

Week Five Topic: Emotions

Emotions are psychophysiological states, we experience them both in our thoughts and our bodies. Emotions can be activated by situations or people or even by memories.

Emotions are messengers: they give us information. For example, if you feel irritated, the message may be that you are not getting something you need or want. Different people can have different emotions even in the same situation.

Emotions are neither ‘right’ nor ‘wrong’. They just are.

Emotions often move us to action or otherwise influence our behavior. This happens even if we are not aware of our emotions.

As helping professionals, we were often trained to repress or ‘push down’ our emotions. Or to label our emotions as “bad” or “unacceptable”. This can lead to a disconnect. It can also drain our energy, leading to distress and burnout.

Being able to name, allow, and welcome all of our emotions helps us understand the message and then respond to it. Identifying our emotions helps us take care of ourselves instead of spending our energy ignoring or overriding our emotions.

Awareness of emotions helps us be aware of our behavior (what we do and why we do it) so that we can make choices that match our values. For example, if you are irritated and repress it, it may lead to behaviors such as emotional/mindless eating, drinking too much, or ‘snapping’ at others. If you are irritated and allow the emotion, you can then explore it and address the cause.

In iRest, working with opposites of emotion can be a way to give attention to strong emotions, then habituate, desensitize, and resolve our challenging

emotions. Opposites give context to each other. We do this knowing that we can feel and weave our inner resource into this practice.

Imagine a person with whom you are often annoyed or frustrated. How does this make you feel? Where do you sense it in your body? How does it influence your thoughts and behavior? Now - move to the opposite and imagine a person with whom you are often happy and welcoming. How does this feel different? Just imagining these people affects us physiologically! The connection between our mind and body is quite powerful.

With practice, we become more conscious of our emotions and how they influence our behavior. This helps us to welcome our emotions as messengers.

Daniel Goleman: “The emotional brain responds to an event more quickly than the thinking brain.”

Week Five Homework: Take time this week to try to notice and welcome your emotions. Check in with yourself and see if you can identify an emotion you are feeling. In that moment, where or how are you experiencing that emotion? Does it have a sensation or feeling in your body? How has it influenced your breathing? Your behavior? What message or information is this emotion giving you?

What would be the opposite emotion? Can you imagine feeling this opposite emotion? Where does that arise in your body? How does it influence your breath? What impact might it have on your behavior?

If you are having trouble identifying an emotion or would prefer to engage with opposites in a different way, pick a pair of opposite emotions below and take 5 to 10 minutes to reflect and feel each emotion, alternating between the two, and interweaving your inner resource along the way.

Opposites of Emotion:

Alert - Numb

Calm - Nervous

Calm - Angry

Apprehensive - Safe

Afraid - Courageous

Easygoing - Cranky

Exhausted - Vital/Energetic

Forgetful - Thoughtful

Ashamed - Proud

Helpless - Powerful

Indifferent - Empathetic

Depressed - Happy

Dissatisfied - Satisfied/Content

Weak - Strong

Nourished - Neglected

