

# Communication and Understanding emotions

Hub Presentation  
Adult ASD Service

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This session will look at:

Social skills

*Why is it important?*

*Types of communication*

*Conversations*

*Socialising*

*Social skills*

Emotions

*Neurodiversity and emotions*

*Identifying emotions*

*Communicating emotions*

## Why is communication important?

Communication is the act of transferring information from one person to another.

Good communication skills helps us to develop relationships with others and helps us to know how to behave in different situations.

We need communication skills to manage in work and learning environments.

- ▶ Communication skills helps us build relationships with other people
- ▶ It helps us to share our experiences and needs
- ▶ It helps us to express our feelings
- ▶ It helps us pass on information
- ▶ It helps us to understand what other people expect from us
- ▶ It helps us to feel more connected and less of an outsider

# Social skills and Autism

You might find social situations difficult and overwhelming

You may need a break after social interaction to overcome anxiety

You may find it difficult to communicate and interact with each other.

You may feel that other people don't understand you.

# Social skills and Autism

You may not want to interact with people you do not know well

You may have difficulty “reading” other people

It may be difficult to recognise and understand other people emotions

# Types of communication

## Non-verbal

- ▶ Gestures
- ▶ Facial expression
- ▶ Body posture
- ▶ Eye movements
- ▶ Pictures/signals
- ▶ written

## Verbal

- ▶ Words
- ▶ Tone of voice
- ▶ Volume of voice
- ▶ Active listening

# Body Language and Autism

You may not notice or pick up on body language and be unaware of how the other person is feeling

You may not understand gestures

You may process body language differently which could impact on the way you view someone's feelings

# Interpreting Communication

- ▶ **What can be helpful?**
- ▶ It is easier to 'read' someone by looking at their face, their body movements and you can also listen to the tone of their voice
- ▶ is their voice raised?
- ▶ Is it loud?
- ▶ Are they breathing quickly and spitting words out?
- ▶ Look at their body language - are they looking at their watch? Have they moved away from you? Have they turned away?
- ▶ Eye contact allows you to check their expression. It shows you are listening to them and valuing them, even if eye contact is only made once every so often during a conversation. Find your comfortable level of eye contact.

# Communication differences in Autism

Most people on the autism spectrum have difficulty interacting with others.

using interaction to be sociable.

You may have difficulty with :

Understanding and relating to other people

responding

initiating interactions.

# Communication

- ▶ Autistic people can find socialising and communicating challenging. Many really do want to make friends and form relationships but find it difficult to do this and sustain it.
- ▶ There may be difficulty understanding social cues and knowing when to speak or listen, and facial expressions can be hard to read resulting in social isolation.

# Conversations

- ▶ Autistic people have different needs and have developed different skills.
- ▶ Approaching someone:
  - ▶ If the person you would like to talk to is already talking to someone else, it may be better to speak to them later on when they are free.
  - ▶ If the person is free or is in a conversation with someone you know, approach the person. Stop when you are about an arm's length away and face them to talk to them



General conversation starters to use at the beginning of the conversation rather than starting on a certain topic:



How are you? It's nice to see you



Talk about the weather



Other generic examples;



Weather



Tv Programme



Film



Sport

# Examples of conversation starters

# Sensitive Topic Conversations

Examples of topics that are usually more sensitive or thought of as inappropriate are:

Critical comments about the way a person looks, e.g., saying that you do not like what they are wearing.

Money, e.g., asking someone how much money they earn.

Politics or religion

A persons age

Avoid talking about these if you don't know the person well.

# Maintaining a conversation



The more times you meet the same person, the more you can develop conversations about common interests.



Talk about things that you know the other person likes as well as the things that you like. If you both like the same things, then you could talk about these.



Take it in turns when talking to people. Let them answer your questions and give them a chance to ask you a question in return if they want to

Watch out for signals that someone wants to end a conversation with you.

These may include:

not asking questions back

looking around the room

Yawning, looking at their watch

saying they have got to go and do something.

# Ending a conversation

# Making Friends and Socialising

Some Autistic people prefer not to socialise with other people, or others enjoy friendships, but find it very difficult to make friends.

Having friends means you can go out with them and have a chat, being able to share common interests or discuss your problems with them.

*It is important to avoid social isolation if you want contact with others.*

## Clubs and Groups

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- ▶ One option is to join a club relating to an activity or hobby that you are interested in. The other members will have a common interest, often making conversation easier.
- ▶ Another option is to join a social group for autistic people. Some groups take part in leisure activities, others focus specifically on developing social skills.
- ▶ Joining a course- Learning a new skill whether for pleasure or related to your employment can often lead to making new friends.
- ▶ [www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com)

# Friendships

## - Who is a real friend?

It can be hard to tell if someone is a real friend or not. It maybe difficult for you to notice body language and tone of voice or to interpret people's intentions unless they tell you explicitly.

Most friends really are friends... but sometimes people might pretend to be your friend. People who commit Mate Crimes might be nice to your face. These people may not be rude, violent or aggressive, or steal your things. They pretend to be nice to you, but may take advantage of you in some way.

- Mate Crime does not start with bullying, but it can become bullying. It starts with people saying they are your friend.
- Mate Crimes often happen in private and are not seen by others.
- Mate crimes are Disability Hate Crimes and should be reported to the Police

## Someone pretending to be a friend

- ▶ might make unfair requests of you or put you in awkward situations
- ▶ might treat you less well than their other friends
- ▶ might play on your guilt if it helps them get their own way.

## A true friend

- ▶ will always be kind and make you feel welcome and talk to you if they have the time
- ▶ will treat you as well as they treat all of their friends

- ▶ If you tell people that you are autistic this often helps people to understand you and communicate better with you. It is your choice whether to tell people or not but often it is considered be a positive decision.
- ▶ You could tell them things you'd like them to know (e.g., that you can concentrate more on a conversation by not making eye contact) and things you'd like them to do e.g., be more direct with you and tell you how it is as you may miss subtle cues. You could tell them where they can find out more information about autism.
- ▶ It could be helpful to tell your employee about your Autism diagnosis. This way, they can put reasonable adjustments in place for you and help prevent any misunderstandings in the workplace.

*Telling people  
that you are  
autistic.*

# Local groups

- ▶ Some websites to find local-interest-based groups:
- <https://www.meetup.com/>
- Virtual village hall-  
<https://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/virtual-village-hall/>
- Wirral- Involve north west holds local activities and groups-  
<https://involvenorthwest.org.uk/>
- Crisis café 71 Chester (10am- Midnight) 01244 393139
- ▶ Number 71 Crisis Café, No. 71 St Anne Street,  
Newtown, Chester, CH1 3HT
- ▶ Facebook link: <https://www.facebook.com/Number-71-Spider-Project-Chester-104086068011632>

# Resources for relationships

- ▶ <https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/articles/tips-for-women-in-relationships.html> - this is written for women whose partner is autistic, but the advice given is written in a generic way and is accessible.
- ▶ <https://www.aane.org/topics/adults/couplespartners/> - scroll down to the bottom of this page as there are a lot of resources.
- ▶ <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/family-life-and-relationships/family-life/partners>
- ▶ [https://autism.lovetoknow.com/Asperger\\_Relationships](https://autism.lovetoknow.com/Asperger_Relationships)
- ▶ [https://www.worldofbooks.com/en-gb/books/louise-weston/connecting-with-your-asperger-partner/9781849051309?gclid=CjwKCAjw9aiIBhA1EiwAJ\\_GTSif9kEHZU3Vj23VaAIYCnjPU8JXCoz0ftUJU9PnSGShySKGjhJAYhhoCHeQQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.worldofbooks.com/en-gb/books/louise-weston/connecting-with-your-asperger-partner/9781849051309?gclid=CjwKCAjw9aiIBhA1EiwAJ_GTSif9kEHZU3Vj23VaAIYCnjPU8JXCoz0ftUJU9PnSGShySKGjhJAYhhoCHeQQAvD_BwE)
- ▶ [https://www.amazon.co.uk/Pretending-Normal-Living-Aspergers-Syndrome/dp/1849057559/ref=asc\\_df\\_1849057559/?tag=googshopuk-21&linkCode=df0&hvadid=310814775587&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrand=13397158801842071613&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcndl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9046489&hvtargid=pla-479260154044&psc=1&th=1&psc=1](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Pretending-Normal-Living-Aspergers-Syndrome/dp/1849057559/ref=asc_df_1849057559/?tag=googshopuk-21&linkCode=df0&hvadid=310814775587&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrand=13397158801842071613&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcndl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9046489&hvtargid=pla-479260154044&psc=1&th=1&psc=1)

# Understanding emotions

An emotion is a feeling such as happiness, love, fear, anger, or hatred, which can be caused by the situation that you are in or the people you are with.

Emotions are caused by your brain. They are generated by an experience, a thought or a memory.

Emotions play an important role in how you think and behave, they can play a part in the decisions you make in your life.

# Facts and Myths

## Facts

- ▶ Autistic people have the full range of human emotions.
- ▶ Every autistic person is unique; some may struggle with empathy while others may feel completely overwhelmed by other people's feelings, and then there is everyone in between
- ▶ Some autistic people have trouble identifying their emotions, a condition known as alexithymia
- ▶ Autistic people may find it challenging to understand and process their emotions, and to communicate their emotions to others

## Myths

- ▶ Some people think that autism means that the person cannot feel emotion or cannot feel ALL emotions, and therefore have no interest or ability in fostering relationships with others or making friends.
- ▶ Some people thinks that autistic people do not feel empathy

## Autism and Emotions

It is well known that a lot of autistic / neurodiverse people find it challenging to recognise how they feel, and identify their emotions, unless they are extreme emotions, whereas some people are extremely sensitive to emotions. A lot of people struggle to regulate their emotions. This links to our interoception.



# Interoception

Our bodies are covered in special nerve receptors which send messages to our brain to tell us how we feel. This sense is called Interoception

Interoception is the perception of sensations within the body

Interoception is how we recognise feelings such as emotions, hunger, thirst, pain and temperature

Interoception has been defined as the 8<sup>th</sup> sensory system. It allows us to identify how we are feeling

# Autism and interoception

Interoception can be affected by

- Autism
- ADHD
- Mental wellbeing
- Physical illness

- ▶ You may find it more difficult to manage your emotions and social interactions.
- ▶ You may experience differences with emotional regulation, resulting in emotional lability, sensory overload, meltdowns, rapid mood changes, difficulty expressing yourself and frustration
- ▶ If you do not recognise the signals for an emotion, you are not able to respond to it. This can result in anger becoming rage, sadness becoming distress and so on
- ▶ You may find it difficult to understand your emotions or to describe them to others. This can make it difficult for people to offer you support.
- ▶ You might avoid things which give you uncomfortable feelings. This can result in your life opportunities being limited



► Some people may be hypersensitive and experience these feelings or sensations in great detail, so it becomes too much, to the point that they feel really overwhelmed and can't work out how they feel.

► They may eat or drink all the time, or frequently need to use the bathroom, having an impact on their functioning.

# Alexithymia

**“Alexithymia is a term to describe problems with feeling emotions. In Greek, it loosely translates to “no words for emotion.” It is estimated that 1 in 10 people has alexithymia, but it is much more common in those with depression and in autistic people. 1 in 5 autistic people have alexithymia”.**

**“People who have alexithymia may have trouble identifying, understanding and describing emotions. They may also struggle to show or feel emotions that are seen as socially appropriate, such as happiness on a joyous occasion”.**

**(Autistica 2021)**

**Online alexithymia questionnaire:**  
<https://embrace-autism.com/online-alexithymia-questionnaire/>



## Strategies for de-coding emotions

- ▶ A common difficulty amongst autistic people is recognising and naming emotions in themselves and others. If you struggle to recognise your own emotions, you are highly likely to struggle recognising emotions in others. Therefore, to improve this skill within yourself is important. You can put in place strategies to help you recognise your own emotions.
- ▶ Often it is about trying to look at physical symptoms within yourself in order to try and identify the emotion. This can be done several different ways and using an analytical approach. A good starting point is five emotions:
  - ▶
  - ▶ happy,
  - ▶ sad,
  - ▶ excited,
  - ▶ anxious
  - ▶ okay / alright

► Using an analytical approach, and perhaps the help of someone who knows you well, try and work out the things you could recognise in yourself about those emotions. Often you will notice physical signs. Pay close attention to:

- ▶ how did it make you feel in your body?
- ▶ Were there any physical signs? Some examples are:
- ▶ How was your breathing rate?
- ▶ How was your heart rate?
- ▶ Where you hot or cold?



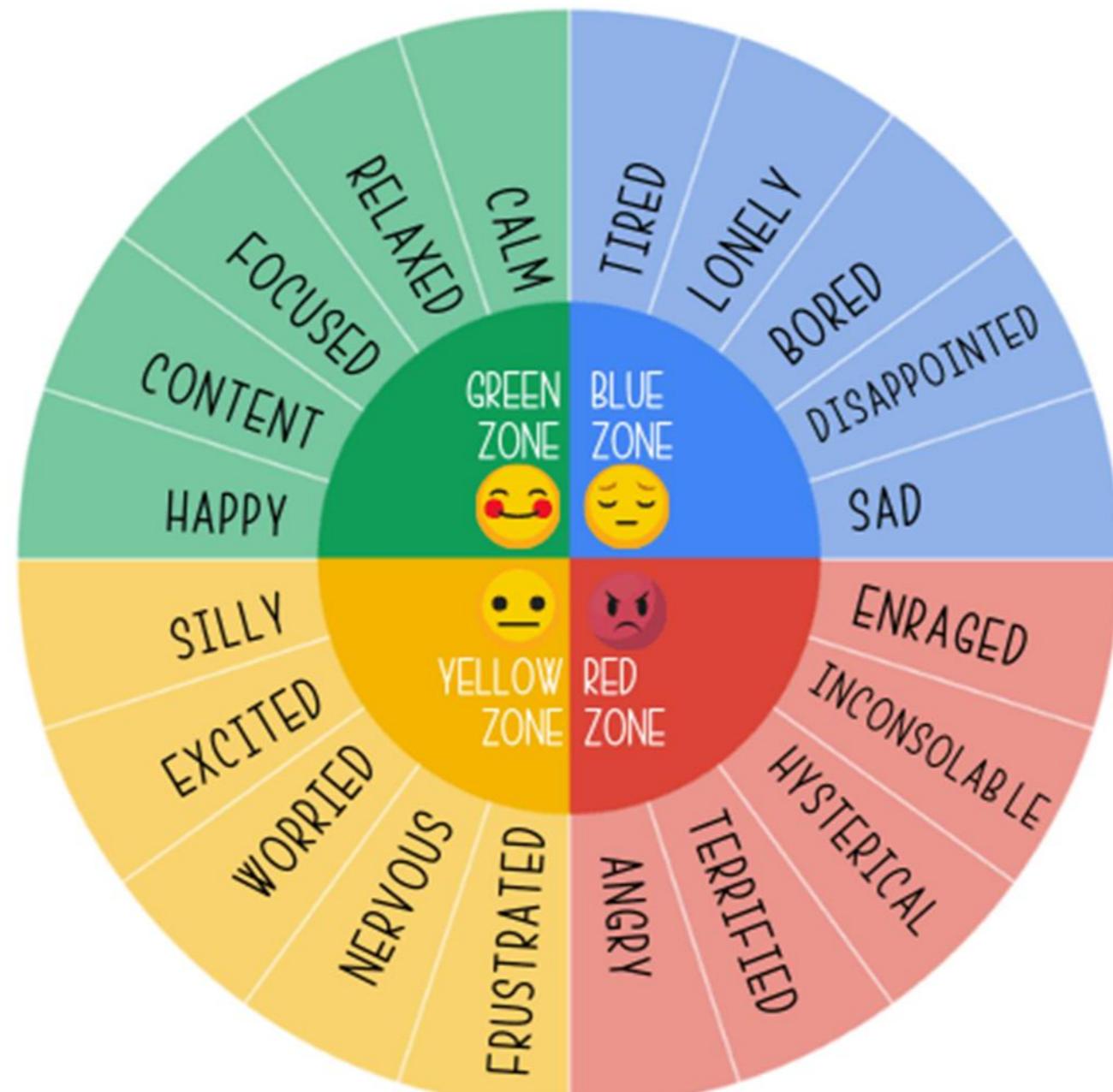


The next step is to have a tool or object that you can use each time you feel that emotion, which reinforces the emotion and being able to name it. This tool can then be used to communicate the emotion to another person. There are various tools available, and although the examples contain lots of different emotions. To start with you could simplify them to just have five emotions.

A feelings wheel - <https://aca-arizona.org/resources/the-feelings-wheel/>

using picture-based resources,  
e.g.:<https://innovativeresources.org/resources/card-sets/stones-have-feelings-too/>

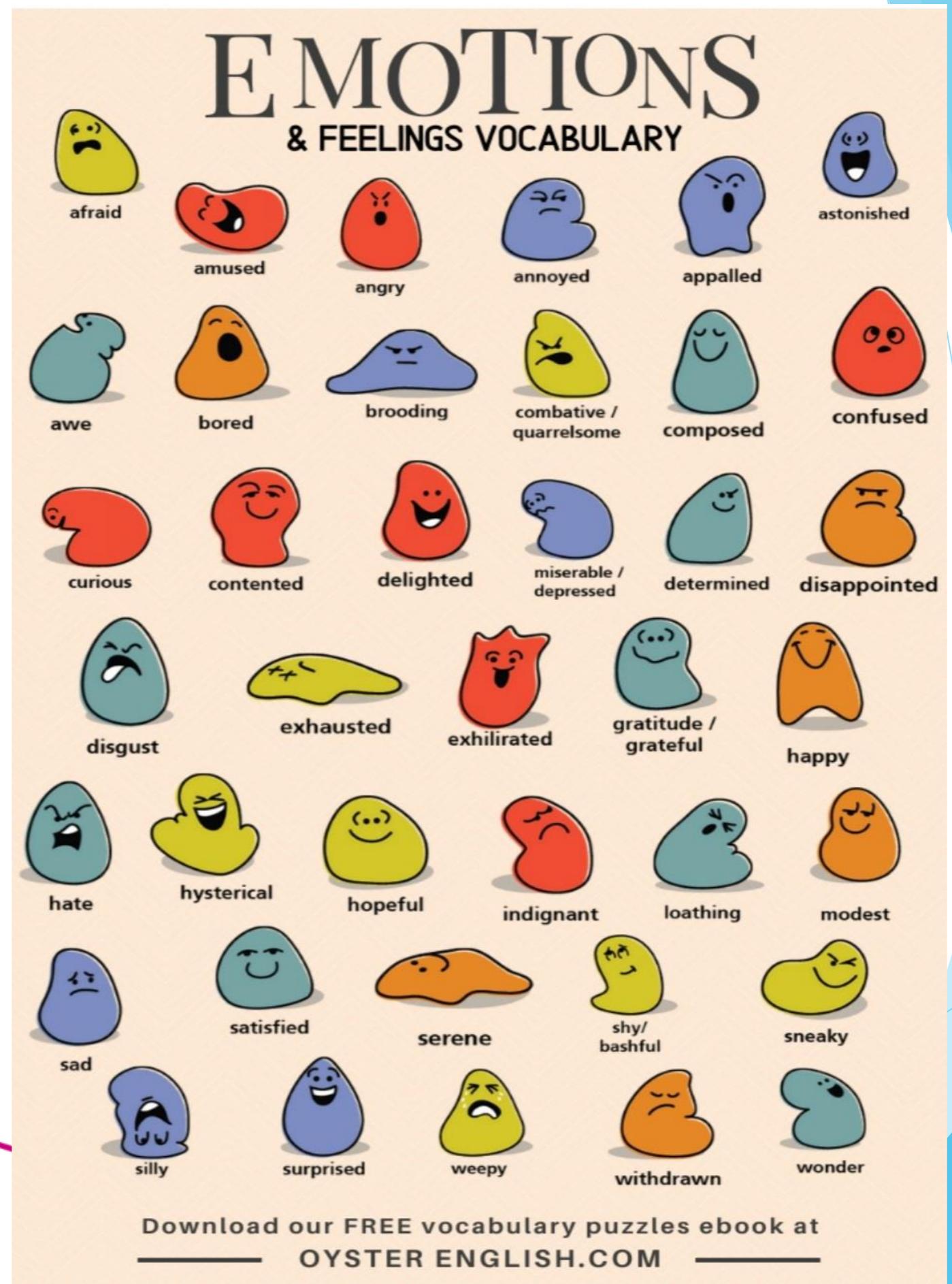
using a mood app



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## Using an 'alphabet' of emotions

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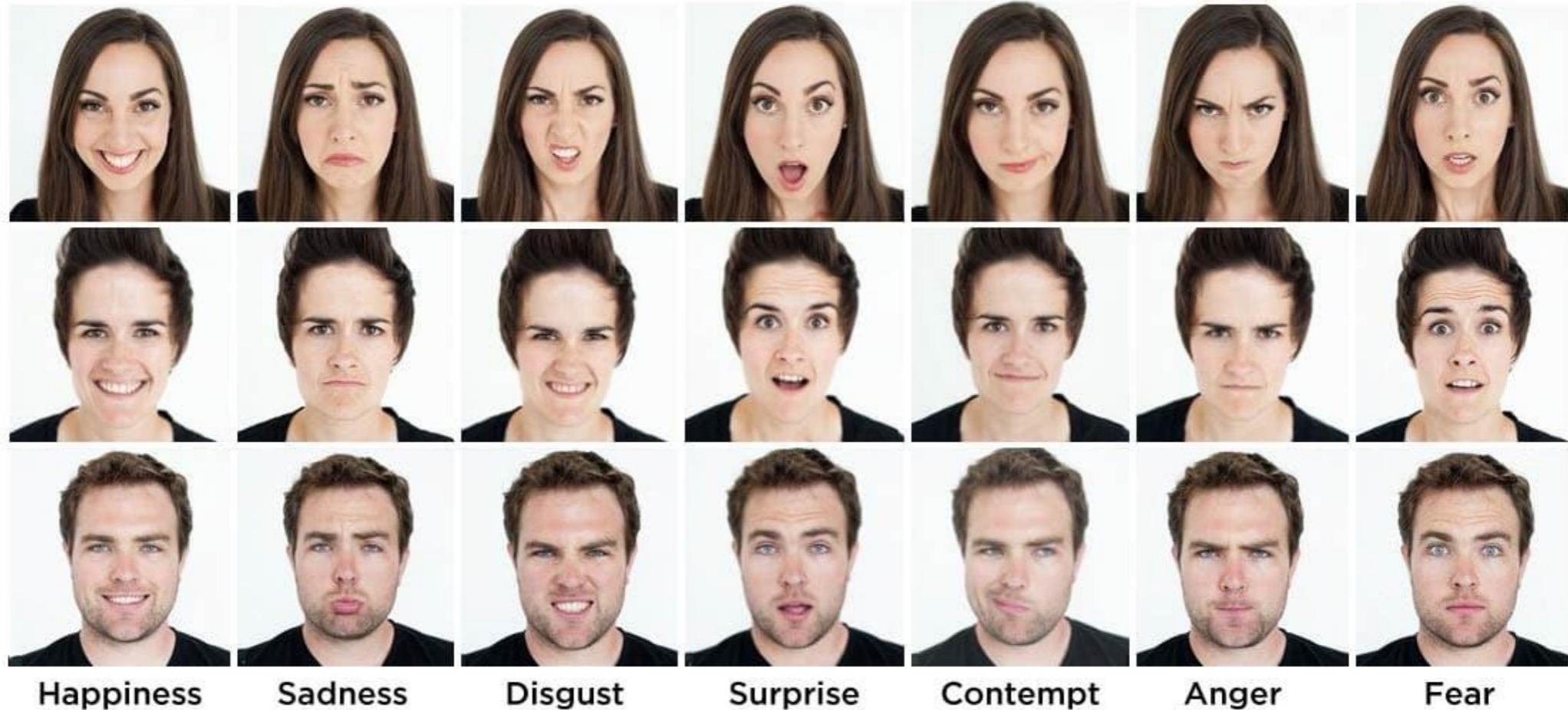


# The ‘Blob’ or ‘jellybean’ tree

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# FACIAL EXPRESSIONS CHART



Happiness

Sadness

Disgust

Surprise

Contempt

Anger

Fear

SCIENCE OF PEOPLE



## Practice strategies



**There is no right or wrong strategy to use, it is whatever you feel you can relate to and is helpful to you personally.**



**Once you can consistently recognise five emotions, you can pick another emotion to add to your repertoire, using the same approach.**



**These can be helpful strategies to be able to communicate how you are feeling with someone else, as you can show them the item or 'tool' you are using.**

## More strategies

- **Making a coloured card system, where you link that mood and feeling to a colour, and make a card with the name of the emotion on and possibly an image that helps you connect to that emotion.**
- **Traffic light system.**
- **Using items that you can relate to that demonstrate those emotions, such as something that is angry, something that is upset, and using these as objects or pictorial references.**
- **Making an emotional dictionary - containing information of the name of the emotion, pictures, descriptive information especially about how you felt, or what you observed within yourself.**

- **Communicate emotions by placing an object outside your door to let others know how you are feeling**
- **Listening to music can evoke emotions and using lyrics can be helpful**
- **Freeze frame scenes from soap operas or your favourite film/TV programme to represent different emotions.**
- **A system to assist with asking for help. Put a picture or symbol on the fridge.**
- **Have code words**
- **Observe body language in others**

# Discussion.....

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