

# Emotions – Making them work for me

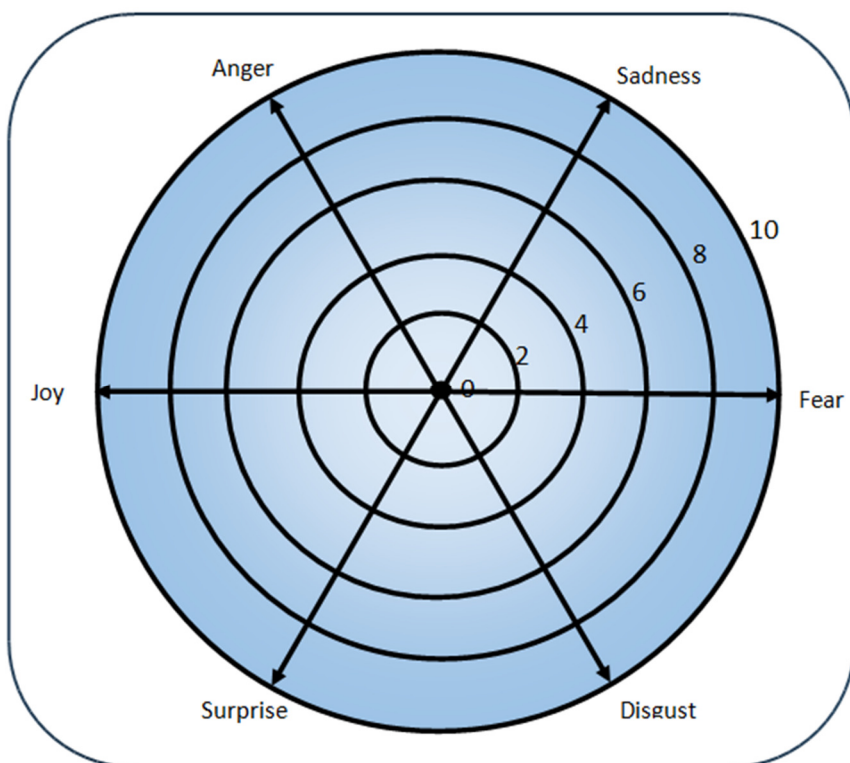
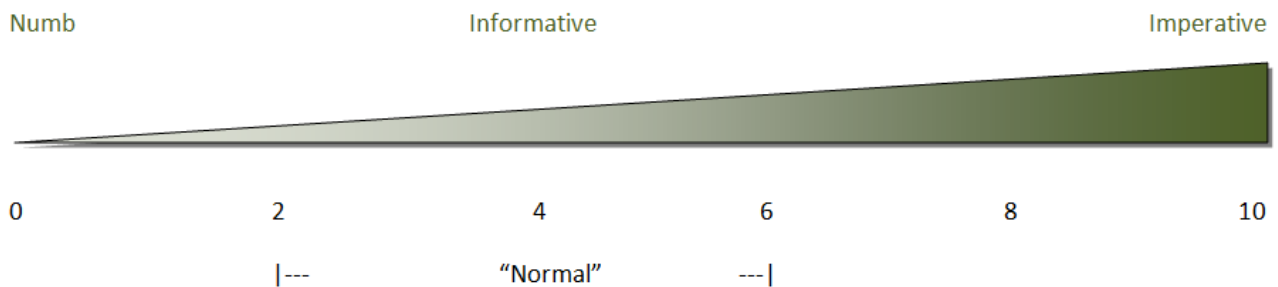
## Defining an emotion

Emotions are a biological response to a current physical, previously remembered or imagined future situation (event). These biological responses set our body up to respond in the most instinctive manner to survive the moment, setting up the reaction that by default should keep us alive. They don't care that the event may be a memory of the past or an anticipation of the future, they are priming us for action now. They aren't always accurate or appropriate responses as sometimes we have formed bad habits or simply do not know enough to respond appropriately to the event.

This response can be anything from a requirement to rest/evaluate, a reasoned cognitive response/action and an un-thought of response/reaction.

## Emotional Intensity

There are various intensities of emotion we can feel, from numb, through normal and informative all the way to extreme and imperative. For example, when we feel an absence of emotions, we can feel numb and disconnected from the world and un-motivated. Events and objects have very little meaning because we don't feel an emotional connection to them. When we feel a "normal" intensity, we are aware of our emotion and we can use this emotion to help us make reasoned decisions. When we feel an extreme emotion, we feel overwhelmed by it, and it can take away from our sense of reason and ability to think about what to do.



The intensity wedge above shows how a single emotion can range from non-existent to full intensity, changing one's own responses from ignoring the emotion, being informed by the emotion to having to act due to the emotion.

The emotion wheel shown to the left indicates how being numb in all emotions can leave you without useful information on the current circumstance. At the same time, being stuck bouncing from one intense motion to another can leave you on a roller coaster of emotion driven actions with very little intent or control. Clinical depression frequently looks like emotions less than 1 in all directions, while mood disorders such as borderline personality disorder or bipolar affective disorder can have you bouncing from one extreme emotion to the next.

### Numb to Low Emotion

Feeling numb sometimes allows us to work without distraction or take a pause to evaluate the situation. It can be the result of some kind of shock, trauma or exhaustion. Numbness can also be as a result of medication, a medical condition, emotional overload or stress.

As a reaction to an event this will generally be a brief time, occupying minutes to perhaps a couple of hours. The depression of our emotions allows us to get something done that would be too hard to do if we were feeling, or it prevents us from doing things when we are lost and unsure. If this low intensity depressed state goes on for too long, it can become a clinical problem and should be referred to a professional. An example of where it can be useful is in the situation of a car accident, where instead of processing the loss of one family member's life, you numbly extract the living family member from the wreckage. An example of where it is no longer useful is where you continue to feel numb days to weeks later and cannot process the loss of the family member.

Biologically, when you are thinking but not feeling, the majority of your blood is located at the front of your brain (the thinking part), where your decision making process is, and away from your hind brain (the feeling part). If you are experiencing general numbness, non-thinking and amotivation (not being motivated) the blood flow could be low (feeling light headed), evenly dispersed or pooled in semi-random sections of the brain when your numbness is chaotic. Headaches can indicate too much blood and thus too much pressure. Medications/drugs can influence the connectivity of signals between the hind (feeling) and fore (thinking) brain, or increasing the blood pressure or decreasing the blood pressure, simulating these biological states and thus affecting our thinking in a similar way.

### Informative/“Normal” Emotion

This is the intensity that most people feel most of the time. Things in the world have emotional meaning for you – you like the look of that tree, your children are beautiful, the driver that cut you off annoys you, that behaviour over there repulses you and so on. These emotions inform you about the world and is just another attribute you give objects, events or actions. Examples of attributes include: A cup has colour; the photo reminds you of your friend and so you like it; the apple is heavy; the kitten is cute while the spider is scary and so on.

When you feel an emotion about something – joy, anger, frustration, disgust, fear, surprise – it informs you about what you think or how you react to that thing. It adds to your choice, but it isn't making a choice for you. That person is tall, male, scary and dressed richly. Each of these attributes helps you make a decision about whether you would ask them for the time or not, but doesn't force you into a decision.

Biologically, the blood is evenly distributed between the fore and hind brain at the appropriate pressure.

### Intense / Imperative Emotion

Intense emotions are where your normal emotion has expanded to become all you feel about something. When this happens you must act, and often will before thinking about it critically and making a suitable decision. Your intense emotions create imperative actions. Consider when you step on a nail – you move your foot before you think “I should move my foot”, or when you pick up a hot object, you are already letting go before you think “ouch”. These are physiological imperative reactions similar to the emotional imperative reactions. When you see the snake in the grass rearing up, you react with fear and leap aside before you realise that it is merely a garden hose.

## Emotions – Making them work for me

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When this is brief, it is usually in response to an extreme event. Generally this heightened emotional state happens in a flash, triggers an action in you to promote your survival, and then you are left with the chemical after affect (nausea, thumping heart, light headedness etc).

Biologically the blood has gone to your hind brain to help you analyse the raw information your body's senses are sending to you. Your body has also gone into survival mode, getting ready to fight, flee, freeze or reproduce, all depending on your basic defaults and the situation. Your body picks up a lot of information your thinking brain doesn't have time to consider. It takes 100 milliseconds for your hind brain to decide a picture is dangerous, but 300 milliseconds for your fore brain to decide what the picture is. By bypassing the fore brain, the hind brain keeps us alive. It takes away the cognition (thinking) part of your mind to add resources to the feeling (understanding) part of your mind.

If you get stuck in this intense emotion phase it can be very tricky to move out of it. Studying a relaxation technique such as mindfulness can be helpful to decrease emotions and reconnect to the "now" instead of the past or future stimuli, or dial back hyper responses to something more "normal".

If you're prone to rush straight to intense emotion, your emotional thresholds are over sensitive. You shouldn't be surprised by the garden hose each time you go into the garden. Learning how to relax, or how to face your triggers and desensitising them is important for regulating your emotions. This will allow you to take actions in your life instead of living a life of reactions.

### Types of Emotion

Emotions are formed by both biological reactions, internal cognitive experience (memories and what they mean to you) and cultural values. What one culture finds normal another may find disgusting, what one person within that culture finds disgusting, another person within that culture may not, while all humans find some things disgusting.

Most psychology texts refer to a basic set of emotions that appear to be true regardless of culture, personal experience or time. These can vary from five emotions to eight emotions depending on the study and research. Gathered here in this document are the six most commonly agreed upon basic emotions.

The full range of complex human emotions measure from between 200 to over 1000, depending on the culture being assessed. Each of these emotions draws from one or more of the basic emotions represented here. It is not feasible to list all of the possible complex emotions and describe their subtle difference, however learning these six basic emotions will allow you to understand their basic roots and what they can inform you about your situation and what you can do about and with them.

### Reducing reactions and increasing planned actions

You have probably heard of the clichéd "count to 10 before you act". It is actually very useful advice. Many people go straight from an event (physically present, remembered or expected) to a reaction instead of noting their surroundings, noting their emotions, analysing, forming a plan and then executing an action.

The goal is to separate the stimulus from the act so that the act is a planned action rather than an automatic and likely erroneous reaction. In this way a stimulus that produces the anger emotions does not need to be an aggressive violent act, but can be a calm statement that creates change that makes a real difference, or initial disgust can be overruled and the meal sampled anyway to discover a lovely new cuisine. It puts you back in charge of your life and allows you to make changes to how you interact with this universe, instead of you potentially being a slave to your initial erroneous reactions.

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To do this requires pausing before acting and checking to see what level your emotions are compared to the stimuli – are they in the “normal” range, are they too intense, or too little? – and discovering what the emotion is informing you about the event – are you in danger, has your boundary been crossed, are you happy?

Cobbling together this emotional information and other information about the event allows you to make a more reasoned judgement about what is actually going on. Once you know that, you can make a more reasoned judgement about what you should do, even if that is to do nothing. Once you know what you should do, you can then act. This allows you choice and makes you the master of your actions.

# Emotions – Making them work for me

## Anger



This is probably the emotion the public have the greatest problem with. It can vary from annoyance and frustration, through anger, intense anger and rage. This emotion prompts you to do something to fix whatever it was that caused you to feel anger. But what is that?

Anger is generally caused by someone or something appearing to cross a boundary that you think is important. It is also a feeling that crops up when you feel powerless or frustrated. It is the desire to get your power back.

Anger is often a prelude to aggression, which is poor tool for making oneself feel powerful right now. Aggression generally doesn't fix the actual problem, but it can make it go away for a bit. There are many more ways to fix problems than violence, such as talking, making a change in your life or simply recognising that this is a temporary problem.

There is no problem feeling angry, despite the media hype. Anger management is not about not feeling angry, it's about knowing what to do with it. If you didn't have anger, how would you know something was wrong?

Anger is an emotion that informs you that something has, or you expect will, cross a boundary that infringes upon your power to act and immediate or future safety.

### How does Anger affect me?

Frequency      Rarely  → Often

Intensity      Low  → High

Physical feelings (how do I feel physically when I feel angry? How do I recognise this emotion?)

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How do I manage my anger? (What do I do when I am angry?)

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How do I manage other people's anger? (How do I react when someone else is angry near me, or at me?)

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# Emotions – Making them work for me

## Joy / Happiness



Joy is the nice emotion. It rewards us for doing the right thing, for succeeding, for helping another and so on. Without joy, the world becomes a very dark place.

Often we don't have enough joy in our life and we seek to add joy to it with objects. Objects don't make us feel happy, or content, or complete. They can sometimes enable us to reach these emotions, but to rely on them to make you feel this can be a mistake. Another person can be substituted as an object to try to make you happy, but again, an object (even if it is a person) can't make you happy. Only in finding peace and attaining achievements within yourself can you find joy and happiness.

Feeling too much joy can interfere with our fear and anger responses, which in turn can damage us or put us in danger. If we feel happy that the car is zooming towards us, we may not get out of the way, or if we are gambling we may risk too much because we feel good and not fearful enough of the consequences. Joy must be in balance with fear or our own safety can be compromised.

### How does Joy affect me?

Frequency                  Rarely —————> Often

Intensity                  Low —————> High

Physical feelings

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How do I manage my joy?

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How do I manage other people's joy?

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# Emotions – Making them work for me

## Surprise



Surprise

We experience surprise when our prediction of the future is wrong. We often predict the future in subtle but important ways. For example, if you lift an object up you can predict that it will fall if you let it go. If it doesn't, you would be quite surprised. Prediction is an important part of life and a good survival quality. Too much prediction can lead to paralysis through over analysis while too little prevents you making reasonable predictions to keep you safe.

Surprise can be due to a good thing, like winning a lotto ticket. The common pattern with lottery tickets is that you don't win, and if you do, it isn't much. To win a lot is quite surprising and not a bad thing at all. Surprise can also be the result of a bad thing, such as when you learn that you have lost your job, or a loved one has passed away.

An oversupply of surprise is called shock and can stop us in our tracks, numbing us from the world or making it very hard to act. Generally though, surprise is seen as an odd facial expression, sometimes a physical reeling, or even just a pause in what someone is doing as they take new stock of the situation and resume action based on their new predictions.

Surprise is you taking stock of the change so you can make a new plan based on the unexpected event.

### How does Surprise affect me?

Frequency      Rarely \_\_\_\_\_ → Often

Intensity      Low \_\_\_\_\_ → High

Physical feelings

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How do I manage my joy?

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How do I manage other people's surprise?

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## Emotions – Making them work for me

### Disgust



We mimic disgust to babies and young children to inform them of what is poisonous, unsanitary and not socially acceptable. This ranges from biologically unsafe to culturally not acceptable. Biological disgust is far rarer to see in adults, except when food has gone off. It is a very basic method of imparting to someone a very primal evaluation of the situation. Words like revulsion and abhorrence are differing levels of disgust.

We can be disgusted at objects, such as manure of different types (especially our own) or mucus, and we can be disgusted at actions, such as cultural taboos.

Disgust can be devastating if we, or our actions, are perceived to be the cause of disgust in others. It can also be a problem if we are disgusted at behaviour that is common, such as a vegetarian finding it hard to eat in public places where people are consuming meat. We can also feel disgust at ourselves when we feel we have crossed an important social or personal line.

Disgust in adults is an emotion that tells you that a fundamental cultural value you hold, or someone else holds, has been crossed.

#### *How does Disgust affect me?*

Frequency            Rarely —————> Often

Intensity            Low —————> High

Physical feelings

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How do I manage my disgust?

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How do I manage other people's disgust?

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## Emotions – Making them work for me

### Sadness



Sadness is the natural feeling of emotional hurt. It informs us when we have damage to who we psychologically and spiritually are, much like pain informs us of physical damage. Sadness is the feeling of that damage beginning to heal.

Much like physical pain, sadness can be sharp, throbbing, short or long lived, and it can last much longer than we want it to. Sadness, like physical pain, can become a habit that lasts longer than the damage does. When this happens do things that you enjoy and consider seeking professional help.

Sadness is not an emotion to avoid, it is an emotion that tells you that you have been hurt and that you have begun to heal. So long as it is a transitional emotion it is good, when it is the status quo, that is, it has become the normal, then it is important to get some help to move on.

Sadness is the recognition of being hurt and the healing of that psychological and spiritual hurt.

#### *How does Sadness affect me?*

Frequency      Rarely —————> Often

Intensity      Low —————> High

Physical feelings

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How do I manage my sadness?

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How do I manage other people's sadness?

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## Emotions – Making them work for me

### Fear



Fear is the warning of anticipated physical or emotional pain. There are many things that can hurt us, and we avoid them because fear inhibits us from them. Generally we are only concerned with the potential danger that is in front of us. Sometimes we exaggerate the actual danger that something poses us, such as can be seen in phobias. We can also fear what we image is happening or going to happen, even though that danger isn't in front of us. Fear is a useful tool for ensuring our safety, but when these fears interfere with our lives we have a problem. The reverse is also true, those who do not fear enough often do dangerous things and get hurt, lose assets, lose loved ones or die.

Fear does not have to stop you from doing things that you fear. It is an emotion that exists to inform you that what you are doing could have some nasty consequences, and as such, be very careful. With some suitable precautions, one can do the things that are scary.

Fear is a warning of potential danger.

#### *How does Fear affect me?*

Frequency      Rarely —————> Often

Intensity      Low —————> High

Physical feelings

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How do I manage my fear?

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How do I manage other people's fear?

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## Emotions – Making them work for me

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### Understanding our person experience

Each person has a slightly different inner experience and outer response to these basic emotions. The next page contains a chart for you to fill in your unique personal experience to these feelings. Mapping them allows you to recognise what you are feeling either directly or via a physical response, what kind of event is causing this emotion in you and what you should consider doing about that kind of event.

By mapping these emotions you not only get a better idea of how these emotions affect you, but you also enable yourself to re-program how you are going to respond to them. This allows you to change your habits, change your life and get back in control of your responses instead of being a victim to your reactions.

Event: What general occurrence triggers the emotion?

Physical: How I feel in response to the emotion. Some people recognise they are having an emotion based on their physical response. Many people experience emotions physically in different ways.

Cognition: How you think when you feel that emotion, or what that emotion is trying to inform you.

Action: What to do in response to the emotion, assuming you have time.

Effect: What is the effect of the above action on the future, what are you trying to address and achieve.

# Emotions - Making them work for me

## Feelings / Effects chart



Event	Physical	Cognition	Feeling	Action	Effect
			Anger		
			Joy		
Something beyond my plans	Heart thumps, I jump and feel really alert	"What just happened?"	Surprise	Stop what I was doing to reassess what to do next	Interruption, feeling of uncertainty, confidence in next action
			Disgust		
			Sadness		
			Fear		