

Developing an Emotionally Intelligent Public Service

Exploring Your Emotions



Job Aid Series 1 of 4

Purpose

This job aid is designed to help learners improve their emotional intelligence skills by building their vocabulary and awareness around emotions and emotional self-management. This information is especially beneficial for those taking [Developing Your Emotional Intelligence \(TRN458\)](#) and [Emotional Intelligence for Successful Leadership \(TRN151\)](#).

What is an emotion?



An emotion is a natural instinctive reaction.



triggered by a particular situation or social interaction.



Emotions are not good or bad, nor are they facts.



Emotions are transitory data that provide individuals with information or emotional messages about themselves, others or a situation.

These emotional messages are received and communicated.

People are constantly engaged in both conscious and subconscious situational awareness: throughout their lives, they continuously take real-time internal and external scans to help them make sense of their experiences. This creates a mental picture that serves to direct further perceptions, make predictions, anticipate future events and make decisions.

How are emotional messages communicated?



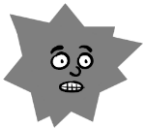
Through our mind (thoughts, memories, imagination)

Through our body (physical sensations)

Through our behaviour (urges and actions)

What are primary emotions?

Researchers and scientists have detected **eight chemically identifiable states** in the human body commonly referred to as **primary emotions**. (Brackett, Rivers, Bertoli & Salovey, 2016; Pollack, 2016): fear, anger, sadness, joy, surprise, anticipation, disgust and trust.



Fear



Anger



Sadness



Joy



Surprise



Anticipation



Disgust



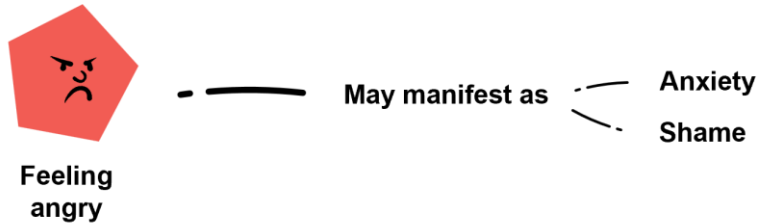
Trust

Emotions elicit thoughts, feelings and sensations in everyone. Studies have shown that all emotional reactions are a combination of these eight primary emotions.

“Our emotions, even the difficult ones, contain signposts to the things we care about.”

Susan David, Ph.D.,
author of *Emotional Agility: Get Unstuck,
Embrace Change and Thrive in Work and Life*

What are secondary emotions?



People's secondary emotions often serve as less sensitive responses to cover up more sensitive primary emotions. Secondary emotions are learned from experiences with others, including from our families, communities, work environments, and cultures.

For example, when a person is angry at someone it may manifest as anxiety or shame instead:

- They may fixate on what the other person is doing (mind)
- They may feel their heart rate increase, or their shoulders tense up (body)
- They may be tempted to confront the situation head-on (behaviour)

The better a person is at identifying the source of an emotional reaction, the more prepared they will be to handle it, whether that emotional reaction is their own or someone else's.

Why do emotions matter in work environments?



Public organizations have traditionally encouraged a more intellectual, analytical, and data-driven approach to work, emphasizing the cerebral above all else. Although this approach has helped the public service address ever-evolving challenges, research indicates that there are significant benefits to learning from the emotions, sensations and feelings we experience in our bodies while we work.

Public servants at all levels can leverage their emotionally driven insights to encourage the best possible relationships and maintain healthy and effective teams while reducing stress and its health consequences.

Primary Emotions and Secondary Emotions



Anger

Secondary emotions: Fury, outrage, wrath, irritability, hostility, resentment, shame and violence

Cognitive effects: Racing thoughts, antagonism, imagining the worst-case scenario, mind blanking

Physical effects: Elevated heart rate, sweating, tense muscles, rapid breathing

Behaviour: Confrontational



Fear

Secondary emotions: Anxiety, apprehension, nervousness, dread, fright and panic

Cognitive effects: Racing thoughts, perceived danger, imagining the worst-case scenario, mind blanking

Physical effects: Racing heart, sweating, feeling cold, tense muscles, rapid breathing

Behaviour: Fight-or-flight response, avoidance



Joy

Secondary emotions: Enjoyment, happiness, relief, bliss, delight, pride, thrill and ecstasy

Cognitive effects: Thinking fast, self-possessed, positive outlook

Physical effects: Energized

Behaviour: Approachable, open



Sadness

Secondary emotions: Grief, sorrow, gloom, melancholy, despair, loneliness and depression

Cognitive effects: Thinking slowly, isolation, mental confusion, negativity

Physical effects: Heaviness, emptiness, numbness, fatigue

Behaviour: Distraught, withdrawn

**The information in this table is based on Introduction to Emotions in Education, Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garica, 2014, as cited.*

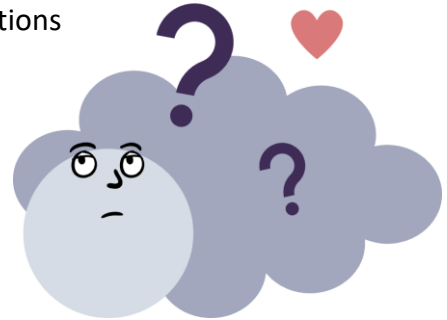
Reflection in Action

How well do you know your own emotions?

Before a person can address their emotions effectively, they must first be able to recognize their emotions and how they affect their behaviour.

We can learn how to observe and understand our own emotions by asking some powerful questions:

- What am I feeling right now?
- What emotion(s) are related to this situation?
- How did I react to this emotion?
- What underlying need is associated with this emotion?



Dr. Fred Luskin, a Researcher at Stanford University, found that the human brain has an average of 60,000 thoughts per day. Each thought triggers different primary and secondary emotions and reactions, switching the data signals from self-doubt or confidence to opinions, judgments and beliefs.



Getting curious about what a specific emotion is trying to tell you can help you interrupt your current emotional pattern.



Make time for contemplation and planning. Give yourself the time to sit with your emotions, and use your newfound understanding to guide you forward.



Look back at when you felt that similar emotion and what you did to successfully handle it. This is an effective way to develop resilience and inner confidence.



Practice ahead of time how to handle a situation where this same emotion is likely to surface. That way, you will be better prepared to handle it when it does arise.

Reflection in Action



- Experiment with shifting attention by engaging in an activity like exercising, a practice of deep breathing, or listening to music.



- What are some mindfulness exercises you can use to stop overthinking and be present in the moment? [Visit the “Separate you from your thoughts” Job Aid](#) on the Workplace Strategies for Mental Health website, courtesy of Canada Life, for tips.



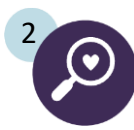
- What [kind of body language can you adopt](#) to promote positive thinking?

For example, changing your posture and moving your body may shift your mood and reduce stress. Take posture breaks: sit upright, straighten your spine and hold your head high, keeping your shoulders straight and relaxed.

The 5-Step to shift your mood



Identify and name your emotion. There are [many tools](#) available to help.



Sit with the emotion and explore what lies beneath it. Hold off on taking any action.



Ask yourself what [triggered this emotion](#) and what information or messages your body is trying to send you.



Shift your mood. There are [many tools available](#) to help you return to a state of clarity and balance.



Use the information gathered from exploring your emotions to choose how to respond to the situation.



Please note that you should reach out to a health professional if you are experiencing any mental health issues, high anxiety, or depression.

Additional reference tools



Books

- ***Emotional Agility: Get Unstuck, Embrace Change and Thrive in Work and Life*, by Susan David, Ph.D.**

This book explains how anyone can thrive in an uncertain world by becoming emotionally agile, using four key concepts that can help us acknowledge uncomfortable experiences while simultaneously detaching from them, thereby allowing us to embrace our core values and align our actions with what we truly want.

- ***Working with Emotional Intelligence*, by Daniel Goleman.**

This book demystifies emotional intelligence as a set of skills that anyone can learn and offers practical insights into their importance and how best to develop these skills.



Canada School of Public Service

Job Aids:

- [Managing the Impact of Your Emotions \(TRN4-J46\)](#)
- [Managing the Impact of Other Peoples' Emotions \(TRN4-J47\)](#)
- [Leading with Emotional Intelligence \(TRN-J48\)](#)

Courses:

- [Developing Your Emotional Intelligence \(TRN458\)](#)
- [Emotional Intelligence for Successful Leadership \(TRN151\)](#)

Other



- If you want to learn more about psychological safety and cultural differences, Workplace Strategies for Mental Health and Canada Life have created a helpful online [orientation tool for navigating psychological health and safety in the workplace](#) that is designed to help employees delve deeper into the topic.