

EQ in Harry Potter

"Every bitter and resentful thought that Harry had had in the past month was pouring out of him..."

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix p. 65

By Jean Greaves and Lac Su

Do you know what to do when someone blows up at you? Sometimes you can see it coming and sometimes you can't. Regardless of the amount of warning, when emotions take over, they take rational decision-making right with them. This is called an emotional hijacking. Emotions "hijack" the person's usual rational thought right out of the situation. What can you do in response?

Take Harry Potter, for example. In the 5th book, *The Order of the Phoenix*, Harry enters his troubled teenage years and often lets his emotions hijack his decisions. Consider the following conversation from the book, as Harry joins his two best friends, Ron and Hermione. It's been a long, lonely summer for Harry, without news or help from his mentor, Dumbledore.

'Maybe Dumbledore thinks I can't be trusted' said Harry, watching their expressions.

'Don't be thick,' said Ron, looking highly disconcerted.

'Or that I can't take care of myself –'

"Of course he doesn't think that!" said Hermione anxiously.

"So how come I have to stay at the Dursley's while you two get to join in everything that's going on here?" said Harry, the words tumbling over one another in a rush, his voice growing louder with every word.

Let's stop here a moment and notice that Ron is *highly disconcerted* by Harry's suggestion and Hermione feels *anxious*. Harry's friends know him well enough to realize that something major is upsetting him. Harry jumps to the conclusion that their respected schoolmaster has doubts about him. In response, Ron focuses on Harry with *"don't be stupid,"* while Hermione focuses away from Harry on to Dumbledore: *"of course he doesn't think that!"*

Those familiar with the story know what happens next: Harry becomes intensely bitter and shouts at his classmates. They are left to watch his frustration "pouring out of him; his frustration and lack of news, the hurt that they had all been together without him." Once Harry's feelings burst out this way, there is nothing to hold them back. A painful summer cumulates in an emotional explosion directed at his schoolmates.

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Harry's tirade continues for a page and a half, leaving his friends stunned. Ron stands motionless with his "mouth half-open" and Hermione is "on the verge of tears." Rarely, if ever, is the person on the receiving end of such an explosion to blame for the outburst. In this case, Ron and Hermione are Harry's only real friends and they don't deserve to be treated this way.

So, how can Ron and Hermione respond with emotional intelligence when Harry hasn't extended the same courtesy? Ron takes an important first step by speaking up and letting Harry know assertively that his suggestion isn't true. This is a start only, and certainly not enough to move them out of this difficult conversation. Ron avoids escalating the situation by responding to Harry rationally. He doesn't get angry and yell back.

Ron's reason isn't enough to stop Harry from coming up with new accusations about how everyone's been leaving him out, and it's ultimately Hermione who steps in and is able to stop Harry's fury with empathy. Hermione validates Harry's emotions by telling him she'd also be upset if placed in the same situation. She doesn't comment on his yelling; she simply speaks to what Harry is trying to tell them: he is upset.

When reason isn't enough to quell an emotional outburst, honoring the other person's experience often is. No matter how irrational the other person may seem, his or her emotions are in control and speaking to those emotions is the only way to connect with any success.

Validating someone else's feelings doesn't mean you have to agree with *what he or she is saying*, just *how he or she is feeling*. Once Hermione tells Harry his feelings are justified, Harry is able to stop, breathe, get it together and move on. He finally feels understood.

The next time you face the wrath of Harry Potter, try Hermione's conflict management strategy:

1. Tell yourself this isn't about you.
2. Stop talking about the facts.
3. Acknowledge the person's feelings.
4. Give the person time to regroup.

Who knows? Hermione's strategy may work, well, like magic.

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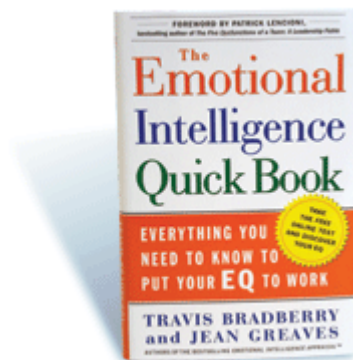
Dr. Jean Greaves is the author of *The Emotional Intelligence Quick Book*, endorsed by the Dalai Lama, Stephen Covey and Ken Blanchard, among others. Dr. Greaves is an award-winning consultant and entrepreneur with twenty years experience helping organizations and people reach their potential. She specializes in challenging periods of rapid growth, with a third of the Fortune 500 having benefited directly from her expertise.

She is cofounder and CEO of TalentSmart® and holds a doctorate in Industrial-Organizational Psychology. She and her two daughters have read each of the *Harry Potter* books and look forward to the release of the sixth on Friday, July 16th.

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Lac is Manager of Strategic Alliances for Talentsmart®, the leading provider of emotional intelligence assessments and training. Lac's experience includes research on leadership skills, creating assessment instruments and designing training programs and e-learning activities.

Lac's expertise is in emotional intelligence, cultural awareness, communication, decisiveness and decision-making and adaptability. Lac has experience consulting in both the private and public sectors. He holds a master's degree in Industrial-Organizational Psychology and his wife is a schoolteacher who has stimulated his interest in the *Harry Potter* series.



When you're at the bookstore to check out the new *Harry Potter*, be sure to pick up a copy of Dr. Greaves new book, *The Emotional Intelligence Quick Book*.

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