

## Mindfulness of Emotions: Primary & Secondary Emotions

It's important to be able to separate primary and secondary emotions. This can be tricky since primary emotions trigger other emotions so quickly we usually aren't aware it's happening.

### Primary versus Secondary Emotions:

**Primary Emotions** are our immediate emotional response to what just happened. These emotions typically make sense and are straightforward. When a good friend moves away, you feel sadness. If someone tells you how much you've helped them, you feel happy.

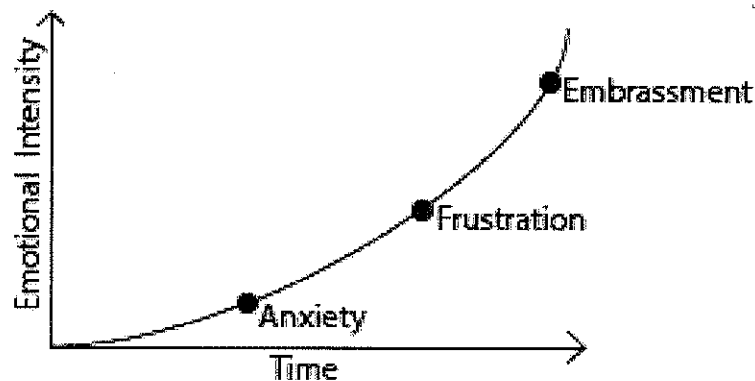
**Secondary Emotions** are emotional reactions to primary emotions. They are emotions about our emotions, and are often more intense. Imagine you're feeling anxious about having to do a class presentation this semester in an English class. The nervousness is primary, but suddenly this shifts. Then, you start to feel frustrated, disappointed, and embarrassed for feeling anxious about public speaking.

By expanding emotional awareness through mindfulness, we can separate these apart. This also allows us to recognize how judging our emotional reactions, rather than accepting them, often leads to greater distress. For example, anger is often a secondary emotion to anxiety (and sadness) that we fuel by not accepting primary emotions.

Secondary emotions tend to increase the intensity and duration of emotional experiences.

Try to notice your emotional reactions (secondary emotions) to your first emotional response (primary emotion), and judgmental thoughts that play a role.

It can also be very helpful to expand your emotional vocabulary to pinpoint precisely what you're feeling. Feeling annoyed is very different than feeling enraged, and feeling a little nervous is very different than being petrified.



It also helps to be more precise, using words beyond upset or uncomfortable, to better understand and support your emotions. Please look over a few examples of this below:

### **Anxiety & Fear Words:**

Afraid, Apprehensive, Cautious, Distrustful, Dread, Endangered, Excited, Fearful, Hesitant, Hypervigilant, Impatient, Nervous, Panicked, Petrified, Overwhelmed, On-edge, Scared, Self-conscious, Shaky, Shy, Suspicious, Suspenseful, Tense, Threatened, Restless, Uneasy, Unsafe...

### **Sadness Words:**

Alone, Burdened, Burdensome, Devastated, Disappointed, Dejected, Demoralized, Discouraged, Disheartened, Distraught, Down, Excluded, Grief-stricken, Gloomy, Heartbroken, Hopeless, Ignored, Invalidated, Lost, Miserable, Tearful, Sorrow, Unhappy, Unsupported...

### **Anger Words:**

Annoyed, Agitated, Aggressive, Aggravated, Belligerent, Cranky, Crushed, Depressed, Displeased, Distraught, Enraged, Furious, Frustrated, Grumpy, Irritated, Mad, Mistreated, Provoked, Rageful, Resentful, Snappy, Touchy, Unappreciated, Violated, Wronged...

### **Happiness & Joy Words:**

Acknowledged, Appreciated, Beautiful, Carefree, Cheerful, Connected, Content, Encouraged, Excited, Hopeful, Humorous, Included, Jovial, Joyful, Loved, Lighthearted, Optimistic, Pleased, Protected, Overjoyed, Safe, Satisfied, Secure, Supported, Relieved, Thrilled, Welcomed...