

EMOTIONAL RESOURCE

5.1 EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

Our ability to express how we feel is extremely important in managing emotional reactions. Just doing this alone can help to reduce the intensity of our emotions. However, we communicate how we feel to others in various ways, and these are not always easy for others to understand or interpret. Problems with direct and clear emotional expression can lead to problems in communication and relationships. Emotions also naturally want to express themselves, so, holding them back too much can cause them to build up. This is a particular problem known as *expressive suppression*. This can sometimes lead to emotions being expressed in more extreme, unhelpful and indirect ways, as part of problematic emotional reactions.

Learning how to express your emotions clearly and directly is the easiest way to let others know how you really feel. To do this, it is important to be clear about how you feel, and why you feel that way. If you are not sure about this, you may have to spend more time building emotional awareness (see sessions 1 and 2 and handout **2.2: Labelling**).

It's also very important to think about who you are expressing your emotions to, and when. There is little point in expressing your emotions to someone who is never going to respond in a helpful way. In fact, this will probably only be harmful to you. Similarly, timing is important; expressing your emotions to someone who is completely out of the zone themselves is unlikely to be helpful.

The **Expressing Emotions Worksheet** can help you with each of the steps involved in practising expressing your emotions clearly and directly. The instructions and tips on the following page can also be useful and will help you complete the worksheet.

Expressing Emotions - Instructions

Once you are clear about what you are feeling and why, and you think that the situation is right, it can be helpful to express your emotions clearly and directly. This involves some key steps that are the same for pleasant and unpleasant emotions:

1. Look at the person
2. Tell them exactly what they did/what happened that you liked (be clear what the trigger was)
3. Tell them how it made you feel (label the emotion using an emotion word)
4. Tell them why (using an emotion message)

Of course, learning to express yourself clearly and directly like this takes time and practice. The following tips can help:

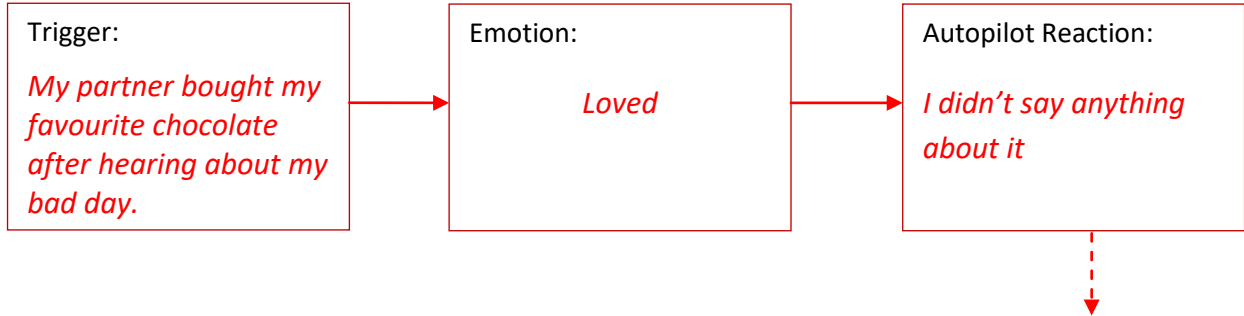
Remember that it's best to work on expressing your emotions when you (and the other person) are in the zone. Too far outside of the zone and it can be hard to express emotions and communicate well with others.

- Use 'I' language.
- Be clear about how you feel – don't mix your words.
- Repeat yourself if you need to – use the 'broken record' technique.
- Be open-minded – your way of looking at it may not be totally accurate
- Have realistic expectations – don't always expect to be understood or get what you want.
- Remember that expressing yourself is the only goal. It's not about getting the other person to agree or change their behaviour.

Try to remember that expressing emotions is just the first part of successful communication with other people. However, it is one of the most difficult for many people. Effective emotional expression gives you the best chance for effective communication to develop.

Expressing Emotions Worksheet

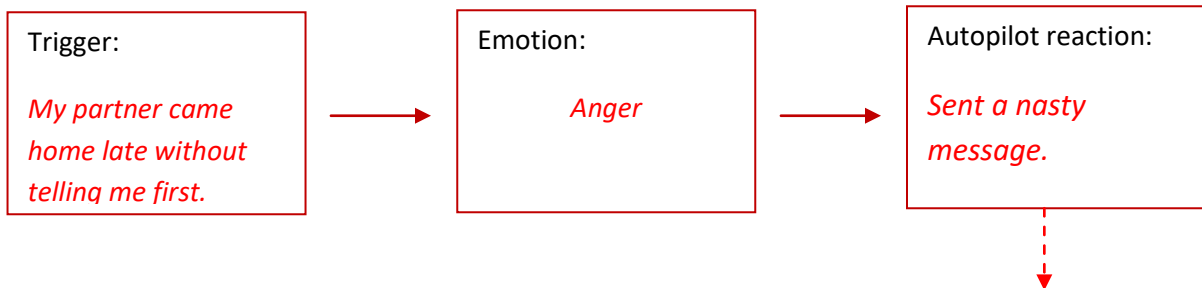
1. Expressing Pleasant Emotions



Expressing emotion step-by-step:

1. Look at the person (also think about body language and facial expression)
2. Tell them exactly what they did/what happened that you liked (e.g. when you ...):
When you heard I'd had a bad day about bought my favourite chocolate...
3. Tell them how it made you feel using an emotion word (e.g. it made me feel ...)
It made me feel loved
4. Tell them why using an emotion message (e.g. because...)
Because I felt cared for

2. Expressing Unpleasant Emotions

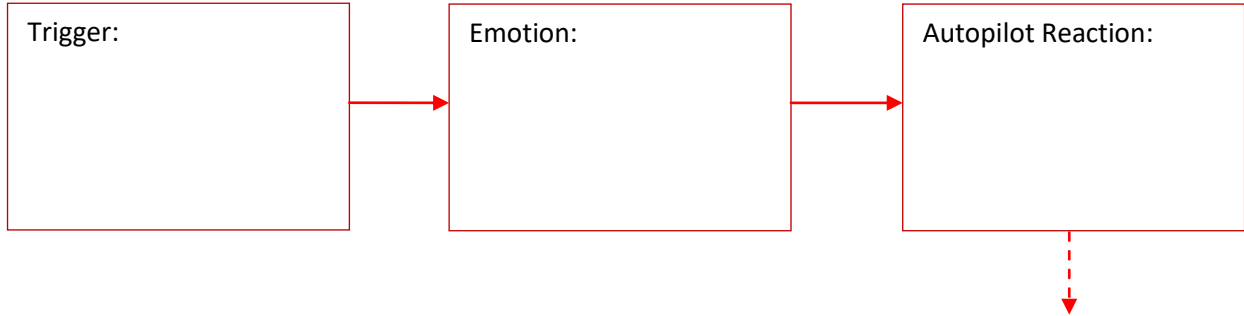


Expressing emotion step-by-step:

1. Look at the person (also think about body language and facial expression)
2. Tell them exactly what they did/what happened that you disliked (e.g. when you ...)
When you didn't come home when I expected...
3. Tell them how it made you feel using an emotion word (e.g. it made me feel ...):
It made me feel angry
4. Tell them why using an emotion message (e.g. because...)
Because it felt unfair

Expressing Emotions Worksheet

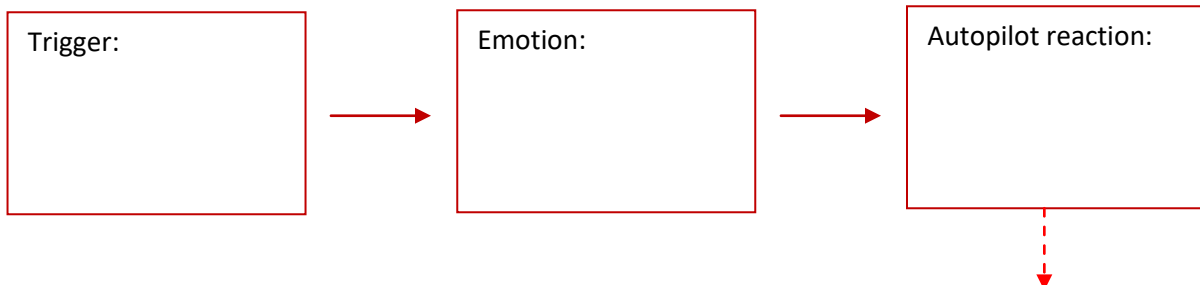
1. Expressing Pleasant Emotions



Expressing emotion step-by-step:

1. Look at the person (also think about body language and facial expression)
2. Tell them exactly what they did/what happened that you liked (e.g. when you ...):
3. Tell them how it made you feel using an emotion word (e.g. it made me feel ...)
4. Tell them why using an emotion message (e.g. because...)

2. Expressing Unpleasant Emotions



Expressing emotion step-by-step:

1. Look at the person (also think about body language and facial expression)
2. Tell them exactly what they did/what happened that you disliked (e.g. when you ...)
3. Tell them how it made you feel using an emotion word (e.g. it made me feel ...):
4. Tell them why using an emotion message (e.g. because...)