

# Three Stages Of Emotional Development

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John and Mary, both very successful doctors, were proud parents. Sitting amongst other parents to witness their son Josh's graduation from Stanford, they had every reason to be. Josh was graduating with *full honors* as the *valedictorian* of his class.

Months earlier, Josh had accepted an amazing job offer from a major technology company. As they heard Josh give his valedictorian speech, tears of joy and relief rolled down John and Mary's eyes. Years of hard work as parents had paid off, they thought. They took comfort in the fact that Josh had grown into a fine young man with a great education that would ensure his success for the rest of his life. He was now ready for the world, they concluded.

Unfortunately, the story did not pan out as John and Mary had imagined. A few years into his working life, Josh ran into trouble. First it was a couple of unsuccessful relationships. His most recent girlfriend had left him feeling betrayed, and in a depression that lasted over a year. Later, it was work. He could not understand why he was not promoted when he thought he should have been, and changed a few jobs, only to run into similar trouble each time. At 33, on his 4<sup>th</sup> job, Josh was *single and lonely*.

## *What went wrong? And why?*

Thanks to his parents, teachers, and others around him as a young person, Josh had become physically and cognitively able as he grew up. But was he as "ready for the world" as his parents had imagined on graduation day? Clearly not.

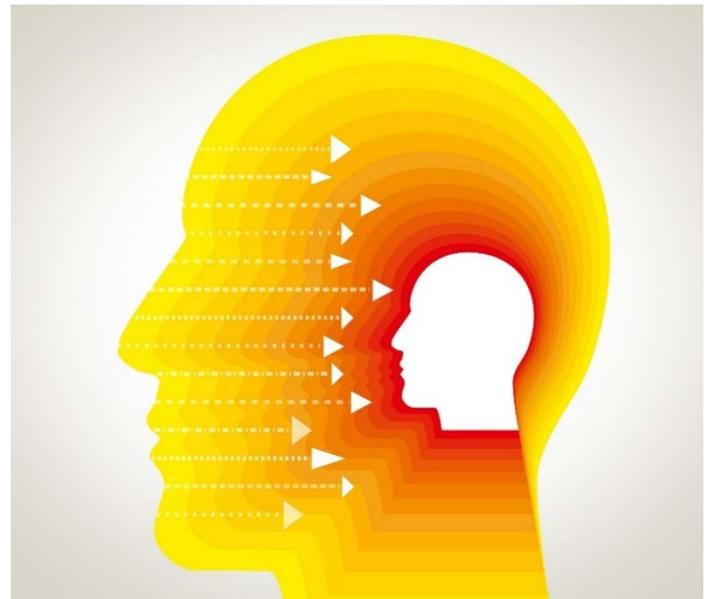


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Independence, a key element in the three stages of emotional development, was lacking. This aspect of development is often overlooked both by parents as well as individuals themselves.

## *The Three Stages of Emotional Development*

### *1. Dependence*

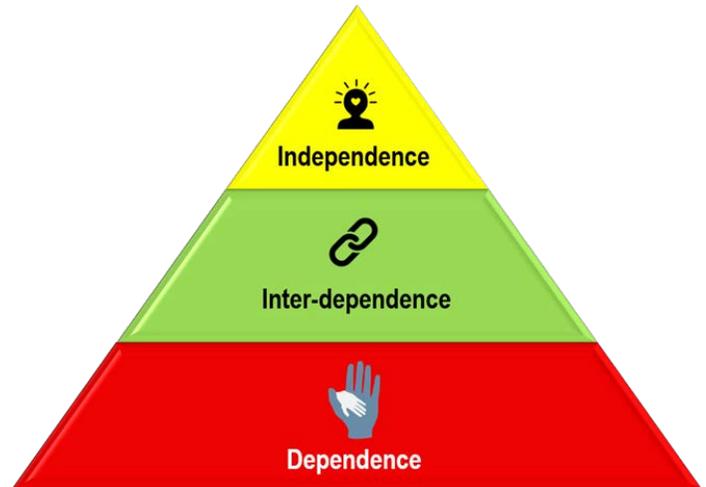
The first stage is Dependence, where one's wellbeing - success, happiness, and sense of self-worth - depends on others. Initially people are physically dependent on parents for basic needs. Later, they become emotionally dependent on friends, teachers, peers, and partners. How they feel depends on their perception of how all these relationships treat them. In this sense, their wellbeing is outsourced to others. Often without realizing it, they become overly centered on their own needs, and expect from others more than they give. The problem is, a lot of people like Josh get stuck in this first stage, and often end up feeling betrayed by someone or the other in their life.

## 2. *Inter-dependence*

Many people eventually get to this second stage, where they realize that one's own sense of wellbeing is intertwined with that of others. One must give in order to get, but it is not about instant gratification or perfect matching. Rather, one must care for others and give for the joy of giving itself; and hope that over time, others treat him the way he treats them.

## 3. *Independence*

Fewer people make it to the third stage, which is Independence. Here, one realizes that how one feels depends entirely on oneself. Now, one fully understands that she has a choice to respond to life's situations in whichever way she likes. No one can hurt or insult her unless she allows herself to be hurt or insulted, because *she* chooses how to feel. No one else can make her feel good or bad. She now develops a relationship with herself; and is at peace. She still cares for others as in the inter-dependence stage; but does not depend on others' behavior for her own happiness.



So how does one go about achieving the final stage of independence? By understanding and empowering oneself with three magical ideas: Gratitude, Forgiveness and Acceptance

### 1. *Acceptance*

True emotional independence is about accepting life's ups and downs with equanimity. Knowing that they can choose and control their own reaction (but not much else), they do not get carried away by excessive pride upon winning, or extreme sorrow upon losing. Acceptance begins with first truly understanding, then fully accepting who we are in terms of our strengths, weaknesses, wants

and desires. Only from this base of deep and honest self-awareness can we imagine what we want to be; and build towards that new self.

### 2. *Forgiveness*

Emotionally independent people know that the chemical reaction of anger or resentment happens inside one's own brain, and no other person can enter one's brain. If one forgives the offender, he rids himself of negative feelings. Instead of "*how dare you do this to me, let me show you,*" the self-talk becomes, "*I forgive you for losing control and saying/doing what you do. I do not feel the need to settle scores with you. It is up to you to recognize your behavior or not. I will not allow your behavior to trouble me*"

### 3. *Gratitude*

A truly independent person knows that if you fill your brain with gratitude for life's blessings, it is hard if not impossible to feel sorrow or pain at the same time. So, such people make gratitude a habit, and can lift themselves out of emotional lows much easier than others. For them, every day is Thanksgiving Day.



## At first glance, accepting everything, forgiving everyone, and being grateful all the time might sound like weakness and lack of ambition.

However, only the wisest know that accepting reality is an important pre-condition for changing it. And only the strongest can forgive. Instead of seething in anger or lamenting forever, acceptance and forgiveness frees them from negative energy, and enables them to focus exclusively on creating the better future they are ambitious about. The same is true about focusing on life's blessings rather than sorrows. Visualize a ball falling from the 10<sup>th</sup> floor of a building. For it to bounce back, it must hit the ground first. It cannot bounce back midair. Similarly, without acceptance, forgiveness and gratitude, there can be no resilience.

Truly independent people try to master the three ideas above, thereby managing their own sense of wellbeing better than others. Over time, the brain rewires itself around acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude, making them more empowered.

Fortunately for Josh, an executive coach eventually helped him learn the three ideas and turn his life around. He is now both successful and happy. More than anything else, he is in charge of his own life.

Are you?