



The Emotion Meter

Awareness of emotions in oneself

 Exercise

 3 min.

 Client

 No

Characteristically, an emotionally intelligent person has an extensive emotional vocabulary, which facilitates his ability to accurately label his emotional experience. He is also able to discern the intensity of his emotions and to distinguish between different complex emotional experiences. Research shows that the ability to label emotional experiences with a high degree of specificity (i.e., being able to explain different emotional experiences with detail and accuracy) is adaptive. For instance, people high in “emotion differentiation” have been found to be less likely to drink excessively when stressed immediately prior to an upcoming drinking episode (Kashdan, Ferrisizidis, Collins, & Muraven, 2010; Kashdan, Barrett, & McKnight, 2015), and are less likely to react aggressively toward someone who has hurt them (Pond et al., 2012).

A strong emotional vocabulary enhances emotion regulation skills and emotional communication. Clients who have difficulty identifying and labeling their emotions may consequently lack the ability to become aware of emotional states that need regulation in everyday life. Furthermore, clients who lack the language required to communicate the nuances of what they are feeling to others are less likely to receive suitable emotional support. In this tool, clients are asked to reflect on their current energy levels and the pleasantness of their current state. Using this information, the tool offers a description of the emotion that corresponds with this state, helping clients to expand their emotional vocabulary.

Author

This tool was adapted from Nathanson et al.’s (2016) Mood Meter exercise by Lucinda Poole (PsyD) and Hugo Alberts (PhD).

Goal

This tool is designed to help clients build the skills of recognizing and labeling emotions.

Advice

- This exercise can be used to help the client track his or her emotions throughout the day (e.g., when they wake up, at meals, after class), week and month. For regular emotion checking, help the client set reminders (e.g., phone alarms, sticky notes).
- Developing emotional self-awareness takes practice. Over time, this exercise can become an intuitive, powerful tool for clients to acknowledge emotional states.
- There is also an app of this tool available: <http://moodmeterapp.com/>. This app may facilitate daily reflection.



Suggested Readings

Davies, M., Stankov, L., & Roberts, R. D. (1998). Emotional intelligence: In search of an elusive construct. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 75(4), 989.

Kashdan, T. B., Barrett, L. F., & McKnight, P. E. (2015). Unpacking emotion differentiation: Transforming unpleasant experience by perceiving distinctions in negativity. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 24(1), 10-16.

Kashdan, T. B., Ferssizidis, P., Collins, R. L., & Muraven, M. (2010). Emotion differentiation as resilience against excessive alcohol use: An ecological momentary assessment in underage social drinkers. *Psychological Science*, 21(9), 1341-1347.

Russell, J. A., & Barrett, L. F. (1999). Core affect, prototypical emotional episodes, and other things called emotion: Dissecting the elephant. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76(5), 805-819.

Pond Jr, R. S., Kashdan, T. B., DeWall, C. N., Savostyanova, A., Lambert, N. M., & Fincham, F. D. (2012). Emotion differentiation moderates aggressive tendencies in angry people: A daily diary analysis. *Emotion*, 12(2), 326.

Nathanson, L., Rivers, S. E., Flynn, L. M., & Brackett, M. A. (2016). Creating emotionally intelligent schools with RULER. *Emotion Review*, 8(4), 305-310.

Tool Description

Instructions

This tool is designed to help you build your emotional intelligence. Specifically, this exercise develops the skills of recognizing and labeling your emotions, so that you may live a healthier, more productive, and fulfilling life.

Step 1: Connect to the emotion

Take a moment to connect to your current emotional experience. Sitting comfortably, gently close your eyes, and tune in to your body's emotional charge. Focus all of your attention on the physical sensations that are here now. There might be feelings of tingling or agitation, or anger, or sadness. Allow yourself to remain in this state for a moment and observe it carefully.

Step 2: Rate pleasantness of emotion

Rate how pleasant this emotion is for you on the scale below (where 1 = very unpleasant and 10 = very pleasant):

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
very unpleasant					very pleasant				

Step 3: Rate your energy levels

Rate how high your energy is at this moment (where 1 = very low amount of energy and 10 = a very high amount of energy):

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
very low amount of energy					very high amount of energy				

Step 4: Plot the emotion on the graph

Using your scores from steps 2 and 3, find the emotion that matches in the emotion meter (see the appendix). The numbers along the bottom reflect pleasantness (Step 2), and the numbers on the left side represent intensity (Step 3). For instance, if you scored 3 on step 2 (pleasantness) and 8 on energy (step 3), the emotion that corresponds with these scores is anger.

Note the table quadrants are color-coded: the red cells represent emotions that are high in energy and low in pleasantness (e.g., angry, scared, and anxious); the blue cells are emotions that are low in energy and low in pleasantness (e.g., sad, disappointed, and lonely); the green cells are emotions that are low in energy and high in pleasantness (e.g., calm, tranquil, and relaxed); and, the yellow cells are emotions that are high in energy and high in pleasantness (e.g., happy, excited, and curious). There are 100 emotions in total; 25 emotions per quadrant.

Step 5: Reflect on the reason for the emotion

You now have the opportunity to reflect on why you are feeling the way that you are feeling right now. Use the space below to write about why this emotion is here with you.

Appendix A: The Emotion Meter

