

‘Emotions are friends not foes’: Why we shouldn’t try to control negative emotions

In just the past few years cutting-edge theorizing has focused more on the link between belief and emotion. And new empirical research has drilled down on the effects of specific beliefs. To begin with, a number of psychologists have created self-report scales. [The Emotion Beliefs Questionnaire](#), for example, asks people how much they agree with statements such as “There is very little use for negative emotions” and “It doesn’t matter how hard people try, they cannot change their positive emotions.” Another scale, [Individual Beliefs about Emotion \(IBAE\)](#), focuses on more subjective variations such as “I don’t want to admit to having certain feelings—but I know that I have them” and “If I let myself have some of these feelings, I fear I will lose control.”

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In a series of studies tracking acceptance and overall emotional health, University of Toronto psychologist Brett Q. Ford showed that [accepting negative emotions led to better mental health](#). People were asked to keep a daily diary for two weeks. Each evening they reflected on the most stressful event that day and on their responses at the time and afterward. Six months later “acceptors” felt less depression and anxiety and more well-being overall.

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