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# Emotions and Feelings

Most people seek psychological interventions to help deal with unpleasant emotions and associated thoughts and behaviours. However, all emotions, even negative emotions, have evolutionary purposes, although not always helpful. Cognitive-behavioural therapy and emotion regulation techniques help you work with your emotions and process them more effectively.

The idea is not to run away or escape from your anxiety, sadness, or anger. Instead, you will learn to work with these emotions on a day-to-day basis and manage them in a manner that helps you live your life meaningfully.

### Extreme emotions can hurt you physically.

Most of our thoughts and actions (behaviours) are influenced by our emotions, and vice versa. Intense emotions cause physiological arousal and increased cortisol production. This can hurt your physical health. Extreme fear, sadness, anger, and anxiety are all known to cause different health problems, ranging from heart disease to autoimmunity.

### Are emotions and feelings the same?

We often use the words “emotions” and “feelings” interchangeably, and that is ok. However, to be pedantic, emotions are psycho-physiological in nature and affect your thoughts, bodily responses, and your behaviours. Feelings, on the other hand, are your subjective perception of the felt emotion.

### Common unpleasant emotions

Here are some commonly experienced negative emotions, their uses, and potential techniques to manage them.

**Anger:** A response to frustrating, unjust, or boundary-violating events that encourages you to take action. You may notice your body getting warmer, a sense of aggression quickly taking over your mind and body, and a rush of thoughts that drive you into action.

Anger motivates you to address the source of irritation, fight for your rights, and ensure that you feel safe and protected. However, anger can cause pain and make you act in unpredictable ways.

Anger management skills help you modulate angry feelings and take more effective control of your situation.

**Sadness:** A reaction to loss, helplessness, and unfulfilled desires. It could present itself as lethargy, crying spells, tiredness, numbness, or even anger.

Sadness allows you to step back, reflect, and gather energy to face life’s challenges. However, prolonged sadness is not normal and may be a sign of an underlying mood disorder, such as depression.

Cognitive behaviour therapy, behaviour activation, and social support can help you manage sadness better.

**Fear and anxiety:** Fear is a primary emotion that helps you to identify threats or danger. It prepares you to fight the threat, and if you can't, to flee the situation (also known as the fight-or-flight response). An immediate fear response (the fight-or-flight response) may cause you to panic. When you can neither fight the situation nor flee from it, you may freeze or feel helpless, leading to depression.

Anxiety, on the other hand, is longer-lasting and is usually associated with events that may or may not occur in the future. Anxiety can be perceived as “free-floating”.

Both fear and anxiety can be managed with the help of cognitive behaviour therapy, behaviour modification, and addressing longstanding psychological problems.

**Jealousy and envy:** Although used interchangeably, jealousy and envy aren't the same. You may envy someone for qualities that you lack. If you're envious of someone's skills, you may try to acquire those skills yourself. However, jealousy involves a threat, especially in interpersonal relationships.

It's essential to work through both envy and jealousy to prevent feelings of resentment, anger, and sadness. Persistent jealousy and envy indicate deeper psychological and personality problems.

**Stress and conflict:** Stress isn't exactly an emotion, but it can have emotional effects on you. We often experience stress when we are in conflict and need to choose between two or more unpleasant choices. You may also experience stress when you need to choose between two or more attractive choices. Having to choose causes conflict, and conflict causes anxiety.

Stress can be relieved through progressive muscular relaxation, diaphragmatic breathing techniques, and grounding exercises (sensory experiences).

### **What are some commonly felt emotions?**

While these are just a few basic emotions we all feel, there are many others. These include contempt, disgust, surprise, joy, hate, love, affection, pride, embarrassment, shame, guilt, concern, loneliness, emptiness, melancholia, excitement, etc.

### **Dealing with unpleasant feelings and emotions**

- Naming your emotions and rating their intensity accurately is the first step towards reflecting on exactly how you feel.
- The next step is to identify how thoughts and behaviours coexist with problematic emotions and how they interact within the context of your unique life experiences and belief systems. This leads to emotional awareness.
- Finally, you'll learn to regulate and modulate your emotions so that they don't affect your functioning.