



Meta-emotions

Background: What are meta-emotions? To put it simply, meta-emotions are our **feelings about our feelings**. The concept of meta-emotions considers the idea that when we experience feelings, we also encounter other feelings about the experience itself. Another way to look at this is that meta-emotions are secondary feelings that come after a situation that has triggered primary feelings. Meta emotions are our secondary emotions (later) about these primary emotions (initial). **Consider an example to increase understanding:**

Sharon – Sharon's was very angry with her sister for doing something that she asked her many times not to do. While Sharon's anger was being released, she felt a rush of **excitement** while yelling at her sister uncontrollably. However, after a little time passed and Sharon calmed down, she thought about her anger and related behaviors she felt **guilty** for letting her anger get the best of her. She also then started feeling a little **anxious** about her inability to control her anger sometimes. **[Meta-emotions bolded]**

Sometimes people can feel comfortable or complacent with an emotion especially if that feeling is common or habitual: For example:

- “To be honest, I am angry so often these days I feel I am in my comfort zone when I am mad”
- “I am so used to being sad since I have been suffering from depression that I have become almost complacent with my own sadness, which I know cannot be a good thing”

Sometimes a meta-emotion can be the same as the primary emotion:

- “I can feel myself getting anxious when I just think about feeling anxious (even if nothing made me anxious yet)”
- “Anger just makes me even more angry so I cannot be around it”
- “I am afraid of being afraid which keeps me from trying new things at times”

There are no right or wrong answers. Learning about your own meta-emotions takes self-reflection and honest self-awareness. If you are up to the task, try to identify your own meta-emotions about some of the following feelings:

Stop and think deeply first, then fill in the blank with a meta-emotion (or two as there can be more than one)

- I feel _____ about feeling angry
- I feel _____ about feeling sad
- I feel _____ about feeling anxious
- I feel _____ about feeling afraid
- I feel _____ about feeling annoyed
- I feel _____ about feeling guilty
- I feel _____ about feeling surprised
- I feel _____ about feeling happy
- I feel _____ about feeling _____ (try some of your own ideas)



We can also experience meta-emotions about other people's feelings. Answer some of the following with meta-emotions. Think and be honest with yourself:

- When others around me are feeling anxious, I often feel _____
- When others around me are feeling angry, I often feel _____
- When others around me are feeling sad, I often feel _____
- When others around me are feeling happy, I often feel _____
- When others around me are feeling proud, I often feel _____
- When others around me are feeling jealous, I often feel _____
- When others around me are feeling _____ (select your own), I often feel _____

So now what? So, you have learned about and practiced working on meta-emotions. What can we do with this information to make self-improvement? Consider the following discussion points as a group:

- 1. Be mindful of your “comfort zone” with meta emotions.** Ask yourself “have I gotten too comfortable with feeling angry, guilty, depressed, silly, etc.?”
- 2. Watch out for meta-emotion fears** – Fear of emotions can hold your social-emotional development back from growing and expanding. Are you afraid of feeling some feelings?
- 3. Identify adverse (unhealthy) and unbalanced meta-emotions** – Some meta-emotions are not good for us or for our overall well-being. Sometimes meta emotions can lack balance or congruency. Consider how some of meta-emotions can be problematic especially over time. (These are just a few examples as there can be other troubling meta-emotion pairings)
 - a. Feeling happy about others who may be feeling angry or sad**
 - b. Feeling guilty about our own feelings of happiness**
 - c. Feeling jealous about others feeling proud**
 - d. Can the group come up with more examples?**
- 4. Develop a positive relationship with positive emotions** – Addiction and mental health issues can impact the way we experience emotions. As part of the positive change and recovery process it is important to learn about and explore emotions that are productive and positive like happiness, joy, love, peacefulness, compassion, kindness, etc. How can you learn more about and increase emotions like these in your life and relationships?
- 5. Accept and recognize that some of our meta-emotions may be deep-rooted based on our personal experiences** - Emotions quite often can originate in our past and our childhood and are impacted by things like trauma and other experiences. If you have identified some issues from this worksheet on meta-emotions, it would be a good idea to follow up with these issues in therapy or with your support system. If you notice that your meta-emotions may be impacting your relationships or your behavior, then engaging in honest and open conversation with others close to you (or a professional) may be necessary. Seek help and support if needed.