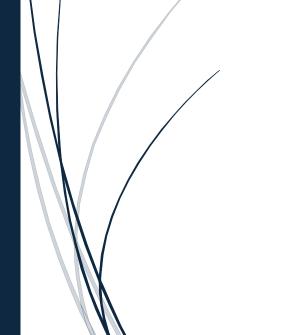
Emotional Awareness

In 3 Steps



Tracy Henderson Counseling

Why Emotions Matter

Emotions are **not bad**—but they can feel confusing, overwhelming, or even disproportionate. The goal isn't to avoid emotions, but to **build awareness, understanding, and strategy** around them.

Think of Emotions Like a Smoke Alarm

Emotions are **signals**—they notify us when something is happening:

- Chirp: A subtle emotion you might ignore
- Alarm: A louder, more urgent emotional response that's hard to miss

If we ignore the *chirp*, we often end up overwhelmed when the *alarm* goes off. Instead, our aim is to **notice and respond early**, when emotions are just starting to stir.

Step 1: Awareness

Notice and Name - You can't regulate what you don't recognize.

- Label what you're feeling. The more specific, the better. "Name it to tame it..."
- Ask yourself:
 - o WHAT am I feeling?
 - o WHEN does this feeling arise?
 - o WHO tends to be involved?
- Explore the underlying **WHAT**:
 - o What story, script, or belief might be fueling this emotion?
 - What is the purpose or utility of this emotion? Aka "What's it doing for me?"
 - o Is that narrative still accurate, is the purpose useful, or does it need updating?
- Expanding your emotional vocabulary builds emotional intelligence.
 - Words matter and how you label the emotion has an impact on how you respond.

 HOW does it show up in my body or behavior?

Step 2: Understanding

Manage & Differentiate - Understanding the distinction can help with reducing how one responds to their emotional reactivity.

Primary Emotions

- Your first, instinctual reaction. Felt in the body and often visible to self and with others.
- Natural and normal responses. E.g., Feeling grief when losing someone you love.

Secondary Emotions

- Your reaction to your reaction. E.g., Feeling shame about being anxious, or anger about feeling hurt
- Shaped by thoughts, judgment, or social conditioning

Step 3: Emotional Flexibility

Regulate & Ride the Waves - Emotions usually pass in 2-5 minutes if allowed space to flow.

- Acknowledge your emotions without over-identifying with them.
- Hold emotions loosely let them inform, not define you.
- Let emotions move through you, rather than bottling them up avoid building emotional knots.

Practice & Skill Building

Here are practical tools to help you build emotional regulation as a daily practice:

- Pause & Step Back Create space between emotion and reaction.
- Review the Tape Reflect after the fact to build insight.
- **Get Upstream** Anticipate patterns before they escalate.
- Express Honestly Practice naming emotions with others.
- Check Alignment Ask: Does this align with my values?