

EMOTIONAL RESOURCE

2.2 EMOTIONAL UNDERSTANDING

(Labelling)

Emotional understanding means recognising what specific emotions you are feeling and why. It is an essential part of emotional awareness. This is because our emotions help us to understand what is happening to us and how we can respond. Without this, we may end up feeling more confused and overwhelmed. In fact, not understanding your emotions can actually make them more intense. This is because emotions naturally want to deliver messages to you (e.g. Fear: “you’re in danger!”). If it seems like you are not picking up on the message, or getting it wrong, the emotion will keep trying to get through.

Labelling is a relatively simple technique to help you consciously identify your emotions and the things that trigger them. Basically, it involves putting words to what you are feeling. Research tells us that the more words you can use to describe how you feel, the better you are likely to be at managing your emotions. Doing this alone can actually make them less intense! Imagine it a bit like being a painter – the more colours you have to paint with, the more detailed your painting can be. It’s the same with emotion, the more words you have, the more you are able to feel – researchers call this ability *emotional granularity*.

Although labelling might seem like a simple exercise, remembering to do it in the midst of an emotional reaction is not easy, and takes practice. A good way to start developing this skill is to look back on emotional reactions with your **Trigger Log**. As you start to feel more confident with it, you may want to start thinking about upcoming events or situations that are likely to trigger you, and try practicing labelling in these situations. Eventually, with time and practice it should start to become a more natural response when you feel triggered. Your **Labelling Card** and the instructions on the next page will also be helpful.

Labelling - Instructions

There are four main steps to labelling:

1. Identify the emotion you are feeling
2. Identify the trigger that caused you to feel this way
3. Identify the emotion message
4. Identify the options you have to respond

Your **Labelling Card** may help if you can keep in your wallet or purse. Some people like to take a photo of it to keep on their phone. Your **Emotion Sheet** can also help with identifying the emotion you were feeling. To begin with, don't worry too much about coming up with ideas for how to respond. This will come gradually as you continue to develop new resources and develop plans for changing your reactions.

Just like the acceptance exercise, it can be helpful to practice this new skill using a trigger that you select yourself. It could be something very personal, such as a photograph of a person or place. It could also be something less personal, such as a sad piece of music, a movie clip, or a YouTube video. It could even be a situation, like coming to a new group. What's important is what it triggers in you, and how much. The trigger should be something that generates an emotion that is not overwhelming, does not take you too far out of the zone, and does not make you unsafe!

Remember that if you start to feel overwhelmed, you should stop the exercise and return to it when you feel able. If you keep feeling overwhelmed and this doesn't get any easier, you may need to choose an easier trigger.

Labelling Card



What's happening?

I notice I am feeling (**emotion?**)

Because (**trigger?**)

It is telling me (**emotion message?**)

I can respond by (**choices?**)