

Emotional Message Chart

<u>Emotion</u>	<u>Message</u>	<u>Questions to Ask of the Emotion</u>	<u>Intensification</u>
Fear	Intuitive, focused awareness of a threat to your well being	What is the threat? What action must I take to move to a position of safety?	worry, anxiety panic, terror confusion dissociation dulling of senses

In its purest form, fear is nature’s warning system of an external threat in the environment. Intensifications like worry, anxiety, and confusion result from trying to explain fear away or control what scares us, while ignoring a deeper message we don’t want to face. For instance, it’s common for people override fear to enter into an abusive relationship, disregarding early evidence that “something’s not quite right” in order to reap some other benefit, such as a wealthy lifestyle or prestigious marriage. (In this case, a perpetually anxious wife might worry about keeping the house clean and making sure dinner is served on time to avoid a beating.)

Panic and terror are the result of true and urgent endangerment that is being ignored, often pointing back to and accentuated by an injury or trauma the person wasn’t allowed to work through. Peter Levine, author of *Waking the Tiger*, and other psychologists active in the field of somatic psychotherapy, have some important insights to offer people who work with trauma survivors, including military personnel suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Dissociation (“going blank and numb” under stress) is a state that can initially result from not being able to flee a situation perceived as deadly, such as a serious accident, rape, physical abuse, or war. However, survivors of extreme experiences sometimes get stuck in this mode, freezing under mildly stressful current situations when they’re not in physical danger, such as conflicts at work, or speaking in front of groups. This leads to the “perpetual assistant” phenomenon, where an otherwise brilliant person is unable to realize his/her true potential.

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Vulnerability	Something significant is about to change or be revealed	What belief, behavior, perception or comfortable habit is being challenged? How might my life change if I adapt to this new insight? Who can I go to for help in changing an ineffective habit or integrating new information?	Panic Rage

Vulnerability is an emotion that feels like fear on the surface, but it represents an internal threat, a threat to your self image, belief system, or comfortable habits. The key lies in separating it from fear, our natural warning system, which points to external threats. If, upon checking in with the mind-body awareness system, there is no discernable threat in the immediate environment, check to see if the threat seems to instead arise from a conflict within the self. Vulnerability marks the point at which an old coping strategy, behavior pattern, or perception of the world is being challenged---or a previously repressed part of the self is being revealed. People with a low tolerance for vulnerability tend to develop a rigid identity based on established methods, degrees, or familial/societal norms. This false sense of self or “conditioned personality,” however, is merely a collection of habits and has no creative power to imagine a new way of acting in response to change or unexpected information. (See Guiding Principle Seven for strategies on how to move beyond limiting thought patterns.) Panic results when the conditioned mind feels a need to “run away” from the insight. Rage arises when the personality tries to fight or violently suppress the insight. (See Guiding Principle Five for ideas on how to develop a higher tolerance for vulnerability.)

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Anger	Proper boundaries should be maintained or rebuilt	What must be protected? What boundary must be restored?	rage, fury (exploding at those who've violated our boundaries) deflected rage (exploding at an innocent bystander) boredom, apathy (masks anger that can't be dealt with, a non-violent coping strategy)

When anger arises, it signals that someone has invaded your physical or psychological space, perhaps unconsciously, perhaps with the intention to control or take advantage of you. Either way, the surge of energy that accompanies this emotion helps you stand your ground when someone pushes your boundaries.

Karla McLaren's insights into **boredom and apathy as repressed anger** are intriguing. Someone who uses boredom or apathy as a coping strategy for dealing with anger can be resentful and sarcastic without causing anyone serious physical damage, but the emotional toll on co-workers, family, and friends can be equally damaging---covert expression of anger through sarcasm and complacency is toxic over time.

It's important to note that **sadness and anger are sometimes used to mask each other**. Women will sometimes cry and assume they're sad when they're actually feeling anger because they're afraid of standing up for themselves. Men are more likely to express anger when they actually feel sad because they've been taught that "real men don't cry." This is not a hard and fast rule, however. Sometimes men are afraid of the explosive forces of their own repressed anger and will opt to show sadness instead. Some women would rather get angry than feel sad because they're afraid they'll never stop crying if they allow the tears to come forward.

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Frustration	The action you're taking is not effective	Where is the block? What can I do differently? Who can I ask for ideas/assistance	Rage Powerlessness

Commonly mistaken for anger, the two emotions do in fact feel similar and can both intensify into rage. The difference, however, lies in the message. Frustration arises when we employ a technique in work or life, or an influence in relationship with another being, that simply isn't effective. Rather than look for alternatives, or ask for help, we continue to try to force a breakthrough using familiar coping strategies that, while they may have worked in the past, produce little or no result in the current situation. Frustration continues to build to the point of rage if we refuse to adapt or explore other alternatives. Powerlessness arises when we give up without asking for help.

The most efficient way to read anger is to first sense if someone has stepped over a boundary. If not, check for frustration. If neither of these messages seems relevant, this uncomfortable feeling may indicate that you're interacting with an incongruent person.

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Agitation or Anxiety (often mistaken for anger)	You're interacting with an incongruent person	What is the true emotion behind the other person's mask of control, friendliness, or well being, and is it directed toward me?	rage mistrust

You might wonder how you can answer this question when someone's trying to hide his emotions. Someone who wears a mask of happiness, compliance, indifference, or stern control to hide vulnerability, disappointment, frustration, jealousy, or grief may or may not be "lying" per se. Some people have been so conditioned to suppress emotion that they no longer know *what* they're feeling. By asking yet another question — "What is the emotion behind the mask, and is it directed toward me?" — you can determine whether this person is hiding something in order to take advantage of you, or if he's simply sad, angry, or fearful for personal reasons. In the latter case, this "incongruence alarm" (which feels like anger to some people, and more like agitation or anxiety to others) often subsides when you notice the incongruity and realize the person may act unpredictably because of his conflicted emotional state.

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Guilt	Critique of a destructive, neglectful, or abusive <i>behavior</i>	What questionable behavior or action did I engage in? What was my motivation? How can I get my needs met in a more productive way? Who can help me change this hurtful habit?	Denial Blame Shame Projection

In its purest form, guilt encourages people to hold *themselves* accountable. The justice system can punish people for breaking the law, of course, but it can't make them *feel* guilty. As an internal feeling, rather than an external cultural control, guilt is empathy's alarm system, a social regulator, an emotional moral compass that tells you when you've drifted off course. When guilt arises in your own mind-body awareness system, notice what questionable behavior you engaged in and who suffered as a result. *Sincerely* saying you're sorry, making amends or restitution if necessary, are appropriate responses. But you must also *change* the original behavior---otherwise people will become cynical and mistrustful, considering any future attempts to take responsibility for aggressive or neglectful actions as "empty apologies." Taking responsibility for your actions and making appropriate changes helps release the guilt, and keeps you from experiencing similar guilt-inducing situations in the future.

Other than shame, the intensifications listed here are not feelings, they are evasions designed to keep us from feeling guilty and taking personal responsibility. Many people choose denial when they feel that initial pang of guilt, usually blaming another person or social system, which may in fact need to change as well. However, even if you learned a destructive behavior for legitimate survival purposes, or perhaps were taught to engage in questionable practices as part of a predatory business, political, or educational system, you must still change that behavior in yourself. It's important to remember, however, that *you* are not defective; the behavior is defective; otherwise you will plunge into shame.

Many people, however, opt for the much more destructive practice of "projecting their shadow" onto others, picking a co-worker, family member, or perhaps entire race to punish for their own transgressions. Scapegoating others to avoid guilt initially allows people to abdicate responsibility in favor of persecuting someone else, but this abusive practice leads to more guilt. See Chapter Twelve's section on Projection and Objectification for more information on this archaic practice.

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Shame	Critique of a “defective” state of consciousness or being	What destructive behaviors must I change to fully enter this new more conscious phase of life?	Despair Blame Projection Suicidal Urge Bullying

Shame, on the other hand, is a critique of who we *are*, rather than what we’ve done (guilt). We can also feel shame as a by-product of personal transformation, when we “wake up” and realize that we were objectifying, abusing, or neglecting others. However, it’s important to shift focus from shaming ourselves (for a limited, selfish, perhaps childish state of consciousness) to analyzing which *behaviors* were destructive. In this way, we move into the more constructive realm of guilt, charged with making amends and appropriate changes, perhaps through counseling, coaching, or family support. Again, despair and the suicidal urge are feelings. Projection, blame and bullying are evasions or unproductive strategies for releasing the feeling of shame.

Shame is tricky because it can be dumped on us by parents, spouses, co-workers, and authority figures. However, by asking the questions above, we can tell if shame is an emotion that originated in our behavior (an intensification of guilt), which we can do something about, or if the shame really belongs to someone else who is projecting it onto us to make him/herself feel better without changing his/her own behavior (let alone the limited belief system or state of consciousness that justifies the behavior).

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Envy	Someone is modeling a desirable talent, success, or lifestyle	What aspects of this person’s life, career, personal qualities, relationships, or talents inspire me to excel? What professional training and/or personal skills must I develop to achieve similar success? Who can I enlist for support in this next stage of growth?	Rivalry Hero worship Powerlessness Resentment

Envy is defined as a “painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another joined with a desire to possess the same advantage.” In other words, when you feel envious *you want something that someone else has*, usually wealth or success. This may include a promotion, a certain talent, professional recognition, or a valuable relationship of some kind.

Used constructively, this emotion inspires us to excel. When we envy someone, he or she is modeling something we want to attain. From a distance, we can analyze this person’s success, and study how he or she achieved it . Sometimes the person you envy can even act as a formal or informal mentor. If not, this is a good time to find a coach or teacher who can help support you through the journey you’re about to undertake. Nonetheless, it’s important to study the person who inspired you to begin with, focusing not only on the perks of his/her success, but on the hardships, education, experience, dedication, ingenuity, courage, and work it took to get there. In his book, *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Malcolm Gladwell observed that most innovators, from the Beatles to Steve Jobs, spent an average of 10,000 hours developing their talents before they were capable of making significant contributions to their respective fields.

It’s also important to be realistic about your own talents, values, and resources. If you’re 5’4” and have always dreamed of becoming a fashion model, you may be envious of a girlfriend who is 5’10” but your true calling probably lies elsewhere. Similarly if you envy the head of a Fortune 500 company who clawed his way to the top, betraying numerous friends and colleagues along the way, you may want to look more deeply into his lifestyle and relationships, comparing his methods with your own moral compass.

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Disappointment	The outcome you desired or envisioned did not live up to your expectations	What was I hoping/expecting to happen? Was this realistic? If so, how can I better communicate my vision to those <i>capable</i> of carrying it out? If not, how can I modify my vision and better train/prepare/support the people involved?	Anger, frustration Mistrust Powerlessness Apathy

Disappointment is a common emotion in the workplace and in personal relationships. When we ignore or try to hide disappointment over time, unspoken negativity and/or apathy rise, communication breaks down, and cynicism abounds. When people finally gain the courage to address their disappointment, they've quite often reached high levels of frustration and agitation through multiple instances of unexpressed disappointment. In this much more desperate emotional state, the tendency to speak in a shaming tone of voice puts others on the defensive, creating further blocks to clarity and creative problem solving. Asking the above questions before meeting with a person or group of people who've disappointed you can help you prepare for a much more constructive conversation. Often, you realize that you weren't clear in communicating your expectations to begin with, essentially setting others up for failure. When used thoughtfully, and *expediently*, disappointment inspires greater clarity, team work and problem solving. When suppressed and ignored, it leads to an increasingly confusing and toxic work or home environment.

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Sadness	Restores flow to psyche when loss is immanent and in our best interest	What must be released? What must be rejuvenated?	despair despondence

Sadness, by this definition, implies we have a choice in when and how to let go of something we once valued but is no longer working for us: a job, a relationship, a home. McLaren emphasizes we must ask both questions to complete the cycle authentically again. According to Karla McLaren, this misunderstood emotion "restores flow" to the system "when loss is immanent and *in our best interest*." More specifically, sadness "brings the healing waters of tears and physical release to us," and "removes log jams in our psyches" so we can live authentically again.

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Grief	A significant loss or death has occurred, usually due to circumstances beyond your control	What must be mourned? What must be memorialized or celebrated?	Depression

Grief does not involve a choice. Through an accident, illness, or change in the economic climate, a person loses a spouse, a job, physical health, etc., before he's ready, if he ever would have been. Because something valuable has been so rudely snatched away, there is also an element of anger in grief: It is the ultimate boundary violation to have your life turned upside down by outside forces beyond your control. Crying tears that often feel like a mixture of deep sadness, loneliness, anger, and vulnerability allows you to slowly let go of an important relationship, job, or other part of your life.

Memorializing what was lost adds to the constructive expression of this emotion: Finding ways to remember, cherish and, at times even celebrate the gifts that this person, job or stage of life provided you is healing, and over time, restores your appreciation and enthusiasm for life.

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Depression	“Ingenious Stagnation” “Stop sign of the soul”	What activities or relationships drain my energy? What new direction gives me energy?	Loss of self Loss of life’s purpose Suicidal Urges Physical Illness

Depression often follows a period when we didn’t listen to sadness, fear, anger, or grief. McLaren emphasizes that depression is not a sign of stupidity; it is, in fact, a most ingenious survival mechanism where the psyche is given no choice but to hinder our ability to move forward because it knows we shouldn’t move in the direction we’re headed. This “ingenious stagnation” takes over when people refuse, over an extended period, to acknowledge the wisdom behind “outlawed” emotions like anger, fear, sadness, and grief. “In a world where we’re taught to ignore our emotions, dreams and true passions,” McLaren says, “where we enter blindly into the wrong relationships and the wrong jobs, depression is our emergency break.” Depression takes over when “what we were doing and where we were going didn’t match up with our inner desires.”

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Suicidal Urge	The life being lived is endangering body and soul at such an extreme level that it will cause permanent damage	What must end <i>now</i> ? What must be eliminated or pruned?	Becoming a “soulless automaton” Physical death

Sometimes the suicidal urge results from depression related to chemical imbalance and/or chronic pain. In these cases, medical, psychological, and spiritual support are needed, or the person may successfully commit suicide in a moment of extreme fatigue to simply end the pain.

Yet in most cases, the suicidal urge absolutely does not want an end to physical existence; rather it emerges when the difference between who we are in our deepest, most authentic selves and who we’ve become to fit into a certain social system are completely out of alignment. The suicidal urge, McLaren writes, often “emerges when our lives are already endangering our souls....What needs to die is our attachment to falseness, lovelessness, lies and spiritual emptiness,” basically whatever stops us from living authentically. The dark night of soul experienced in this state “exists in direct proportion to the dawn that awaits” us.

People experiencing a suicidal urge must be taken seriously, but I’ve seen these times to be most empowering and transformational if the impulse is listened to as an urgent emotional message capable of rallying untapped resources. The questions, then, are the most extreme for this reason. As McLaren so eloquently conveys, “if you ask these questions prayerfully and ceremonially, your suicidal urge will tell you this draining behavior, this soul-killing relationship, this painful addiction, this weakness and self pity, this pathetic story about why you can’t do your art (shows that) you’ve forgotten who you are, but *I remember*. If you let it speak, your suicidal urge will stand up for your lost dreams, and it will help you clear away everything that threatens to kill them. It will remind you of your forgotten goals, and it will help you move toward them again....You’ll be given you own life back.”