

Building Emotional Vocabulary

Adults can support the social and emotional skill development of children and teens by helping them build their emotional vocabulary—the words we use to describe our feelings and our reactions to experiences. Expanding emotional vocabulary can enhance self-awareness, or the ability to recognize one’s emotions and values as well as one’s strengths and challenges. Try implementing these emotional vocabulary strategies:

- **Label observed feelings:**

Educators can label the feelings they observe in their students to build self-awareness. It can be helpful to follow up a statement with a strategy for managing the observed emotion.

Examples:

“I notice that you seem **frustrated** with this activity. Would you like to take a break to get a drink of water before coming back to it?”

“You are very **energetic**! We will be focusing on a test review soon, so let’s take some deep breaths in together before we move to the next activity.”

“It appears you are **distracted** today. Would it be helpful to write a journal entry of what’s on your mind before you begin your work today?”

- **Validate feelings:**

Normalizing emotions is an effective way to build social and emotional competence in students. Recognizing that emotions are not “good” or “bad” but instead are simply comfortable or uncomfortable will help to make conversations about feelings a consistent practice in the classroom.

Examples:

“It does seem **exhausting** to manage all the responsibilities at school.”

“It’s great to see you **confident** about the work you put into this project.”

“Thank you for sharing that you feel **anxious** for this test. It can be **overwhelming** to keep those feelings inside/to yourself.”

- **Model identifying and vocalizing your own emotions:**

Educators can practice their own self-awareness skills by modeling identifying emotions they experience in the classroom and sharing them with students, as appropriate.

Examples:

“I am **excited** about the schedule this week; we have many events to look forward to!”

“I am **worried** about making progress on our work together. Let’s stay focused on our work so we don’t fall behind.”

- **Share a time when you felt a similar emotion and what it felt like physically:**

Educators can create a safe and supportive learning environment by empathizing with students’ feelings and experiences.

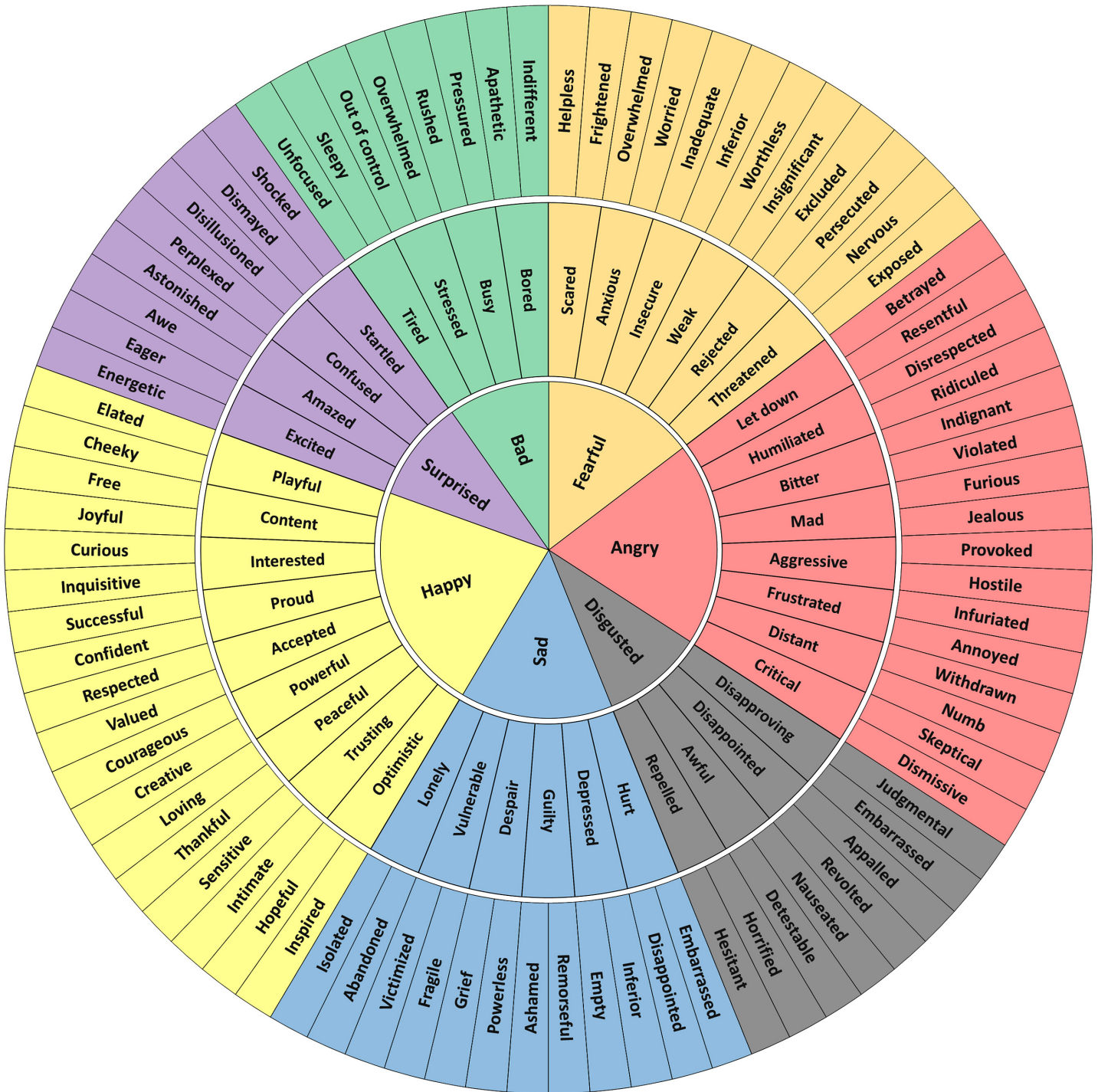
Examples:

“I have felt **embarrassed** before, too. For me, my face feels hot and my heart beats fast, and I even feel a little **angry** sometimes.”

“When I feel **proud**, I like to share my good news with others or teach someone what I’ve learned.”

Wheel of Emotions

Building Self-Awareness



Adapted from Geoffrey Roberts