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# FEELINGS IN A SIMPLE, LOGICAL WAY

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A small pamphlet aimed at  
adults and older adolescences with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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In the academic world, there exists a complex literature on feelings, emotions, moods, and drives. In this pamphlet, we won't deal with the complex academic stuff. This is a practical pamphlet, and we will just concentrate on feelings and how we can know how we are feeling. Why? Amongst other things, because of the question: "How are you?" Many people with Autism Spectrum Disorders dread this question and never know how to reply.

The question "How are you?" can mean one of two things. The more common meaning is an offer to start a conversation, not an interest in how you are really feeling. If the person asking is not a close family member, friend, doctor, or therapist, it is best to presume that they are not inquiring about your feelings but starting a conversation. So the simple answer to this question is "Fine."

The rarer meaning is the literal meaning when people are really interested in your feelings. These people are usually close family members, friends, doctors, therapists, and others whose job it is to assist you. They expect to get some description of how you are feeling. This pamphlet might help you to answer.

It can also sometimes be useful to know how you are feeling. Knowing that can help you to change your feelings or to get help from others to feel better.

It can also be important to sort out feelings. We can have many feelings at the same time, and sometimes, we just don't know which ones we are feeling. "Am I angry or do I feel hurt or both?" This pamphlet can hopefully help you with such simple questions. But before we start on the feelings, there is one important thing we must mention—lack of feelings.

## LACK OF FEELINGS OR JUST NOT SENSING THEM

When Neurotypicals experience a lack of feelings, it is often connected to mental problems. This is why Neurotypicals are often concerned about a lack of feelings in others.

Many people on the autism spectrum describe a lack of feelings. Sometimes it is just because they are deep in their thoughts and are not thinking about their feelings. When this is the case, it has nothing to do with mental problems.

It is important to remember that there is a difference between not having feelings and not sensing them. A man running to escape a lion doesn't sense his feelings very well while he is running. He is busy running—trying to save his life—and doesn't have much time to think about feelings.

**WE CAN HAVE FEELINGS, THOUGH WE DO NOT SENSE THEM**

Sometimes it is simpler to think logically about feelings rather than to think about how you sense them. It is safe to presume that the man running away from a lion is scared. If he weren't afraid of the lion, he wouldn't be running away from it. If the man says afterwards he wasn't afraid—he is just describing how he sensed his feelings, not describing what feeling controlled his actions.

**IT CAN BE SENSIBLE TO THINK LOGICALLY ABOUT FEELINGS INSTEAD OF THINKING ABOUT HOW YOU ARE SENSING THEM**

# ANXIETY

**ANXIETY IS A FEELING THAT YOU ARE INCAPABLE OF HANDLING CIRCUMSTANCES THAT MAY  
ARISE**

The difference between fear and anxiety is that fear arises in real circumstances, whereas anxiety is the thought of what might happen. You are fearful when a lion chases you. You are anxious when you think about a lion chasing you.

**STRESS IS WHEN EXTERNAL REQUIREMENTS ARE SO GREAT THAT YOU FEEL YOU CAN'T HANDLE  
THEM**

If people are stressed, they are always anxious, but not all anxiety is stressful. To understand the difference, imagine a situation where you see a lion in the distance. You need to hide before the lion sees you. That is an external demand and causes stress, but you are, of course, anxious too. If the lion sees you and rushes to you, you will be afraid. An example of anxiety without stress or fear would be that the following day when you wake up, you are worried about meeting a lion that day.

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## HOW DO YOU DISTINGUISH BETWEEN STRESS AND ANXIETY?

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1. Is someone making demands on you, and you don't feel you handle the demands?  No 0  Yes 1 Strength 0-10: \_\_\_\_

2. Do you feel that something that you can't handle will happen soon?  No 0  Yes 2 Strength 0-10: \_\_\_\_

3 points: You are both stressed and anxious. Compare the strength score to see whether you are more stressed than anxious

2 points: You are anxious  
1 point: You are just stressed  
0 points: You are neither stressed nor anxious

# ANGER

**TO BE ANGRY IS TO FEEL SOMEONE HAS DONE YOU WRONG (OR DONE SOMEONE YOU CARE ABOUT WRONG) BY INTENTION OR NEGLIGENCE. IN ADDITION, THEY HAVE NOT MADE UP FOR IT**

Anger can be a powerful emotion, and sometimes, it can be so strong that we don't feel any other emotions. That means we sometimes use it to get rid of other feelings. Anxiety makes most people uncomfortable, and they want it to disappear. So many people use anger to get rid of anxiety, even unconsciously. Therefore, it can be difficult to distinguish between anger, anxiety, and stress.

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## HOW DO YOU DISTINGUISH BETWEEN ANGER, STRESS, AND ANXIETY?

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1. Do you feel that someone has done you or someone you care about wrong?  
 No 0  Yes 1
2. Is that person making demands on you that you feel you can't handle?  
 No 0  Yes 2
3. Has that person created a situation which you think you can't handle?  
 No 0  Yes 4

Total score \_\_\_\_\_

7 points: You are angry, stressed, and anxious

6 points: You are stressed and anxious

5 points: You are angry and anxious

4 points: You are just anxious

3 points: You are angry and anxious

2 points: You are just stressed

1 point: You are angry

0 points: You have none of these feelings

# IRRITATION

**TO FEEL IRRITATED IS TO FEEL THAT SOMEONE OR SOMETHING IS CAUSING YOU DISCOMFORT**

Some people find it difficult to distinguish between irritation and anger. That is understandable since these feelings are closely related. Anger, however, has to be towards a person that understands what he/she has done or is supposed to understand. Irritation is different in that things, animals, and infants can irritate you. You can even be irritated without reason. Another characteristic of irritation is that it disappears reasonably quickly. If someone whistles, and you get irritated, you soon stop being irritated once the whistling stops. On the other hand, if you are angry with the person whistling, you can be angry for days afterwards.

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HOW DO YOU DISTINGUISH BETWEEN ANGER AND IRRITATION?

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Are you angry for a reason?  No 0  Yes 1

Are you angry at an object, animal, or a baby?  No 1  Yes 0

Will you stop being angry soon after the person stops doing what he or she is doing?  No 2  Yes 0

Total score \_\_\_\_\_

4 points: You are angry

0-3 points: You are irritated

## FEELING HURT

When you get angry at someone you care about, you often feel hurt.

**TO FEEL HURT IS TO FEEL THAT SOMEONE, WHO SHOULD CARE ABOUT YOU AND YOUR FEELINGS,  
HASN'T BEEN THINKING ABOUT YOU AND YOUR FEELINGS**

It is important to understand the relationship between feeling hurt and loving someone. You can only be hurt by people you care about. If a stranger says you are stupid, you don't get hurt—you only get angry. If your best friend tells you that you are stupid, you can get hurt as well as angry. This is because your best friend is supposed to be nice to you and to consider your feelings. When people say they are not angry, just hurt, it is because they feel the greatest wrong that was done to them was not to think about their feelings

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### HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU ARE HURT?

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Are you or were you fond of the person you are angry at?

No 0  Yes 1

Do you feel that the person should have thought about your feelings?

No 0  Yes 1 Strength 0–10: \_\_\_\_

Total score \_\_\_\_\_

How angry are you?

Strength 0–10: \_\_\_\_

2 points: You are hurt

Compare the strength score to see whether you are more hurt than angry

0–1 point: You are not hurt; you are just angry

# JOY

**JOY IS A FEELING YOU GET WHEN YOUR LONGINGS ARE FULFILLED OR ARE CLOSE TO BEING FULFILLED**

When we experience joy, we say we are glad or happy\*. Most people recognise joy, but not all people realise that:

**JOY IS PROPORTIONAL TO THE STRENGTH OF THE LONGING. THE JOY REACHES ITS HEIGHT WHEN THE LONGING IS FULFILLED, AND THEN LESSENS UNTIL IT DISAPPEARS!**

You are happier to get a present you have wanted for two years than to get a gift that you are not so eager to get. You can't, however, be happy all your life because of a present.

What is interesting is that you can't be happy all the time. Joy comes and goes.

Most people with ASD have frequently experienced disappointment. Some respond to that by having few longings. If you have few longings, you have few opportunities to be happy. If you are rarely glad, it is sensible to try to increase your longings but to be careful to only long for something that is easily obtainable. If you increase your longings for something that is hard to get, you will increase your feeling of disappointment.

**IF YOU WANT TO INCREASE YOUR JOY IN LIFE, YOU NEED TO INCREASE YOUR LONGINGS FOR SOMETHING THAT IS EASILY OBTAINABLE**

*\*Please note that feeling happy is different from the state of happiness. Feeling happy is an emotional state that comes and goes. Happiness is a long-term state of contentment. Many people confuse the two.*

# DISAPPOINTMENT

**DISAPPOINTMENT IS A FEELING YOU GET WHEN YOU WERE EXPECTING JOY, BUT SOMETHING PREVENTED YOU FROM FEELING HAPPY**

It can sometimes be difficult to know whether you are disappointed or hurt, and often we are both at the same time.

Let's take an example. You get disappointed when your favourite band cancels a concert you were supposed to attend. You don't get hurt because the band is not supposed to think about your feelings.

On the hand, let's say you are expecting to attend your best friend's birthday, and you are really excited to go, and he doesn't invite you but invites all his other friends. Then you would be disappointed because you won't be enjoying yourself in the party. You would also be hurt because your best friend didn't invite you and wasn't thinking about your feelings

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HOW DO YOU DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE FEELINGS OF  
DISAPPOINTMENT AND HURT?

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Did you expect to be happy, and it didn't happen?       No 0     Yes 1

Did somebody you care about prevent you from being happy?       No 0     Yes 1

Total score \_\_\_\_\_

2 points: You are hurt and disappointed

1 point: You are just disappointed

0 points: You are neither hurt nor disappointed

## FEELINGS CHARACTERISED BY A LACK OF JOY

Many feelings are characterised by a lack of joy. One of these feelings is boredom. If you are bored, you are not happy, and you can't find anything to do that will bring you joy.

**TO BE BORED IS TO BELIEVE THAT YOU DON'T HAVE THE POSSIBILITY TO DO SOMETHING THAT WILL BRING YOU JOY**

You can also be lonely. When you are lonely, you want to be with somebody.

**TO BE LONELY IS TO WANT A CLOSE INTERACTION WITH PEOPLE—BY TALKING TO THEM OR DOING SOMETHING WITH THEM—BUT BELIEVE THAT YOU DON'T HAVE THE POSSIBILITY TO DO THAT**

You can also be feeling down. The difference between being bored and feeling down is that if you are bored, you feel that there is a lack of opportunity for joy, but if you feel down, you feel like you can't do anything to be glad again. For example: If you are you are bored, you wouldn't be if there were a good film to watch or a good computer game to play. When you are down, a good film or a good computer game doesn't make you happy.

**TO FEEL DOWN\* IS TO FEEL THAT THERE IS NOTHING YOU CAN DO TO MAKE YOU HAPPY.**

You can have all these feelings or some of them at the same time. You can be bored, lonely and feel down all at once.

*\* If you have been down for a long time, two weeks or more, it is possible that you are depressed. If that is the case, it can be helpful to talk to someone and see if you need help.*

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HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU ARE LONELY, BORED AND/OR  
FEELING DOWN?

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Do you believe you lack the opportunity to do something that will bring you joy?

No 0  Yes A      Strength 0–10: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you want to have a close interaction with people, but you don't have the opportunity?

No 0  Yes B      Strength 0–10: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you feel there is nothing you can do to make you happy?

No 0  Yes C      Strength 0–10: \_\_\_\_\_

0: You feel none of these feelings

A: You are bored

B: You are lonely

C: You are feeling down

You can see what feeling is the strongest by comparing its strength with other feelings.

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## ABOUT THIS PAMPHLET

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This pamphlet is an attempt to explain feelings by simple logical definitions and how people can distinguish between them. The Pamphlet is aimed at high-functioning individuals with Autism spectrum disorder aged 16 and older. The discussion is limited to ten feelings, as there is not enough room to include more.

This pamphlet is not an explanation of current academic knowledge on feelings. It is purely practical and helps to answer simple questions such as “Am I anxious or angry or both?” Some people may not agree wholeheartedly with the definitions put forward. If you don’t agree with a definition in the pamphlet, try to create your definition and replace the faulty definition with yours.

If this pamphlet is successful, it might be followed by other ones dealing with other feelings or how to respond to other people’s feeling or even how to work on changing your feelings.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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