

# Emotional Intelligence Exercises



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# Welcome

It is a great pleasure to offer you this compilation of Emotional Intelligence tools. During the past years, Positive Psychology has gained an increasing amount of attention, both from helping professionals and researchers. This attention has resulted in many valuable insights in what contributes to a happy, fulfilling life. In addition, positive psychology has given us many tools not only to flourish, but also to cope with difficult times in life.

Since 2013, our aim with the Positive Psychology Program has been to contribute to this field by disseminating the science to psychology practitioners and educators alike.

We hope that the tools presented here may inspire you too to increase your own wellbeing and the wellbeing of the people around you. Please feel free to print and share this document with others.

For those who like what they see, make sure to also check out our online searchable database with all kinds of practical positive psychology tools:

<https://positivepsychology.com/toolkit/>

All the best!

Seph Fontane Pennock  
Hugo Alberts, Ph.D.



## Building Emotional Awareness

### Emotions

Exercise

10-40 min.

Group

No

Noticing and understanding emotions in oneself is considered one of the four key ingredients of emotional intelligence (Davies, Stankov & Roberts, 1998). According to Charoensukmongkol (2015), mindfulness can help one develop emotional intelligence, by increasing people's understanding of their own emotions. Since the practice of mindfulness involves noticing one's current thoughts and feelings without judgment or interference, one learns to observe different emotional states. In line with this notion, Feldman, Hayes, Kumar, Greeson, and Laurenceau (2007) found that mindfulness is positively correlated with increased clarity of feelings, attention to feelings, and lower distraction. Just as intellectual intelligence is manifested through reading and learning, emotional intelligence can be fostered through mindfully attending to current emotional states.



### Author

This tool was created by Hugo Alberts (PhD) and Lucinda Poole (PsyD).



### Goal

The goal of this tool is to help clients develop their emotional awareness through mindfulness meditation.



### Advice

- While other mindfulness practices for emotions typically include 'acceptance' instructions (e.g., direct the breath toward the feeling in the body, allow the feeling to be there, sit with the feeling until it reduces or changes) to allow clients to experience the transient nature of difficult or painful emotions (see the Acceptance of Emotions Meditation tool), this exercise focuses on emotional awareness only, and as such does not guide people through the process of emotional acceptance. Clients are invited to simply notice and connect with an emotional state. The goal is not to regulate or tolerate emotions, but to help clients to become gradually more familiar with their emotions. As such, it is advisable that clients choose to connect with positive or neutral emotions in this exercise, rather than difficult or distressing emotions.
- Clients who have a low level of emotional awareness may struggle to find words to describe their emotions or find it hard to describe edges, colors, and any other characteristics of the emotion. The practitioner should instruct these clients to adopt a curious attitude while completing this exercise. Moreover, it takes time and practice to increase emotional awareness.



## Suggested Readings

Charoensukmongkol, P. (2014). Benefits of Mindfulness Meditation on Emotional Intelligence, General Self-Efficacy, and Perceived Stress: Evidence from Thailand. *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, 16, 171–192.

Davies, M., Stankov, L., & Roberts, R. D. (1998). Emotional intelligence: In search of an elusive construct. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75, 989–1015.

Feldman, G., Hayes, A., Kumar, S., Greeson, J., & Laurenceau, J.-P. (2007). Mindfulness and emotion regulation: The development and initial validation of the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale-Revised (CAMSR). *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, 29, 177–190.

## Tool description

This exercise invites you to become aware of your emotions. It's your chance to really get to know your emotions. By practicing emotional awareness in this way, you can build your emotional intelligence.

### Step 1: Emotional awareness meditation script

1. Find a comfortable seated position. Either sitting on a cushion on the floor, or in a chair. Allow your spine to be straight and long, and let your shoulders drop. Gently close your eyes, or, if you'd prefer, simply gaze down in front of you with a soft focus.
2. As you sit here, notice where your body is making contact: your feet touching the floor, perhaps your back on the ground, your sit bones on a chair...
3. Notice your breath. For the next five or so breaths, follow each inhale and exhale, feeling or imagining the breath flowing into and out of the body.
4. Now, shift your awareness from your breath to your body, and begin to scan through the body slowly from head to toe, observing any feelings or emotions that are present.
5. You might detect numerous feelings or emotions throughout the body. For the purpose of this exercise, choose one feeling or emotion to focus on for now.
6. Notice where in your body this emotion located... so what part of the body is holding this feeling?
7. How big or small is the feeling?
8. Where are its edges? Are these edges sharp or soft?
9. Does the feeling have a color? And if so, is the color changing or remaining the same?
10. Is the feeling heavy, or light?
11. Is the feeling moving, or still?
12. Is the feeling hard or soft? Is it rough or smooth? If I could touch this feeling with my hand, what would its texture be like?
13. Now, if you were to give a name to this feeling or emotion, what would it be? Can you identify it? Can you give it a label?
14. If a name for this feeling doesn't come to mind, that's OK. Be kind to yourself, and continue to observe the feeling in the body with curiosity and without judgment, until the nature of this emotion becomes clearer to you.
15. Continue to get to know this emotion for another five or so minutes. When you feel that you have reached a level of comfort with and understanding of this feeling, gently open your eyes and bring your attention back to the room you are in.



## Step 2: Reflection

In the space below, write about your experience in Step 1 in as much detail as possible. Writing about your experience of this emotion will enhance your understanding and familiarity with it.

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray background, intended for the user to write their reflection on their experience from Step 1.

## Decoding Emotions by Analyzing Speech, Body, and Face

### Emotions

Exercise

10-40 min.

Group

No

The ability to accurately perceive and understand the emotions of the people around us is a core component of emotional intelligence (Davies, Stankov & Roberts, 1998). Accurately “reading” other people’s emotions plays a key role in social interaction (Kilts, Egan, Gideon, Ely, & Hoffman, 2003) as it facilitates appropriate responding and bonding (Isaacowitz et al., 2007). There are three different ways to “read” other people’s emotions.

First, one can try to decipher facial expressions. Past research has provided strong evidence for the universal facial expressions of seven emotions – anger, contempt, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, and surprise. For instance, a study by Friesen (1972) found that the same facial expressions of emotions were produced spontaneously by members of very different cultures in reaction to emotion-eliciting films.

Second, one can attempt to “read” body language. There is evidence to suggest that numerous emotions, including pride, shame, anger, fear, and disgust (e.g., de Gelder & van den Stock, 2011; Keltner, 1995; Tracy, Robins, & Schriber, 2009) can be accurately deciphered from nonverbal bodily displays (see Witkower & Tracy, 2018 for a review).

Third, it is possible to decode emotions by observing speech. People use hundreds, if not thousands, of semantic terms to express a wide variety of emotional states (Russell, 1991; Sabini & Silver, 2005). Aside from the verbal information in speech, emotions are also expressed by the non-verbal qualities of speech, such as pitch, loudness and rate of speech (for reviews see Scherer 1977, 1981). In this tool, participants practice reading other people’s emotions by exploring each of these three ways of decoding emotions.



### Author

This tool was created by Hugo Alberts (PhD).



### Goal

The goal of this tool is to increase people’s ability to accurately perceive and understand the emotions of others.



### Advice

- In daily life, it is often difficult to check whether one’s inferences regarding another



person's feelings are correct. A valuable aspect of this tool is the opportunity for participants to check whether their observations are correct or not. The instructor may decide to reserve more time for step 5 (share observation) so that participants can maximally benefit from the opportunity to verify their observations.

- The speech decoder's job requires the observation of both verbal and non-verbal qualities of speech. For some participants, attending to both aspects of the communication may be too challenging. The instructor can solve this problem by making groups of 5, where the speech decoder's job is carried out by 2 group members; one focusing on the verbal and the other on the non-verbal characteristics of the speech. Alternatively, the speech decoder may choose to focus on only one characteristic rather than both.
- In this tool, the speaker is asked to choose one of seven primary emotions (anger, contempt, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, and surprise). To increase the difficulty of the exercise, the instructor may also ask the speaker to select more specific descriptions of emotions. A list is provided in Appendix C.
- Sharing a negative story may cause participants to re-experience a difficult emotion. The instructor is advised to inform participants that they should choose an emotion that they feel comfortable sharing with the group. Moreover, the instructor should stress that participants can stop at any given time with the exercise.



## 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*, 989-1015.

De Gelder, B., van den Stock, J., Meeren, H. K. M., Sinke, C. B. A., Kret, M. E., & Tamietto, M. (2010). Standing up for the body. Recent progress in uncovering the networks involved in the perception of bodies and bodily expressions. *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews, 34*, 513-527.

Friesen, W. V. (1972). Cultural differences in facial expression in a social situation: An experimental test of the concept of display rules. *Unpublished doctoral dissertation*. University of California San Francisco.

Isaacowitz, D. M., Löckenhoff, C. E., Lane, R. D., Wright, R., Sechrest, L., Riedel, R., & Costa, P. T. (2007). Age differences in recognition of emotion in lexical stimuli and facial expressions. *Psychology and Aging, 22*, 147-159.

Keltner, D., & Buswell, B. N. (1997). Embarrassment: Its distinct form and appeasement functions. *Psychological Bulletin, 122*, 250-270.

Kilts, C. D., Egan, G., Gideon, D. A., Ely, T. D., & Hoffman, J. M. (2003). Dissociable neural pathways are involved in the recognition of emotion in static and dynamic facial expressions. *Neuroimage, 18*, 156-168.

Russell, J. A. (1991). Culture and the categorization of emotions. *Psychological Bulletin*, 110, 426-450.

Sabini, J., & Silver, M. (2005). Why emotion names and experiences don't neatly pair. *Psychological Inquiry*, 16, 1-10.

Scherer, K. R. (1981). Speech and emotional actions. In J. K. Darby, Jr. (Ed.), *Speech evaluation in psychiatry* (pp. 189-220). New York: Grune & Stratton.

Scherer, K. R., & Oshinsky, J. S. (1977). Cue utilization in emotion attribution from auditory stimuli. *Motivation and Emotion*, 1, 331-346.

Tracy, J. L., Robins, R. W., & Schriber, R. A. (2009). Development of a FACS-verified set of basic and self-conscious emotion expressions. *Emotion*, 9, 554-559.

Witkower, Z., & Tracy, J. L. (2018). Bodily Communication of Emotion: Evidence for Extrafacial Behavioral Expressions and Available Coding Systems. *Emotion Review*.

## Tool description

### Step 1: Introduce the exercise

The experience of an emotion is reflected by changes in speech, body, and face. For example, a person who experiences joy may speak loudly, make a lot of gestures, and use positive words like “beautiful” and “exciting”. An overview of the aspects of our speech, body, and face that are commonly influenced by our emotions is provided in Appendix A.

In this exercise, you are going to practice “reading” other people’s emotions. Reading others’ emotions involves analyzing their facial expressions, as well as the way in which they are talking and moving. (See Appendix A for an overview of these three characteristics of emotional expression.)

### Step 2: Create groups of four

Divide your group of participants into smaller groups of four.

### Step 3: Assign roles

Inform your participants that they will each be assigned a role. There are four different roles per group: the speaker, the face decoder, the body decoder, and the speech decoder. Hand out the role descriptions shown in Appendix B to each participant. (Note that every group member will receive all four role descriptions because the role descriptions include scoring forms.) Ask each group of four to read the role descriptions, and then organize who will play each role amongst themselves. The three decoders use the form in the role description to write down their observations. The four roles are as described:

- **The speaker.** The speaker selects one emotion (see the list of emotions described in the speaker role description in Appendix A) and talks about a time when he or she experienced this emotion quite strongly. The speaker should not mention the emotion he or she has chosen, as the job of the observers is to guess the selected emotion.
- **The face decoder.** The face decoder carefully observes the speaker’s facial expressions to decipher the emotion being spoken about. For instance, are the speaker’s eyes opened wide in surprise, or drooped down in sadness?
- **The body decoder.** The body decoder carefully observes the speaker’s bodily movements to decipher the emotion being spoken about. For instance, how is the speaker using his hands to gesture while speaking, and what is his posture like?
- **The speech decoder.** The speech decoder carefully observes how the speaker is talking in order to decipher the emotion being spoken about. The speech decoder focuses on both verbal and non-verbal characteristics of speech. For instance, what kind of words is the speaker using (i.e., strong, bold, positive, negative), and how is the emotion reflected in the pitch, loudness, and speed of the speaker’s way of talking?



#### Step 4: Start the conversation

Announce to all that the speaker has five minutes to share his or her emotional story. Note that the decoders should be advised to limit their interaction with the speaker as much as possible, as this may interfere with their observation. So, decoders should simply observe without responding to the speaker, and write down their observations in the space provided in Appendix A.

#### Step 5: Share observations

After five minutes, when the speaker is finished, the decoders take turns to share their observations with their group. Take up to 10 minutes for this step. The following questions may be used to guide this step:

- What were the observations of the face decoder?
- What were the observations of the body decoder?
- What were the observations of the speech decoder?
- What did each of the decoders think was the emotion that was chosen by the speaker?
- What was the actual emotion that was chosen by the speaker?

#### Step 6: Exercise evaluation

Evaluate the exercise with all participants. The following questions may serve as a guide:

- How was it to do this exercise?
- Which aspects were challenging?
- What did you learn?
- What is your take-home message?

#### Optional Step 7: Switch roles

As an optional next step, have participants within their smaller groups switch roles so that each person plays each role once (i.e., each person is the speaker once, each person is the face decoder once, and so on). The instructor is advised to set a timer so that participants are informed when to switch roles. The total duration of this part of the exercise is 20 minutes.

## Appendix A Overview of three characteristics of emotional expression

### 1: *Facial expressions*

The face is a dynamic canvas on which people display their emotional states, and from which they decode the emotional states of others. For instance, a person who is surprised may raise his eyebrows, open his eyes wide, and drop his jaw. When a single emotion emerges and the individual does not attempt to modify or conceal it, facial expressions typically last between 0.5 to 4 seconds and involve the entire face. The ability to correctly perceive and understand other people's emotions through facial expressions is associated with better personal and social effectiveness, and as such is a key aspect of optimal human functioning.

### 2: *Bodily expressions*

There is evidence to suggest that numerous emotions, including pride, shame, anger, fear, and disgust can be accurately deciphered from nonverbal bodily displays. Pride, for instance, is typically signaled by an expanded chest, upward head tilt, and arms akimbo—either spread out from the body with hands on hips or raised above the head with hands in fists. Bodily expressions of emotions are universal, generalizing across race and disparate cultures, being reliably recognized by young children, and being spontaneously displayed by the blind.

### 3: *Speech*

People use hundreds, if not thousands, of terms to express emotional states. In some cases, the words that are used point directly to the emotion one is experiencing. For instance, the experience of fear may be expressed by saying "I am afraid". In other cases, figurative expressions are used, so that rather than literally naming the emotional state one is in, one relies on metaphors or analogies to express his or her subjective experience. In the English language, there are hundreds of linguistic expressions commonly used to talk about emotions. For example, "trembling like a leaf", "feeling trapped" and "hitting rock bottom". Obviously, in order to accurately decode emotion from language, one must know the meaning of the words or expressions used to communicate an emotion. Obviously, deciphering emotions in a non-native language is harder than doing so in one's own language. In addition to the verbal information in speech, emotions are also expressed by the non-verbal qualities of speech, such as pitch, volume, and rate of speech.

These three characteristics of emotional expression (facial, bodily and verbal) operate together rather than in isolation. For instance, focusing only on words to decode the emotion of another person is unlikely to be accurate, given nonverbal cues modify, augment, illustrate, accentuate, and contradict the words they accompany. The integration of facial and bodily expressions is required to capture the full essence of an emotion.

## Appendix B Role descriptions

### The Speaker

You are the speaker. Your job is to talk for 5 minutes about a time when you experienced one of the following difficult emotions: anger, sadness, fear, joy, interest, surprise, disgust, shame, other. Take a moment to bring this personal situation to mind and try to connect with the situation and the emotion that you experienced at the time as much as possible. Keep this connection to the emotional experience throughout the 5 minutes. The job of your other group members is to guess the emotion you are talking about. Therefore, you should not try to name the emotion you chose (that would spoil the exercise), but focus on describing the situation at hand.

*Important note: Do not choose an emotion or situation that you feel uncomfortable talking about and sharing with others. Also, remember that you can stop participating at any given moment.*

### The Face Decoder

In a few moments, one of your group members will share a personal story. We call this person “the speaker”. The speaker will speak about a personal past situation that evoked a particular (unknown to you) emotion in him or her.

While the speaker shares this story, it is your job to carefully observe his or her facial expressions. For example, you may notice that the speaker’s eyes are wide open, lips are tensed, and cheeks are flushed red. Write down every facial sign of the emotion that you notice during the speaker’s story in the scoring area below, and then make an informed guess as to what emotion the speaker chose to talk about.

Scoring	
Eyes	
Eyelids	
Eyebrows	
Nostrils	
Mouth	
Lips	
Other	
The speaker’s emotion is:	

### The Body Decoder

In a few moments, one of your group members will share a personal story. We call this person “the speaker”. The speaker will speak about a personal past situation that evoked a particular (unknown to you) emotion in him or her.

While the speaker shares this story, it is your job to carefully observe his or her bodily expressions. For example, you may notice that the speaker has a slumped posture, downward gaze, and closed chest. Write down every bodily sign of the emotion that you notice during the speaker’s story in the scoring area below, and then make an informed guess as to what emotion the speaker chose to talk about.

Scoring	
Head	
Shoulders	
Chest	
Arms	
Hands	
Legs	
Other	
The speaker’s emotion is:	



### The Speech Decoder

In a few moments, one of your group members will share a personal story. We call this person “the speaker”. The speaker will speak about a personal past situation that evoked a particular (unknown to you) emotion in him or her.

While the speaker shares this story, it is your job to carefully observe his or her speech, including both *what* is being said (e.g., you may notice that the speaker is using signaling words and terms like “I felt trapped” or “I was on a high”) and *how* it is being said (i.e., is the speaker talking quickly, loudly or softly, and with a high or low pitch?).

Write down every verbal sign of the emotion that you notice during the speaker’s story in the scoring area below, and then make an informed guess as to what emotion the speaker chose to talk about.

Scoring	
Words	
Pitch	
Volume	
Rate of speech	
Other	
The speaker’s emotion is:	

## Appendix C Emotions list

Emotions list	
Anger	fury, outrage, wrath, irritability, hostility, resentment and violence.
Sadness	grief, sorrow, gloom, melancholy, despair, loneliness, and depression.
Fear	anxiety, apprehension, nervousness, dread, fright, and panic.
Joy	enjoyment, happiness, relief, bliss, delight, pride, thrill, and ecstasy.
Interest	acceptance, friendliness, trust, kindness, affection, love, and devotion.
Surprise	shock, astonishment, amazement, astound, and wonder.
Disgust	contempt, disdain, scorn, aversion, distaste, and revulsion.
Shame	guilt, embarrassment, chagrin, remorse, regret, and contrition.

## Identifying False Beliefs about Emotions

### Coping

Exercise

15 min.

Client

No

Many people have implicit beliefs about emotions. These beliefs operate outside conscious awareness, and strongly determine the way people cope with their emotions.

First, people hold beliefs about the “acceptability” of emotions. People vary in the degree to which they believe that experiencing and expressing negative feelings is acceptable. Beliefs about the unacceptability of experiencing or expressing negative thoughts and emotions have been suggested to play a key role in the development and maintenance of clinical problems (Surawy, Hackmann, Hawton & Sharpe, 1995) and can be associated with a worse prognosis and treatment outcome (Corstorphine, 2006). In general, beliefs about the unacceptability of emotions have been found in people with a range of different problems, such as depression (Jack, 1991, Cramer, Gallant & Langlois, 2005), eating disorders (Corstorphine, 2006), social phobia (Clark & Wells, 1995), post-traumatic stress disorder (Ehlers & Clark, 2000), and borderline personality disorder (Linehan, 1993). These beliefs may lead to the avoidance of emotions, which prevents the individual from developing self-awareness and self-understanding and, hence, the ability to take care of oneself appropriately (Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 2001). Growing up in an environment where the expression of difficulties or negative feelings was met with punishment or a lack of sympathy has been suggested as a potential cause for the development of beliefs about the unacceptability of emotions (Linehan, 1993).

People may also hold beliefs about the malleability of emotion. For instance, one may believe that no matter how hard one tries, one cannot really change emotions. This belief that emotions are outside personal control is likely to result in fewer efforts at regulating the emotion (Dweck, 2000; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Because the individual does not engage in active attempts to regulate emotions, and will therefore not experience that emotions can be regulated, the belief will remain unchallenged. Moreover, research has shown that people who believe that emotions are less changeable experience fewer positive emotions and more negative emotions, decreased psychological wellbeing, lower perceived emotion regulation self-efficacy, and higher levels of depression (Kappes & Schikowski, 2013; Tamir, John, Srivastava, & Gross, 2007). By contrast, a person who believes that emotions are changeable will display a more assertive and active pattern of coping (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Tamir et al. 2007). Over time, this active pattern of coping with emotions will confirm that emotions are indeed changeable and thus strengthen the very belief regarding the changeability of emotions. This exercise addresses clients’ basic and often unconscious assumptions about their emotions.



### Author

This tool was created by Hugo Alberts (PhD) and Lucinda Poole (PsyD).



## Goal

This exercise is designed to help clients uncover dysfunctional or false beliefs about emotions.



## Advice

- Gently remind clients that they should not blame anyone for the false beliefs they have about emotions. Advise them that parents, grandparents, siblings, and teachers were likely told the very same dysfunctional messages.
- This exercise can be completed numerous times with different emotions, as people can hold different beliefs about different emotional states. The client may benefit from completing the exercise with each of his or her main problematic emotional states, to gain an in-depth understanding of the core beliefs and consequences associated with each emotion. It may also be interesting to complete the exercise with a positive emotion; it is likely that the client holds adaptive core beliefs about positive emotional states, which leads to adaptive outcomes.
- An example of a completed worksheet is presented in Appendix B. This may be helpful for clients who have difficulty understanding the exercise.
- The Core Beliefs About Emotions worksheet is intended to be printed out and brought into the session, so clients can fill it in themselves. This helps to increase client engagement in the activity as well as autonomy and empowerment.



## Suggested Readings

Clark, D. M. & Wells, A. (1995). A cognitive model of social phobia. In R. Heimberg, M. Liebowitz, D. A. Hope, & F. R. Schneier (Eds.), *Social phobia: Diagnosis, assessment and treatment*. (pp. 69–93). New York: Guilford Press.

Corstorphine, E. (2006). Cognitive–emotional–behavioural therapy for the eating disorders: Working with beliefs about emotions. *European Eating Disorders Review: The Professional Journal of the Eating Disorders Association*, 14, 448-461.

Cramer, K. M., Gallant, M. D., & Langlois, M. W. (2005). Self-silencing and depression in women and men: Comparative structural equation models. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 39, 581-592.

Dweck, C. S. (2000). *Self theories: Their role in motivation, personality, and development*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis Group.

Dweck, C. S., & Leggett, E. L. (1988). A social-cognitive approach to motivation and personality. *Psychological Review*, 95, 256-273.

Ehlers, A., & Clark, D. M. (2000). A cognitive model of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 38, 319-345.

Jack, D. C. (1991). *Silencing the self: Women and depression*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kappes, A., & Schikowski, A. (2013). Implicit theories of emotion shape regulation of negative affect. *Cognition & Emotion*, 27, 952-960.

Kennedy-Moore, E., & Watson, J. C. (2001). *Expressing emotion: Myths, realities, and therapeutic strategies*. New York: Guilford Press.

Linehan, M. M. (1993). *Diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders. Cognitive- behavioral treatment of borderline personality disorder*. New York, NY, US: Guilford Press.

Surawy, C., Hackmann, A., Hawton, K., & Sharpe, M. (1995). Chronic fatigue syndrome: a cognitive approach. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 33, 535-544.

Tamir, M., John, O. P., Srivastava, S., & Gross, J. J. (2007). Implicit theories of emotion: Affective and social outcomes across a major life transition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92, 731-744.

## Tool description

In this exercise, we will examine your basic assumptions about emotions; that is, what emotions mean to you, what it means to express them, and what would happen if you allowed yourself to feel particular emotions. The purpose of this is to uncover any false or misleading beliefs that you have which may be having a negative impact on your wellbeing.

### Step 1: Choose a difficult emotion

For the purpose of this exercise, choose one particular difficult emotion to work with. Perhaps choose an emotional state you are struggling with at the moment; for instance, you might be feeling anxious about an upcoming event, or regretful about a recent transgression. Write down the emotion you have chosen to work with in the center of the person outlined in the Core Beliefs About Emotions worksheet (Appendix A).

### Step 2: Uncover false core beliefs about emotion

Read through the below list of common false beliefs about emotions and see which resonate most with you. Place a check mark next to those statements that ring true for you. Pay particular attention to those that sound familiar, as these may be thoughts that exist outside your awareness. Please add any personal beliefs that are not listed at the end. Then, write down your core beliefs about emotions in the thought bubbles outlined in the Core Beliefs About Emotions worksheet (Appendix A).

- If I lose control of my emotions in front of others, they will think less of me.
- I should be able to control my emotions.
- If I let myself feel this emotion, I will become overwhelmed by it.
- If I tell others how I feel, they will use it against me.
- If I tell others how I feel, they will think I am weak.
- Other people don't feel this way. There must be something wrong with me.
- Only an immature person would get so emotional.
- I should be able to cope with difficulties on my own without turning to others for support.
- To be acceptable to others, I must keep any difficulties or negative feelings to myself.
- This emotional state is not a normal response; I have to get rid of it.
- A happy person would not feel this way.
- That person responded differently than I did, therefore my emotional reaction is wrong.
- If I let myself feel this pain, it will kill me.
- Letting myself feel bad would mean falling to pieces, being a total mess, or wallowing in self-pity.
- If I show signs of weakness then others will reject me.
- Being an adult means not getting carried away by emotion; I'm supposed to be rational!
- Showing my emotions to others makes me look like a "drama queen."
- I'm stupid for feeling this way. I should just suck it up!
- I should not let myself give in to these feelings.
- Other:
- Other:



### Step 3: Explore the consequences of holding these beliefs

Now let's look at what happens as a consequence of holding these beliefs about emotions. What impact do these beliefs have on how you feel, behave, and talk to yourself when faced with this emotion? Write down as many outcomes (positive and negative) as you can think of in the Consequences section of the Core Beliefs About Emotions worksheet (Appendix A).

### Step 4: Evaluation

Discuss the following:

- How was it to do this exercise?
- Looking at the consequences part of the exercise, how adaptive is it for you to hold such beliefs about your emotions?
- What was easy or difficult about the exercise?
- What insights have you gained about your beliefs about emotions?

Appendix A Core Beliefs About Emotions worksheet

BELIEF:  
.....  
.....  
.....

BELIEF:  
.....  
.....  
.....

BELIEF:  
.....  
.....  
.....

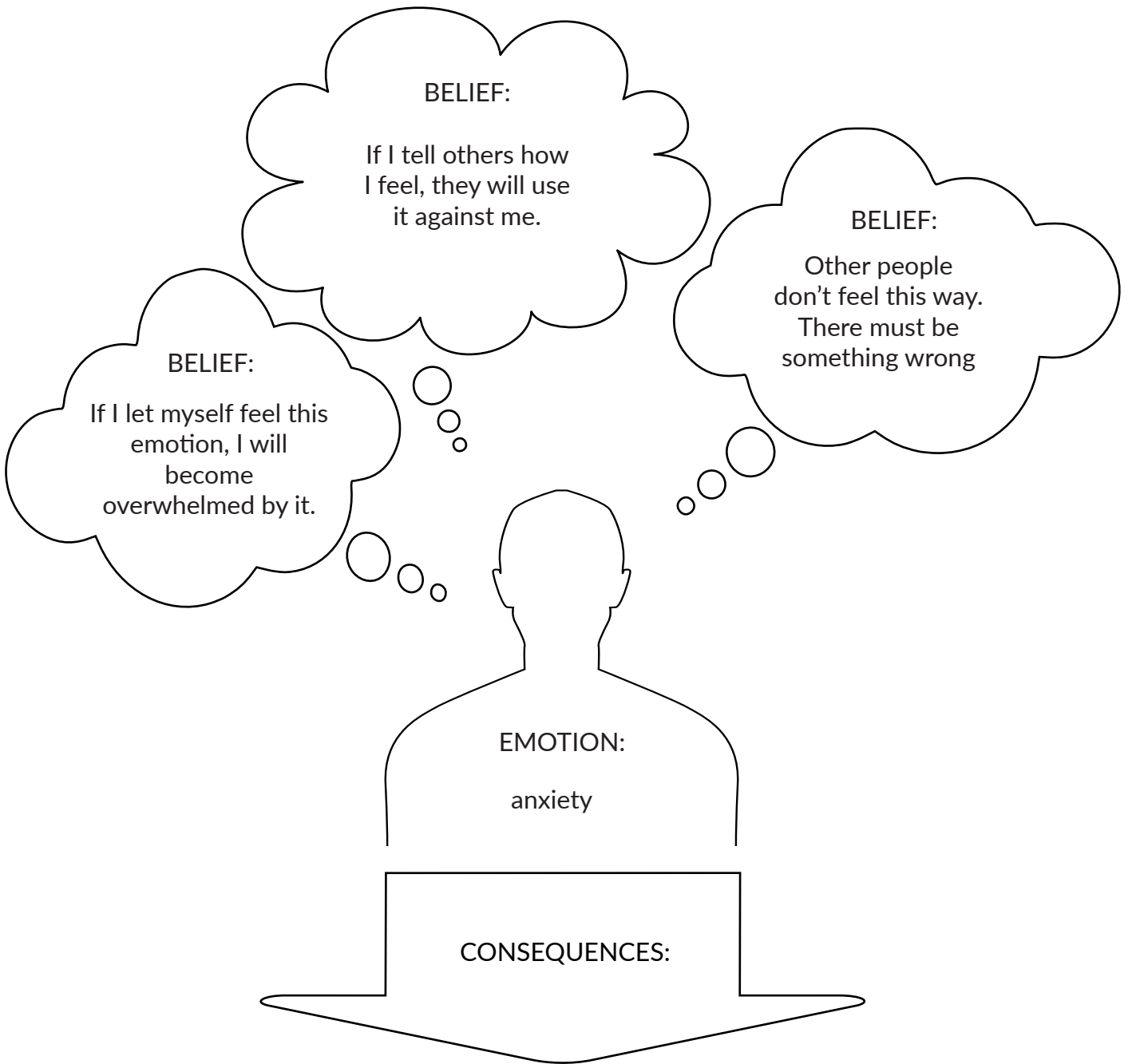
EMOTION:  
.....

CONSEQUENCES:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....



Appendix B An example of a completed Core Beliefs About Emotions worksheet



I withdraw and isolate myself so that others don't find out how I feel prevents me from their emotional support

I am harsh and self-critical towards myself