

THE DEPARTMENT OF COMPOUND EMOTIONS

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The premise

People can experience anger and disappointment, hurt, sadness, or frustration simultaneously. A feeling may provide information about what matters, but it does not automatically determine what happened or what action is wise.

1. Separate the event from the interpretation

Write down what a camera or neutral observer could confirm. Then write your interpretation of that event. These are not always the same. For example, a delayed reply is observable; an assumption about the reason for the delay is not.

2. Give the feeling a more precise name

Anger may accompany a perceived boundary violation. Disappointment can follow an unmet expectation. Hurt may involve a valued relationship or identity. These are possibilities, not universal hidden meanings.

3. Identify what mattered

Ask: Which expectation, need, value, or boundary felt important? If you cannot answer, uncertainty is an acceptable answer. You do not have to force a story.

4. Consider ordinary alternatives

Try two explanations consistent with the available facts. Consider what evidence would distinguish them. The purpose is not to invalidate emotion, but to avoid mistaking a first interpretation for a settled fact.

5. Choose, do not just react

You may want to ask a question, communicate a boundary, wait, change the subject, or do nothing. Your emotional state and your chosen action are separate things.

Five-minute reflection

EVENT: What happened?

FEELINGS: Which emotions can I name?

STORY: What am I inferring?

ALTERNATIVES: What else could explain it?

CHOICE: What response fits my values and available evidence?

Example

Event: A friend cancels plans at short notice. Anger: I had organised my evening around the meeting. Disappointment: I was looking forward to seeing them. Possible alternative: They may have a genuine emergency. Reasonable response: Ask what happened, and explain the inconvenience if appropriate.

Limits

This is a creative educational guide, not a clinical assessment or therapy. It does not infer another person's intentions or diagnose the reader. The interactive dials are illustrative, not psychometrically validated.

Explore the universe

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