

# Basic Ideas of an Emotional System

1. All human beings live in emotional systems. The same emotional processes occur in all relationships.
2. Emotional systems are automatic, instinctive, reactive, and defensive. Driving these systems are innate forces that seek survival. The resulting behaviors are not learned or thought out. They are “wired in” natural phenomena.
3. Every person functions within a context of relationships. Two needs influence these relationships: A) the need to be separate, to stand alone, and to be independent, and B) the need to be close, to connect, and to interact with others.
4. Separation forces work to reduce the tension associated with being too close to others and the need to affiliate.
5. Closeness forces work to reduce the tension associated with individual differences and the need to be distinct.
6. Anxiety arises when one senses being outside of one’s comfort zone regarding separateness and closeness.
7. Automatic, survival-based behavior (emotional reactivity) issues from anxiety, limiting a person’s imaginative response to the situation.
8. Driven more by emotionality, one loses clarity, direction, good judgement, discriminatory powers, and resiliency.
9. Critical to healthy emotional systems is the ability of leaders to self-differentiate, i.e., defining self to others while staying in touch with members of a group, even if the others remain reactive.
10. Self-differentiation directs energy to one’s own functioning, one’s own response to the situation, and one’s own contribution to the interaction.

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Based on the theory of Murray Bowen*