



## Heart Zones Emotional Fitness Training

by Sally Edwards and Bev Robinson

When we say that a strong body requires a healthy heart, we're not just talking about the physical aspects of heart fitness. We're talking about having an emotionally fit heart, too. Physical fitness and emotional fitness truly go hand in hand.

What's the big deal about emotional fitness? Well, for starters, the medical community is saying more loudly every day something that we, in our hearts, probably already know: Stress – that is, the lack of emotional fitness – makes us sick. And it's not just your physical and emotional health we're talking about here. As Dr. Dan Rudd, creator of the Heart Zones Emotional Fitness Training program and author of *Health in a Heartbeat*, states, "stress makes us stupid." Truly, stress hormones interfere with rational thought, causing us to do and say things – from road rage to yelling, or other forms of verbal or even physical abuse – that we often regret.

Still, the biggest obstacle people face with emotional fitness training is a reluctance to "go within." Facing the reality of our inner emotional worlds can be less appealing than, say, a swim through leech-infested waters. So, it may not be easy, but achieving emotional fitness is the key to leading a life that is more enjoyable and successful in every way. Regular emotional fitness training makes us aware of our emotional state and teaches us to shift to a healthier state of mind whenever we are swept into a distressful or toxic zone. Fueled with positive emotions we not only survive, but we thrive and rejoice in life, regardless of the circumstances.

It's time to zone in on your emotional health. Dr. Rudd offers the following 10 steps as part of Heart Zones Emotional Fitness Training.

**“Have a good time as you learn about Emotional Fitness. Happiness is very good for your heart!”** Research indicates that we are hard-wired for happiness. Happiness improves our mood and immunity. Be happy – life is good – rejoice.

**“Learn about the five Emotional Heart Zones and how to use them for increased emotional fitness”.** (Summarized in the Emotional Heart Zones chart below.)

Emotional Heart Zone 1: Safe Zone: This zone gives us energy. We re-charge, re-focus our energy, find peace, and go inside ourselves. The Safe Zone is very personal, and care must be taken to design your own safe place and safe process. You may enter your Safe Zone through meditation, prayer, deep breathing, sounds of nature, music, poetry, or a visual memory of a special place or event. Time in Zone 1 provides healing as stress hormones and negative messages from the brain are absent. Heart rate is lower (about 5-10 beats below ambient), respiration is deeper and immune system functioning is increased. With practice one can shift to Zone 1 with a deep breath or loving thoughts. In a fast-paced world, a well-developed Zone 1 is one of the best gifts you can give to your heart.

Visit our website at [Heartzones.com](http://Heartzones.com)



Emotional Heart Zone 2: Productive Zone: This zone spans a range of feelings that should dominate much of your time at home, work, and play. In this zone you experience high concentration, focus, peacefulness, and productivity while accessing both your emotions and your thoughts. In this zone your heart rate would be at a normal ambient level.

Emotional Heart Zone 3: Performance Zone: This zone offers all the benefits of Zone 2 and is characterized by even greater focus, concentration, positive intensity, and accomplishment. Peak performances are achieved in this zone, and when you are in this zone you are working hard but feel in the flow, in control, and fulfilled. In physical training, athletes will often describe this zone as being in the flow, floating, super alive, tuned in, and in the groove.

Emotional Heart Zone 4: Distress Zone: This zone is energy draining and where the bad stuff starts to happen. It is characterized by feelings of fear, worry, anger, anxiety, guilt, and helplessness. The stress response is triggered resulting in a rise in heart rate (your ambient heart rate may be 10-20 beats higher than normal), rise in blood pressure and a decrease in cognition. The stress response within Zone 4 is designed to mobilize us to act but unfortunately many people are spending far too much time in Zone 4. Zone 4 is definitely hazardous to your health: decreased immunity and digestion, increase in self-destructive behaviors, and changes in weight (usually weight gain).

Emotional Heart Zone 5: Red Zone: This is a zone you want to avoid. It is toxic with out of control behavior and irrational thought that is destructive to the individual/athlete and anyone else that is around them. Usually characterized by aggression, violence, and hysteria. Most people that find themselves in Zone 5 need mental health professionals to help guide them back to the lower zones.

**“Increase awareness of your own emotional state”.** Being consciously aware of what emotional zone you are operating in is the core of making your emotions work for you. What is your heart saying to you right now? Do you perceive feelings of happiness, joy, gratitude, fear, anger, or worry? Or do you not perceive anything at all? Whatever you are sensing, sit back, take a deep breath, then exhale. Take time each day to just be, rather than being caught up in the emotionally distracting (and exhausting) frenzy of constantly doing. Don’t run away from your feelings, but instead explore them and try to identify their source. Your emotions should help to guide you to positive action and thoughts. For example, if during your physical training session you find yourself continually bored or hating the workout you are long overdue in revamping your training program.

**“Increase awareness of the emotional state in others.”** What emotions do the people around you at work, home, and within the community exude? As you become cognizant of others’ emotions you will become more cognizant of your own and how your emotions and those of others inter-relate. If you tend to be surrounded by people that are stressed, depressed, and angry with the world (that is, in the Distress Zone) then you may also find yourself operating largely in the Distress Zone. Help to create an environment that exudes passion, care, respect, and kindness to others.

2 Visit our website at [Heartzones.com](http://Heartzones.com)



**“Determine your emotional habits and patterns.”** We are very social creatures. Get feedback from training partners, colleagues, friends and family members. What feelings elicit certain behaviors, such as becoming withdrawn, sarcasm, criticism, pouting, whining, and laughter? If you don’t like what you see or hear, forgive yourself. Stop behaviors that harm others, and make amends for your mistakes and move forward.

**“Decrease your recovery period after emotional arousal.”** With emotional fitness training you will rebound from an unsettling situation by cuing yourself to the emotions and shifting to a more desirable zone via some deep breathing or taking a quick escape to a pleasant memory. If you are emotionally unfit it can often take hours, days, or even weeks to recovery from an event that others would describe as “small stuff”. So, practice taking what you can from each situation and moving on.

**“Increase your ability to self-regulate.”** By being in touch with your own emotions you will be able to regulate your own energy flow. Nourish your emotional heart by spending most of your time in Emotional Zones 1 (Safe), 2 (Productive), and 3 (Performance). Engaging in physical activity is often one of the easiest ways for people to experience a positive mood shift. Leave the chaos of the workplace behind and go for a walk.

**“Learn how to generate positive emotions and overcome destructive emotions.”** If you focus on “fear” it gets bigger and bigger. The same holds true for positive emotions. If you want more love and compassion in your life you can grow these positive emotions by consciously thinking positive thoughts. If you want to become a better swimmer it is much easier with positive affirmations such as “I am becoming a strong swimmer” instead of negative self-talk such as “I’ll never be much of a swimmer”.

**“Plan ahead to prepare for challenging situations.”** Certain situations and people in our lives tend to trigger us to a major mood shift and increased stress. If possible, try to avoid or eliminate these situations. When that isn’t possible and you’re going face to face with the situation, use the “ZAP” technique developed by Dr. Rudd.

Kick Off: Recognize the rush of anger, fear, anxiety, worry, or confusion that signifies Zone 4, the Distress Zone.

Stop and Take a Time Out: Consciously shift to Zone 1 through entering your “safe place”. Stay in this zone until you feel relaxed and peaceful in your mind, heart, and body.

Resume Play: Shift to Zone 2, the Productive Zone and make a rational decision on how you can most effectively deal with the present situation.

**“Develop your personal emotional fitness training plan.”** Just as you have a physical training plan it is also essential to create a Personal Emotional Training Plan. Two key steps to define are why you want to improve your emotional fitness and what actions you will take to become more emotionally fit. To increase adherence be sure to write down your plan and share your plan with members of your support team (e.g. friend, partner, colleague). And don’t forget to reflect and review your emotional training plan on a weekly basis.



With regular emotional fitness training you can control your feelings instead of having your feelings control you. Look after your emotional heart and you will be rewarded with increased health in all aspects of your life.

## HEART ZONES®

ZONE NUMBER	EMOTIONAL ZONE	ZONE DESCRIPTION	ZONE BENEFIT
<b>5</b>	<b>Red Zone</b>	<b>Out of control, frantic, total panic, disconnected, emergency, stat</b>	<b>Toxic</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Distress Zone</b>	<b>Worried, anxious, angry, scattered, fearful, reactive</b>	<b>Cautious Alert</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Performance Zone</b>	<b>Focused, in the flow, positive stress, fulfillment, completion</b>	<b>Achievements</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Productive Zone</b>	<b>High concentration, effective, energetic, prolific</b>	<b>Results</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Safe Zone</b>	<b>Meditative, relaxed, affirming, re-generative, comfortable, compassionate, peaceful</b>	<b>Energizing</b>

© Copyright 2003 Heart Zones Company

**Heart Zones USA**  
Training and Education Company

2636 Fulton Avenue, Suite 100, Sacramento, CA 95821  
PH: (916) 481-7283, Fax: (916) 481-2213  
Email: sallyedwards@heartzones.com, Website: www.heartzones.com

### Books:

Carlson, Richard. Don't Sweat the Small Stuff, Hyperion, 1997

Goldman, Daniel. Emotional Intelligence, Bantam Books, 1995

Rudd, Dan and Edwards, Sally. Health in a Heartbeat, A 6-week Heart Zones Program to Emotional and Physical Fitness, Heart Zones Publishing, 2004

Jackson, Susan and Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. Flow in Sports, The keys to optimal experiences and performances. Human Kinetics, 1999

4Visit our website at [Heartzones.com](http://Heartzones.com)

