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## Why It's Good to Feel Sad

Being sad is more useful than you might think.

Sadness is one of the four main human emotions — the others being [happiness](#), [fear](#) and [anger](#). Sadness is valid and useful; it alerts us to how we need to treat ourselves, and also as to how we want to be treated by others.

I am not talking about long-term sadness, or as Lewis Wolpert calls [depression](#), “malignant sadness,” and I am certainly not talking about [grief](#). Here, I am talking about the feeling of sadness that can be experienced when someone we like or love is unkind to us, when we see or experience something poignant, or when we experience some loss or hurt. These feelings will not last weeks but are not transient either. It may feel like a temporary shadow has passed across your feelings.

Some people have real difficulty identifying this emotion, due to living in a culture which values “positive” emotions above the more negative ones. This is a mistake because as humans, we need the full range of our emotions to be in working order in order to be able to respond appropriately to our own needs and those of others.

As sadness is not always acceptable in our culture and many people are uncomfortable witnessing the sadness of another, it can often be covered up by anger.

Occasionally when I feel angry with someone, when I look for the underlying emotion, it will be sadness or fear. You can check your true feelings by asking yourself what made you feel angry. For example, you might think, “I felt angry because he said something rude about my family.”

Then ask yourself, “What does it mean to me when people are rude about my family?” Maybe it means you feel attacked, or that you have parented badly — this could cause feelings of fear that you are inadequate or sadness that you haven’t done a good job and that your friend thinks badly of you. I don’t know what you will come up with, but if you are interested in your authentic feelings, then you can uncover what you feel by keeping asking the same question: “What does it mean for me when (fill in whatever they said or did)?”

Once you have identified sadness, then respond appropriately to this emotion in yourself and others. First, allow yourself to be sad. You don’t have to be “up” or “positive” all the time. If you feel sad, explore your feelings and find out what you need. You may need to talk to a friend, have time to yourself, or to work through your feelings and accept them.

When you respond to others who are feeling sad you may just need to be with them, not rejecting them whilst they feel sad. It is okay to ask them, “What do you need right now?” Sometimes the experience of having someone sit with you whilst you experience previously unacceptable feelings can be very healing.

Whatever your own experience of sadness, remember it is part of being human. It allows us to recognize and value the contrast between feeling happy and sad. We need these contrasts in order to recognize our own vulnerabilities and those of others and to be able to appreciate our gains and losses.

The ability to recognize and respond to your own and others' emotions will stand you in good stead. It will mean you are more likely to understand others and they are more likely to understand you.

Try to embrace all the emotions you have at your disposal, even the ones that may seem “weak” or “shameful”—these are just other people's labels. After all, these feelings are what allow you to experience life at its fullest, and ultimately, they are part of what makes you human.