

# Navigating Emotions



Each one of us moves along the spectrum of emotions all day long depending on what's going on around us. We may experience emotions from anger and fear or frustration, to happiness, excitement and sadness. Learning to navigate our emotions is to become emotionally intelligent and emotionally healthy.

Do you ever pause to recognize your emotions and name them?

We can get worked up inside and not even realize the emotions that are eating at us. Our systems get activated and we begin to feel anxious, irritation or worry. Our brains create negative thoughts and our behavior changes.

Naming our emotions gives us the chance to take a step back and figure out what to do with them.

Let's practice the steps of navigating an emotion together.

1<sup>st</sup> step is to realize or acknowledge your emotion. As soon as you recognize that you are agitated, anxious or worked up, **PAUSE**...What are you feeling? Choose to be **STILL** in your anxiety. Too often we experience agitation for a long time before we even recognize it and acknowledge it.

2<sup>nd</sup> step is naming the emotion, label it, or put a word to it...

What is an emotion you are experiencing right now? Can you name your emotion?

View that emotion as a signal on your dashboard that alerts you that something is happening, it doesn't tell you if it's good or bad, or helpful or not helpful, but it let's you know that something is going on.

For example: Let's say I'm experiencing distance in a relationship, and now I'm behaving in an irritable way...I need to stop and recognize my emotion. Am I afraid, angry or sad? ..... I've identified the emotion and given it a name, "anger".

Now that I've named it, I'm not **IN** the anger, now I'm a person that's experiencing anger. I've made a mental shift and moved from being in a state of anger, to recognizing a feeling of anger. Naming emotions bridges the gap between thoughts and feelings. The step from "I am \_\_\_\_..." to "I am feeling \_\_\_\_...", reminds me that the emotion is temporary, and I can get above it.

When we remember that we are bigger than what we are feeling in that moment, we can be more at peace with the feeling, and simply listen to what that emotional data is trying to tell us. If we're not bigger than our emotions, then we're out of control.

We want to **USE** the emotion to help us diagnose or understand what triggered our thoughts.

**3<sup>rd</sup> step is to pause.** Sit with that emotion and feel the effects of it for a short time...**Be STILL....**Remember how your mom taught you to count to 10 when you were a kid? That was a useful tool to create a little space and use your whole brain to make your best possible decision.

So, right now I want you to take a deep breath and relax your body as you slowly exhale and practice stillness. Repeat deep breathing several times as you consider the following:

Consider: What is the reason for your emotion? What is it that I don't like?

Maybe "I'm feeling rejection". Rejection could be one of my triggers.

A trigger is a reminder of a bigger emotional issue that we may be experiencing that isn't necessarily healed yet. Our triggers could be connected to other things inside us that are not related to this current issue that's creating the anger. Maybe I experienced rejection or abandonment in a relationship before that was never resolved.

**4<sup>th</sup> step, determine that YOU can decide your next step.** When we get insight into our emotion, we calm down, we sit with it, and we can eventually let it go. We recognize that we have options:

- We can set it aside (It's not that big of a deal)
- We can overlook the offence
- We can set it aside for now and address it later.
- We can address it in the moment with less hostility, for example you could say "You know what? That didn't feel good".

So next time you are feeling a difficult emotion, start by labeling it: "I am angry"..."I'm sad"... "I'm afraid". Just tell it like it is.

The lowered intensity of our emotions after we name them allows us to take it a step further, and ask: "What choices do I have?" - "What do I really want?"

Sometimes we don't know exactly how we're feeling, or we don't have the words to describe it, which makes naming our emotions difficult. The *Wheel of Emotions* is a great tool for increasing your emotional vocabulary and it can be found by doing a quick internet search.

Practice this in the difficult moments you experience.

1. Realize your emotion
2. Name it
3. Pause
4. Decide your next step