

WHEN YOUR MATE IS UNEMOTIONAL

The characteristics for the emotionally unavailable or unemotional individual are very similar in nature. Although the emotionally unavailable mate may show some negative emotions, such as anger, both individuals have difficulty showing healthy emotions and are unable to provide healthy encouragement or support when emotions are expressed by others. A person that is emotionally unavailable or unemotional will fit many of the following characteristics. (These characteristics are explained throughout the book.)

- Has (or had) people and experiences in life that have discouraged emotions
- Stubborn and sees life more in extremes — black and white
- Relates more with facts and logic rather than with emotions of the heart
- Unable to emotionally respond and validate the feelings of others
- Rarely shows emotion (crying) or initiates physical signs of tenderness (hugs or kisses)
- Does not understand why others show emotions and believe it is a sign of weakness
- Tunes people out when emotions are being expressed
- Struggles with getting emotionally close to people, including God
- Has difficulty with conversations that include feelings about self or others
- Demonstrates love by performing tasks or giving material “things” rather than by showing signs of love and tenderness
- If physical affection is given, there is an expectation to receive a favor in return
- Believes sex is what makes you emotionally close, rather than feeling close from a loving relationship — or emotions are so closed there is no desire for sex.

How the unemotional person relates with others

When emotions are not part of your life, you will struggle with relating to people and situations of daily living. Since unemotional people do not know how to deal with emotions the person will use a variety of ways to handle daily circumstances. For the unemotional person, the following behaviors can become the normal way of handling life. But, to others (especially family members), the behaviors can be seen as very frustrating, disappointing, irrational, childish, defiant, and irresponsible.

• Just the facts

Since emotions are not part of life, unemotional people relate through facts, logic, and rules. If someone is hurt, showing compassion, tenderness, and empathy rarely happens since they do not have the capacity to use feelings to connect with the heart. Discussions will center on what and why something happened rather than a sensitive conversation to understand how the person feels or how they are dealing with the issues. When you don't have emotions, there is not the capability to show affection, love, and tenderness to encourage a trusting, close relationship and little ability to validate or encourage emotions in others.

Matt was successful at his job and his strong work ethic made him serious about getting the job done right with little time for idle chitchat. If a fellow employee showed some emotion over an issue, Matt would become irritated inside. Matt might listen and offer some advice, but what he really wanted was to tell the person, “Quit your moaning and get back to work.” Matt could get away with his insensitive nature at work since his productivity thrived on his unemotional state of mind. However, his emotional insensitivity was very evident with his lack of patience and inability to get emotionally close with his wife and children. How Matt treated others was very frustrating, disheartening, and disappointing to his family members.

• If you ignore it long enough, it will go away

Tom was raised in a family that did not deal well with conflict. His parents did not follow through with solving sensitive issues. They often “swept things under the rug” believing that if they ignored the problems they would just go away. These behaviors became so common for Tom that he continued

them into adulthood. Tom would put off making decisions and often ignore sensitive issues, hoping the problem would go away on its own. Of course, the problem just got worse and his wife's constant reminder about the issue only made Tom want to ignore it even more. Because of Tom's behavior his wife handled many of the decisions which made her feel even more aggravated and resentful. She interpreted his ignoring things as if he didn't care and didn't love her. In reality, Tom's ignoring and indecision came from fear of conflict, poor self-esteem, laziness, and the learned behaviors of his parents.

- Tuning out

Joe has an incredible ability to tune everybody and everything out of his life by watching television, reading the paper, working on the computer, or working in the garage. This is particularly aggravating to his wife, Sara, who feels they can never communicate because Joe is in his own little world. "I feel like I'm invisible; I might as well talk to the wall," complained Sara. When Joe was a child, there was so much chaos at home he quickly learned to escape from it by watching television. "There was so much going on in my house growing up," Joe shared, "I would sit in front of the TV and tune out my parents' arguments." Like Joe, children that live in hurtful, unemotional, or chaotic homes survive by withdrawing into their own world or through activities to block out the chaos and hurt. Some children escape into excessive amounts of reading, computer games, playing outside, daydreaming, or playing in their bedroom. Whatever survival behaviors worked during childhood, the same type of behaviors will likely continue in adulthood.

- Shutting down

Molly would not express much emotion when she was disappointed or hurt. In fact, she would not do much of anything. Molly grew up in a home where emotions were discouraged and not expressed. When she cried, disagreed, or became angry, she was either sent to her room or told statements such as, "Stop acting like a baby." Molly came to believe early in life that emotions were wrong and that she needed to shut off her feelings to keep the peace in her home. As an adult, whenever Molly did not express herself, her husband would interpret her silence as if she didn't care or that she didn't love him. Similar to Molly, when a person reacts through silence or shutting down, it destroys any chance of communication and leaves the mate feeling aggravated, misunderstood, and lonely.

- Walking away

Todd has never liked conflict. Even small arguments with his wife would make him feel uncomfortable enough that he wanted to leave. He never realized that the childhood experience of witnessing arguments between his family members would affect him this much. He had to search hard and deep to remember how uncomfortable he felt when his parents started to argue. He realized his parents' arguing was why he played outside to get away from the turmoil. As an adult, Todd's dislike of conflict triggered his need to get away. "I feel abandoned every time he leaves," his wife said, "like he doesn't care about me." For the spouse experiencing a mate walking away, it is especially hurtful. Not only is your partner ignoring you, you also get a second slap in the face when you feel physically abandoned. This is devastating to any relationship.

- Bursting out

The longer an unemotional person holds in emotions, the greater the likelihood those emotions will burst out to relieve the growing tension. Since unemotional people do not know how to express themselves appropriately, there will often be an accumulation of emotions just waiting to be released. The release can come through anger and yelling or in the form of behaviors such as emotional temper tantrums, whining, stomping around, slamming doors, throwing things, driving fast, threats to themselves or others, and senseless arguments. Suppressed anger can also show through physical outbursts like hitting, shoving, and physical fighting. This type of behavior can be very hurtful and destructive to other members of the family. Often the family members become confused as to why they bear the brunt of these hurtful outbursts. Such hurtful behaviors cut deep to the core, destroying

any connection of trust or respect in the family relationships.

Why don't you change?

I have often been asked questions like: "Why can't they change?" "Why would an adult continue these same immature behaviors into adulthood?" "Why doesn't the person know they are acting this way?"

Often, these behaviors were learned during the early years in life, as a way to survive what was happening. As an innocent child, you simply responded to the hurtful or chaotic childhood situations the best way you knew how. If no one taught you differently (and especially if you continue to live in hurtful and chaotic situations), you would continue with the same behaviors and not realize your behaviors are inappropriate or immature. People remain immature because they are emotionally stuck at an early age when they were originally hurt. Since immature people do not like to be corrected by others, it is very difficult to talk to that person about their inappropriate behaviors. A person has a better chance to change inappropriate behaviors when the childhood hurts that started the behaviors, become healed.

Excerpt from the book, *When Your Mate Has Emotionally Checked Out* ©2006

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