

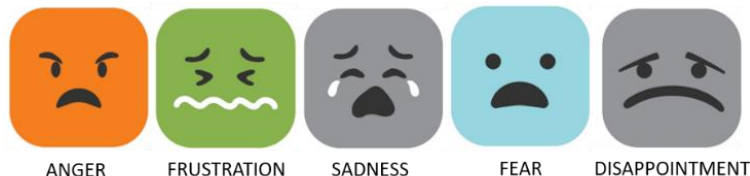
FEELING WHAT WE FEEL

unprocessed emotions



We know that processing our feelings is necessary. On the surface, it seems simple enough: identify what you feel, give yourself the time and space to experience those feelings, and then decide how to handle them. Of course, this “simple” process easily gets complicated and we often end up finding ways to avoid or repress feelings without even realizing it.

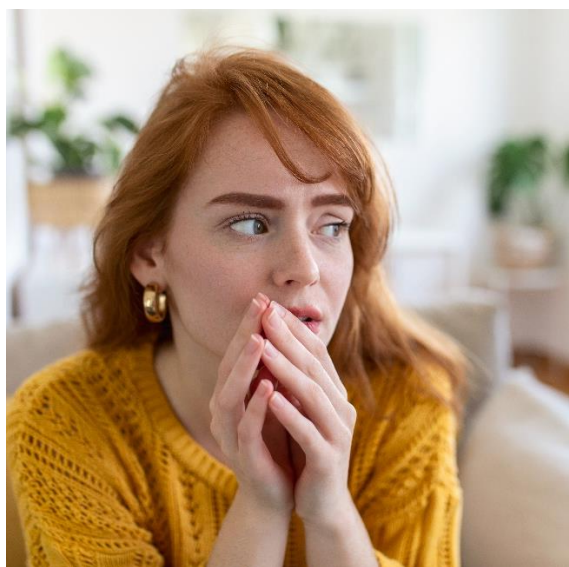
For the most part, we tend to repress strong emotions, especially those associated with discomfort or other unpleasant experiences. These are typically considered “negative” emotions that we are conditioned to believe should be avoided or at least kept to ourselves and not displayed for others to see.



When emotion isn’t fully processed, it can become “stuck” in the body and manifest in physical ways. Repressed emotions can create mental health issues by increasing stress and anxiety, which often cause physical symptoms including muscle tension and pain, nausea and digestive problems, changes in appetite, fatigue and sleep problems. Research has even found a connection between emotional repression and decreased immune system function. When your immune system isn’t at its best, you may get sick more often or recover more slowly.

RECOGNIZING EMOTIONAL REPRESSION

Left unchecked, emotional repression can have an impact on your feelings and behaviours – both towards yourself and others. It can affect your ability to talk about things that matter to you, understand how others feel, and build relationships. This means that it’s in your best interest to better manage emotions and process them effectively. But how? It’s not always easy to recognize when you’re dealing with unprocessed emotions, but there are signs that you can watch for and signal that you may want to look deeper into your emotional well-being.



- ☹️ Feeling nervous, low, or stressed often – even if you aren’t sure why
- ☹️ Feeling uneasy or uncomfortable when others share their feelings
- ☹️ Feeling irritated when someone asks you about your feelings
- ☹️ Feeling cheerful and calm most of the time because you never let your thoughts linger on anything significant or upsetting
- ☹️ Often forgetting things
- ☹️ Simply going along with situations instead of expressing what you really want or need
- ☹️ Using substances, television, social media, or other activities to distract you from your feelings
- ☹️ Spending most of your time with others to avoid being alone
- ☹️ Exhibiting passive-aggressive behaviours when dealing with situations that upset you

HOW TO MAKE PROCESSING YOUR EMOTIONS A HABIT!

All forms of emotional processing require one thing, and that's mindfulness — recognizing and experiencing your feelings without judging yourself for having them.

1

Recognize Your Signs

Look for patterns in your behaviour when you're faced with strong emotions. Do you react a particular way or try to lose yourself in a certain activity? The better you get at calling yourself out for avoiding your feelings, the less likely you are to reject them — whether out of fear, habit, or trying to force positivity.

2

Acknowledge Your Feelings

If you have trouble identifying your feelings, experiment with activities that can help you. Try journaling or a creative outlet like painting. Talk to a trusted friend or use tools like the emotion wheel or body mapping. Research shows that labeling your emotions can reduce their intensity. Recognizing your feelings is also the first step in being able to process them.

3

Move Intentionally

Unprocessed emotions can cause tension in the body and intentional movement can help release stored energy and help the brain recognize the difference between tension and relaxation. Examples of intentional movement include stretching, yoga, dance, martial arts, tai chi, meditative walking, and breathing exercises.

4

Practice Stillness

Being still allows us to disengage and helps us connect with our thoughts and feelings. It taps into the brain's default idle mode, which is when we daydream or let our mind wander. Practice stillness through breathing exercises, meditation, or by sitting in nature, listening to calming music, or repeating affirmations. Reflect on your emotions without judgment.

5

Compartmentalize

At times, it makes sense to temporarily set emotions aside. When strong emotions arise, but you have a meeting to attend, it's fine to set them aside so you can focus on the task at hand. The key here is *temporarily* — with the intention to revisit the emotions as soon as you can. If you continue to put it off, emotions can quickly shift from compartmentalized to repressed.

6

Recognize Rumination

If you find yourself revisiting the same issues or internal stories, again and again, that's a sign you're not processing, but stuck in rumination mode. Instead, try a technique called *radical acceptance*. When you're faced with something that's upsetting but that you can't control, accept it instead. Acknowledge how you feel about it, but permit yourself not to obsess over what you can't change.

NEED MORE HELP?

No one approach will work for everybody. It's a process of discovering what works best for you. It's important to note, however, that you don't have to do it alone. In some cases, repressed emotions are a result of traumatic life experiences, and working with a professional can be beneficial. There are a variety of therapy techniques that can help with processing particularly challenging emotions.

Sources: www.healthline.com/health/mind-body/how-to-release-emotional-baggage-and-the-tension-that-goes-with-it#How-to-release-emotions-from-the-body
www.webmd.com/mental-health/what-to-know-repressed-emotions | <https://openaccesspub.org/ijpr/article/999> | Images by Freepik