

### PRACTICE AND REFLECTION 4.3: ADDING NUANCE TO YOUR FEELING VOCABULARY

Emotions have complex physical, neurological, situational, social, and likely evolutionary roots. If you do an internet search for “emotional vocabulary” you could be besieged by an array of maps, charts, lists, and emojis all designed to expand your emotional vocabulary. You can also discover the difference between emojis and emoticons, and stumble into the century-long academic debate on basic emotion vs. dimensional emotion theory. You might even go on Dictionary.com and learn, “What does 😞 Weary Face emoji mean?” – “The weary face emoji, 😞, cries out: ‘I can’t handle this!’ It marks content dealing with a very wide range of overwhelmed feelings, from genuine exhaustion to ironic self-pity to being overjoyed” (<https://www.dictionary.com/e/emoji/weary-face-emoji/>).

Emotions have a long history of being confusing. When I (JSF) use the internet (as implied above) to expand my emotional vocabulary, I easily identify the correct emoji to express my emotional state: Overwhelmed 🤯.

In clinical practice, it’s better to drown out emotional confusion and focus in on the basics. First, consider five basic emotional states, all of which appear to have some evolutionary value:

- Fear
- Anger
- Sadness
- Guilt
- Joy

You may have heard that emotions are irrational. Not true. Most emotional responses have rational and logical triggers and meaning. For example,

- Fear is typically triggered by threats and results in an impulse to flee.
- Anger is typically trigger by pain or injustice and results in an impulse to fight.
- Sadness is typically triggered by loss or failure and results in an impulse to cry.
- Guilt is typically triggered by reflections on regrettable behavior and results in an impulse to make amends.
- Joy is typically triggered by achievement or relational happiness and results in an impulse to celebrate.

You also may have heard anger is a secondary emotion. Although other emotions can be underneath anger (e.g., sadness, fear), anger also stands on its own, and has since Darwin or before.

Using words along a continuum of intensity can give you greater nuance in reflecting feelings. The Table below provides a list of lower to higher intensity emotional words within four emotions frequently linked to client problems, along with joy. We also add a column for general emotional responses because many clients—primarily due to socialization factors, such as gender—will not be able to engage in much emotional specificity. In such cases, it’s much better to begin your emotional reflections with general words, such as “frustrated” or “bothered.” We understand our use of five basic emotions runs the risk of activating tremendous academic debate, and we feel emotionally ready to accept that risk.

<b>Fear</b>	<b>Anger</b>	<b>Sadness</b>	<b>Guilt</b>	<b>Joy</b>	<b>General</b>
Terror	Fury	Despair	Disgrace	Elated	Frustrated
Panic	Rage	Misery	Ashamed	Thrilled	Bothered
Afraid	Pissed	Depressed	Guilty	Happy	Unsettled
Frightened	Annoyed	Blue	Regret	Glad	Upset
Apprehensive	Irritated	Down	Second thoughts	Pleased	Not yourself

End of Practice and Reflection 4.3