



Tools for Caring

Emotional Nourishment

CREATED BY
Josephine Tite

Think of emotions as teachers. Bits of information or signals that happen inside your brain and through your body that have the capacity to guide your behavior, thoughts and actions. The most effective teachers are able to help learners apply information in real life, and as you get better at recognizing emotions, you will be able to take note of information and apply it in ways that serve you and those you support.

What kind of information do emotions provide? Emotions direct you to pay attention to what is going on. They can tell you what's going well and what's not going well. When something is going well and you are safe, your mind, body and heart get instant feedback through emotion to indicate ease and comfort. These emotions are "feel good" emotions. Think of these warm and tender emotions like comfort, joy, appreciation, or contentment. These emotions expand our thinking, help generate new ideas and encourage us to consider possibilities. (Caruso, Salovey, 2004). For example, when you experience feeling brave you are more likely to try something new. You may take your loved one someplace new, or have a conversation about a difficult topic around physical or cognitive limitations, or even dying.

Emotions will also indicate when something is not going well or you are in danger. Your mind, body and heart get instant feedback through emotion to indicate the need to fight and flee. These emotions don't necessarily help us feel good and are sometimes avoided or ignored. Think of these uncomfortable emotions like frustration, sadness, disgust or fear. These emotions provide us with clearer focus, allow details to be examined more efficiently and motivate a more efficient search for errors. (Caruso, Salovey, 2004). For example, when you experience caution you are more likely to adhere to the instructions and procedures for certain medical treatments that are done at home to avoid infection.

Emotions are more like a sticky note and less like super glue.

You can choose to identify the emotion and not identify as the emotion. You feel emotions, but they don't have to stick to you forever, just so they serve you.



How do you experience emotions?

Are you numbing or acknowledging emotions?

Are you noticing or ignoring emotions?

How else can you implement emotional information? Emotions can be cultivated by you. You can use self-directed, intentional action to cultivate emotions you would like to experience that serve you and the situation. You can send the signals to your brain too. You can be the teacher. This is proactively creating emotion, where you get to decide what action will bring about which emotion(s). In positive psychology we call this positive or negative affect. You decide for yourself or prime yourself to generate what you are looking for. You are the creator of your day and your moments.

TIP: Think about where you are, who you are with and what time you have available to you and then choose appropriately. There is no sense choosing meditation when you have 3 minutes, or a bubble bath when it is mealtime. There are times you can juggle tasks around and times when you cannot. Be wise and trust yourself.

Let's imagine you are going to connect with someone you know who has recently lost a family member. It would be contextually appropriate for you to show up with an open heart so the two of you can be there for each other. You may need to decide you want to create an emotion of protective grief. To come with compassion for their grief, while protecting your own well-being.

Alternatively, you may want to feel more intention. You can choose to wake up in the morning with purpose. You can listen to upbeat music, write about what the best version of today could be, or go for a brisk walk.

What works for you? Connect with your heart, mind and body. Your heart may say to listen to music or reach out to a friend. Your body may say go for a walk, breathe or have a bubble bath. Your mind may say write about your best possible day. Maybe you're already doing something and it's time to look at it with a fresh perspective. What are you already doing? How can it be viewed through a different perspective? This is a powerful experience. With intention, when you connect with your heart, mind and body you are providing yourself with emotional nourishment to help you be the best for yourself and those you support, and that doesn't always mean, happy.

What emotion do you want to create or are already creating?

**Stillness, calm, positive, joy, gratitude, ease, wonder...
What action brings about that emotion?**

What does emotional nourishment mean to you?

Noticing emotion, responding to emotion and generating emotion is part of a process called Emotional Regulation or Emotional Agility. Emotional Agility, as defined by researcher Susan David, is a process that enables you to navigate life's twists and turns with self-acceptance, clear-sightedness, and an open mind. You step into your emotions and use them to help you be your best for yourself and those your support. Being emotionally agile is a skill that takes time to develop. Be kind to yourself. Being your best isn't about being happy all the time. Remember, sadness is information, so is jealousy and frustration, so is awe and enthusiasm.

All emotions are useful. All emotions need to be validated. All emotions need to be processed.

People who can notice and process emotions, which is known as Emotional Regulation, have higher levels of vitality and well-being. One study found that nurses with higher Emotional Regulation abilities have more motivation at work and well-being at home when they have to face high emotional demands at work. (Donoso et al, 2015).

Although you can not feel happy all the time, there is plenty of research that indicates the benefits of feeling positive emotions. Many studies show experiencing positive emotions can build your mental and social resources and, according to Barbara Fredrickson's Broaden and Build Theory, positive emotions can shift how your mind operates, helping broaden the possibilities you see over time (Fredrickson, 2001).

Feeling a positive affect reduces inflammatory response to stress, improves sleep, immune function and decreases pain and lowers blood pressure (Pipe et al., 2012). You can build up these benefits over time, so when tough times come you are able to process emotion in healthy ways. You especially need positive emotions during times of crisis. Many studies done after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the U.S. have shown that positive emotions, such as gratitude and love, accounted for post crisis growth and resilience (Fredrickson et al., 2003). Positive emotions help prevent depression after a crisis.

Just as studies show the benefits of positive affect, there are benefits to negative affect as well. Negative affect can improve memory performance, reduce judgmental errors, improve motivation, and result in more effective interpersonal strategies (Forgus, 2013). You can use sadness to help you catch more details, endure difficult tasks longer and use more politeness when asking for help with certain tasks. Researcher, Joseph P. Forgas found that people in a sad mood were also more fair and took less time to make fair decisions.

How you respond or cultivate emotion will vary on context, approach, perspective, and situation. Use emotion for your benefit and for the benefit of those you support. Emotions are not good or bad, right or wrong.

Your Emotion Journey: Here is where you learn to be nourished by your emotions.

EMOTION ASSESSMENT

How would you rate your emotional regulation or emotional agility skill level?
Feel free to take Susan David's emotional agility quiz at: susandavid.com/quiz

Emotional Nourishment Experiences

Here are a few suggested activities to help you connect with emotions.

- 1. Increase your emotional awareness.** Noticing emotion is essential in increasing your emotional agility. Start by checking in with yourself on a consistent basis. Choose a time in your day that works for you and indicate what emotion you feel, just write what is natural for you.

Enjoy a free download of the CheckingIn App:

checkingin.co/30daychallenge/pcfrees

If you do not have access or choose not to use an app, simply follow these simple steps.

Right now, I notice this emotion:

Do you want to explore more? Why are you feeling the above emotion?

2. Connect emotion with your body. Your body is impacted by emotion. What do you notice in your body when you experience certain emotions? What emotion might be there? Where do you feel it in your body? What do you feel in your body? What patterns show up for you?



Depression



Neutral



Happiness

References

Caruso, D. R., & Salovey, P. (2004). *The Emotionally Intelligent Manager: How to Develop and Use the Four Key Emotional Skills of Leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

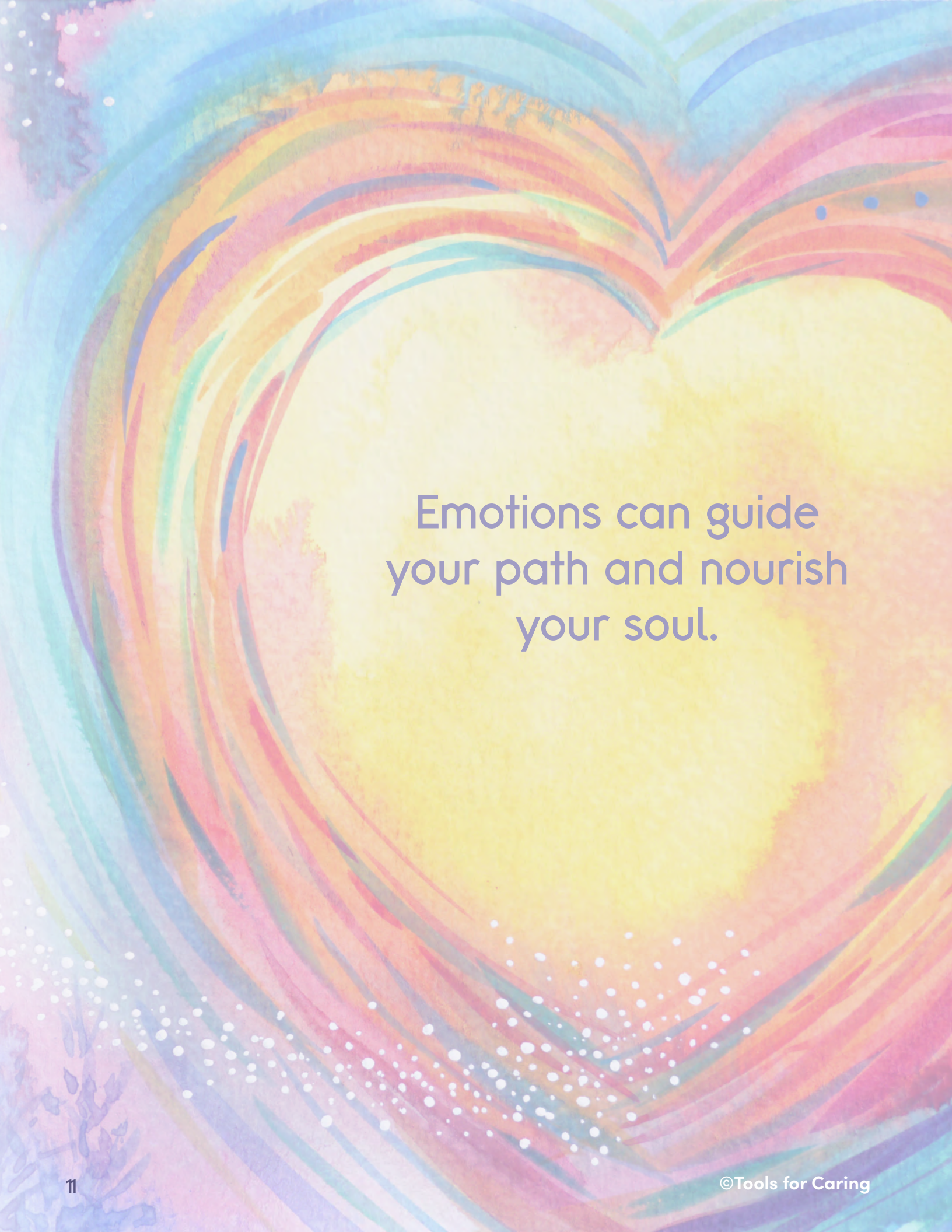
Donoso, Luis Manuel Blanco, Demerouti, Evangelia, Garrosa Hernández, Eva, Moreno-Jiménez, Bernardo, and Carmona Cobo, Isabel. "Positive Benefits of Caring on Nurses' Motivation and Well-being: A Diary Study about the Role of Emotional Regulation Abilities at Work." *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 52.4 (2015): 804-16. Web.

Fredrickson, Barbara L. "The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology." *The American Psychologist* 56.3 (2001): 218-26. Web.

Pipe, Teresa Britt, Buchda, Vicki L, Launder, Susan, Hudak, Barb, Hulvey, Lynne, Karns, Katherine E, and Pendergast, Debra. "Building Personal and Professional Resources of Resilience and Agility in the Healthcare Workplace." *Stress and Health* 28.1 (2012): 11-22. Web.

FREDRICKSON, Barbara L, TUGADE, Michele M, WAUGH, Christian E, & LARKIN, Gregory R. (2003). What good are positive emotions in crises? A prospective study of resilience and emotions following the terrorist attacks on the United States on september 11th, 2001. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(2), 365-376.

Joseph P. Forgas. "Don't Worry, Be Sad! On the Cognitive, Motivational, and Interpersonal Benefits of Negative Mood." *Current Directions in Psychological Science : A Journal of the American Psychological Society* 22.3 (2013): 225-32. Web.



Emotions can guide
your path and nourish
your soul.



Tools for Caring