

Emotional Vocabulary for Men

A guide to naming, feeling, and soothing your emotions



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A note from Erik

So many of us were never given the tools - or even the language - to name what we feel. We were told to be strong, to hold it together, to figure it out alone. But healing starts with recognition. When we can name what is happening inside us, we can begin to relate to it differently.

This guide is not about becoming a better man. It is about becoming a more connected, honest, and compassionate version of yourself. It is an invitation to turn toward your emotional life with curiosity instead of shame - and to remember that you are not alone in this work.

Kindly,

Erik Karff, LMFT

Psychotherapist | San Francisco & California

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1. How to use this guide

Start anywhere. Skim the emotion lists to find words that fit. Notice what shows up in your body. Look at the needs list to see what your emotions might be pointing to. Try the practices when you are activated, numb, or unsure. Bring this guide into therapy and use it to help you speak from your experience, not perform it.

2. Emotional vocabulary (by clusters)

Calm and grounded

- Calm
- Content
- Peaceful
- Present
- Centered
- Connected
- Grateful
- Open

Activated and anxious

- Anxious
- Worried
- Restless
- On edge
- Overwhelmed
- Hypervigilant
- Agitated

Anger and boundaries

- Annoyed
- Irritated
- Frustrated
- Resentful
- Angry
- Enraged
- Indignant

Sadness and grief

- Sad
- Heavy
- Disappointed
- Heartbroken
- Grieving
- Hurting
- Lonely

Shame and guilt

- Ashamed
- Embarrassed
- Humiliated
- Guilty
- Remorseful

- Unworthy

Fear and threat

- Afraid
- Terrified
- Alarmed
- Panicked
- Frozen
- Dread

Joy and pride

- Joyful
- Playful
- Proud
- Energized
- Inspired
- Relieved
- Hopeful

Numb and disconnected

- Numb
- Empty
- Flat
- Shut down
- Detached
- Zoned out

3. Somatic and sensory vocabulary

Use these words to describe what is happening in your body when you name an emotion.

- Tight
- Clenched
- Heavy
- Hollow
- Fluttery
- Buzzing
- Burning
- Icy
- Goosebumps
- Trembling
- Nauseous
- Knotted
- Pounding heart
- Short of breath
- Suffocating
- Electric
- Shivery
- Pins and needles
- Light
- Dense
- Blocked
- Breathless
- Achy
- Dizzy
- Numb
- Shuddering

4. Core human needs (what feelings point to)

Emotions often signal whether a core need is being met or not. Use this list to explore what you might be needing.

Safety and stability

- Security
- Predictability
- Rest
- Regulation
- Shelter
- Health

Connection and belonging

- Acceptance
- Understanding
- Affection
- Support
- Community
- Closeness

Autonomy and agency

- Choice
- Freedom
- Respect
- Space
- Independence

Competence and growth

- Mastery
- Learning
- Challenge
- Contribution
- Effectiveness

Meaning and purpose

- Direction
- Values alignment
- Spirituality
- Coherence
- Impact

Play and rest

- Leisure
- Spontaneity
- Ease
- Recovery

Integrity and authenticity

- Honesty
- Congruence
- Transparency
- Self-respect

Sexuality and touch

- Pleasure
- Intimacy
- Tenderness
- Physical closeness

5. Reflection prompts and micro-practices

- Right now I notice I feel... (emotion word)
- In my body I notice... (somatic sensations)
- If this feeling could speak, it would say...
- What this feeling is asking for is... (need)
- What I am afraid will happen if I express this is...
- One gentle action I can take in the next 24 hours is...

6. Practices for feeling and releasing emotion

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) - 5 to 10 minutes

- Find a comfortable position. Breathe slowly.
- Starting at your feet, tighten the muscles for 5 seconds, then release for 10 seconds.
- Move up: calves, thighs, glutes, stomach, chest, hands, arms, shoulders, face.
- Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Let the exhale be longer than the inhale.

Tai chi inspired grounding - 3 minutes

- Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent.
- Feel your weight drop into your feet. Imagine your breath moving down into your legs.
- Shift weight gently from left to right, slowly, with the breath.
- Let your arms hang heavy. If it helps, slowly float them up on the inhale and down on the exhale.

Body scan (inspired by Shinzen Young) - 5 minutes

- Close your eyes or soften your gaze.
- Sweep attention slowly from head to toe, noticing sensations (pressure, temperature, tingling, tightness).
- Name what you feel (warm, tight, empty).
- If you find a difficult spot, gently breathe into it. Let it be there without forcing it to change.

5-4-3-2-1 Grounding

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can feel (e.g., chair, clothing, ground)
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste
- Then take one slow, deep breath.

Box breathing (4x4x4x4)

- Inhale through the nose for 4 seconds
- Hold for 4 seconds
- Exhale through the mouth for 4 seconds
- Hold empty for 4 seconds
- Repeat 4 to 8 rounds

7. Mindful self-compassion: a short script

Use this any time you notice pain, shame, or inner criticism. Three steps:

- Mindfulness: "This is a moment of suffering." (or: "This is hard.")
- Common humanity: "Suffering is part of being human. I am not alone in this."
- Self-kindness: "May I be kind to myself right now." (or choose your own phrase: "May I give myself what I need.")

8. Using this guide in therapy

Bring this guide to session. Circle the words that resonate. Mark the needs you keep coming back to. Practice the exercises in session and at home. Therapy can be a laboratory for trying new ways of being with yourself and with others - without performance, pressure, or shame.

Ready to explore this with support? Scan the QR code on the cover or visit erikkarffpsychotherapy.com/contact