

Primary Emotions List

Understanding the primary emotions

Primary emotions are innate, universally experienced emotions that respond instinctively to stimuli. These emotions are fundamental to human interactions and are recognized across various cultures.

The following are key characteristics of basic emotions:

- **Universal signals:** Each basic emotion is associated with specific, universally recognized facial expressions, reflecting the adaptive nature of these emotional responses.
- **Distinctive physiology:** Unique physiological changes are linked to each emotion.
- For example, fear might increase heart rate, whereas anger could increase muscle tension.
- **Automatic appraisal:** These emotions emerge from automatic evaluations of environmental stimuli, often occurring without conscious thought.
- **Evolutionary adaptation:** These emotions have evolved to address essential life tasks, such as escaping danger (fear) or confronting threats (anger).
- **Emotion families:** Basic emotions are part of broader "families" that include variations like frustration or rage for anger, differing in intensity and context.

The primary emotions

The concept of primary emotions refers to the fundamental feelings that are universally recognized and instinctual responses to stimuli. The most widely accepted list of primary emotions includes:

- **Happiness:** A pleasant emotional state characterized by feelings of joy and contentment.
- **Sadness:** An emotional state associated with feelings of disappointment or grief.
- **Fear:** A primal emotion that triggers a fight-or-flight response, crucial for survival.
- **Anger:** An emotional response leading to feelings of hostility or frustration.
- **Surprise:** A brief emotional state that occurs in response to unexpected events, which can be either positive or negative.
- **Disgust:** A strong emotion that results in feelings of repulsion towards something perceived as offensive or unpleasant.
- **Contempt:** An emotion that combines disdain and superiority over others which often arises when one perceives another's actions, beliefs, or characteristics as inferior or morally unacceptable.

According to Robert Plutchik, he adds two more emotions on top of Ekman's basic emotions:

- **Trust:** In Plutchik's model, trust is positioned as the opposite of disgust, reflecting its fundamental role in forming positive relationships and social cohesion.
- **Anticipation:** It is often associated with hopefulness about positive future experiences but can also involve anxiety about potential negative outcomes.

Primary vs. secondary emotions		
Feature	Primary emotions	Secondary emotions
Origin	Instinctual response to stimuli	Reaction to primary emotions
Complexity	Simple and straightforward	Complex and nuanced
Duration	Short-lived	Long-lasting
Cognitive involvement	Minimal cognitive processing	Requires reflection and thought
Universality	Universal across cultures	Varies significantly among individuals
Examples	Joy, sadness, fear	Guilt, shame, resentment
Additional notes		

References

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- Plutchik, R. (1982). A psychoevolutionary theory of emotions. *Social Science Information*, 21(4-5), 529–553. <https://doi.org/10.1177/053901882021004003>