

Emotion Vulnerability

The concept of **Emotion Vulnerability** describes how some of us are physiologically (biologically) wired to have a more sensitive temperament. The three components of Emotion Vulnerability are: **1. Heightened Emotional Sensitivity**, **2. Heightened Emotional Reactivity**, and **3. Slow Return to Baseline**.

1. Emotional Sensitivity

Emotional Sensitivity refers to:

- Being more **sensitive to emotional stimuli**.
- Being **more likely to detect subtle emotional information in the environment** that others don't even notice.
- Having a **low threshold for emotional reaction** and, subsequently, **experiencing emotions much more often** than others. Emotions seem to hit for no reason, from *out of the blue*.

Imagine an emotion thermometer (with a scale of 1 to 100). An individual who is not emotionally sensitive may, for example, sit at a baseline of 10. An individual who **is emotionally sensitive** may, for example, sit at a **higher baseline** (e.g., 20 or 30 or 40).

2. Emotional Reactivity

Emotional Reactivity refers to:

- Having **extreme emotional reactions**.
- Having **intense emotions**. Emotions tend to hit like a *ton of bricks*.

If we go back to the concept of an emotion thermometer (with a scale of 1 to 100), emotional intensity and reactivity means moving up the emotion thermometer scale steeply and quickly, often finding oneself in an **intense Emotion Mind state (the “red zone”)**, which can disrupt the ability to think and the ability to self soothe.

3. Slow Return to Baseline

Slow Return to Baseline refers to:

- Having **long lasting emotional reactions**.
- Having a **hard time returning to baseline**.

During this long lasting, intense Emotion Mind state, **the world is viewed through “emotion glasses”**, narrowing perceptions and focusing more on things that affirm current emotions. **Interpretation and memories of events are more likely to be biased (judgment based) and less likely to be fact based**. These biased, narrow perceptions then contribute to maintaining a physiologically and emotionally intense state of arousal. **Slow return to baseline also contributes to high sensitivity to the next emotional stimulus**.