

# The Art of Empathy: Honoring Your Emotional Ecosystem

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Empathy is first and foremost an emotional skill, and empathizing is much easier when you understand that each emotion arises for important reasons. All emotions contain gifts, skills, and intelligence that you can't get anywhere else, and *there are no unnecessary emotions!* When you know *why* emotions arise and how to work with them intentionally, you'll understand yourself and others better – and you'll be able to access the deep intelligence and skills that all emotions contain.

## Three pathways to emotional genius (from [The Art of Empathy](#) by Karla McLaren)

1. **Unvalence** your emotions. There are no negative or antisocial emotions; there are no positive or prosocial emotions. *All* of your emotions are irreplaceable aspects of your intelligence, your social skills, your capacity to learn, and your ability to love and empathize. All emotions are necessary.
2. Learn to **channel** your emotions instead of merely expressing or repressing them. Open up your options, learn the language of emotions, and explore the healthy middle path to emotional awareness and empathic skill.
3. Bring empathic **nuance** to your emotional life. Emotions arise in a multitude of intensities, from the most subtle hints to the most intense levels of activation, and all emotions are present in your every waking (and sleeping) moment.

There are **four** basic emotional categories: The **Angers**, the **Fears**, the **Sadnesses**, and the **Happinesses**. Each group of emotions contains a specific kind of intelligence that helps guide your thoughts and actions.

The **Angers** tell you when a boundary has been crossed or a rule has been broken. They help you set behavioral guidelines for yourself and others.

The **Fears** are your intuition and your instincts. They help you orient yourself to your surroundings, and they help you notice change, novelty, and possible hazards.

The **Sadnesses** help you release things that aren't working and mourn things that are gone so that you can relax, let go, and rejuvenate yourself.

The **Happinesses** help you look at yourself, around yourself, or toward the future with hope, satisfaction, and delight.

## Understanding the Angers – Boundaries, Rules, and Behaviors

**ANGER:** Anger arises when your self-image, ideas, behaviors, or boundaries are challenged – or when you see them challenged in someone else. THE INTERNAL QUESTIONS: *What must be protected? What must be restored?*

**APATHY & BOREDOM:** Boredom (or apathy) is a protective mask for anger, and it arises in situations where you are not able or willing to work with your anger openly. THE INTERNAL QUESTIONS: *What is being avoided? What must be made conscious?*

**GUILT & SHAME:** Shame (or guilt) arises to make sure that you don't hurt, embarrass, or dehumanize yourself or others. THE INTERNAL QUESTIONS: *Who has been hurt? What must be made right?*

## Understanding the Fears – Instincts, Intuition, and Orienting

**FEAR:** Fear arises to help you focus on the present moment and tune into change, novelty, or possible hazards. THE INTERNAL QUESTION: *What action should be taken?*

**WORRY & ANXIETY:** Worry and anxiety are focused on the future – they arise to help you look toward the future and identify the tasks you need to complete (or to stop procrastinating). **Note:** If you feel anxiety or worry, you'll know that there is nothing to fear in the present moment! THE INTERNAL QUESTIONS: *What brought this feeling forward? What **truly** needs to get done?*

**CONFUSION:** Confusion is a mask for fear and anxiety, and it arises when you have too much to process all at once. Confusion can give you a much-needed time out. THE INTERNAL QUESTIONS: *What is my intention? What action should be taken?*

**JEALOUSY:** Jealousy arises when your connection to love, loyalty, or security in your relationships are challenged. THE INTERNAL QUESTIONS: *What has been betrayed? What must be healed and restored?*

**ENVY:** Envy arises when your connection to security, resources, or recognition are challenged. THE INTERNAL QUESTIONS: *What has been betrayed? What must be made right?*

**PANIC:** Panic arises when you face threats to your survival. Panic gives you just **three choices: Fight, flee, or freeze.** THE INTERNAL QUESTIONS (*during the emergency*): Just listen to your body – don't think, just react. Your body is a survival expert, and it will keep you safe.

## Understanding the Sadnesses – Stopping, Letting Go, and Recovering

**SADNESS:** Sadness arises to help you let go of things that aren't working for you any longer. If you can let go, you'll finally be able to relax and recover. THE INTERNAL QUESTIONS: *What must be released? What must be rejuvenated?*

**GRIEF:** Grief arises when you have lost something – a person, a thing, or a situation – that you cannot get back. THE INTERNAL QUESTIONS: *What must be mourned? What must be released completely?*

**SITUATIONAL DEPRESSION:** Situational depression arises when some aspect of your life is unworkable or dysfunctional, and it hinders you from moving forward. Pay attention; depression stops you for a vital reason. THE INTERNAL QUESTIONS: *Where has my energy gone? Why was it sent away?*

**THE SUICIDAL URGE:** The suicidal urge arises when something in your life needs to end – but it's not your actual, physical life! THE INTERNAL QUESTIONS: *What idea or behavior must end now? **If you are in crisis, help is available.*** Please reach out or call the [National Lifeline](#) at **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**.

## Understanding the Happinesses – Hope, Confidence, and Inspiration

**HAPPINESS:** Happiness arises to help you look around you and forward to the future with hope and enjoyment. THE INTERNAL STATEMENT: *Thank you for this lively celebration!*

**CONTENTMENT:** Contentment arises after you've accomplished something, and it helps you look toward yourself with pride and satisfaction. THE INTERNAL STATEMENT: *Thank you for renewing my faith in myself!*

**JOY:** Joy arises to help you feel a blissful sense of open-hearted connection to others, to ideas, or to experiences. THE INTERNAL STATEMENT: *Thank you for this wonderful moment!*

From [The Language of Emotions: What Your Feelings are Trying to Tell You](#) by Karla McLaren