these suggestions, over time you will see an improvement.

- Use a notebook or journal to track your thoughts and feelings.
- Sign up for a Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) app on your smart phone like Sanvello, Bloom, Happify, Evolve, or CBT-i Coach.
- Become curious about your feelings and emotional states and start to link how you feel with your body's sensations.
- Ask loved ones or coworkers for honest feedback.
- Meditate or practice other mindfulness activities.
- Write down your goals and priorities and identify ways to achieve them.
- Clarify your values.
- Practice thought-challenging when you think about yourself in a negative way. Re-frame those thoughts and replace them with positive thoughts.

With improved self-awareness, you will feel more self-assured and capable of acting appropriately in challenging situations.

What to Do

Use the chart on the following page for the next two weeks. Track your thoughts and feelings. Each time you encounter a challenging situation, or find yourself thinking negative thoughts about yourself, write down the date, what happened, the associated thoughts and feelings, and your emotional state. Then, write down what you did. Review the example.

Date	What Happened? Associated Thought(s)	Feeling(s)	Current Emotional State	Action

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you improve your self-awareness? Why or why not?

Did you experience any challenges while completing this activity? What was hard? Easy? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
 (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn during this exercise?
