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## Understanding our Emotions as Teenagers

### How Emotions Help Us

What are you feeling, right now, as you start to read this? Are you curious? Hopeful that you'll learn something about yourself? Bored because this is something you have to do for school and you're not really into it — or happy because it's a school project you enjoy? Perhaps you're distracted by something else, like feeling excited about your weekend plans or sad because you just went through a breakup.

Emotions like these are part of human nature. They give us information about what we're experiencing and help us know how to react.

We sense our emotions from the time we're babies. Infants and young children react to their emotions with facial expressions or with actions like laughing, cuddling, or crying. They feel and show emotions, but they don't yet have the ability to name the emotion or say why they feel that way.

As we grow up, we become more skilled in understanding emotions. Instead of just reacting like little kids do, we can identify what we feel and put it into words. With time and practice, we get better at knowing what we are feeling and why. This skill is called **emotional awareness**.

Emotional awareness helps us know what we need and want (or don't want!). It helps us build better relationships. That's because being aware of our emotions can help us talk about feelings more clearly, avoid or resolve conflicts better, and move past difficult feelings more easily.

Some people are naturally more in touch with their emotions than others. The good news is, everyone can be more aware of their emotions. It just takes practice. But it's worth the effort: Emotional awareness is the first step toward building emotional intelligence, a skill that can help people succeed in life.

# Emotions 101

Here are a few basic things about emotions:

- **Emotions come and go.** Most of us feel many different emotions throughout the day. Some last just a few seconds. Others might linger to become a mood.
- **Emotions can be mild, intense, or anywhere in between.** The intensity of an emotion can depend on the situation and on the person.
- **There are no good or bad emotions, but there are good and bad ways of expressing (or acting on) emotions.** Learning how to express emotions in acceptable ways is a separate skill — managing emotions — that is built on a foundation of being able to understand emotions.

## It's All Good

Some emotions feel positive — like feeling happy, loving, confident, inspired, cheerful, interested, grateful, or included. Other emotions can seem more negative — like feeling angry, resentful, afraid, ashamed, guilty, sad, or worried. **Both positive and negative emotions are normal.**

All emotions tell us something about ourselves and our situation. But sometimes we find it hard to accept what we feel. We might judge ourselves for feeling a certain way, like if we feel jealous, for example. But instead of thinking we shouldn't feel that way, it's better to notice how we actually feel.

Avoiding negative feelings or pretending we don't feel the way we do can backfire. It's harder to move past difficult feelings and allow them to fade if we don't face them and try to understand why we feel that way. You don't have to dwell on your emotions or constantly talk about how you feel. Emotional awareness simply means recognizing, respecting, and accepting your feelings as they happen.

## Building Emotional Awareness

Emotional awareness helps us know and accept ourselves. So how can you become more aware of your emotions? Start with these three simple steps:

1. **Make a habit of tuning in to how you feel in different situations throughout the day.** You might notice that you feel excited after making plans to go somewhere with a friend. Or that you feel nervous before an exam. You might be relaxed when listening to music, inspired by an art exhibit, or pleased when a friend gives you a compliment. Simply notice whatever emotion you feel, then name that emotion in your mind. It only takes a second to do this, but it's great practice. Notice that each emotion passes and makes room for the next experience.
2. **Rate how strong the feeling is.** After you notice and name an emotion, take it a step further: Rate how strongly you feel the emotion on a scale of 1–10, with 1 being the mildest feeling and 10 the most intense.
3. **Share your feelings with the people closest to you.** This is the best way to practice putting emotions into words, a skill that helps us feel closer to friends, boyfriends or girlfriends, parents, coaches — anyone. Make it a daily practice to share feelings with a friend or family member. You could share something that's quite personal or something that's simply an everyday emotion.

Just like anything else in life, when it comes to emotions, [practice](#) makes perfect! Remind yourself there are no good or bad emotions. Don't judge your feelings — just keep noticing and naming them.

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