

# A 30-Day Guide to Emotional Well-being

From *The Poetry of Human Emotion*



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## Using the Guide

This Guide offers 30 ways to practice being the author of your emotions.

The Guide is flexible. You can do a practice each day for a month. You can do them in whatever order makes sense to your experience. Create your own path.

When something is particularly new for you, start easy. When possible start with easier and more pleasant ones. Then progress to more challenging and unpleasant opportunities.

Experiment with anything. Try things out and use your experience to pivot or shift what you want. Consider everything you try as a small experiment.

You might find certain practices are most useful in certain kinds of situations or certain times in a day or week. Weave them into your routines.

## **Narrating our emotions**

### **The recipe**

\* When you want to move any feelings into emotions and expand emotions into more specific forms so they become more meaningful.

Take any kind of situation in your life, work, or world today. It's easier to start with one where you experience more pleasant than unpleasant emotions. They can also be a mix of pleasant and unpleasant. When you get some experience with the recipe, try it with more unpleasant or challenging emotions.

Name the more common types of emotions you experience in this situation. Name any and all you commonly feel here.

Now describe anything that's true in this situation. Also name anything that might be true. Then name anything you like or want in this kind of situation.

Finally, shape a sentence or paragraph of any length by weaving together everything that is true, could be true, and what you like and would also like in this kind of situation. Start with *It's the feeling when...*

## **Modifiers on the continuum**

\* When you want to make emotions more specific to the qualities of pleasant and unpleasant and levels of volume intensity.

Emotions live on two continuums, pleasant to unpleasant and louder to quieter. You can compose emotions along each and both.

You can begin composing emotions with feeling modifiers like mildly, moderately, and very. "It's a mildly / moderately / very pleasant feeling when.." or "It's a mildly / moderately / very unpleasant feeling when..."

Use whatever alternatives to the words pleasant and unpleasant you'd like. These include modifiers like comfortable and uncomfortable, enjoyable and difficult.

Go back to the emotions you composed in your recipe practice and begin them with these kinds of modifiers.

## **Presence**

\* When you want to feel more centered and grounded in the chaotic or disorienting swirl of intense emotions

One way to bring ourselves back to the present is gently cycling awareness through channels of knowing: seeing, hearing, feeling, and thinking.

Go in any order. Spend a few moments in one channel, then shift to another, and then to another, and then to another.

Pay attention to details. Mindfully notice in each round something you didn't notice in the previous round.

Do this for as many cycles as you would like and have time for.

This is a quick and easy way to reduce the volume of one emotion or layers of emotions. It takes you from past and future into the present.

## **Interesting**

\* When you want to bring more curiosity and openness to emotions that might feel flat, stale, or imposing.

You can make emotions interesting or challenging.

Choose any kind of emotion. Begin your composition of this with "It's interesting when ..."

Notice how this feels. Notice how it makes an emotion more situationally specific and meaningful.

When we want to understand an emotion better or want it to make sense, we can bring a sense of curiosity into it. Curiosity opens the space for understanding.

An understood emotion feels very different from one not understood, more quieter and meaningful.

## **Emotions as reminders**

\* When you want to turn any kind of emotion into a meaningful way to remember what matters to you in your life and world.

Take a few of your more common emotions, pleasant, unpleasant, and mixed. For each name what this emotion reminds you that you like or want. "This emotion reminds me that I like/want..." Write the words as completely and with as much detail as possible.

Name as many things as apply. Notice how one

emotion could remind you of a few or several things that are important to you.

When these emotions are live, include these reminders in your narration of them. Notice how this makes any emotions meaningful. Notice how meaningful emotions feel different than others that could be just bothersome or tiresome.

## **Everyday emotions**

\* When you want to expand your emotional vocabularies to include more nuanced versions and variations beyond your usual language.

Take any everyday emotions you experience and explore synonyms from a Thesaurus.

Think of specific situations where you might feel these emotions, look up definitions and "try on" different synonyms to see which fit better or well than our usual



language. Work any new synonyms into the way you narrate emotions.

Keep a journal that maps these. Review them every so often as some distinctions, example, similarities, and differences might have shifted or be shifting.

## **Layers of emotion**

\* When it feels like you have more emotions than you have words for, when emotions might not make sense, or when it's challenging to make sense of them.

In your more emotionally charged or complex situations, notice all the layers of emotions that might be alive in these experiences.

After naming any immediately apparent emotions with "It's the feeling when..." add "and..." and see if there are any others to include. Continue until you have no more to name.

Keep checking in to the sensations of your feelings to see if there are any hints or twinges you could put into words and work into composed emotions.

It's perfectly fine to notice emotions that seems to go together as well as those that are contrasting, even conflicting and contradictory.

## **Connoisseurs of emotions**

\* When you want to expand the narration of your emotions, where you'd like to have more emotional varieties and flavors.

These could be emotions you might consider stale, ones you are perhaps tired of feeling, or would like to liven them up.

Add to your language references to hints, tinges, and notes as you would being a connoisseur of emotions.

This is the language of: "This is the feeling when... with hints of..." and add anything that makes sense.

Spice up any emotions with subtleties in whatever we find true, possibly true, and what we like and want.

Relish endless opportunities.

## **Moments**

\* When you want to feel less overwhelmed or stuck in certain emotions so you can compose space for others.

When you use "I am" to describe an emotion, like "I'm happy," or "I'm upset," or "I'm overwhelmed," shift being that emotion to narrating that emotion.

This is the shift to "I'm having moments of...happiness...upset...overwhelm..." Notice how these shifts feel.

Notice how no feelings or emotions are perfectly persistent or permanent. We have moments of them.

Also make a list of all the ways you are more than your emotions. Notice how there is an abundance of more about who you are beyond any emotions.

## **Metaphors**

\* When you want to animate and enrich the language you use to narrate emotions.

Choose a couple emotions to work with. Imagine what these are like. What images come to mind?

Work with the root phrase "This situation and these emotions make me think of..." or "This situation is like..." or "This emotion feels like..."

Play with metaphors of feeling derailed, trapped, shocked, drained, wrapped up, melted, beaming, lost, beside yourself, over the moon.

Keep growing your list and refer to it every once in a while to add new dimensions to narrated emotions.

## **Timelines of significance**

\* When you want practice composing varieties of emotions using your personal timeline.

Create a timeline of personally significant events. These can be important beginnings and endings, achievements and losses, events and turning points.

Go through each and use the recipe to compose emotions that best fit the memories of your experience. These experiences are often good opportunities to narrate layers of emotions. If any experiences seemed to have unfolded in phases or waves, create emotions for each.

## Well-being practices

### Time-bracketing

\* When you want to spend less time feeling any specific or generic emotions, freeing up more time for other experiences.

Select an emotion that currently seems to take up more of your time than you would like. It weighs on your mind. It follows you around like a cloud or shadow. You can't seem to shake it off. It can even become a drag on your energy, making it harder to be productive, patient, or at peace.

You'd like to feel it for shorter periods of time, and perhaps less frequently.

Schedule calendar time to give to these emotions. Make these time-boxes as brief or long as you want and as often as you want. During these times give these emotions mindful attention.

If the emotion comes up outside of its scheduled time, postpone attention to it until its next scheduled time.

## **Untangling feelings**

\* When you want to reduce the volume or volatility of feelings and emotions.

Think about any situation in your life right now. It can be more pleasant or unpleasant.

Bring to mind anything about it and as you do this, notice how you feel. Now, shift your awareness into your body. Notice any sensations.

Notice instances and regions of tension and relaxation, cooler and warmer, calm and shaky, movement and stillness, stuck and flowing energy, lightness and heaviness, dullness and aliveness.

Notice roughly their physical location in your body. Notice how they have no edges and how they might

shift from one moment to the next. Let yourself float in these feelings, untangling them from your emotions.

## **Untangling actions**

\* When you want to feel more ready to do things and less at the mercy of your emotions.

Think about times when you're tempted to act on your feelings or emotions. You're tired and want to do nothing of significance. You're not up to doing something that is undone. You're worried or anxious about doing something uncertain.

You untangle actions from feelings and emotions by simply doing what you can however you are feeling. You don't wait for feelings and emotions to be different. You just do what's possible to do.

In an experience of emotion, consider what at that time is waiting to be done.



Regardless of how you're feeling, or how ready you feel, just do what you can do and put your full attention into the details of doing it well.

## **Breathing**

\* When you want to shift the sensations and feelings and emotions into a more manageable space.

Choose an emotion to work with and say the name of this emotion aloud or silently several times, each time noticing the quality of your breathing. Don't try to do anything to change or control it.

Notice if it's more shallow or deep. Is it more in your chest or does it go into your belly? Does your breath feel more warm or cool? Is it more even flowing or erratic? Are your inhales or exhales longer? Does it feel more natural or controlled?

Now play with lengthening or shortening the duration of our inhale, exhale, or both. The change in durations

can be very slight and subtle or more pronounced. Keep doing any change for a minute or two and notice any shifts in how you feel.

Notice how different ways of breathing changes how you feel.

## **Soothing**

\* When you feel you just need a break from all that's been weighing you down or creating a sense of overwhelm or numbness.

Make a list of things you have found soothing. It can be a hot bath, a long walk or ride, listening to or playing certain kinds of music at certain times, relaxing or cuddling with someone, a massage or sauna, resting in your favorite spot, meditating or praying, a favorite beverage or treat, pleasure reading or watching, the sounds of water and any rhythmic sounds.

Make time in the next couple weeks for some brief soothing experiences. It doesn't matter when because they will either be experiences of proactive or reactive energy smoothing.

Experiment with new options and new combinations.

## **Forest bathing**

\* When you want to enjoy the soothing, quieting power of nature to refresh or recharge.

Take a nature or urban walk. Even 20 minutes can work.

Engage all your senses, noticing small details and signs of new growth, or decay in both what you see and smell.

Walk at different times of day and night, noticing the subtle differences in smells and sounds. This includes

the sounds of wildlife, people, traffic and your own contact with the ground.

Take in all the details and patterns of the sky, wind, and elements. Observe any animal and insect life forms and signs, plant differences and cycles. Notice and compare rock and tree formations.

When taking the same route, notice anything you didn't notice last time or before. Reimagining everything later will help prime your imagination for new kinds of discovery on future walks.

## **Mindsets**

\* When you want to shift out of stuck or narrow perspectives to different and more expansive perspectives through questions.

Shift your mindset through a mix of questions. Each different question shifts the lens of what's possible in

any of your emotion experiences. Here are some to consider.

What could this be an opportunity for?

What do you actually have control over?

What could be the most productive or enjoyable things you could do given the situation as it is?

Is there evidence to support the opposite of your current view?

How would you imagine a very wise person would think about this situation?

## **Emotional habits**

\* When you want to react differently to common situations

Think about the more typical people you interact with and situations you have in your life. Think of the usual

ways you tend to emotionally react to people or situations.

What emotions and feelings do you tend to experience? List any you can. Narrate them with as much detail as you want.

Then reflect on how these might shape your actions, interactions, and reactions. What do they make likely and possible?

Then consider what you would like to feel in these experiences and what you could or would do if you felt the way we would want to feel in these experiences. This opens the door to new possibilities.

## **Organizing chaos**

\* When you're in any situation of uncertainty including challenges, changes, projects, and passions.

You can turn uncertainty into an asset. You first identify anything that's true, that you know for sure about your uncertain situation.

Then identify anything unknown including anything that is unresearched, unverified, and undecided. Turn these into questions.

These are questions of who, what, when, where, how, what, why, what if we, could we, should we, and what would it look like to.

For each question decide what kinds of actions could answer these questions. These could be things we search on, ask others about, visualize, and try.

Organize your questions in the sequence in which you will answer them. Then get busy answering your questions in order. As new questions emerge, keep updating your path of questions.

## **The social side**

### **Emotional breadcrumbs**

\* When you're in any conversations where you would like to feel somewhat or more emotionally connected to other.

Throw out some emotional breadcrumbs by sharing any of your emotions.

Framed as something you feel, sharing anything that is or could be true for you - about anything - and anything you do or would like is sharing emotions.

You can invite others to share their emotions in the same ways.

You can also ask them about their emotions with words like "So, what's that like for you...?" Asking for more specifics can deepen your understanding of their



emotions and give you ways to reciprocate the sharing of our emotions.

## **Simple listening**

\* When you want someone to feel heard, trusting, open, valued, and connected.

Do some simple listening. This is the opposite of making everything about you, telling them what you think they should be doing, and keeping the conversation superficial.

In simple listening, listen to their words. Imagine what their words could mean and think of different variations possible.

If someone says they had a good or bad day, imagine what kinds of good or bad days they might have. You're not trying to guess. You're using your imagination to prime your curiosity.

Ask for more details. In the process, they will feel heard and understood.

## **Emotional ecosystems**

\* When you want to cultivate a wider network of people with whom you can share different emotions.

Make a list of people you most often talk with. For each, list the kinds of emotions they tend to share with you and the ones you tend to share with them.

Then list people you talk with less often. For each, list the kinds of emotions they tend to share with you and the ones you tend to share with them.

Notice how each relationship might have its own emotional character. We share struggles and gossip with certain people. We share humor and good news with others.

Think about how you might expand the character of any relationship to include other emotions and emotional flavors to spice things up.

## **Strangers**

\* When you want to enjoy new connections, which can be new ways of expanding your emotional range.

In situations where you feel comfortable and have a few minutes, start a conversation with a stranger.

Start with common and obvious things to talk about: the weather, something others are wearing you could compliment, something about the surroundings.

Use the curiosity of simple listening to allow the conversation to flow and expand. Even simple questions like "What's your day/evening looking like?" can open the conversation to all kinds of possibilities.

Any relevant stories or anecdotes you can share makes the experience that much more enjoyable, even possibly meaningful.

## **Talk and text**

\* When you want to make any kinds of conversations in any media more emotionally connecting.

However you talk by text or phone, both media are ripe opportunities to bring emotion into the conversation.

In next conversations in either media, make a point to share more emotions, especially lighter and simpler ones. Ask more about those for others.

Add words beyond emojis to narrate more specific emotions. Use the recipe to compose and share more meaningful emotions.

Switch media when it makes sense. Expect text to be more prone to misinterpretation and surface emotions. Use the phone for more clarity and depth.

## **Cans of worms**

\* When you're unsure it's wise to have people open up about their emotions because you're concerned it might overwhelm them, you, or both.

Think of people you have people in your life or world who are currently fairly overwhelmed with emotions. The idea of getting into their emotions feels like opening a can of worms that we might not be prepared for.

Opening the conversation doesn't need to be more complex than something like "So, how are you doing?"

Then it's all about simple listening. If they reveal any emotions you can ask if there are others they might be feeling. You can feel free not to suggest they must feel

other emotions, or that their emotions are problems that need to be fixed.

Our greatest gift along with simple listening is validating the truth of their experience with words like "That makes sense to me that you would feel..." You can also be sure to focus on their truth, possibilities, and likes and wants.

## **Not taking things personally**

\* When you'd like to stop taking personally things people do or don't do, do say or don't say.

Think about times you are tempted to take things personally. These can be pleasant or unpleasant things. You can take personally another's caring or criticism.

Consider how they could be creating what they feel. How could it be about what's true for them, what they think might be true, and what they like or want?

Remind yourself that only they can compose their emotions. We have absolutely no ability to compose what they feel.

Given that, you can decide what might be the most wise and kind things you can do for them.

## **Neediness**

\* When you'd like to feel less needy, more freedom in your life

Think of when you might feel needy, in need of the presence, approval, or support from someone.

Now create a list of all the things you are physically capable of doing that do not require their presence, approval, or support, or whatever else we think we need them for and from them.

Start to give time to any of these. Enjoy the freedom to feel less needy.

## **Self-compassion**

\* When you're upset with or disappointed with yourself, when you feel you have failed, and let yourself down.

Think of times when you're most hard on yourself, most critical and unforgiving of yourself. Think about each as a refusal to accept we are and will always be imperfect.

Then imagine the most loving, caring person you have ever known or you could ever imagine.

Write what they would say to you in the midst of these emotions. Write as much as you can in their voice as you imagine it. Notice as you do this how you feel. Let yourself be immersed in their kindness, caring, wisdom, and love.



## Supporting others

\* When others might be struggling with any emotions and you want to help them move into a space of greater emotional well-being.

You can use the recipe questions to help them narrate more experience specific emotions for the occasion.

What's true for you in this situation...what else is true...? What might be true...what else might be true...? What do like or want?...what else..?

Be prepared for them to not have immediate answers. Give them time because this is new for them, which is what makes it powerful.

Feel free not to answer for them or make your questions multiple choice. Give them the space to come to their own realizations on their own. Listen simply and validate what you can.

## Sharing the Guide

Share this Guide with others. Shared learning is the best and most sustainable learning. Surround yourself with well-being.

There are two ways this works. They both relate to times when someone is not in the thick of a meltdown.

Introduce any of the activities in emotionally quieter, more accessible, and when possible, more pleasant moments.

Aim for progress not perfection. People need to make everything their own. Their brain is wired differently so how they learn and do something might not be the same as your approach with your brain wired as it is.

Above all, practice yourself and share your experience as inspiration and support.

