

Additional Resources

REVISED  
AND  
UPDATED

*What  
Your  
Feelings  
Are Trying  
to Tell You*

The  
**LANGUAGE**  
of  
**EMOTIONS**

KARLA McLAREN, M.Ed.

# Table of Contents

---

Introduction .....	3
A Guide to the Language of Emotions .....	4
Your Emotional Vocabulary List .....	6
Nonspecific Emotion Words .....	9
Your DEI Depression Inventory.....	10
Your DEI Depression Inventory Checklist .....	15
The Ethical Empathic Gossip Practice .....	16
Further Resources .....	18

# Introduction

---

Hello and welcome to the revised and updated version of *The Language of Emotions*! It's been so wonderful to be able to update this work and share my current understanding of the amazing world of emotions with you.

The bonus material in this packet didn't fit in the book or audiobook, but it wanted to be included. I'm glad that you've downloaded it, and I've included a gift for you on the next page: a full-color chart that presents all of the emotions and their information in one place.

Please enjoy these additional resources with my blessings.

If you'd like to gather with others to share what you're learning, I invite you to my online learning site, [EmpathyAcademy.org](https://EmpathyAcademy.org).

At Empathy Academy, I and my Dynamic Emotional Integration® colleagues offer short workshops and longer courses on emotions and empathy every month.

Welcome,  
*Karla McLaren*

# A Guide to the Language of Your Emotions

Emotion	Gifts	Internal Questions	Signs of Obstruction
<b>ANGER</b> <i>The Honorable Sentry</i>	Honor & conviction, healthy self-esteem, proper boundaries, healthy detachment, protection of self and others	<i>What do I value?</i> <i>What must be protected and restored?</i>	Enmeshment, self-abandonment, and/or boundary loss. Or cycling rages that create harsh boundaries, interpersonal violence, or isolation. <i>Be aware:</i> Repetitive rages may be a sign of untreated depression.
<b>APATHY</b> (or BOREDOM) <i>The Protective Mask for Anger</i>	Detachment, boundary-setting, separation, taking a pause	<i>What is being avoided?</i> <i>What can be made conscious?</i>	Monotonous indifference, impassivity, or distractibility that halts creative action.
<b>SHAME &amp; GUILT</b> <i>Restoring Integrity</i>	Atonement, integrity, conscience, self-respect, behavioral change	<i>Whose ethics and values have been disrespected?</i> <i>What must be made right?</i>	Crippling, repetitive guilty feelings that do not instruct you or heal your relationships. Or shamelessness – where you and others are endangered by your delayed remorse or inappropriate behaviors.
<b>HATRED</b> <i>The Profound Mirror</i>	Intense awareness, piercing vision, sudden evolution, shadow work	<i>What has fallen into my shadow?</i> <i>What must be reintegrated?</i>	Fierce, laser-focused attacks on others without any concurrent self-awareness or integration.
<b>SADNESS</b> <i>The Water Bearer</i>	Release, fluidity, grounding, relaxation, rejuvenation	<i>What must be released?</i> <i>What must be rejuvenated?</i>	Inability or unwillingness to relax or let go. Or unmoving despair that does not bring resolution or relaxation.
<b>GRIEF</b> <i>The Deep River of the Soul</i>	Mourning, release, lamentation, complete immersion in the river of all souls	<i>What must be mourned?</i> <i>How do I honor what was lost?</i>	Unwillingness or inability to accept or honor loss, death, or profound transitions. Or self-injuring, death-seeking behaviors that help you pretend that death cannot touch you.
<b>SITUATIONAL DEPRESSION</b> <i>Ingenious Stagnation</i>	Inward focus, stillness, purposeful inactivity, reality check, the ingenious stop sign of the soul	<i>Where has my energy gone?</i> <i>Why was it sent away?</i>	Inability or unwillingness to stop and re-assess unworkable situations. Or cycling emotions or repetitive manias that destabilize you or halt your forward progress.
<b>THE SUICIDAL URGE</b> <i>The Darkness Before Dawn</i>	Certainty, resolve, liberty, transformation, rebirth	<i>What behavior or situation must end now?</i> <i>What can no longer be tolerated in my soul?</i>	Bleak, agonizing feelings that threaten your physical life instead of offering transformation and reawakening.  <i>*If you're in crisis, contact a counselor or your local crisis hotline.</i>

\*988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (U.S.): Text 988 or call 1-800-273-8255, 988lifeline.org | International resources: [iasp.info](http://iasp.info)

To learn more or to find a licensed *Dynamic Emotional Integration*® professional, visit [EmpathyAcademy.org](http://EmpathyAcademy.org)

# A Guide to the Language of Your Emotions

Emotion	Gifts	Internal Questions	Signs of Obstruction
<b>FEAR</b> <i>Intuition &amp; Action</i>	Intuition, instincts, focus, clarity, attentiveness, readiness, vigor	<i>What am I sensing?</i>  <i>What action should be taken?</i>	Poor instincts and poor awareness. Or constant activation and apprehension that decrease your focus and clarity.
<b>ANXIETY</b> <i>Focus, Motivation &amp; Completion</i>	Foresight, focus, task-completion, preparation, procrastination support system	<i>What brought this feeling forward?</i>  <i>What <b>truly</b> needs to be done?</i>	Inability to complete your tasks, meet your deadlines, or focus and organize your life.
<b>CONFUSION</b> <i>The Healing Mask for Fear and Anxiety</i>	Diffused awareness, innocence, obliviousness, malleability, taking a pause	<i>How can I welcome not-knowing and not-doing?</i>  <i>What is my intention?</i>	Taking unwise or impulsive actions without deliberation. Or being unable to decide, act, or believe in yourself or your decisions.
<b>JEALOUSY</b> <i>Relational Radar</i>	Love, commitment, security, fairness, intimacy, connection, loyalty	<i>What kinds of intimacy do I desire and want to offer?</i>  <i>What betrayals must be recognized and healed?</i>	Inability to choose loyal, stable, and available mates. Or cycling suspicions that don't bring useful awareness to you or stability to your relationships.
<b>ENVY</b> <i>Interactional Radar</i>	Fairness, security, generosity, access to resources, recognition, and approval	<i>What resources and security do I desire for myself and others?</i>  <i>What inequalities must be made right?</i>	Inability to ask for or receive what you desire or dream of. Or feverish greed that places your needs above all other things, including ethics and empathy.
<b>PANIC &amp; TERROR</b> <i>The Powerful Protector and the Healing Witness</i>	Sudden energy, fixed attention, absolute stillness, survival instincts, healing from trauma	<b>Immediate Panic:</b> <i>What is currently a threat?</i>  <b>For PTS:</b> <i>What has been frozen in time?</i>  <i>What <b>healing</b> action must be taken?</i>	Additional statement for Immediate Panic: <i>Please help me fight, flee, freeze, or flock to safety.</i>  Signs of Obstruction: Cycling attacks of panic and terror that immobilize or torment you. Or taking actions that are not healing and thereby increasing your distress.
<b>HAPPINESS</b> <i>Amusement &amp; Possibilities</i>	Gaiety, amusement, hope, delight, wonder, playfulness, invigoration	<i>What delights me?</i>  <i>What makes me feel hopeful?</i>	Lack of belief in possibilities or the future, or the unwillingness to play. Or ungrounded positive outlook and excitement, and unwillingness to listen to your other emotions.
<b>CONTENTMENT</b> <i>Appreciation &amp; Recognition</i>	Enjoyment, satisfaction, self-esteem, confidence, renewal, fulfillment	<i>How have I embodied my authentic values?</i>	Inability to feel satisfied with yourself, or unwillingness to challenge yourself and risk failure. Or inflated self-esteem that places your needs above everyone and everything else.
<b>JOY</b> <i>Affinity &amp; Communion</i>	Expansion, communion, inspiration, splendor, radiance, bliss	<i>What brings me deep connection and infinite expansion?</i>  <i>How do I integrate this radiant experience?</i>	Inability to feel connected to humanity or the world, or to feel pleasure. Or mania, ungrounded and boundary-less bliss, or unwillingness to listen to your other emotions.

# Your Emotional Vocabulary List

A large and articulate emotional vocabulary can – all by itself – help you develop emotional regulation skills. What’s more, research is showing that a large emotional vocabulary can even protect your mental and emotional health!

This emotional vocabulary list was crowd-sourced by the Dynamic Emotional Integration® (also known as DEI) community over many years, and is organized alphabetically by emotion and intensity. Enjoy building your vocabulary – and note that we’ve included our DEI words for the gifts, skills, and genius your emotions contain!

ANGER, APATHY, and HATRED		
SOFT	MEDIUM	INTENSE
Ambivalent ▪ Annoyed ▪ Assertive Calm ▪ Certain ▪ Confident ▪ Crabby Cranky ▪ Critical ▪ Cross ▪ Detached Determined ▪ Discerning ▪ Disengaged Displeased ▪ Distracted ▪ Frustrated Honorable ▪ Impatient ▪ Irritated Peeved ▪ Protective ▪ Quiet ▪ Rankled Secure ▪ Self-Assured ▪ Separate Steady ▪ Uninspired	Affronted ▪ Aggravated ▪ Angry Antagonized ▪ Apathetic ▪ Arrogant Autonomous ▪ Aware of Your Shadow Bored ▪ Bristling ▪ Clear-Eyed ▪ Cold Courageous ▪ Defended ▪ Dignified Disinterested ▪ Exasperated ▪ Incensed Indifferent ▪ Indignant ▪ Inflamed Listless ▪ Mad ▪ Offended ▪ Protected Resentful ▪ Riled up ▪ Sarcastic Self-Aware ▪ Sharp ▪ Sovereign Steadfast ▪ Well-Boundaried	Aggressive ▪ Appalled ▪ Belligerent Bitter ▪ Contemptuous ▪ Disgusted Energized ▪ Fierce ▪ Furious Hateful ▪ Hostile ▪ Hypocritical Integrated ▪ Irate ▪ Livid ▪ Loathing Menacing ▪ Numb ▪ Passionate Piercingly aware ▪ Powerful Projecting ▪ Raging ▪ Ranting Raving ▪ Righteous ▪ Seething Shadow-Resourced ▪ Shielded Spiteful ▪ Transformed ▪ Tuned out Unresponsive ▪ Vengeful ▪ Vicious Vindictive ▪ Violent
SHAME and GUILT		
SOFT	MEDIUM	INTENSE
Awkward ▪ Conscientious Considerate ▪ Decent ▪ Discomfited Ethical ▪ Flushed ▪ Flustered Forgiving ▪ Hesitant ▪ Honest Humble ▪ Reserved ▪ Restrained Self-Conscious	Abashed ▪ Apologetic ▪ Ashamed Chagrined ▪ Contrite ▪ Culpable Dignified ▪ Embarrassed ▪ Guilty Honorable ▪ Humbled ▪ Intimidated Just ▪ Moral ▪ Noble ▪ Penitent Principled ▪ Regretful ▪ Remorseful Reproachful ▪ Respectable ▪ Rueful Self-Effacing ▪ Self-Respecting Sheepish ▪ Sorry ▪ Speechless Upstanding ▪ Willing to Change Withdrawn	Belittled ▪ Conscience-Stricken Degraded ▪ Demeaned ▪ Disgraced Guilt-Ridden ▪ Guilt-Stricken Humiliated ▪ Incorruptible ▪ Mortified Ostracized ▪ Projecting ▪ Righteous Self-Condemning ▪ Self-Flagellating Shamefaced ▪ Stigmatized
ANXIETY		
SOFT	MEDIUM	INTENSE
Capable ▪ Clear-headed ▪ Focused Organized ▪ Prepared	Activated ▪ Anxious ▪ Attentive Forward-Focused ▪ Motivated Nervous ▪ Ready ▪ Task-Focused Vigilant ▪ Worried	Accomplished ▪ Driven ▪ Frenzied Hyper-Activated ▪ Laser-Focused Pressed ▪ Vigorous

## CONFUSION

SOFT	MEDIUM	INTENSE
Adaptable ▪ Changeable ▪ Doubtful Innocent ▪ Malleable ▪ Open-Minded ▪ Pensive ▪ Preoccupied ▪ Puzzled Soft-Focused	Ambivalent ▪ Bewildered ▪ Clouded Confused ▪ Contemplative ▪ Floating Fuzzy ▪ Indecisive ▪ Muddled Nebulous ▪ Perplexed ▪ Spacious Uncertain ▪ Unfocused	Befuddled ▪ Discombobulated Disoriented ▪ Escaping ▪ Immobile Lost ▪ Mystified ▪ Overwhelmed Scattered ▪ Suspended ▪ Timeless Waiting

## FEAR and PANIC

SOFT	MEDIUM	INTENSE
Alert ▪ Apprehensive ▪ Aware ▪ Careful Cautious ▪ Clear ▪ Concerned Conscious ▪ Curious ▪ Disconcerted Disquieted ▪ Edgy ▪ Fidgety ▪ Hesitant Insecure ▪ Instinctive ▪ Intuitive Leery ▪ Lucid ▪ Mindful ▪ Oriented Pensive ▪ Perceptive ▪ Shy ▪ Timid Uneasy ▪ Watchful	Afraid ▪ Alarmed ▪ Attentive Aversive ▪ Distrustful ▪ Disturbed Fearful ▪ Focused ▪ Jumpy ▪ Perturbed Rattled ▪ Ready ▪ Resourceful Safety-Seeking ▪ Shaky ▪ Startled Suspicious ▪ Unnerved ▪ Unsettled Vigorous ▪ Wary	Dissociated ▪ Filled with Dread Frenzied ▪ Healing from Trauma Horried ▪ Hyper-Activated Immobile ▪ Laser-Focused ▪ Motionless Panicked ▪ Paralyzed ▪ Petrified Phobic ▪ Reintegrated ▪ Self-Preserving Shocked ▪ Survival-Focused Terrorized ▪ Violent

## JEALOUSY and ENVY

SOFT	MEDIUM	INTENSE
Concerned ▪ Connected ▪ Disbelieving Fair ▪ Insecure ▪ Inspired ▪ Protective Self-Aware ▪ Trusting ▪ Vulnerable Wanting	Ambitious ▪ Amorous ▪ Bonded Committed ▪ Covetous ▪ Demanding Desirous ▪ Devoted ▪ Disrespected Distrustful ▪ Driven ▪ Envious Equitable ▪ Generous ▪ Guarded Jealous ▪ Just ▪ Lonely ▪ Loving ▪ Loyal Motivated ▪ Prosperous ▪ Romantic Secure ▪ Self-Preserving ▪ Threatened Wary	Affluent ▪ Ardent ▪ Avaricious ▪ Fixated Deprived ▪ Gluttonous ▪ Grasping Greedy ▪ Green with Envy ▪ Longing Lustful ▪ Obsessed ▪ Passionate Persistently Jealous ▪ Possessive Power-Hungry ▪ Resentful ▪ Voracious

## HAPPINESS, CONTENTMENT, and JOY

SOFT	MEDIUM	INTENSE
Amused ▪ Calm ▪ Comfortable Encouraged ▪ Engaged ▪ Friendly Hopeful ▪ Inspired ▪ Jovial ▪ Naïve Open ▪ Peaceful ▪ Smiling ▪ Unaware Upbeat	Appreciative ▪ Cheerful ▪ Confident Contented ▪ Delighted ▪ Excited Fulfilled ▪ Glad ▪ Gleeful ▪ Gratified Happy ▪ Healthy Self-Esteem Invigorated ▪ Joyful ▪ Lively ▪ Merry Optimistic ▪ Playful ▪ Pleased Praiseworthy ▪ Proud ▪ Rejuvenated Tickled ▪ Unrealistic ▪ Ungrounded	Arrogant ▪ Awe-Filled ▪ Blissful Ecstatic ▪ Egocentric ▪ Elated Enthralled ▪ Euphoric ▪ Exhilarated Expansive ▪ Flighty ▪ Giddy ▪ Gullible Heedless ▪ Inflated ▪ Jubilant ▪ Manic Oblivious ▪ Overconfident ▪ Overjoyed Radiant ▪ Rapturous ▪ Reckless Renewed ▪ Satisfied ▪ Self-Aggrandized Thrilled

## SADNESS and GRIEF

SOFT	MEDIUM	INTENSE
Contemplative ▪ Disappointed Disconnected ▪ Fluid ▪ Grounded Listless ▪ Low ▪ Steady ▪ Regretful Relaxed ▪ Releasing ▪ Restful ▪ Wistful	Dejected ▪ Discouraged Dispirited ▪ Down ▪ Drained ▪ Grieving Heavy-hearted ▪ Honoring ▪ Lamenting Melancholy ▪ Mournful ▪ Rejuvenated Relieved ▪ Remembering ▪ Respectful Restored ▪ Sad ▪ Soothed ▪ Sorrowful Still ▪ Weepy	Anguished ▪ Bereaved ▪ Cleansed Despairing ▪ Despondent ▪ Forlorn Grief-Stricken ▪ Heartbroken Inconsolable ▪ Morose ▪ Released Revitalized ▪ Sanctified

## DEPRESSION and SUICIDAL URGES

SOFT	MEDIUM	INTENSE
Apathetic ▪ Discouraged Disinterested ▪ Dispirited Downtrodden ▪ Fed Up Feeling Worthless ▪ Flat ▪ Helpless Humorless ▪ Impulsive ▪ Indifferent Isolated ▪ Lethargic ▪ Listless Pessimistic ▪ Practical ▪ Purposeless Realistic ▪ Resolute ▪ Tired Withdrawn ▪ World-Wearied	Bereft ▪ Certain Constantly Irritated, Angry, or Enraged (see the Anger list above) ▪ Crushed Depressed ▪ Desolate ▪ Desperate Drained ▪ Emancipated ▪ Empty Fatalistic ▪ Gloomy ▪ Hibernating Hopeless ▪ Immobile ▪ Inactive Inward-Focused ▪ Joyless ▪ Miserable Morbid ▪ Overwhelmed ▪ Passionless Pleasureless ▪ Sullen	Agonized ▪ Anguished ▪ Bleak Death-Seeking ▪ Devastated ▪ Doomed Freed ▪ Frozen ▪ Guttled ▪ Liberated Nihilistic ▪ Numbed ▪ Reborn Reckless ▪ Self-Destructive ▪ Suicidal Tormented ▪ Tortured ▪ Transformed

## Support for Suicidal Feelings

**Note:** If you're having thoughts of suicide, don't feel as if you have to wait until you're in the throes of torment to reach out for help. If you can identify your suicidal urges when they're in the soft stage, you can often stop yourself from falling into a pit of anguish. In the territory of the suicidal urge, your vocabulary, and your capacity for emotional awareness and sensitivity can literally save your life!

If you or anyone you know is feeling suicidal, free and confidential help is available. In the U.S., you can call the [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), or you can text or call 988 in many areas. For other countries, the [International Association for Suicide Prevention](#) has a list of crisis and suicide prevention centers throughout the world. In Canada, see the [Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention](#).

### How to Be Helpful to Someone Who Is Threatening Suicide (from the 988 Lifeline website)

- Be direct. Talk openly and matter-of-factly about suicide.
- Be willing to listen. Allow expressions of feelings. Accept the feelings.
- Be non-judgmental.
- Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or whether feelings are good or bad.
- Don't lecture on the value of life.
- Get involved. Become available. Show interest and support.
- Don't dare them to do it.
- Don't act shocked. This will put distance between you.
- Don't be sworn to secrecy. Seek support.
- Offer hope that alternatives are available but do not offer glib reassurance.
- Take action. Remove means, such as guns or stockpiled pills.
- Get help from agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention.

Thank you for your concern and your willingness to reach out.



## Nonspecific Emotion Words

---

As you develop your emotional vocabulary, you may notice that many people don't have strong vocabularies, or that they don't feel comfortable talking about emotions. Luckily, this doesn't need to stop you from developing your own emotional awareness and skills.

If people aren't able to identify or speak about emotions (or if they're disturbed or offended by the true names for emotions), you can use nonspecific words to gently bring awareness to the true emotion that's present.

If you can frame your observation as a question (or use the phrase "It seems that you're feeling..."), you'll help people begin to develop their own emotional awareness and vocabulary.

We've found nine helpful and nonspecific emotion words, and three of them are almost magical because you can use them to describe nearly any emotion. They are ***Bad***, ***Stressed***, and ***Unhappy***.

Another three helpful words are ***Hurt***, ***Overwhelmed***, and ***Upset***. However, you may want to use these words carefully, because they suggest that a person is struggling or vulnerable, and many people don't want to admit that they ever feel that way. Use your best judgment.

There are also three words that many people use to avoid or hide their emotions: ***Fine***, ***Okay***, and ***Whatever***.

Notice how these nine words can be used to describe pretty much every emotion except happiness, contentment, and joy. That's stunning, but it explains why so many of us struggle to develop emotional awareness and emotional skills — both of which rely on a rich emotional vocabulary!!

- **Use liberally:** ***Bad***, ***Stressed***, and ***Unhappy***
- **Use with care:** ***Hurt***, ***Overwhelmed***, and ***Upset***
- **Use when avoidance is wanted:** ***Fine***, ***Okay***, and ***Whatever*** (people can use many other words to avoid emotions, of course!)

Thank you for bringing more emotional awareness to our waiting world (even when it needs to be nonspecific awareness!).

# Your DEI Depression Inventory

---

**When you're depressed**, you may turn inward and blame yourself, but depression is not simply a low mood that arises from within you. Sometimes, depression is a perfectly reasonable response to trouble in your life; depression is often an important signal about real issues that are disturbing you. In our Dynamic Emotional Integration® work, the questions for depression are: *Where has my energy gone?* and *Why was it sent away?*

Depression is a message about and a reaction to things that are going on inside or around you. It's important to pay attention to that message and address whatever is going on.

Current research is suggesting that untreated depressions, especially major depressions (see this [Mayo Clinic description of major depression](#)), can teach your brain how to fall into depression more easily the next time. Untreated depressive episodes can become a habit, so it's very important to address depression with whatever therapy best suits your particular situation.

If you are feeling continually low, please see your doctor or visit the [Helpguide.org depression page](#) to understand more about your symptoms and your options. We all feel depressed every now and then, and help is everywhere.

## So, you're depressed. What's next?

We all experience depression for many reasons, yet in most cases, the cures that are offered to us focus on us: on our behaviors, our chemistry, or our habits of thought. But depression isn't just something that comes from inside you; often, depression is a response to trouble in your life.

There are plenty of life situations that are depressing — such as conflicts, difficulties, injustice, illness, loss, and turmoil. These things should produce some depression. In the face of troubles, something in us should stop moving carelessly forward as if nothing is happening. Something in us should drop, lose energy, and experience a sense of despair or hopelessness every now and then.

Depression can be very challenging, it's true, and we *should* be careful about how long we maintain a depressive mood — but depression has a very important purpose, so it's not something that should be avoided as if it's the plague. Depression's purpose is to tell us that something is wrong. Our job is to find out what that something is.

Karla McLaren created this inventory as a way to keep a close watch on her own depressive tendencies (her form of depression is Recurrent Major Depression with Dysthymia). She's found that by taking an inventory of what's going on around her, she can pretty quickly pinpoint whether her depression is situational (which means that she can make lifestyle changes) or internal (which is a sign that she needs to use some of the Empathic Mindfulness practices and/or check in with her health care team).

This inventory involves your whole life, because depression can be a natural and healthy response to a rotten environment. It's important to be able to understand and identify the differences between depression that comes from inside you, depression that comes from your situation, and depression that is a combination of both. If you tend toward depression, this inventory (and your doctor's guidance, of course) may be helpful:

## The Personal (Are you taking good care of yourself?)

### Diet

Are you eating well, or often enough? Some depressed people avoid food or focus everything on food, and their meals aren't regular or particularly nutritious. Low blood sugar or spikes in blood sugar from an irregular diet can make depression worse.

### Exercise

Are you getting enough exercise, or any? Exercise has been shown time and again to be an excellent mood elevator and a way to break a depressive cycle. This [article](#) suggests ways to exercise when you're so low that you can't even think about exercising.

### Sleep

Are you getting at least seven hours of restful sleep each night? In his book [The Promise of Sleep](#), the father of sleep research, the late, great Dr. William Dement, notes that of the three: diet, exercise, and sleep, only *sleep* is positively correlated with increased longevity and reduced prevalence of disease. This free HelpGuide article on [How to Sleep Better](#) has many excellent tips.

Very few of us treat our sleep as the most important aspect of our healthcare efforts, yet researchers are continually confirming Dr. Dement's advice (most recently, it was found that you should keep your bedroom as dark as you possibly can make it, because [light at night is being linked to depression](#)).

An excellent and soothing book for people with sleep problems or insomnia is W. Chris Winter's [The Sleep Solution](#). He combines decades of strong research with a warm and friendly tone, and he offers ideas that truly help.

## The Relational (Are you surrounded by good people?)

### Your mate or lack thereof

Is your relationship working? Do you feel loved, respected, and welcomed in your relationship? If not, your depression may be trying to tell you something. Or are you alone and feeling isolated? Loneliness and a sense of disconnection can lead to depression.

### Your family relationships

Is your family a healthy place to be, or is it full of endless tension and unsaid words? Family conflicts can feel depressing and entrapping.

### Your friends

Are your friends supportive and restful, funny and good to you? Or do you have to tolerate a lot of "frenemy" conflict and turmoil from people who really don't have your best interests at heart? [This Scientific American study](#) suggests that frenemies are not just depressing, but can actually harm your health.

### **Your colleagues**

Is your work environment healthy and emotionally well-regulated? How well is your workplace managed? How are you treated? Do you look forward to getting to work each day, or do you dread it?

## **The Sociological (Is your social environment healthy?)**

### **Your financial situation**

Are you experiencing money worries, or are you concerned about friends and family who are? Is there financial trouble in your community or your nation? There's a reason times like these are called "depressions."

### **Your employment**

Are you unemployed, or is your current job unstable? Both of these can lead to depression.

### **The condition of your community**

Are you engaged with and hopeful about the future of your community and your town? If not, social alienation can lead to depression.

### **Your political situation**

Are you hopeful about where your town, county, state, and country are headed? Do you feel comfortable with your political party and its direction? If not, political powerlessness can lead to depression (and for some people, to repetitive outbursts of frustration and rage).

## **Some ideas for working through depression**

If you're already exercising, eating well, sleeping well, getting treated medically for depression, and taking good care of yourself — but your situation is depressing you, it's important to look outside yourself for support. Therapy can be very helpful, but therapy is not the only answer.

When you're surrounded by unhealthy relationships, or your financial or political situations are filled with trouble, then your depression is probably trying to tell you that things are not as they should be. So how do you work through your depression when, honestly, things are terrible and your depression is actually the correct emotion to feel in the situation?

Here are some healing ideas for you.

### **Entertainment!**

Distractions like games, TV, movies, texting, web surfing, sports, masturbation ... all of these can give you a nice time out and, in many cases, they can bring you excellent positive input and a sense of pleasure and peace. Distractions are awesome! Keep an eye on the amount of time you spend on distractions each day, but don't shame yourself about it; just take note. Sometimes, distractions are the only things that can keep you going when you're surrounded by trouble.

If you notice yourself using distractions all the time, be gentle with yourself and ask if the time you're spending on distractions is actually keeping you from dealing directly with the depressing situations in your life. Maybe this is true, but maybe your distractions are keeping you going because you're in an unworkable situation that you can't get away from yet. Distractions can be very useful! Love them, observe them, and treat yourself well around them.

### **Artistic Expression**

Expressing yourself artistically (or viewing the artistry and craftsmanship of others) is a special kind of healing activity. Something about writing, singing, painting, building, dancing, and creating can give you a sense of freedom, creativity, focus, and personal control. Doing your art can even be a form of protest against terrible life situations.

If you're feeling totally awful, you can even channel those awful feelings into your art and see what your awfulness is trying to tell you. Doing art with emotions is actually the genesis of the Empathic Mindfulness practices, especially Burning Contracts and Conscious Complaining (see [The Language of Emotions](#) and [The Art of Empathy](#)).

Art can heal you when almost everything else fails. Art is a magical healing practice for the soul.

### **Connection**

Connecting with others is especially important for people who are feeling relational and sociological depression. Creating or joining an interest group, volunteering, caring for people or animals, giving or receiving bodywork, having good sex ... all of these can help you reconnect to the positive aspects of humanity and community.

During depressions, we tend to withdraw, which can be a really good idea when our depression is a response to rotten relationships or miserable social environments. But it's important, when you've identified that your depression is a response to your environment, to reach out for healthy relationships, healthy groups, and positive social engagement.

Good people, healthy groups, and hopeful civic action exist. Don't allow your depression to color the entire world with the palette it created from your current rotten situation. Healthy community and healthy connections can help you feel well again.

### **Nature and Animals**

Getting out into nature can be magically healing — especially if you can be near a body of water or look out over an expansive vista. Nature can also fill you with a sense of connection that may work better for you than connecting to people right now.

Animals can be wonderful companions who won't judge your emotions. You may want to be with companion animals, or you might enjoy watching wild animals in their natural habitats. Natural environments and contact with animals can connect you to living things in soothing ways.

## Sacredness and Transcendence

Depression can strip the meaning from life, and it can lead to a sense of emptiness and hopelessness. All of the suggestions above can address depression, but if you've come to a place of emptiness and world-weariness, you'll need contact with something larger, older, and deeper than yourself so that you can engage with the sacred, soul-making work of wrestling with deep questions of purpose and meaning.

For many people, sacredness and transcendence live only in the realm of religion and spirituality. But the pull toward the sacred, the transcendent, the larger purpose, and the deeper meaning — these live fully in the human heart and mind. Certainly, these qualities can play out wonderfully (or horribly) in religions and spiritual traditions, but these traditions don't own sacredness, or transcendence, or purpose, or deep meaning. These qualities belong to humans, and each of us has full access to them.

When you've lost your sense of purpose and meaning, it's time to reach behind and beyond yourself — to historical thinkers, to the grandeur and mystery of nature, to great writers, artists, and poets, to philosophers and dreamers, to beauty and to intensity — and take your place as a deeply feeling person in a world of sacred, absurd, deep, shallow, and transcendent ideas and experiences.

Depression can lead you into the dark night of the soul — and art, connection, nature, sacredness, and transcendence can lead you through that night and into the dawn of new ideas, new possibilities, and a deeper understanding of human nature, conflict, beauty, injustice, trouble, love, meaning, and meaninglessness. Depression is ingenious in that way, and this inventory can help you uncover the ingenuity inside your depression.

## Reflection Questions

- As you think back to times of depression, can you take an inventory now (see the next page) and discover where your energy was being impeded, and why?
  
- If you could go back in time and give your depressed self one piece of advice, what would it be?

# Your DEI Depression Inventory Checklist

---

You can get a good overview of your depression by using this quick checklist to inventory your life: Place a checkmark by any areas where trouble is occurring — and ask yourself if your depression could be a reasonable response to a depressing situation? If so, see pages 12–14 for some ideas about how to take care of yourself. And of course, if your depression persists, check in with a friend, a counselor, or your doctor for some companionship and relief.

## The Personal

- Diet
- Exercise
- Sleep

## The Relational

- Your mate (or lack thereof)
- Family
- Friends
- Colleagues

## The Sociological

- Your Financial Condition
- Your Employment Situation
- The Condition of Your Community
- Your Political Situation

## How are you working through your depression?

- Entertainment
- Artistic Expression
- Connecting with Others
- Nature and/or Animals
- Sacredness and Transcendence

Even if you find trouble in many areas and your depression arises for perfectly sensible reasons, depressions that last too long can affect your energy, your outlook, and your health. Listen to your depression, but take care of yourself — and reach out — when depression arises. If you don't have social support or healthcare access, the [Helpguide.org depression page](https://www.helpguide.org/condition/depression) can help you find help and support. Reach out.

Good help is available, and you're not alone. Take good care.

# Ethical Empathic Gossip

## *Bringing ethics to your informal communication skills*

**Gossip** is usually seen as a terrible thing, but anthropologists and social scientists see it as a vital part of social life, communication, and emotional health. Studies have shown that gossip is universal, and is used by people of all ages and genders. Gossip is the tool we use to share and understand the informal and unwritten social and emotional rules of each social situation we encounter, and gossip is a way to achieve closeness in relationships.

Gossip is as natural to us as breathing. Anthropologists see gossip in humans as a basic tool of socialization and connection — almost like the grooming behaviors that many animals use to form bonds. So, gossip is older than humankind, and it's indispensable.

Gossip also relieves tension — because it allows us to share the private information we have about others but are not allowed to mention in public! Gossip helps us connect to others, understand human behavior, recognize or change our social position, and support (or undermine) rules and set them for others. Gossip is a very powerful thing! For highly empathic people (who usually aren't able to share everything they see and feel), gossip can also be a wonderful stress-relieving tool.

However, a massive problem with gossip is that it can train us to talk **about** people, rather than talking to them. Gossip can also lead us to invade the privacy of the people we gossip about as we broadcast their behavior all over the place. If we go back to the relationship we gossiped about without addressing the issue more openly, there will always be this thing hanging out there — this gossipy information that we hope never gets repeated.

Although gossip is necessary, it can create a lot of problems if we aren't conscientious and ethical about using it. If we can understand the powerful social and emotional information gossip provides, we can turn gossip into a tool that will support our ethics, our healthy empathy, and our relationships with others. We can turn gossip into an ethical empathic practice.

Here are the guidelines for ethical empathic gossip with a supportive partner (make sure you feel safe with this person, and that there isn't a power differential between you!):

1. **Identify a person** you gossip about consistently, and with whom your relationship has stalled.
2. **Open the gossip session** by acknowledging your trouble in the relationship.
3. **Ask your partner for help** in dealing with your troubled relationship. Ask for opinions, ideas, techniques, and skills that will help you re-enter the relationship in a different way.
4. Go for it — just **gossip**.
5. When your partner gives you feedback, **pay attention**.
6. **Close the gossip session with thanks**, and then go back to the damaged relationship with your new skills and insights — or modify the relationship if it's too damaged to survive as is. *Don't go back in the same old way* — because that's what led to the need for unconscious or unethical gossip in the first place.



When your gossip is conscious and ethical, you'll increase your social skills and your empathy, and you'll become more able to create honest and healthy relationships — *especially* with people you now classify as difficult. What's amazing in this practice is that when gossip is made conscious, you can clearly see what an astounding information-gathering tool it is.

When you're able to gossip openly in a safe, private, and respectful empathic practice, you may be amazed to learn how much intricate social information you've gathered about the people you gossip about. This practice will connect you to the deep, socially-aware, and emotionally rich undercurrents that exist in gossip, and in your informal gossip networks.

This practice will also remind you that you can ask for — and receive — help in dealing with difficult emotions, difficult situations, and difficult people. When you've hit a wall, remember to reach out for the assistance of others instead of isolating yourself. None of us knows how to deal with all emotions, all situations, or all relationships — because we simply weren't taught how.

For goodness sake, most of us weren't even taught how to name our own emotions! We've all been working without a guidebook here, and we can always use some assistance. We all need to stick together and support each other in becoming more aware and skillful in the social world.

Gossip is a vital and irreplaceable communication and connection tool. As you learn to gossip ethically, you'll become more informed and empathic about yourself and other people, more skilled and emotionally agile in your relationships, and more comfortable in your social world. Gossip is a truly brilliant communication tool — as long as it's *ethical and empathic gossip*.

## **Reflection Questions**

Think about situations in which you tend to gossip about others rather than speak with them directly:

- What kind of support are you seeking from your gossip partner(s)?
- What kinds of information are you sharing?
- What is preventing you from speaking directly to the person in question?

Now think about situations in which someone gossips to you:

- What kind of support are they seeking from you?
- What kinds of information are they sharing?
- Why are they unable to speak directly to the person in question?

## Further Resources

---

### EMOTIONS AND EMPATHY

- Buss, David M. *The Dangerous Passion: Why Jealousy Is as Necessary as Love and Sex*. New York: The Free Press, 2000.
- Devine, Megan. *It's OK That You're Not OK: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn't Understand*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2017.
- Dodes, Lance. *The Heart of Addiction: A New Approach to Understanding and Managing Alcoholism and Other Addictive Behaviors*. New York: Harper Collins, 2002.
- Durkheim, Emile. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. New York: Free Press, 1951.
- Ellison, Sharon Strand. *Taking the War Out of Our Words: The Art of Powerful Non-Defensive Communication*. Deadwood, OR: Wyatt-McKenzie Publishing, 2008.
- Empathy Academy's online learning site offers courses on emotions, empathy, and self-care and a licensing program for people who wish to become Dynamic Emotional Integration® professionals. See [empathyacademy.org](http://empathyacademy.org).
- Feldman Barrett, Lisa. *How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017.
- HelpGuide is a website that contains valuable and accessible information about mental and emotional health, plus comprehensive suggestions to help you find support. See [helpguide.org](http://helpguide.org).
- Hecht, Jennifer Michael. *The Happiness Myth: Why What We Think Is Right Is Wrong*. New York: HarperOne, 2007.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Lamia, Mary. *Grief Isn't Something to Get Over: Finding a Home for Memories and Emotions After Losing a Loved One*. Washington, DC: APA LifeTools, 2022).
- . *Understanding Myself: A Kid's Guide to Intense Emotions and Strong Feelings*. Washington, DC: Magination Press, 2010.
- . *What Motivates Getting Things Done: Procrastination, Emotions, and Success*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018.
- Lerner, Harriet. *Why Won't You Apologize? Healing Big Betrayals and Everyday Hurts*. New York: Gallery Books, 2017.
- McLaren, Karla. *The Art of Empathy: A Complete Guide to Life's Most Essential Skill*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2013.
- . *The Dynamic Emotional Integration® Workbook: The Practical Guide for Discovering the Genius in Your Emotions*. Windsor, CA: Laughing Tree Press, 2018.
- . *Embracing Anxiety: How to Access the Genius of this Vital Emotion*. Louisville, CO: Sounds True, 2020.
- Nettle, Daniel. *Happiness: The Science behind Your Smile*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

### TRAUMA HEALING

- Bonanno, George. *The End of Trauma: How the New Science of Resilience Is Changing How We Think about PTSD*. New York: Basic Books, 2021.
- de Becker, Gavin. *The Gift of Fear: Survival Signals That Protect Us from Violence*. New York: Dell, 1999.
- Lalich, Janja, and Karla McLaren. *Escaping Utopia: Growing Up in a Cult, Getting Out, and Starting Over*. New York: Routledge, 2017.

- Lalich, Janja, and Madeleine Tobias. *Take Back Your Life: Recovering from Cults and Abusive Relationships*. Berkeley: Bay Tree Publishing, 2006.
- Levine, Peter. *Healing Trauma: A Step-by-Step Program for Restoring the Wisdom of the Body* (online course). Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2011.
- . *It Won't Hurt Forever: Guiding Your Child Through Trauma* (audiotapes). Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2001.
- McGonigal, Kelly. *The Upside of Stress: Why Stress Is Good for You, and How to Get Good at It*. New York: Avery, 2015.
- Perry, Bruce D., and Maia Szalavitz. *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog: And Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist's Notebook; What Traumatized Children Can Teach Us about Loss, Love, and Healing*. New York: Basic Books, 2017.

## THE BRAIN

- Ariely, Dan. *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions*. New York: HarperCollins, 2008.
- Blakeslee, Sandra, and Matthew Blakeslee. *The Body Has a Mind of Its Own: How Body Maps Help You Do (Almost) Anything Better*. New York: Random House, 2008.
- Burton, Robert. *On Being Certain: Believing You Are Right Even When You're Not*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008.
- Feldman Barrett, Lisa. *7 ½ Lessons about the Brain*. Boston: Mariner Books, 2020.
- Hood, Bruce. *Supersense: Why We Believe in the Unbelievable*. New York: Harper One, 2009.
- Marcus, Gary. *Kluge: The Haphazard Construction of the Human Mind*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008.
- Newberg, Andrew. *Why We Believe What We Believe: Uncovering Our Biological Need for Meaning, Spirituality, and Truth*. New York: Free Press, 2006.
- Purser, Ronald. *McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality*. London: Repeater, 2019.

## SHADOW WORK, MYTHOLOGY, AND RITUAL

- Barks, Coleman. *The Essential Rumi*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995.
- Bly, Robert. *A Little Book on the Human Shadow*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988.
- Bly, Robert, James Hillman, and Michael Meade, eds. *The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart: Poems for Men*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.
- Brinton Perera, Sylvia. *The Scapegoat Complex: Toward a Mythology of Shadow and Guilt*. Toronto: Inner City Books, 1983.
- Hillman, James. *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling*. New York: Random House, 1996.
- Johnson, Robert. *Owning Your Own Shadow: Understanding the Dark Side of the Psyche*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993.
- Meade, Michael. *The Water of Life: Initiation and Tempering of the Soul*. Seattle: Green Fire Press, 2006.
- Somé, Malidoma. *The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose Through Nature, Ritual, and Community*. New York: Viking, 1999.
- . *Ritual: Power, Healing, and Community*. Portland, OR: Swan Raven, 1993.
- Somé, Sobonfu. *Welcoming Spirit Home*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999.
- Storr, Anthony, ed. *The Essential Jung*. New York: MJF Books, 1983.
- Zweig, Connie, and Jeremiah Abrams, eds. *Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature*. New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1991.

## **ADVENTURES FOR YOUR MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES**

- Callahan, Gerald. *Faith, Madness, and Spontaneous Human Combustion: What Immunology Can Teach Us about Self-Perception*. New York: Berkley Books, 2003.
- Dement, William. *The Promise of Sleep: A Pioneer in Sleep Medicine Explores the Vital Connection Between Health, Happiness, and a Good Night's Sleep*. New York: Dell, 2000.
- Fadiman, Anne. *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997.
- Gilovich, Thomas. *How We Know What Isn't So: The Fallibility of Human Reason in Everyday Life*. New York: Free Press, 1993.
- Hoffman, Paul. *The Man Who Loved Only Numbers: The Story of Paul Erdős and the Search for Mathematical Truth*. New York: Hyperion, 1999.
- Nuland, Sherwin. *How We Die: Reflections on Life's Final Chapter*. New York: Vintage, 1995.
- Roach, Mary. Bonk: *The Curious Coupling of Science and Sex*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2009.
- Sher, Barbara, and Annie Gottlieb. *Wishcraft: How to Get What You Really Want*. New York: Ballantine, 2003.
- Shubin, Neil. *Your Inner Fish: A Journey into the 3.5-Billion-Year History of the Human Body*. New York: Pantheon, 2009.
- Tavris, Carol, and Elliot Aronson. *Mistakes Were Made (but Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts*. New York: Harcourt, 2008.
- Winter, W. Chris. *The Sleep Solution: Why Your Sleep Is Broken and How to Fix It*. New York: New American Library, 2017