



FELT SENSE

PSYCHOTHERAPY

Emotions & Action Tendencies Worksheet

Understanding Emotions

The Purpose of Emotions

Emotions are not problems to eliminate — they are **signals from the mind and body**.

Each emotion evolved to help us:

- Notice important information
- Respond to challenges
- Protect ourselves
- Connect with others
- Guide decision-making

Even difficult emotions serve meaningful functions.

When we understand what emotions are trying to do, they become easier to work with.

The Nervous System and Emotions

Emotions are closely connected to the body's **nervous system**.

When something important happens, the brain quickly evaluates whether it might involve:

- Safety
- Threat
- Loss
- Reward
- Social connection

This evaluation triggers physical responses such as:

- Changes in heart rate
- Muscle tension or relaxation
- Shifts in breathing
- Hormone release
- Changes in attention

These body changes prepare us for **action**.

Each emotion carries an **action tendency** — an urge toward a particular behaviour.

Core Emotions and Their Action Tendencies

Fear

Purpose: Protects us from danger.

Common body signals:

- Rapid heartbeat
- Muscle tension
- Heightened alertness
- Faster breathing

Action tendency:

- Escape
- Avoid
- Seek safety

Reflection:

What situations tend to trigger fear for you?

Anger

Purpose: Protects boundaries and signals injustice or threat.

Common body signals:

- Heat in the body
- Muscle tightening
- Increased energy
- Urge to act

Action tendency:

- Confront
- Defend
- Set boundaries

Reflection:

When anger shows up, what might it be trying to protect?

Sadness

Purpose: Comes when we experience loss and encourages us to seek comfort.

Common body signals:

- Low energy
- Heaviness in the chest or body

- Tears
- Withdrawal

Action tendency:

- Slow down
- Reflect
- Seek support

Reflection:

What helps you care for yourself when you feel sadness?

Joy

Purpose: Reinforces experiences that support well-being and connection.

Common body signals:

- Lightness in the body
- Smiling or laughter
- Increased energy
- Warmth or openness

Action tendency:

- Approach
- Connect
- Celebrate

Reflection:

What kinds of experiences tend to bring you joy?

Disgust

Purpose: Protects us from contamination or harm.

Common body signals:

- Nausea
- Urge to push something away
- Facial expressions of rejection

Action tendency:

- Reject
- Distance
- Remove yourself from something harmful

Reflection:

How do you usually respond when something feels deeply unpleasant or wrong?

Body Awareness

Emotions often show up in the body **before we consciously recognize them.**

Try noticing:

- Where do I feel this emotion in my body?
- Does it feel like tension, warmth, pressure, or movement?
- Does the sensation change if I stay curious about it?

Practicing body awareness can help you **recognize emotions earlier and respond more intentionally.**

Reflection Questions

1. Which emotions feel easiest for you to recognize?
2. Which emotions are hardest to allow or express?
3. When a strong emotion arises, what do you usually do?
4. What messages did you learn growing up about emotions?
5. What would it look like to respond to emotions with **curiosity instead of judgment?**
6. What signals from your body help you recognize when an emotion is beginning?