

The Face of Emotion: A Guide to Emotional Cues

By Dr. John Schinnerer

Guide to Self

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What is emotion? According to the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, emotion is defined as “any strong agitation of the feelings actuated by experiencing love, hate, fear, etc., and usually accompanied by certain physiological changes, as increased heartbeat, respiration, or the like, and often overt manifestations, as crying, shaking, etc.; any vehement or excited state.” We understand emotion as any feeling and the respective thoughts, beliefs and physiological and biological changes. There are dozens, if not hundreds, of emotions, including their combinations and degrees of intensity. As relatively little of our attention has been placed on emotion throughout history, there appear to be more variations of emotions than we have words to describe them.

Researchers disagree as to what constitutes the primary emotions and even whether or not there are primary emotions. According to certain researchers, primary emotions are those from which all other emotions can be derived through some sort of emotional blending, similar to combining primary colors to create other colors. Other researchers suggest thinking about emotion in terms of basic emotional families, although there is disagreement as to which ones are the basic families. Most researchers agree on the following emotional families – anger, surprise, fear, disgust, love, happiness, sadness, and shame.

As emotions underlie every thought, perception and action you have, you must be able to accurately identify which emotion you are feeling as you are

experiencing it. This takes practice. When you feel an emotion coming on, ask yourself, “What do I notice happening within my body?” and “What happened right before this emotion to possibly trigger it?”

Below is a list of each major emotional family followed by related emotions from the same family. In addition, there is a description of the physiological cues to watch for to help you identify which emotion you are experiencing at any given moment.

Anger. Emotions in the anger family include fury, resentment, outrage, exasperation, wrath, ire, infuriate, indignation, vexation, animosity, irritability, hostility, annoyance, antagonism, acrimony, and at the extreme end of the spectrum are pathological hatred and violence.

When you begin to feel angry, blood flows to your hands and feet, making it easier to strike at your enemy, your heart rate increases, a rush of adrenaline kicks in and your body prepares for forceful action. Anger causes a surge of chemicals (catecholamines) which creates a quick, one-time rush of energy to allow for one shot at physical action which lasts only a few minutes. Meanwhile, in the background, another batch of chemicals is released (through the adrenocortical branch) into the nervous system that creates a backdrop of physical readiness. This emotional undertone lasts much longer than the initial one-time surge and can last for days. This undertone keeps the brain in a special state of overarousal building a foundation on which reactions can occur with great speed.

Anger builds upon anger. So if your first angry thought is followed by more thoughts of outrage, you risk a dangerous spiral into uncontrollable rage. Anger is seductive with its inner dialogue of rationalized diatribes. Anger is the mood that we are the worst at controlling. The key to controlling anger is to interrupt the thought process that fuels the anger in the first place. Reframing the situation in a more positive, gracious light works well to defuse the anger cycle. The other means to defuse anger is to distract yourself with something you find pleasant and enjoyable. It's hard to be angry when you're having a good time.

Sadness. Emotions related to sadness include unhappy, joyless, grieved, dispirited, downcast, low, crestfallen, heavyhearted, disconsolate, desolate, despondent, melancholy, inconsolable, brokenhearted, depressed, dejected, blue, distressed, despairing, miserable, crushed, sorrowful, forlorn and at the farthest end of the spectrum is clinical depression.

The main reason for sadness is to help you adjust to a significant loss, such as the death of a family member or loss of an old friend. Sadness is accompanied by a drop in your energy and enthusiasm for activities and play. As the sadness deepens and approaches depression, sadness slows your body down. This allows time to grieve, look inward at who you are and what you are doing with your life, and understand the meaning of the loss. After the sadness subsides, and your energy returns, you are able to plan for new beginnings. Usually, these plans are created and pondered during the sadness. And perhaps, most importantly, sadness keeps you close to home where you are safest, when you are vulnerable, after a loss or disappointment.

Chronic sadness is marked by weight gain or loss, difficulties sleeping, exhaustion, a heavy heart, difficulty concentrating, and a feeling of being overwhelmed. Other characteristics include tearing up or crying easily, a lack of caring for activities that used to bring you pleasure, ongoing negative thoughts, decline in personal hygiene, increase in physical pain, and feelings of worthlessness.

Enjoyment and Happiness. Related emotions include sensual pleasure, delight, happy, ecstatic, glad, exultation, satisfaction, rapture, elation, excitement, cheerful, glee, gaiety, exhilaration, jubilation, enjoyment, pleasure, contentment, pleased, enraptured, heartwarming, rosy, blessed, bright, gratifying, relief, amusement, whimsy, thrill and at the extreme end of the spectrum is manic behavior.

During those times when you are happy, your brain discourages negative feelings and thoughts and allows for an increase in your energy reserves. Happiness puts a stop to the processes that create anxious thoughts. There are no other real bodily responses except for a peaceful serenity, which creates a reserve of energy to help you recover and heal. You also feel a readiness and enthusiasm for the task at hand and for working towards goals, such as socializing and exercising.

Love. Related emotions include passion, affection, rapture, amorousness, ardor, agape, amour, infatuation, devotion, adoration, fondness, tenderness, warm feeling, sentiment, esteem, admiration, friendship, amity, brotherhood, sympathy, concord, congeniality, cordiality, charity, goodwill, benevolence,

affinity, penchant, proclivity, attachment, beloved, cherish, savor, appreciate, erotic, ardent, enamored, doting, and warm-hearted.

Love, perhaps the highest of all emotions, engenders tender feelings and a sensual satisfaction. Love sets up your body to relax and lowers your defenses. The emotion of love results in a general state of calm, relaxation, contentment and an increased ability to work peacefully with others.

Fear. Related emotions include fright, terror, panic, threat, horror, affright, apprehension, alarm, dismay, trepidation, consternation, disquietude, quaking, perturbation, qualm, anxiety, worry, concern, fearfulness, cowardice, dread, appalled, terrified, scared, timorous, skittish, fainthearted, intimidated, diffident, chicken-hearted and at the far end of the spectrum are phobias.

When you are afraid, your blood gathers in the large muscle groups such as those in your legs, preparing your body to flee. Blood leaves your face thereby making it appear paler. Your body freezes for a moment to gauge your possible reactions such what is the quickest escape route. Then, the brain sends in a bunch of hormones that put your body on alert which makes it edgy and ready for action, and your attention fixates on the threat at hand to allow you to evaluate the threat and your response better. Fear also induces a quickening of breathing, a constriction of the throat, perspiration, quickened heart rate, and reduced blood flow to the brain. Accompanying this is an overwhelming flood of anxious thoughts which are seemingly uncontrollable. This intense cycle of fear and worry often paralyzes the individual in a figurative sense. It also paralyzes the rational mind, making it unable to think clearly.

Fear and anxiety are closely linked. When fear is sparked, the emotional brain begins its dance of anxiety, forcing the brain to focus on the perceived threat. The worrying or fearful mind spins in an endless loop of negative thoughts. Worrying lies at the heart of all anxiety.

Fear often goes hand in hand with controlling behaviors. This controlling behavior may come across as confidence, love, or concern, but it contains a hidden element of fear beneath the surface.

Surprise. Related emotions include astonishment, shock, amazement, wonder, astound, startle, flabbergast, dumbfound, stun, strike with wonder, stagger, strike with awe, defy belief, stupefy, confound, boggle the mind, and incredulity.

When surprised, your eyebrows lift which lets you take in more information about the unexpected event through your eyes and nose. The pupils in the eyes dilate to allow more light to hit the retina. This makes it easier to determine what is taking place and determine your best course of action.

Shame. Related emotions include guilt, remorse, self-disgust, self-abomination, embarrassment, mortification, chagrin, unworthiness, dishonor, contempt, ignominy, humiliation, disgrace, disrepute, disrespect, debasement, degradation, disappointment, humble, contrition, and regret.

When you feel ashamed, your head and shoulders drop and blood rushes to the face and makes it appear redder. Shame is the inner pain that comes from accepting the belief that something is innately wrong with us. Shame makes us feel worth less than others. This is distinctly different from guilt when we feel

guilty for doing something wrong. Shame, on the other hand, is feeling guilty simply for being you. There are two types of shame – healthy and unhealthy. Healthy shame is a personal moral and emotional warning system. It signals when you entering a potentially dangerous situation. Unhealthy shame occurs when you view your mistakes a true reflection of who you are. Unhealthy shame doesn't differentiate between a failed act and a failed person. Unhealthy shame is noticeable when you experience ongoing bouts of depression, you isolate yourself, you rely on substances to numb your pain, and when your public self is quite different from your private self.

Disgust. Related emotions include revolt, appall, put off, disdain, offend, fill with loathing, sicken, nauseate, turn one's stomach, repugnant, distaste, scorn, abhorrence, aversion, repulse, contempt, dislike, displeasure and disaffection.

The look of disgust is universal -- your upper lip curls up towards the nose and the nose wrinkles a bit. This indicates that something is offensive tasting or smelling or that some idea is offensive. The facial movements suggest an attempt to close your nostrils against a terrible stench or to regurgitate a nasty food.

Emotional Families

Of course, this is just one way in which to categorize emotions. It does not seem to be the final answer. This approach does not answer the question of where to include virtues such as courage, forgiveness, hope and faith. And it provides no clear slot for age-old vices such as sloth, boredom, doubt, and

laziness. It does not resolve the recent questions about where to put emotional blends such as jealousy. Jealousy is an offshoot of anger that combines anger, fear and sadness. Currently there are no clear cut answers to questions such as these. Hopefully, researchers will develop an improved concept of emotions that will encompass all the emotions and their blends. It may be that this new conceptualization will look similar to a color wheel which labels the primary colors along with the blends that are created through various color combinations.

The idea of basic emotions, or emotional families, was initially brought up by Paul Ekman's study which reported that there are four facial expressions that are universally recognized by people. These four expressions include fear, anger, sadness and enjoyment. The universality of these expressions includes those in remote areas of the world who have never been exposed to modern technology such as television. The worldwide recognition of these four emotional responses was originally observed by Charles Darwin who viewed it as proof that evolutionary forces had imprinted these signals on our central nervous system.

Mood Rings

At Guide To Self, we are in agreement with Goleman and Ekman that emotions should be classified into the families or dimensions mentioned above (anger, sadness, shame, surprise, enjoyment, fear and so on). According to Goleman, each of these emotional families has a "basic emotional nucleus at its core, with its relatives rippling out from there in countless mutations. The outer rings, or ripples, are *moods* which are less intense yet longer in duration than a single emotion. For example, you can be pleased or content for days at a time

with brief spurts of joyfulness or rapture. Sheer joy is difficult to maintain for any length of time. On the other hand, you can be in an irritable mood for days on end with shorter episodes of anger and rage interspersed. Inside the ripples of mood are the ripples of *temperaments* which are predispositions towards a certain moods or emotions. And inside the ripples of emotional temperaments are the ripples of emotional *disorders* such as clinical depression or general anxiety. The rings of disorders are marked by the feeling of being entangled in a perpetually negative emotional state.

In conclusion, emotions can be quite complicated and there has yet to emerge one unifying theory on emotions. However, as science turns its attention to the important issue of emotions, we expect greater clarification in the next five to ten years. In the meantime, pay close attention to your emotions since emotional mastery is the best predictor of success at work and satisfaction in life.

About Dr. John Schinnerer

A nationally-recognized expert in anger management and positive psychology, Dr John is an award-winning author, speaker, consultant and expert coach in the fields of Positive Psychology and Anger Management. Dr. John has been nationally recognized as one of the premiere experts in his fields. He has appeared on a variety of national media outlets providing an expert view on managing anger and providing insights to a happier life. Dr. John's work can be found in both print publications, radio, CD, DVD and TV. He consulted on a major motion picture due out in June of 2015. Dr. John is also featured in the upcoming documentary, *Skewed*, on the impact of violence in the media. Dr. John Schinnerer, is a UC Berkeley-trained Ph.D intently focused in the field of happiness. Dr. John has given a Psychiatric Grand Rounds presentation for Kaiser Permanente on positive psychology. He has taught numerous psychologists, doctors and mental health professionals about the benefits of positive psychology. He has consulted with major companies such as Sutter Health, Kaiser, UPS regarding the need for and implementation of emotional intelligence. His book, [Guide to Self: The Beginner's Guide to Managing Emotion and Thought](#) was awarded Best Self-Help Book of the Year. Dr. John was recently included on a music album by Positive Music Imperative, speaking on the importance of positivity in music lyrics. Dr. John's blog on positive psychology, [Shrunken Mind](#), was named one of the top 10 positive psychology blogs on the internet by PostRank and Alltop.

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