

Transformational Engagement: Developing Competent Responsiveness to Learner Needs in the Pandemic-era and Beyond

Todd Bowman, PhD, LCPC

Associate Professor of Counseling

Indiana Wesleyan University

todd.bowman@indwes.edu



This presentation will examine the evolution of the teacher-learner dynamic in the pandemic era, specifically exploring the changing nature of learner needs and the shift toward *transformational engagement* offered by instructors. The concept of *competent responsiveness* will be unpacked through the framework of *interpersonal neurobiology* and traumatology, with practical, innovative activities at the classroom and individual learner level being surveyed .



Reflection Point

How would you teach differently over the next 5 years if your personal performance and building/district/institution performance were no longer directly tied to standardized testing outcomes?



Reality Check



Learning Loss

Math and reading scores have dropped in a statistically significant way.

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2022/03/03/the-pandemic-has-had-devastating-impacts-on-learning-what-will-it-take-to-help-students-catch-up/>



Learning Loss

“New research suggests students still haven’t regained the academic ground they’ve lost in the disruptions of the ongoing pandemic, and many high school students will continue to struggle after graduation.”

ACT scores among HS juniors fell below the 50th percentile.

<https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/the-covid-academic-slide-could-be-worse-than-expected/2022/02>

Emotional disruption

“Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 15 to 20% of students could be expected to be identified as needing support through screening (Dowdy et al., 2015); this percentage will almost certainly be higher given the potential emotional fallout of the pandemic.”



<https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/student-mental-health>

Emotional Disruption

“The fact is: Children can’t process and retain new information if their brains are overwhelmed with anxiety.”

<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/teaching-social-emotional-skills-amid-covid-19/2020/09>



Reflection Point

How did the stress in the early days of the pandemic impact your cognitive functioning?

How have you felt the emotional weight of anxiety throughout the pandemic?

In what ways was your family system functioning impacted by the response to the pandemic?



Claim:

Shutting the schools down in the pandemic, while necessary from an epidemiological perspective, was *fundamentally traumatizing* to the psychosocial growth and development of nearly every individual under the age of 23.



Post-Traumatic Stress

“If you’re experiencing post-traumatic stress, your heart may race, hands shake, you may sweat or feel afraid and nervous. After the stressful event, you might avoid or be leery of engaging in that activity again, you may have a bad dream about the event you just experienced, or you may feel nervous in a situation that reminds you of the unpleasant event.”

<https://www.brainline.org/article/what-are-differences-between-pts-and-ptsd>

Post-Traumatic Stress

The learning loss reported in the Brookings study indicates that the academic losses for students, in general, was greater than measured in students who were directly impacted by Hurricane Katrina.

As such, post-traumatic stress is a necessary framework for us to use in order to understand student functioning in the aftermath of the pandemic and how to engage them in a way that re-orient them to the learning process.

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2022/03/03/the-pandemic-has-had-devastating-impacts-on-learning-what-will-it-take-to-help-students-catch-up/>

Adverse Childhood Experiences



Traumatic Stress and the Developing Brain

“Trauma is an emotional or physical response to one or more harmful or life-threatening events or circumstances with lasting adverse effects on your mental and physical well-being ...As a result of these prolonged stress responses, research — including a [2019 study](#) — shows that childhood trauma literally changes the structure of the brain in two main areas:

- **hippocampus:** learning, memory, spatial relationships
- **prefrontal cortex:** attention, emotional regulation, problem-solving”.

<https://psychcentral.com/ptsd/complex-ptsd-trauma-learning-and-behavior-in-the-classroom#trauma-and-the-brain>

Impact of Traumatic Stress



COGNITIVE

- difficulty concentrating in class
- being easily distracted
- test anxiety
- trouble adapting to changes
- reduced memory capacity

BEHAVIORAL

- angry outbursts
- avoiding peers and teachers
- conflict with peers
- hypervigilance
- lowered grades
- trouble with eye contact

EMOTIONAL

- intrusive thoughts
- a lack of motivation
- low self-esteem
- social anxiety, which might look like not communicating with their peers or teachers
- difficulty with emotional regulation

<https://psychcentral.com/ptsd/complex-ptsd-trauma-learning-and-behavior-in-the-classroom#trauma-and-the-brain>

We provide students free and reduced breakfast and lunch because we know that their physical state impacts their capacity to learn.

Why have we not done the same with providing the necessary resources for their emotional well-being, since we know that emotional state impacts capacity to learn?



Reflection Point

Think about a student you have worked with who experienced adverse childhood experiences or trauma.

How did their learning engagement change?

How did their socioemotional functioning change?

What happens when the entire classroom, the entire schooling system, in fact, carries these same impacts?





Transformational Engagement


Interpersonal Neurobiology

“Interpersonal Neurobiology (IPNB) is primarily a theory and practical working model which describes human development and functioning as being a product of the relationship between the body, mind and relationships. Another term for it is *relational neuroscience*. IPNB describes how the brain and mind are shaped, or developed, and how they function based on the interplay of genes in the context of relationships. IPNB is heavily rooted in attachment theory.”

<https://www.icc.institute/iccm/what-is-interpersonal-neurobiology-ipnb/>

From an IPNB perspective, every teacher is a surrogate attachment figure that plays a direct role in the development or functioning of their students' brains, minds and bodies.

The quality of your emotional grounding and interpersonal connection to students has a *direct impact* on how their social and emotional neurobiology develops.



Right-brain to right-brain
attunement fosters
emotional regulation

Reflection Point

Think about a student whose life you know you impacted in a positive and significant way.

What aspects of your relationship with the student come to mind?

How did you grow as an educator as a result of that experience with the student?



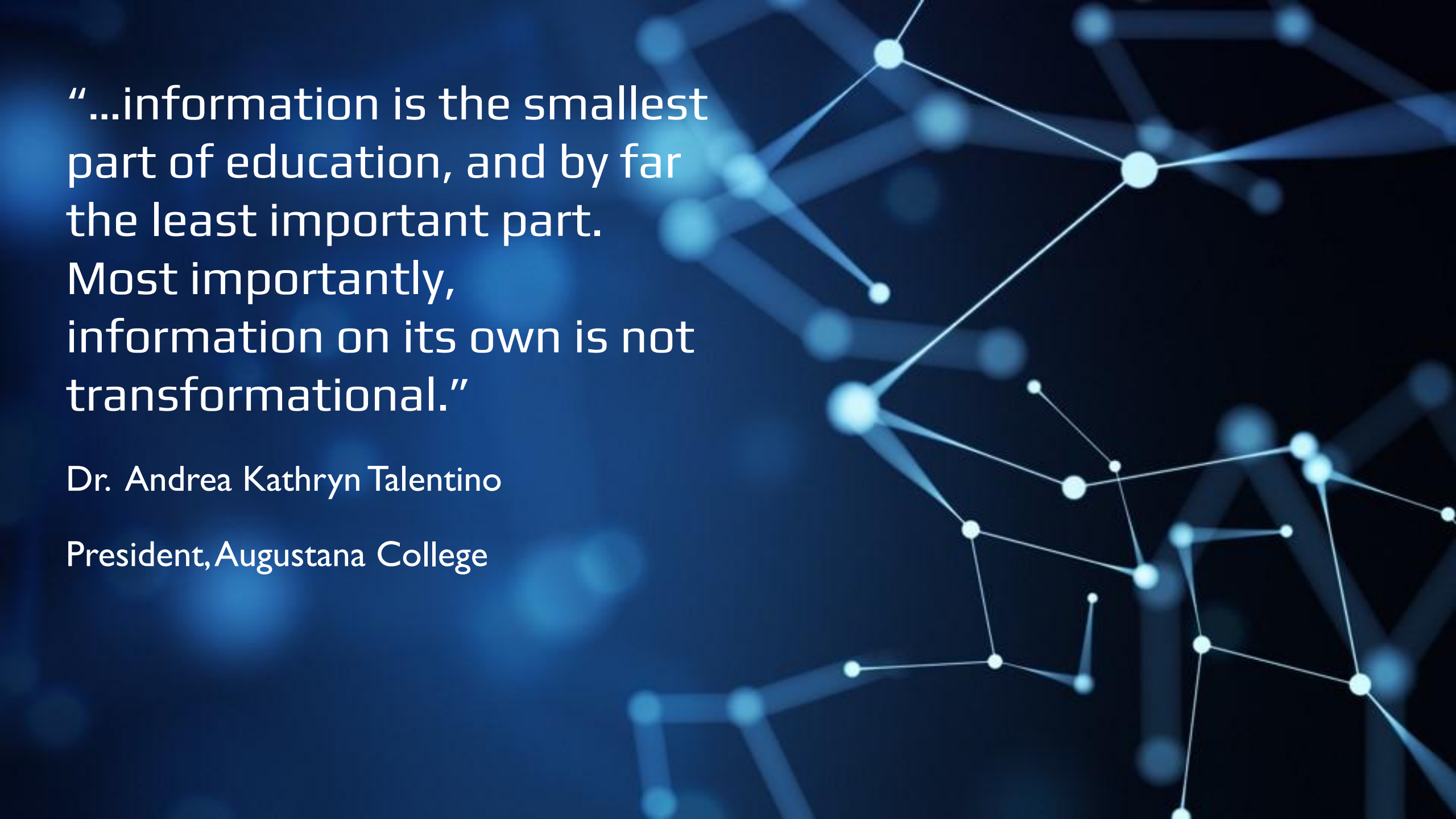
Transformational

Engagement

Transformational

≠

Transactional

A network diagram consisting of numerous white circular nodes connected by thin white lines, set against a dark blue background with a subtle bokeh effect. The nodes are arranged in a complex, interconnected pattern, suggesting a network or data structure.

“...information is the smallest part of education, and by far the least important part. Most importantly, information on its own is not transformational.”

Dr. Andrea Kathryn Talentino

President, Augustana College



Definition

Transformation engagement is a process of drawing on intersubjective relational interactions to help facilitate the transmission of information and the shared discovery of knowledge that emerge as an outgrowth of dyadic regulation. In short, the provision of necessary safety cues and explicit emotional regulation activity in the teacher-learner dyad cultivates a receptivity to and maximizes participation in the learning process.

Transformational engagement requires *competent responsiveness*, or using the necessary tools to metabolize *our* lived experiences and down-regulate emotional distress that interferes with our helping students metabolize *their* lived experiences and down-regulate emotional distress that may interfere with their participation in the learning process.

It is driven by a combination of attunement to the internal cues you perceive within your mind and body and the external cues within in the classroom environment.

Bottom-up processing: bodily engagement (eg movement, stretching, fidgets), regulation provides reflection, best for PK-7th



Top-down processing: cognitive experiences (eg journaling, mindfulness, conversations), reflection provides regulation, best for 8th-college



Zones of Emotion

What zone am I in?



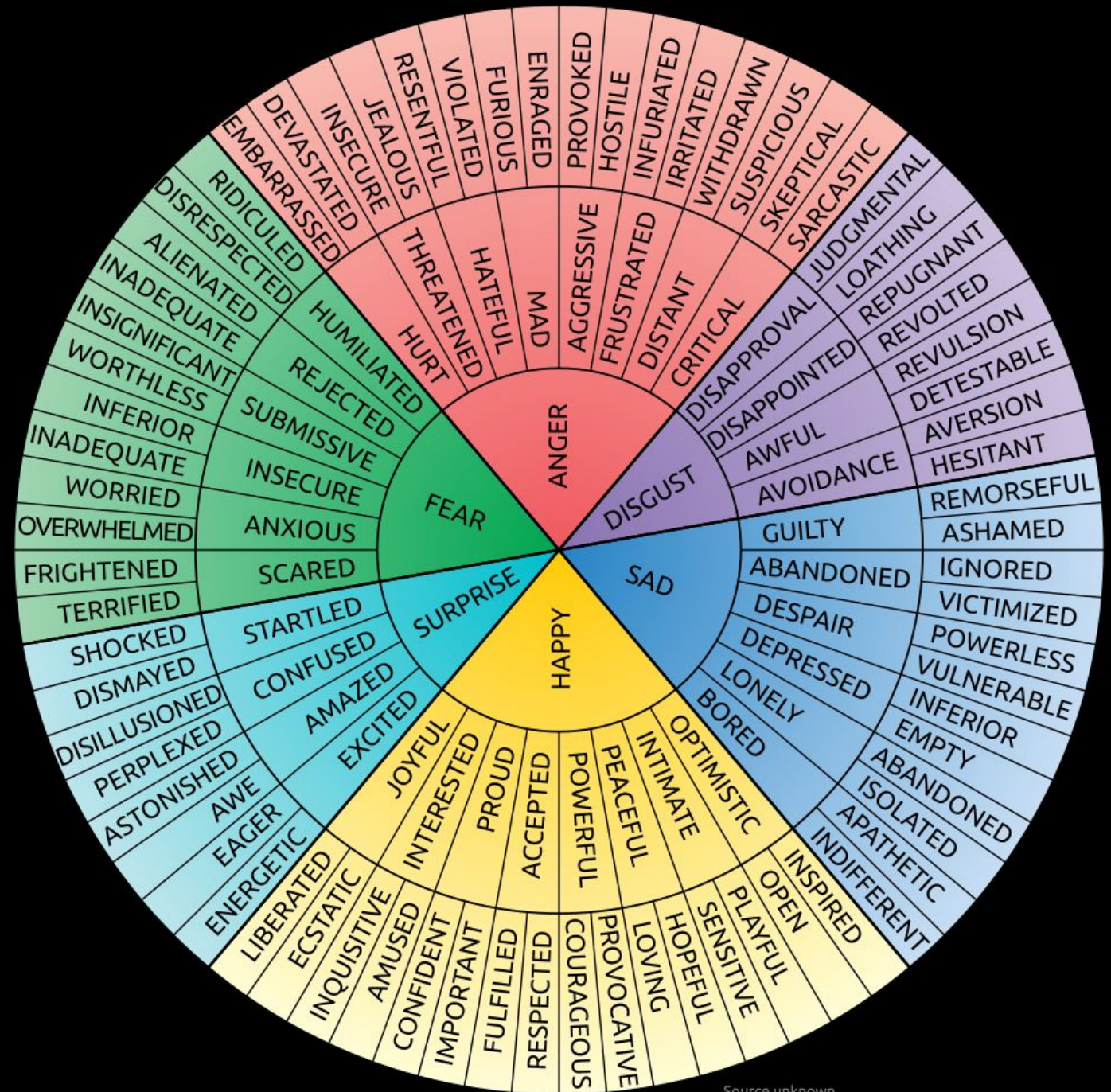
Use tools to get in the green zone.



<https://positive.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/emotion-regulation-zone.png>

Emotion Wheel

https://i0.wp.com/www.glenntripp.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/emotion_wheel2_colour.png?ssl=1



Periodic Table of Emotions

1 Hy Happy															2 Af Affectionate						
3 Pl Pleased	4 Se Separate															5 Lw Low	6 Bl Bleak	7 Wo Worried	8 Ag Aggravated	9 Pt Patient	10 Fo Fondness
11 Jy Joyful	12 Rm Remote															13 Sa Sad	14 Mi Miserable	15 Dp Desperate	16 Ir Irate	17 To Tolerant	18 Y Yearning
19 DI Delighted	20 Ly Lonely	21 C Curious	22 Sd Stimulated	23 Ex Excited	24 Su Surprised	25 Da Daring	26 En Energetic	27 Pa Playful	28 Op Optimistic	29 Ho Hopeful	30 Cv Creative	31 So Sombre	32 Sw Sorrowful	33 Dj Dejected	34 V Vexed	35 Ge Gentle	38 De Desire				
37 B Blissful	38 Al Alienated	39 Ru Rueful	40 Re Resentment	41 Bi Bittered	42 Fs Forsaken	43 Cr Crushed	44 W Wounded	45 Ma Maligned	46 H Humiliated	47 Dg Degraded	48 A Abused	49 Sb Subdued	50 Dm Demoralised	51 Ey Empty	52 O Outrage	53 Gn Generous	54 Ad Adoration				
55 EI Elated	56 I Isolated	57-71 Ti Timid	72 U Uneasy	73 Ts Tense	74 Ah Apprehensive	75 N Nervous	76 Ax Anxious	77 Dd Distressed	78 Fr Frightened	79 T Terrified	80 Py Paralysed	81 Uh Unhappy	82 Me Morose	83 Ds Desolate	84 Fu Fury	85 Te Tender	86 P Passionate				
87 E Ecstatic	88 Ab Abandoned	89-103 Av Adventurous	104 Tc Tenacious	105 Be Brave	106 Cg Courageous	107 Bo Bold	108 Ip Intrepid	109 F Fearless	110 Fy Feisty	111 M Masterful	112 Ie Invincible	113 Aw Awful	114 Dr Dreadful	115 S Suicidal	116 R Rage	117 Id Indulgent	118 L Love				
68 Lu Lust	69 Gy Gluttony	60 Gd Greed	61 Sl Sloth	62 Wr Wrath	63 Ev Envy	64 Pe Pride	65 Ce Chaste	66 Tp Temperance	67 Cy Charity	68 K Kindness	69 Hu Humility	70 J Jealousy	71 Sh Shame								
90 Am Ambivalence	91 Ap Apathy	92 Sg Sanguine	93 Ph Phlegmatic	94 No Nostalgic	95 Mc Melancholic	96 Ne Neutral	97 Ch Cheer	98 Gl Glee	99 Mr Merry	100 Ra Rapture	101 Eh Exhilarated	102 D Delirious	103 Eu Euphoric								

<https://emotionsblog.history.qmul.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Sagacity-Print-Copy.jpg>

Physical Grounding Stations (sensory stimulation)





Bodily
Engagement
(eg movement,
stretching)

Bioaffective Awareness Exercise





Expressive
Writing
(eg prompts,
poetry)