

BEGINNING EMOTIONAL SELF-AWARENESS

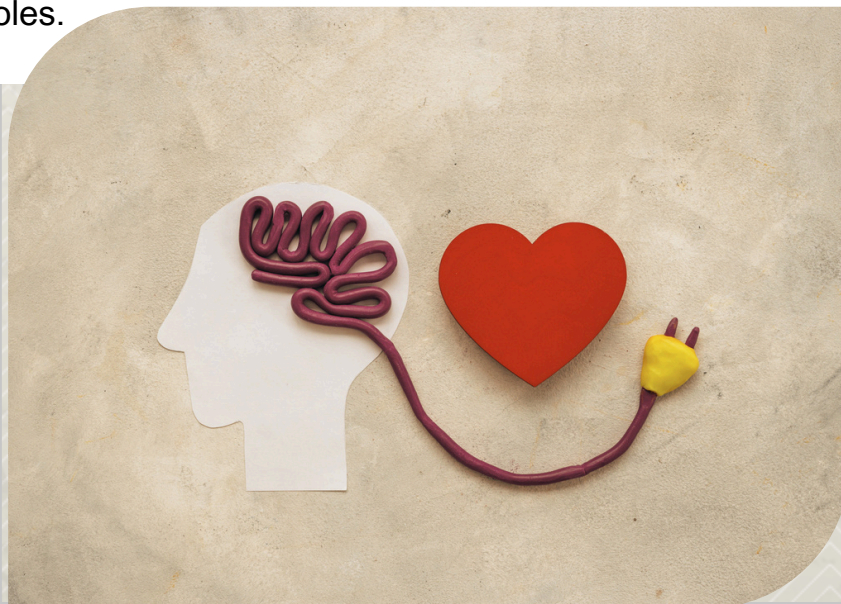
Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI or EQ) is the ability to understand, use, and manage your own emotions in positive ways, as well as to recognize and empathize with the emotions of others in various relationships, situations and circumstances.

Regardless of our upbringing, experiences to date, or current functioning, emotional intelligence is a flexible capability involving multiple skills that can be developed and/or improved at any stage of life.

Development of emotional intelligence is often compromised by childhood experiences involving ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and/or complex trauma, or by other life circumstances that require regular functioning from survival defenses.

High EQ helps people build more satisfying relationships (including with themselves), communicate effectively under pressure, reduce stress, be better parents, and excel in leadership roles.



Emotional Intelligence is comprised of various interrelated skills that come together into a broader capability. Its fulfillment requires development in at least these areas, each of which is comprised of many sub-skills.

The first three skills (emotional self-awareness, emotional regulation and management and motivation and reasoning) involve our relationship with self (although how well we are able to do these things affects many aspects of our lives including others). The latter three skills (emotional expression, social awareness and empathy and social skills) are focused on how we relate to and with others.



**Emotional
Self-Awareness**

recognition and understanding of one's own emotional needs, thoughts, feelings and motivations, strengths, weaknesses as well as how they are affected by and affect others.



**Regulation &
Management**

ability to regulate emotions in a variety of environments including being able to control impulses and moods and think before acting.



**Motivation &
Reasoning**

ability to self-motivate, maintain optimism, and incorporate emotional information into decision-making appropriately.



**Emotional-
Expression**

ability to express one's emotions authentically, respectfully and effectively.



**Social Awareness &
Empathy**

compassion for the human condition, capacity to empathize and appreciate a variety of perspectives, recognize emotions and emotional needs of others.



Social Skills

being able to create and maintain healthy relationships with rapport, trust and emotional content.

It's important to recognize that emotional intelligence overall as well as the six recognized skill sets that come together into its capability are not isolated skills. They are interrelated with many other functions and skills.

For example,

- The skill of interoception, which involves being able to sense, interpret and integrate/take action on internal bodily sensations of various kinds plays a role in being able to recognize the physical cues of our emotions. E.g., tensing that comes with anger.
- The skill of nervous system regulation and whether or not we primarily function from a regulated state (calm, connected, settled etc.) within our window of tolerance versus defensive survival states impacts not only the emotions we have but our ability for emotional self-awareness. The further we drop in the survival hierarchy, the less self-awareness we are capable of because various stress neurochemicals diminish the neocortex and executive functioning. In addition, nervous system states such as freeze, fawn, and flop (shutdown) involve numbing and dissociation which blunt our experience of emotions.
- The skill of turning toward and being with including distress tolerance affects the space we allow for emotions particularly challenging emotions in the first place. It is difficult to develop emotional intelligence if we have patterns of avoidance through distancing or distracting ourselves or any number of other ways of avoiding.

Interoception is the internal sensory system and capability to perceive and understand internal bodily signals, such as hunger, thirst, a racing heart, or muscle tension, being disconnected. It is foundational for self-regulation, stress management and coping, emotional regulation, self-awareness, and maintaining physiological balance.

In many ways, **Emotional Self-Awareness** is the foundational skill of emotional intelligence. We need some degree of it before we can effectively develop the other skill areas.

And even within Emotional Self-Awareness, there are multiple sub-skills which may or may not require deliberate development.



Recognizing and Understanding:

- one's emotions.
- one's emotional needs.
- one's motivations.
- the interplay between one's thoughts and emotions and one's emotions and thoughts.
- one's strengths and weaknesses
- how one is affected by other people.
- how one affects other people.

There are dozens and dozens of potential activities to expand emotional self-awareness. Four such activities are included as a beginning.

See the next pages.



ACTIVITY

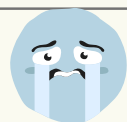
Use a Simple Feeling Chart

Feelings can be confusing for a variety of reasons.

- None of us starts out being able to recognize or name our feelings.
- Some of them can feel big, challenging and even overwhelming.
- They are sometimes messier than we might like and can feel tangled together.
- If we've avoided our feelings it can feel strange to turn into them.

A starting place is to use a basic set of feelings and work to recognize them.

Stop yourself periodically throughout the day or whenever you notice a feeling or feelings arise, and do your best to identify it according to the chart.

	Seeking/Explore	mesolimbic dopamine system
	Fear/Anxiety	fight= high dopamine; flight= low dopamine
	Anger/Rage	closely parallels fear system, different paths in amygdala and beyond
	Lust/Sexual	female= higher oxytocin, some vasopressin male= higher vasopressin, some oxytocin
	Care/Nurturance	oxytocin and prolactin
	Panic/Grief-	opioids, oxytocin, prolactin
	Play	

This basic chart is based on the work of **Panksepp** who mapped the basic neural networks of emotional systems including neurochemicals, neurotransmitters.

Adapted From: Tracy, J. L., & Randles, D. (2011). Four models of basic emotions: A review of Ekman and Cordaro, Izard, Levenson, and Panksepp and Watt. *Emotion Review*, 3, 4, 397-405.

ACTIVITY

Recognize the Feeling Cues

Learning how basic feelings show up as cues in our bodies, adds another layer to our emotional self awareness.

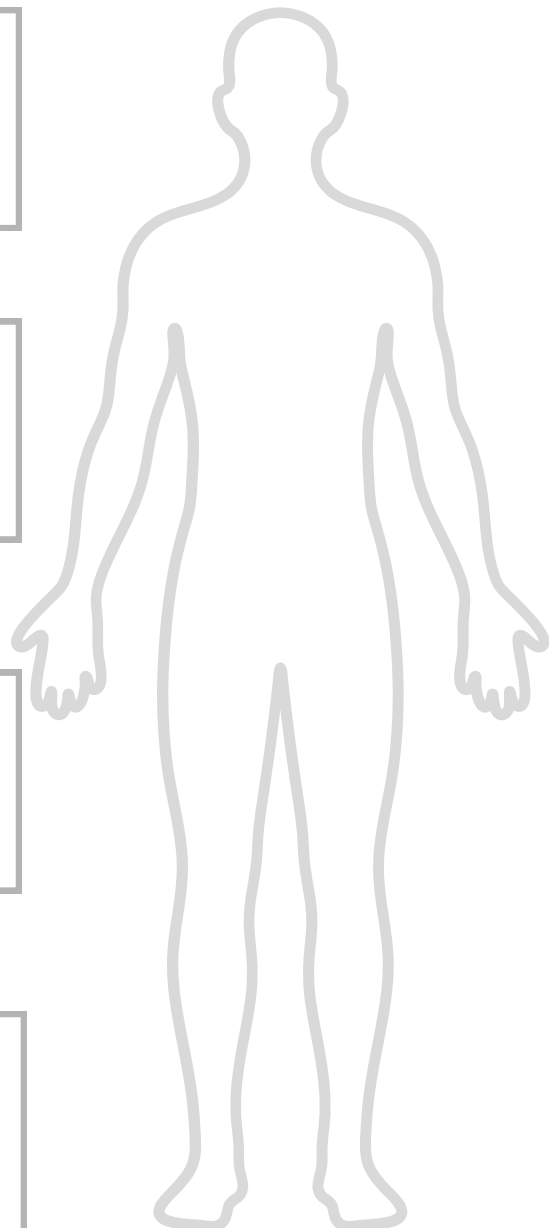
For each of the feelings, identify the physical/bodily sensations that occur for you personally. E.g., warm cheeks, knot in stomach, muscle tension in shoulders etc.

Seeking/Exploring:

Fear/Anxiety:

Anger/Rage:

Care/Nurturance:



ACTIVITY

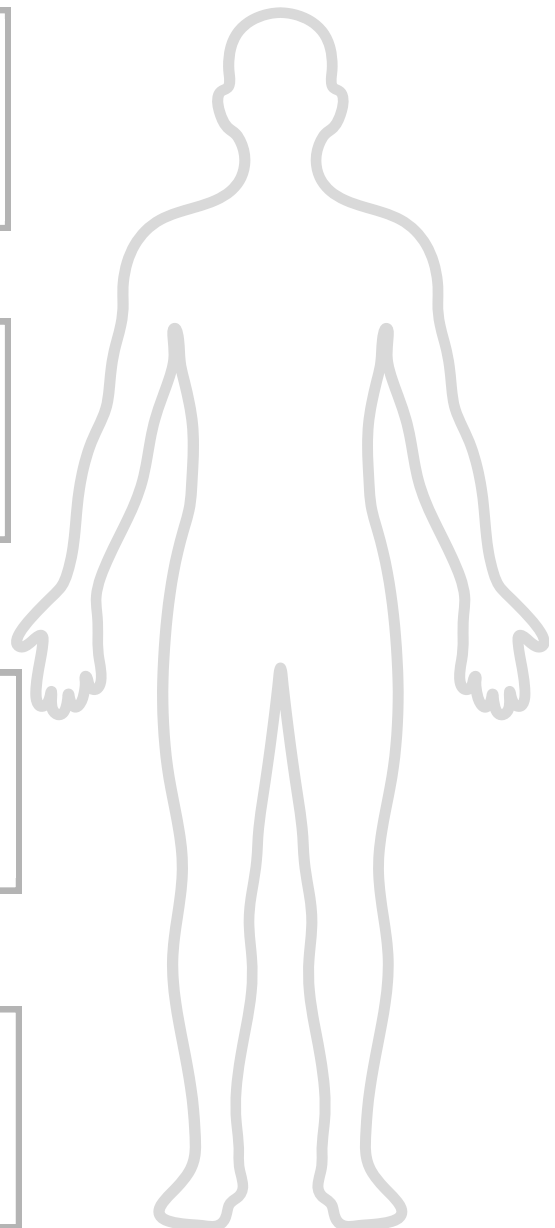
Panic/Grief:

Happiness:

Disgust:

Other:

Other:





Use a Nuanced Feeling Chart or Wheel

Feelings occur in degrees along a spectrum or continuum of intensity.

For example, feeling “concerned” is less intense than feeling “anxious”, and feeling “anxious” is less intense than feeling “afraid”, and feeling “afraid” is less intense than feeling “terrified”.

Learning to slow down and recognize the intensity degree of our feelings can help us understand ourselves and better navigate our emotional territory.

Feelings can also vary by how they are mixed with other feelings.

For example, we can feel pure “delight” at something that is interesting and exciting, or we can feel “delight” combined with “concern” if the interesting and exciting thing happens as part of a new experience that we were unsure of.

Using a more complete feeling chart or wheel can help us begin to recognize the nuance of our feelings, including their intensity and layers.

Whenever you notice a feeling or feelings arise do your best:

- **to identify it in terms of naming the degree of intensity.**
- **to identify each feeling when multiple feelings are involved.**

Three options are provided on the following pages.

See next 3 pages.



You can also look around the internet and find one that works better for you.

Emotions According to Paul Ekman



HAPPINESS

content

glad

cheerful

delighted

elated



SADNESS

down

despair

miserable

depressed

hopeless



FEAR

concerned

anxious

afraid

panic

terrified



DISGUST

hesitant

disapproving

awful

appalled

repulsed



ANGER

irritated

annoyed

agitated

furious

enraged



SURPRISE

curious

startled

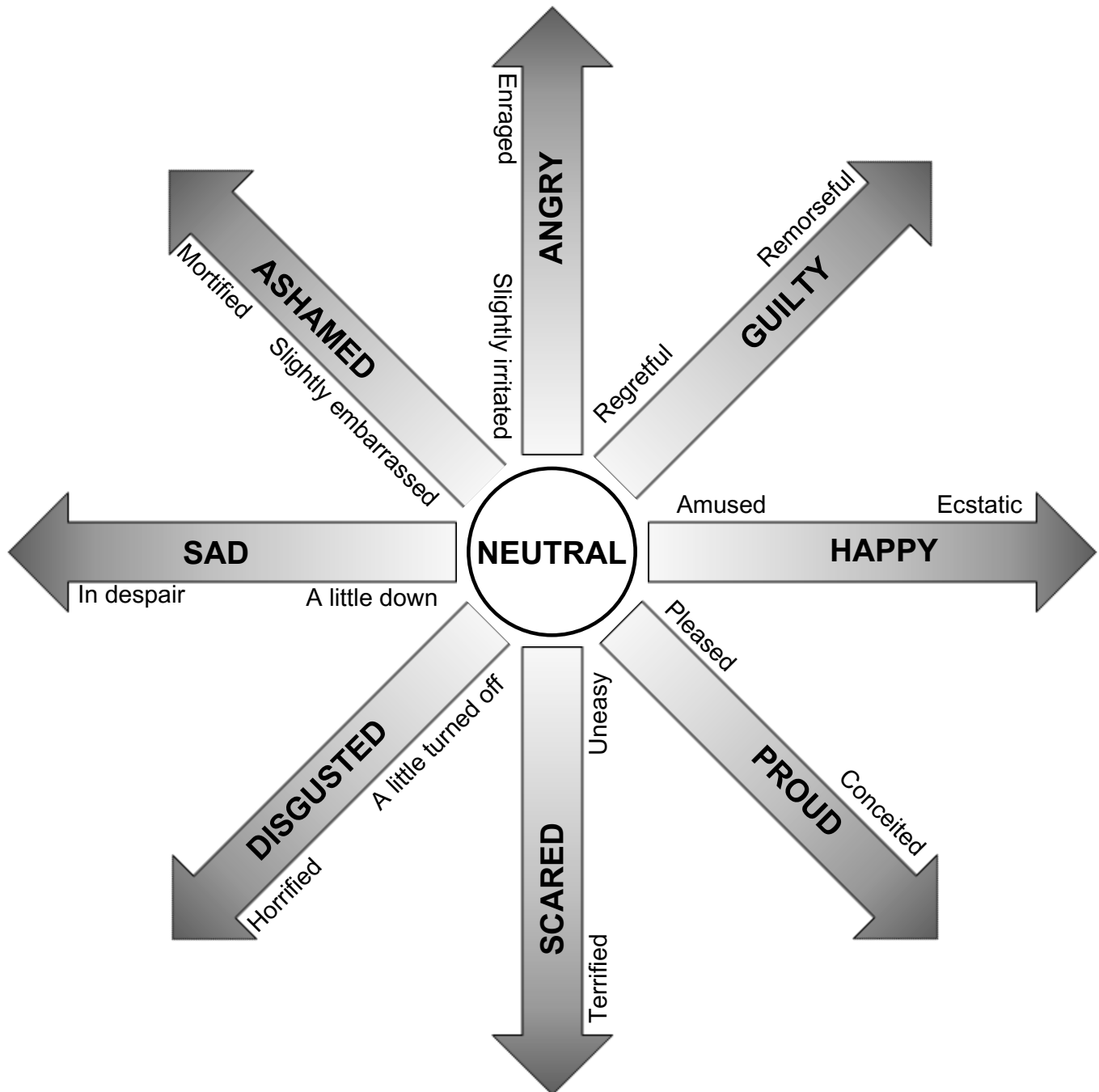
amazed

shocked

stunned

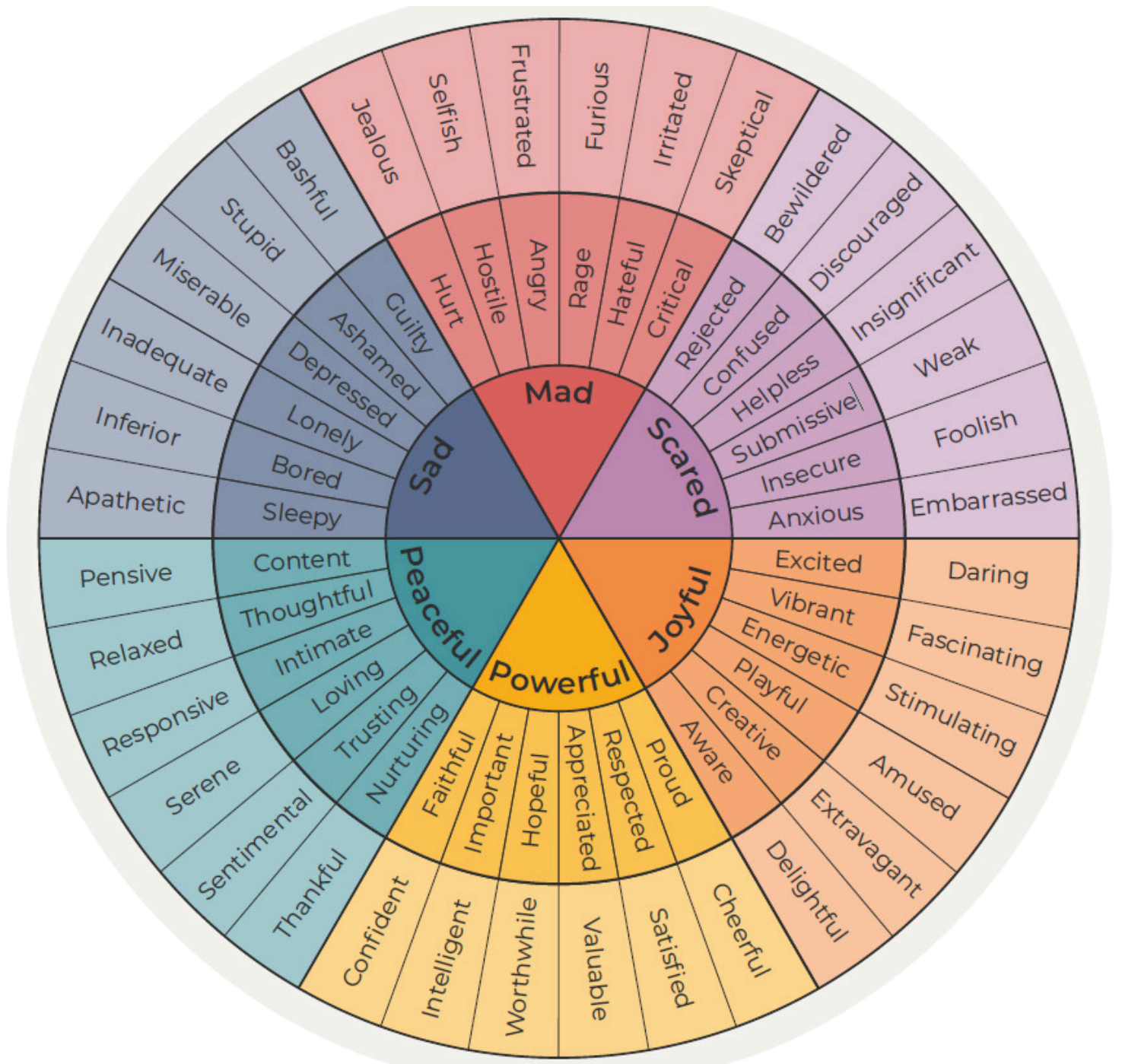
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Emotions According to Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Cognitive Processing Therapy



Adapted From: Resnik, P.A., Monson, C. M. & Chard, K. M. (2017). Cognitive processing therapy for PTSD.

Emotions According to Gottman Institute



Adapted From: Willcox, G. The Feeling Wheel. Gottman Institute.

Natural versus Thought Generated Feelings

We often believe that all of our feelings are created equally.

However, feelings can be naturally arising or can occur in response to our thoughts. We all have both kinds of thoughts, often without realizing it. In cognitive and constructionist approaches to therapy, feelings that occur in response to our thoughts are often referred to as “manufactured”.

Naturally occurring feelings arise and subside with time and allowing them to occur, while manufactured feelings continue to occur and/or reoccur so long as the related thought patterns persist.

It can be incredibly liberating to learn to understand and differentiate between naturally occurring versus manufactured feelings.

Doing so, helps us to know:

- which feelings to recognize and allow (and potentially respond to if needed).
- which feelings may be influenced or intensified by our thoughts, beliefs, or interpretations—and therefore may respond to a shift in how we are thinking about the situation. *(In the future, we can learn to make such shifts).*

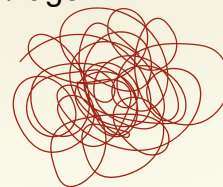
Natural Emotions

- emanate directly from event
- arise and subside naturally
- hard-wired
 - fight, flight, freeze
 - losses = sadness
 - disgust = withdrawal
 - happy = approach



Thought Generated Emotions

- produced by beliefs and thoughts
- feelings based on cognitive states and what we think and say to ourselves
- lens that we hear things from and how we reflect on things
 - self-blame thoughts = guilt
 - other-blame thoughts = anger/rage



Adapted From: Resnik, P.A., Monson, C. M. & Chard, K. M. (2017). Cognitive processing therapy for PTSD.



Differentiate Natural Feelings From Thought Generated Feelings

Use the following table to explore and pull apart one or more experiences of intense feelings to differentiate between what the natural feelings and what might be manufactured feelings.

Go slow. Take your time. Be curious. Simply notice. Be gentle with yourself.

Feelings	Natural Feelings	Potentially Thought Generated Feelings