



How to name and communicate your feelings

[Emotion Wheel: How to Use It for Emotional Literacy](#)

Managing and working through difficult emotions is not always easy. Emotional literacy — the ability to name and communicate your feelings — can make a big difference.

People with strong emotional literacy skills tend to have greater awareness of both their own emotions and those of others.

You might, for example, find it fairly easy to name specific emotions as you notice them and recognise how they contribute to your other feelings and experiences.

If you are still building these emotional skills, though, don't worry. Anyone can work to develop emotional literacy — and using an emotion wheel is a great tool to help you along the way.

The Plutchik wheel

Psychologist Robert Plutchik developed one of the most popular emotion wheels, known as the Plutchik wheel.

He suggested that people experience eight core emotions, which he arranged in opposite pairs on the wheel:

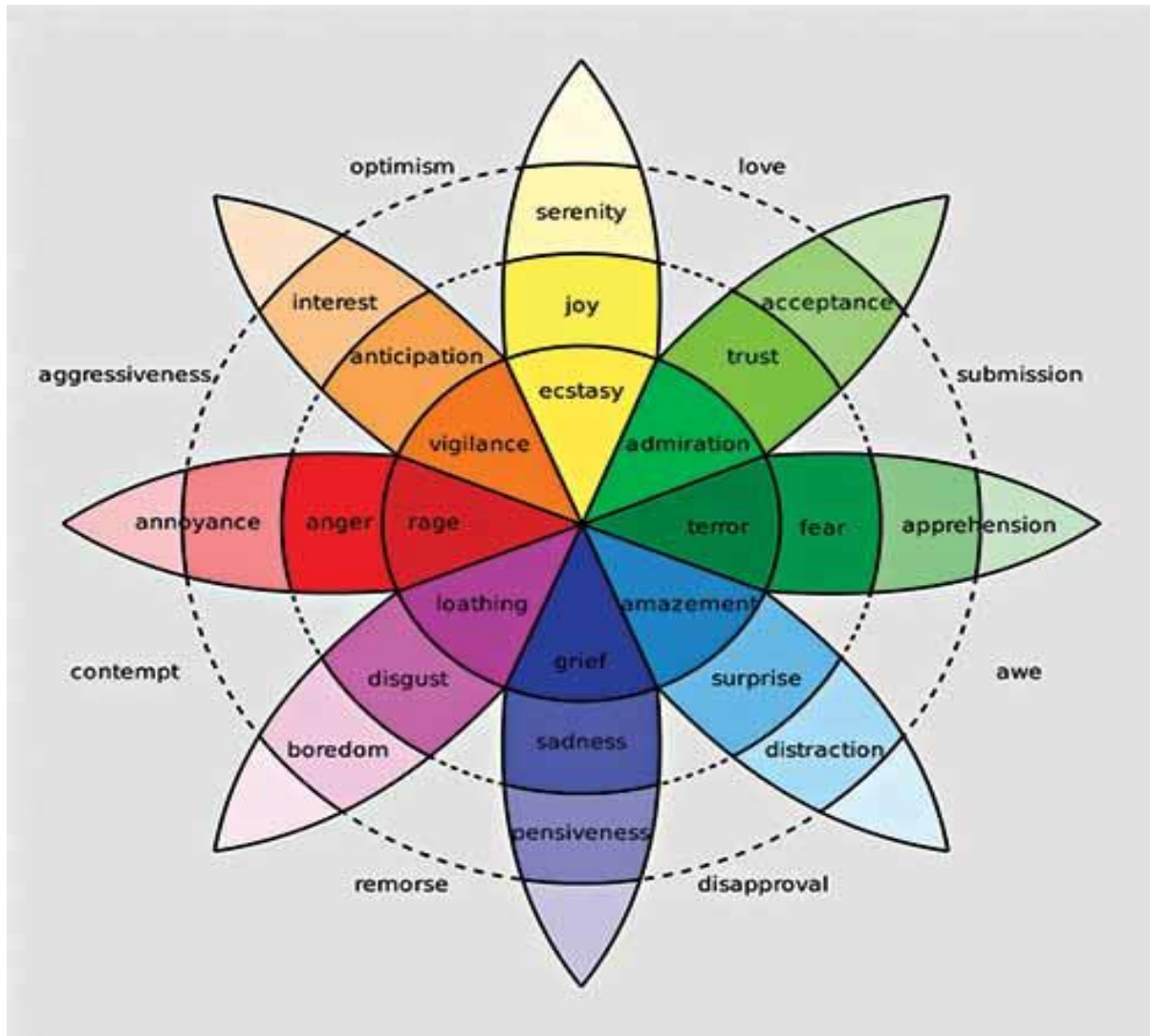
- sadness and joy
- anger and fear
- expectation and surprise
- acceptance and disgust

According to [his theory](#), these basic emotions can intensify, become milder, or even combine to produce any emotional state.



How to use it

There's no right or wrong way to use an emotion wheel, but here are some tips to get you started.



Find your core emotion

1. Got a feeling you don't quite know how to put into words?



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2. Find an approximation of your current emotional state on the wheel to help you start narrow down the distinct layers and nuances of what you are feeling.

As you can see on the wheel above, emotions are arranged on colour-coordinated spokes in three layers:

- **Outer edges.** Along the outer edges, you'll find low-intensity emotions: *apprehension, annoyance, boredom, distraction*
- **Toward the centre.** As you move toward the centre, the colour deepens and milder emotions become your basic emotions: *anger, fear, sadness, disgust, surprise, disgust*, and more.
- **Centre circle.** The centre circle holds the most intense manifestations: *rage, loathing, grief, terror, vigilance* among others.
- **Between each coloured spoke.** Here, you'll find what are called mixed emotions — *contempt, for example, rises out of a combination of anger and disgust.*

Let's say you have some awareness of a vague sense of *discontent*.

Looking at the wheel, you find two emotions that resonate with you: *boredom and apprehension*.

Consider possible causes

Now that you have a few words to help explain what you feel, you can use those as stepping-stones toward a deeper understanding of what's going on.

Emotions happen as part of a sequence of events, rather than isolated occurrences. They come from *somewhere*, even if you don't realise it.

If you are in the habit of pushing down emotions, tracking them out of sequence can help.



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Start by naming the emotion, then retrace its steps back to the initial trigger. Finding the cause is easier said than done, but a few moments to yourself can help you untangle your thoughts.

Let's go back to the example feelings of boredom and apprehension.

Though you are free from obligations at the moment, you feel bored and restless, even distracted, and you can't settle on one particular activity. You know exactly what caused your mood, but you've tried to avoid thinking about it: Earlier that morning, your partner sent a text saying, "You'll be home tonight, right? There's something we should talk about."

Make connections

Your apprehension relates to the fact that you have no idea what your partner wants to talk about. You know you didn't do anything to damage their trust, and they haven't shown any signs of changed feelings or wanting to [break up](#).

Allowing yourself to think about the situation further opens the door to more emotions:

- **Worry:** over a potentially difficult conversation
- **Irritation:** that they brought it up so early and left you to worry about it
- **Sadness:** around potential worst-case scenarios

All these feelings relate to *the love you have for your partner and your dread of losing the relationship*. (Perhaps think about these in terms of 'unmet need' triggering the feelings ie the need to feel more secure, more affection, physical contact more.....?)

On the wheel, love is a combined emotion that rests between serenity and joy, acceptance and trust. This makes sense to you, since you do trust your partner, even though you're slightly annoyed about their handling of this situation.



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Take action

You might notice the emotions you experience showing up in your speech and [body language](#) as well as your behaviour. Emotions generally prompt some type of action. Some of these actions, like blocking your emotions or lashing out, may not be particularly helpful (These are defensive behaviours).

Actions that help you:

- cope with the emotions themselves,
- take steps to address their triggers and
- discuss with your partner how you are feeling and what you might be needing can have a lot of benefit.

Using an emotion wheel or other tool to identify and understand emotions often makes it easier to process them in productive ways. Just keep in mind this does not necessarily mean making them go away.

Let us say you accept you will not get an answer from your partner until later. This is actually quite fitting, since the emotion wheel sets acceptance as the opposite of boredom.

You also realise that taking the time to explore your feelings has already started to ease your trepidation and help you feel calmer, making it easier to accept your feelings.

Instead of continuing to mull over what they might say later, you spend the afternoon doing things you enjoy. You also resolve to mention your stress to your partner and ask them to try a less nerve-racking method of communication in the future.

For examples of the kind of conversation you might have with your partner see the **Divorce Manual chapter 4-[Preparing to communicate in mediation](#)**



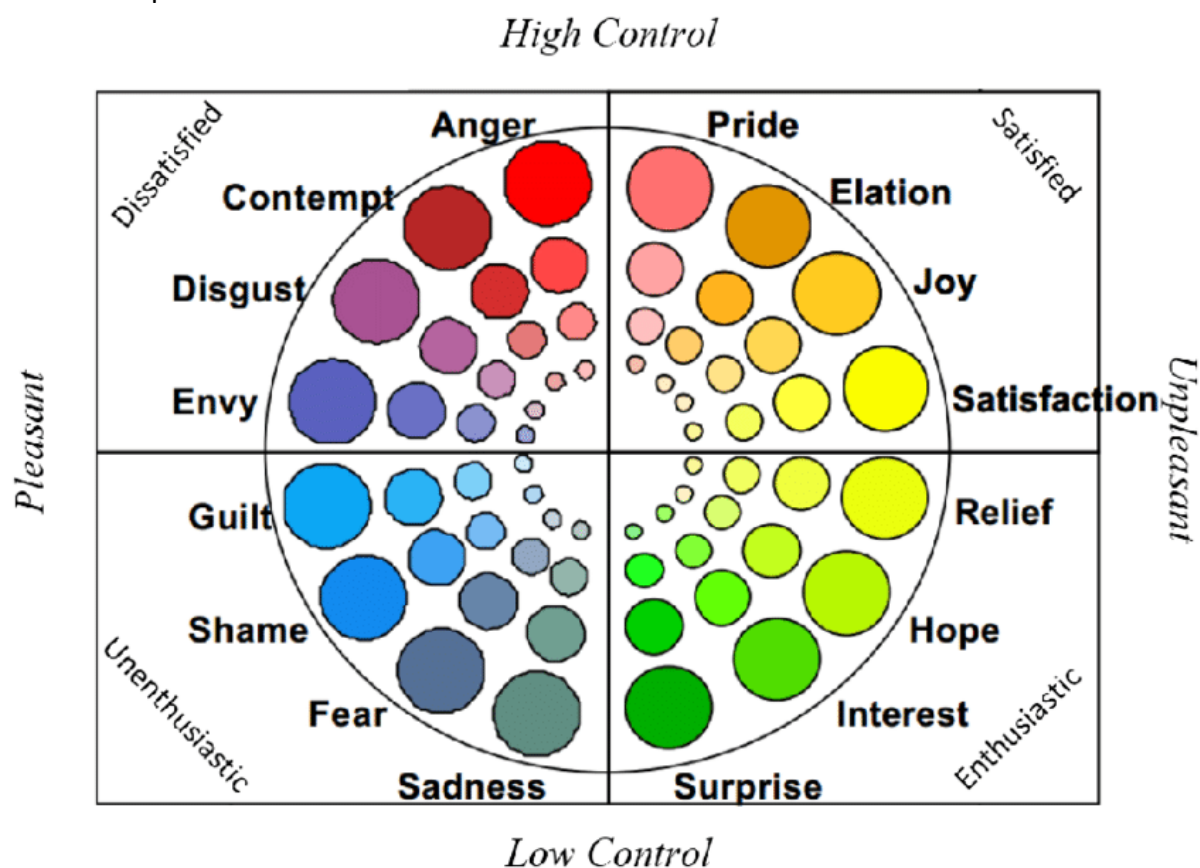
Other variations of the wheel

More emotions exist than can be expressed in one chart alone. While many people find Plutchik's emotion wheel a helpful starting place, it may not be an ideal fit for you, and that's OK.

This wheel is just one way of looking at emotions. If you find it somewhat lacking, one of these other variations might prove more useful.

The Geneva wheel

Instead of dividing emotions into opposing pairs, the [Geneva wheel](#) divides emotions into four main quadrants.





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This wheel first separates emotions into two categories:

- **unpleasant**
- **pleasant**

These categories are further divided by

- **High control**
- **Low control.**

“Control” refers to the power you have over your emotions or the events that trigger them.

For example, you will find ‘surprise’ in the low-control pleasant category, on the border between pleasant and unpleasant. This makes sense: You may find it difficult to control feelings of surprise and you may not always enjoy surprises.

Examining the control you have over emotions can not only help validate difficult feelings you don’t have much control over, it can also help you recognise when you *can* do more to [manage your emotions](#). Have a read of the section- [How to manage strong emotions driving you apart](#)

Another unique feature of the Geneva wheel is the space for no emotions in the centre. This can be useful for expressing [emotional numbness](#) or emotions not shown elsewhere in the wheel.

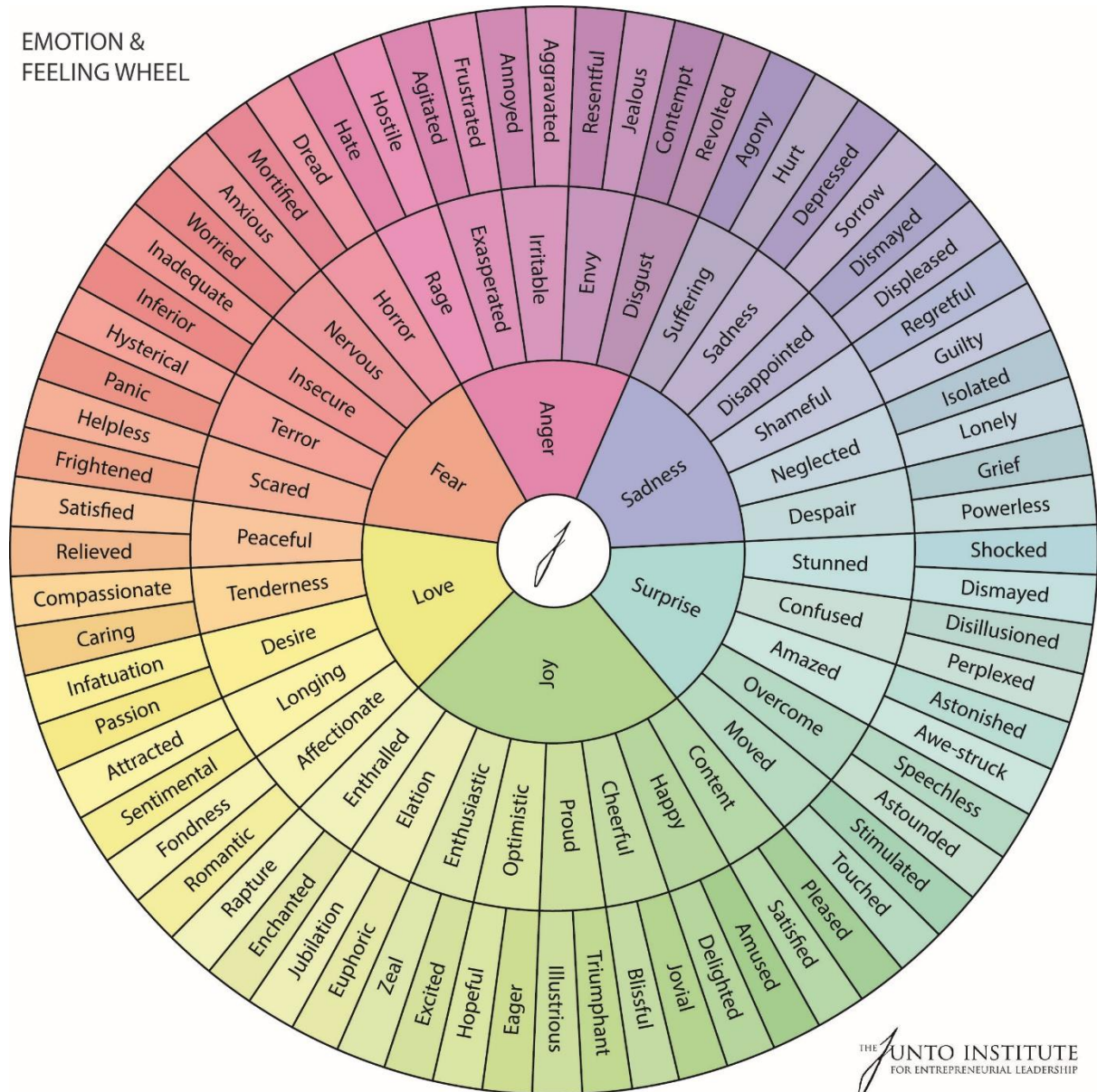
Though you might find it helpful to use your own words to discuss your feelings, this can sometimes be a drawback.

After all, you are using the wheel to get in better touch with your emotions. If you already struggle to express them, you might get stuck on continuing to search for the right words instead of narrowing it down using the emotions that *are* listed.

The Junto wheel

If you prefer a wider array of emotions to choose from, the [Junto wheel](#) may be a great option for you. Of the three wheels, this one has the simplest layout, so you might find it a little easier to read and use.

EMOTION & FEELING WHEEL





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This wheel — which looks very much like an actual wheel — is divided into six colour-coded wedges.

At the centre, you will find **6 basic feeling states**:

1. **love**
2. **fear**
3. **anger**
4. **sadness**
5. **surprise**
6. **joy**

As you move from the centre toward the outer edges of the wheel, you will find more specific feelings — from anger to irritable to annoyed.

Having more complex emotional states to choose from can help you really get to the heart of your feelings when basic emotions just don't cut it.

"I'm feeling sad right now" might be enough — sometimes. Other times, you might want to investigate your emotions a little more carefully. Are you really just sad? Or do you feel lonely and isolated, perhaps even a little hopeless?

Generally speaking, the more specific you can get with yourself when identifying emotions, the easier it becomes to find helpful ways to express, manage them and articulate them to others.

Seeking out some company might help relieve feelings of [loneliness](#), certainly, but you might not arrive at this solution unless you realise you are feeling lonely.



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The bottom line

Emotions can get complicated. Sometimes, they might confuse you to the point where ignoring them seems like the best way to avoid getting overwhelmed.

However, leaving emotions unaddressed can often just intensify them.

It may seem difficult at first but exploring and talking through feelings is typically your best option. Even emotions you would rather wish away usually become less distressing when you confront them.

The emotion wheel is one useful tool that can help you practice identifying feelings and getting comfortable with them.

If you find emotional expression particularly challenging do not hesitate to reach out for a little extra support. [A Divorce coach](#) can offer guidance as you work on building emotional skills and unmasking tough feelings.

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