

9 Signs Of Emotional Maturity

by [Megan Bruneau](#)

People don't always enter therapy with personal growth as their primary goal, but they almost always leave believing they're a better human being. In several years of helping people improve their self-awareness, self-efficacy and self-esteem, here are nine commonalities I notice become more evident as my clients grow:

1. You notice and verbalize (with composure) when you're wrong.

It's far easier to get defensive and deny responsibility, or become overwhelmed with shame for our act of imperfection or ignorance. Being able to acknowledge when we're in the wrong takes humility, self-compassion and courage.

2. You're aware of your biases.

We all have innate biases and prejudices. It's impossible not to: we're socialized into a stereotyping world. So what's important is learning to cultivate an active awareness of these biases and prejudices, and examine how they might influence our decisions and actions. Ask yourself where you might be practicing discrimination (subtly or unsubtly), and how you can begin to counter these ingrained behaviors.

3. You acknowledge your privilege and use it wisely.

I'm a white, able-bodied, heterosexual, educated, employed, English-speaking, fully-cognitive, physically and emotionally healthy Canadian of childbearing age living in a safe neighborhood. Other than

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being born female, I'm pretty freaking privileged. I know this. I acknowledge that many things in life come more easily to me than someone who's bearing multiple levels of oppression.

Sure, I sometimes use my privilege in ways that don't actively help our society. But I also try to take advantage of it, to do what I perceive will make the world a better place — such as educating others, or empowering and amplifying the voices of those whose perspectives are dismissed due to oppression. Ignoring that privilege and oppression exist is a passive way of reinforcing it. Knowing how and when to stand behind those whom society tells us to dismiss often comes alongside self-betterment.

4. **You've created a space between feeling and reacting.**

[Through practicing mindfulness](#), we can increase the amount of time between feeling a particular emotion and reacting to it. We gain a sense of spaciousness with regard to how we observe our emotions — rather than clinging to our feelings immediately and reacting instinctively, we learn how to first observe, and then react more carefully and productively.

5. **You knowingly allow yourself to be vulnerable and allow difficult feelings in.**

Perfectionism tells us to stay in a box where we feel comfortable, certain and in control. It tells us to manipulate our environments so we never

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feel vulnerable, needy or uncertain. It keeps us safe from our fears of failing, embarrassing ourselves or getting rejected. And sadly, many of us miss out on a lot of life because of this. So if you've felt uncomfortable feelings lately, and acknowledged them, you're growing in the right direction, even if your perfectionistic impulses are telling you otherwise.

6. You're compassionate to yourself and others.

Judgment is at the heart of hate. It is what fuels unhealthy relationships with ourselves and others. If you've learned or are learning how to be more compassionate, not just to others but also to yourself, you're moving closer to enlightenment.

7. You know when, who, and how to ask for help.

Clients often emphasize how they want to "be independent" and "not rely on anyone." And yet they've come to therapy, which in itself is a (usually wise) act of asking for help. Knowing when to reach out isn't a sign of weakness, it's a sign of courage and resourcefulness.

8. You know when to quit and when to persevere.

I once did a Vipassana retreat that involved 10 days of no talking, reading, writing, music, exercise or eye contact — and very little sleeping. [Had it not been for my ego](#), I would have left after day five — day two, even. For the most part, I didn't find the practice serving and was not enjoying myself. Looking back, I know it was the fear of being perceived as a "quitter" that kept me there. Oftentimes, we let our ego

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drive our behavior and the outcome is destructive. Knowing when to go into Child's Pose, to close your computer for the day, or to end a relationship are all signs of healthy boundaries and emotional intelligence.

9. You've realized the more you know, the less you know, and you're OK with it.

Zen teacher Shunryu Suzuki says, "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's mind there are few." Those of us who believe we know everything have not much room for possibility and knowledge. This is why the idea of enlightenment is such a paradox: the closer toward this elusive concept we move, the more elusive we realize it truly is. [Yet being able to rest in the discomfort of uncertainty](#) is where growth becomes truly evident.

Some of these "signs" might resonate for you. Some might show you where you could be more intentional in your practice of self-inquiry. Regardless of where you are in your journey, remember we're all imperfect and we all have moments of mindlessness and ignorance. Ultimately, it's being able to notice, acknowledge and reflect upon those moments that lends to personal growth. Have compassion for yourself in the process. We're all in this together.