



Understanding Emotions

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What Are Emotions?

Emotions are dynamic and deeply human. They are like a built-in technology that helps us experience the world through our cultural, social, and relational lives.

- Emotions act as **time machines**, transporting us to past experiences or projecting us into future anticipations.
 - They serve as **clues and artifacts**, offering insight into the origins of when, where, who, and how.
 - Emotions are **both individual and shared**; they live within us and between us.
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The Power and Paradox of Emotions

- Emotions help us understand our **limits, capacities, truths, possibilities, and values**.
- Developing **interoception** (awareness of internal sensations) and emotional self-trust is a **lifelong journey**.
- Emotions can guide us and they can also be **misinterpreted or mislabeled**, leading to confusion or disconnection.
- Emotional patterns are influenced by:
 - Personal beliefs and stories (our **internal scripts**)
 - Cultural, community, and familial environments
 - Psychological and physical safety or trauma

Paradox: Emotions are temporary and ever-changing, yet they can feel overwhelming and long-lasting.

The Emotional Cycle

1. A **stimulus** activates an emotional response.
2. **Beliefs and narratives** shape the way we interpret that stimulus.
3. Emotions become:
 - **Visible** to others (signals)
 - **Felt** internally (symptoms)
 - **Expressed** outwardly (behaviors)

Think of it as: **Energy flows in → flows through → flows out.**

Unless... a **knot** forms.

What Are Emotional Knots?

When emotions become **stuck**, they can create emotional, cognitive, or physical **knots**.

Causes:

- Lack of emotional modeling or mirroring during development
- Absence of emotional safety and secure attachment
- Trauma or harm
- Reinforcing messages from culture, society, or family that suppress emotion

How Knots Show Up:

- **Emotional:** Crying, shame, self-blame, grief
- **Cognitive:** Over-explaining, intellectualizing, dissociation
- **Physical:** Muscle tension, migraines, facial expressions
- **Behavioral:** Avoidance, substance use, over-control, self-harm

Managing Emotions

Step 1: Awareness

- Expand your **emotional vocabulary**
- Learn **when, where, and why** emotions arise
- Identify **who or what triggers** your emotions
- Recognize the **beliefs and stories** tied to those feelings
- Observe how **culture and environment** influence your emotions

Important Distinction:

Someone may trigger your emotion, but **they are not the cause** of it—just like no single stick starts a fire when two are rubbed together.

Step 2: Safety

- Understand what **emotional safety** looks and feels like for you
- Listen to your body's "**chirps**"—those subtle signals that something doesn't feel right
- Cultivate a safe internal and external environment for emotions to be expressed

Step 3: Regulation

- Use both **Top-Down** (thinking-based) and **Bottom-Up** (body-based) strategies:
 - Mindfulness, planning, and reframing
 - Movement, breathwork, grounding

Step 4: Self-Compassion

- Speak kindly to yourself
 - Allow yourself to make mistakes
 - Recognize that **emotions are waves**, not fixed states
 - Let go of shame and practice **emotional forgiveness**
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Where Do I Begin?

Be curious. Start with awareness.

- Start by identifying **how you want to show up** emotionally
 - Start by noticing your **scripts, stories, and beliefs**
 - Start by observing **when you feel safe—and when you don't**
 - Start by reflecting on the **environments and systems** you're part of
 - Start by noticing the **“chirps”** in your body
 - Start by experimenting with **labeling and re-labeling** your emotions
 - Start practicing **self-compassion** when emotions get messy
 - Start **surfing the emotional waves**—they will come and go
 - **Start by being open to your emotions**
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Your emotions are valid. They are meaningful. They are yours. Let them guide you—not define you.