What emotions are for

What each emotion tells you and what it gets you ready to do.

Emotions are fast signals that tell you something matters and get your body ready to respond. Having them is not a weakness or a fault.

Emotion	What it is telling me	What it pushes me to do
Fear	Something may be dangerous	Escape, avoid, freeze, get ready
Anger	A boundary has been crossed, or something is unfair	Stand up, push back, protect
Sadness	I have lost something that matters	Slow down, withdraw, seek comfort
Guilt	I have acted against my own values	Put it right, apologise
Shame	I fear being rejected or seen as less	Hide, or try to repair my standing
Disgust	Something could be harmful or contaminating	Move away, reject
Joy	This is good for me	Do more of it, share it
Love	This person or thing matters to me	Move closer, care, protect

Three things emotions do

1. **They inform.** A feeling points to something that needs attention.
2. **They motivate.** Each emotion comes with an urge to act.
3. **They communicate.** Faces, voices and posture tell other people how we are, faster than words.

When emotions cause trouble

- The signal is too strong for the situation.
- The feeling fits an old situation better than the present one.
- We act on the urge without checking the facts.
- We push the feeling down, and it comes back stronger or sideways.

Noticing a feeling without acting on it

You can take in what a feeling is telling you without doing what it urges. Ask: "What is this telling me? Does it fit the facts? What do I want to do about it?"

> **Note**
> No emotion is bad. Some are painful, but each one has a purpose.

My notes and questions

© 2026 Patrick O'Hare Therapy · patrickoharetherapy.com
This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.

A vocabulary for feelings

Words for feelings, grouped by type and strength.

Many of us get by on a handful of words: fine, stressed, bad, upset. Finding a more exact word is not being fussy. Research suggests that people who can name feelings precisely manage them better.

Family	Mild	Medium	Strong
Sad	Flat, low, disappointed, wistful	Sad, hurt, lonely, discouraged, let down	Heartbroken, grief-stricken, despairing, empty
Angry	Irritated, annoyed, impatient, put out	Angry, frustrated, resentful, indignant	Furious, enraged, bitter, seething
Afraid	Uneasy, wary, nervous, unsure	Anxious, worried, scared, apprehensive	Terrified, panicked, petrified, dread
Ashamed	Self-conscious, awkward, sheepish	Embarrassed, guilty, regretful, inadequate	Humiliated, mortified, worthless, disgraced
Happy	Content, pleased, calm, relieved	Happy, cheerful, hopeful, grateful, proud	Joyful, delighted, elated, thrilled
Loving	Warm, friendly, fond, appreciative	Affectionate, caring, close, tender	Devoted, adoring, deeply connected
Surprised	Curious, puzzled, uncertain	Surprised, confused, startled	Shocked, stunned, astonished
Disgusted	Put off, uncomfortable	Repelled, appalled, contemptuous	Revolted, sickened, loathing
Worn out	Tired, bored, restless	Drained, overwhelmed, stuck	Exhausted, burnt out, numb

Using this list

- When you notice a feeling, start with the family, then look along the row for the word that fits best.
- Try the sentence: "If I had to be more exact, the word closer to it would be..."
- Feelings often come in blends. You can be relieved and sad, or angry and hurt, at once.
- Check the word against your body. Does it match what you feel in your chest, stomach or throat?

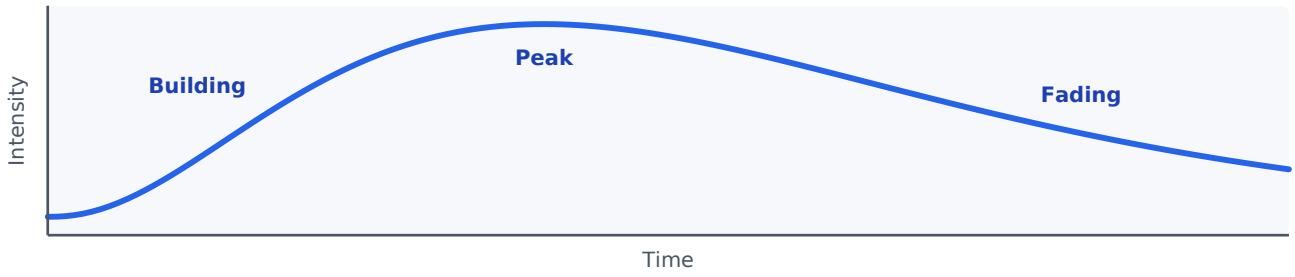
Words that fit how I have been feeling lately

© 2026 Patrick O'Hare Therapy · patrickoharetherapy.com
This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.

The emotion wave

How a feeling rises, peaks and passes, and what to do while it does.

An emotion is like a wave. It builds, it reaches a peak, and it falls away. Left alone, the body's response to a feeling lasts a surprisingly short time, often a matter of minutes.



What keeps the wave up

- **Feeding it.** Going over what happened, building the case, imagining what comes next.
- **Fighting it.** Trying to push the feeling away, which adds tension and a second feeling on top (anxious about being anxious, ashamed of being sad).
- **Acting on it at the peak.** The thing done in the heat of the moment often creates the next wave.

Riding it

1. **Name it.** "This is anger." "This is sadness."
2. **Find it in your body.** Where is it? What does it feel like?
3. **Breathe and make room.** You do not have to like it. Let it be there.
4. **Do not act yet.** Notice the urge. You do not have to obey it.
5. **Watch it change.** It may rise again before it falls. Stay with it.
6. **Afterwards, decide.** Is there something that needs doing, now that I can think?

Reminders

- "This feeling is not all of me."
- "I have felt this before and it passed."
- "I do not need to fix this right now."

A recent wave. How long did it actually last? What made it bigger or smaller?

© 2026 Patrick O'Hare Therapy · patrickoharetherapy.com
This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.

STOP

Four steps for the moment before you do something you will regret.

When emotions are running high, the urge to act can be overwhelming. STOP puts a gap between the feeling and what you do next.

S: Stop	Freeze. Do not move, speak or type. Your emotions want you to act. Do not, yet.
T: Take a step back	Step away, in your head or with your feet. Take a slow breath. Give yourself a moment.
O: Observe	What is happening, inside me and around me? What am I feeling and thinking? What are the facts?
P: Proceed mindfully	Ask: what do I want from this situation? What will make it better, and what will make it worse? Then act on that.

When to use it

- ☐ About to send an angry message
- ☐ In the middle of an argument
- ☐ Urge to walk out, quit or end something
- ☐ Urge to drink, use or hurt myself
- ☐ About to say something I cannot take back
- ☐ Feeling flooded and unable to think

A situation where I could have used STOP

What might have gone differently

Cut along the dashed lines. Keep a card in your wallet or phone case.

STOP

Stop.
Take a step back.
Observe.
Proceed mindfully.

Patrick O'Hare Therapy

What I want to remember

My goal when emotions are high

Patrick O'Hare Therapy

If you are at risk of hurting yourself, call 112 or 999, or Samaritans on freephone 116 123.

STOP is a skill from Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), developed by Marsha Linehan.

© 2026 Patrick O'Hare Therapy · patrickoharetherapy.com
This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.

TIPP: changing your body chemistry fast

Four body-based skills for when emotion is too high to think.

At the height of emotion, reasoning does not work. These four skills act on the body directly and can bring arousal down within minutes, far enough for you to think again.

T: Temperature	Cold water on your face. Hold your breath and put your face in a bowl of cold water, or hold a cold pack over your eyes and cheeks, for 20 to 30 seconds. This sets off a reflex that slows the heart.
I: Intense exercise	Burn off the energy. Run, do star jumps, climb the stairs fast, for a few minutes, as hard as is right for your fitness.
P: Paced breathing	Slow your breathing right down, with the out-breath longer than the in-breath. For example, in for 4 and out for 6 or more.
P: Paired muscle relaxation	As you breathe in, tense a group of muscles. As you breathe out, say "relax" in your mind and let the tension go.

Medical caution

Cold water can lower heart rate quickly. Check with your GP before using the temperature skill if you have a heart condition, take beta blockers, have an eating disorder or have any other medical concern. Choose exercise that suits your health.

Tips

- These work fast and wear off fast. Use the calmer window to take the next sensible step.
- Practise when you are not in crisis, so you know what to do.
- Keep what you need to hand: a cold pack in the freezer, runners by the door.

The one I am most likely to use, and where I will keep what I need

When I tried it: distress before and after (0 to 10), and what I noticed

TIPP is a skill from Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), developed by Marsha Linehan.

If you are at risk of hurting yourself, call 112 or 999, or Samaritans on freephone 116 123.

© 2026 Patrick O'Hare Therapy · patrickoharetherapy.com
This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.

Soothing with the five senses

Things that comfort you through sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and movement.

Name _____ Date _____

Self-soothing is doing something kind for your body through its senses. It will not solve the problem. It helps you get through a hard moment without making things worse. Tick what appeals under each sense and add anything else. Movement is on the list too, because it settles the body in the same way.

Sight

☐ A view ☐ Photos ☐ Candlelight ☐ The sky

Sound

☐ Music ☐ Rain ☐ Birdsong ☐ A familiar voice

Smell

☐ Fresh air ☐ Coffee ☐ A favourite scent ☐ Clean laundry

Taste

☐ Tea ☐ Something warm ☐ A mint ☐ A favourite food

Touch

☐ A hot shower ☐ A soft blanket ☐ A pet ☐ Hand cream

Movement

☐ Rocking ☐ Stretching ☐ Walking ☐ Swaying to music

A soothing kit: things I could gather in a box or bag

What gets in the way of soothing myself (for example, feeling I do not deserve it)? What would I say to a friend who felt that?

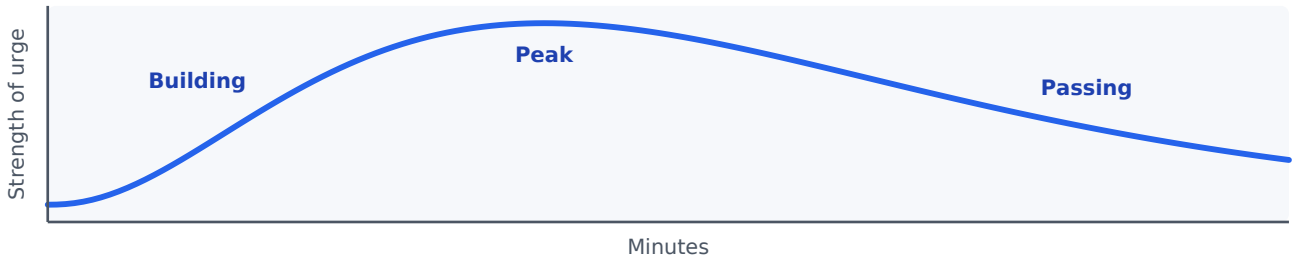
Self-soothing is one of the distress tolerance skills in Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT).

© 2026 Patrick O'Hare Therapy · patrickoharetherapy.com
This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.

Urge surfing

How to wait out an urge without acting on it.

Urges feel as if they will keep building until you give in. They do not. An urge rises, peaks and falls, usually within 20 to 30 minutes, whether or not you act on it. Each time you ride one out, the next is a little weaker.



How to surf

1. **Notice and name it.** "I am having an urge to..."
2. **Find it in your body.** Where is it strongest? Tight, restless, hollow, buzzing?
3. **Breathe and watch.** Keep your attention on the sensations. Describe them to yourself as they shift.
4. **Do not fight it and do not feed it.** No arguing, no planning how to give in. Just watching.
5. **Rate it** from 0 to 10 every few minutes.
6. **Stay until it drops.** Then turn to something that matters to you.

When	The urge	Start (0 to 10)	Peak	After 20 minutes	Did I act on it?

Urge surfing was developed by Alan Marlatt as part of relapse prevention.

© 2026 Patrick O'Hare Therapy · patrickoharetherapy.com
This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.

Opposite action

When a feeling does not fit the facts, do the opposite of what it tells you.

Name _____ Date _____

Every emotion comes with an urge. Acting on the urge keeps the emotion going. When the feeling does not fit the situation, or acting on it would not help, doing the opposite, fully, changes the feeling.

Emotion	The urge	Opposite action
Fear	Avoid, escape	Approach. Stay. Do the thing, again and again.
Anger	Attack, criticise	Step back gently. Be a little kind. Try to see their side.
Sadness	Withdraw, stay in bed	Get active. Do things that give a sense of achievement. Be with people.
Shame	Hide	Share it with someone who will be kind. Head up, eye contact.
Guilt (not deserved)	Over-apologise, punish myself	Stop apologising. Carry on doing the thing.

How to do it

1. Name the emotion and the urge.
2. Check the facts. Does the feeling fit? Would acting on it help?
3. If not, pick the opposite action.
4. Do it all the way: actions, posture, face, words and thoughts.
5. Keep going until the feeling shifts.

Situation	Emotion and urge	Did it fit the facts?	Opposite action I took	What happened

Opposite action is a skill from Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), developed by Marsha Linehan.

© 2026 Patrick O'Hare Therapy · patrickoharetherapy.com
This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.

Check the facts

Check whether your feeling fits what actually happened.

Name _____ Date _____

The emotion I want to check, and how strong it is (0 to 10)

What happened? Only what a camera would have recorded.

What am I telling myself about it? My interpretations and assumptions.

What other ways are there of seeing it?

Am I assuming a threat or a disaster? What is the realistic outcome, and could I cope?

Does it fit?

How well does my emotion fit the facts?

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Not at all — Completely

Does its strength fit the facts?

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Far too strong — About right

If it fits

What problem needs solving? What do I need to say or do?

If it does not fit

What opposite action could I take?

How I feel now

Check the facts is a skill from Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), developed by Marsha Linehan.

© 2026 Patrick O'Hare Therapy · patrickoharetherapy.com
This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.

My distress kit

A plan for getting through the worst moments without making them worse.

Name _____ Date _____

Fill this in when you are steady. Keep it where you can reach it.

Signs that I am heading into crisis

First, to bring my body down

- ☐ Cold water
- ☐ Slow breathing
- ☐ Fast movement
- ☐ Tense and release

Then, to take my mind off it

Activities, people, tasks

To soothe myself

Sight, sound, smell, taste, touch

People I can be with or contact

What I must not do, because it makes things worse

What I want to remember (why it is worth getting through this)

If none of this is working, I will...

If you need help right now (Ireland)

In an emergency	Call **112** or **999**, or go to your nearest emergency department.
Samaritans	Freephone **116 123**, any time, day or night. Email jo@samaritans.ie
Text About It	Free text **HELLO** to **50808**, any time, for an anonymous text conversation.
Pieta	Freephone **1800 247 247**, any time, or text **HELP** to **51444**. For thoughts of suicide or self-harm.
Your GP	Contact your GP or the out-of-hours GP service in your area.

© 2026 Patrick O'Hare Therapy · patrickoharetherapy.com
This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.