

Understanding Emotions

Sometimes it can be difficult to tell thoughts and emotions apart. Some people are better at identifying their thoughts, while others are better at identifying their emotions.

Here are a few strategies to help you distinguish thoughts from emotions:

- Emotions generally take one word to describe, while thoughts are usually a string of words.
- Emotions cause feelings all over our body, while thoughts are typically experienced only in our head/mind.
- Thoughts can be fact-checked. We can argue with thoughts, but we can't argue with an emotion. If I can refute what you're saying, it is probably a thought.

This table can also help you identify the relationship between your feelings and thoughts.

Emotion	Types of Thoughts That Lead to this Emotion	Example
Sadness	Thoughts of a loss, rejection, or failure.	"They don't like me." "I'll never be good enough."
Guilt; Shame	Thoughts that you have failed to live up to certain standards: yours, someone else's, or your culture's. Guilt results from self-condemnation, and shame fears the reaction of others.	"I shouldn't have done that." "I should have studied more." "I'm not what my family wants."
Anger; Irritation; Annoyance	You believe that someone is treating you unfairly or trying to take advantage of you. You make assumptions about the intentions of others.	"They shouldn't do that!" "Nobody has any manners."
Frustration	Thoughts that life is not meeting your expectations and should be different.	"Why does traffic always slow down when I'm in a hurry?" "He should have been on time." "I shouldn't have done that."
Anxiety; Worry; Fear; Panic	Thoughts that you are in danger because something bad is going to happen. Negative predictions about the future.	"What if my mind goes blank when I give this presentation?" "They're not going to like me." "What if I'm sick?"
Inferiority; Inadequacy	Thinking about how you compare to someone else.	"There's nothing special about me." "All the guys like her and nobody likes me."
Hopelessness; Discouragement	Thoughts that your problems are indefinite and things will never be better.	"I'll never find a good job." "I'll be alone forever."

How else can we identify our emotions?

Sometimes it is difficult to identify what emotions we are having. One strategy to help us identify our emotions is to identify what kind of thoughts we are having (page 1). The way our body reacts can also give us clues to what emotion we might be experiencing. Additionally, noticing what behaviors we feel compelled to engage in can also help us understand what we might be feeling. Use the table below if you're struggling to identify your emotions.

Emotion	Physical Feelings	Common Behaviors
Anger	Clenched jaw, tense shoulders, hot face, burning in stomach, increased heart rate	Lashing out; yelling; storming about; behaving impulsively; attacking
Sadness	Feeling heavy, weighted; chest tightness, lump in throat; pain in chest	Crying; reaching out to others for support; withdrawing
Anxiety	Heart racing, sweating, shaking, stomach turning, dizziness, dry mouth	Avoiding; over-preparing; seeking excessive reassurance
Guilt	Heaviness, sick feeling in stomach	Avoiding someone we think we've wronged; becoming overly apologetic

Why do we need emotions?

We might feel more comfortable with some emotions than others, but our emotions can be really useful tools if we know how to recognize and respond to them appropriately. Though emotions can become very intense at times, we don't want to totally get rid of them! Each emotion serves helpful functions. We want to learn skills to manage them when they become too intense and lead to problematic behavior. Below is a list of some ways emotions can be helpful. Can you brainstorm any other ways your emotions are helpful to you?

Emotion	Why is this emotion useful?
Anger	Can motivate us; can help us communicate with and influence others
Sadness	Can show us what is really important to us; can draw others to us to help us cope
Anxiety	Can alert us of danger or problems; can prepare our body to better cope with stress and threat; can save us time in getting us to act in important situations
Guilt	Can help us recognize when our behavior isn't in line with our values; can motivate us to change our behavior; can help us maintain social connection
Happiness	Provides pleasure; helps us connect with others