

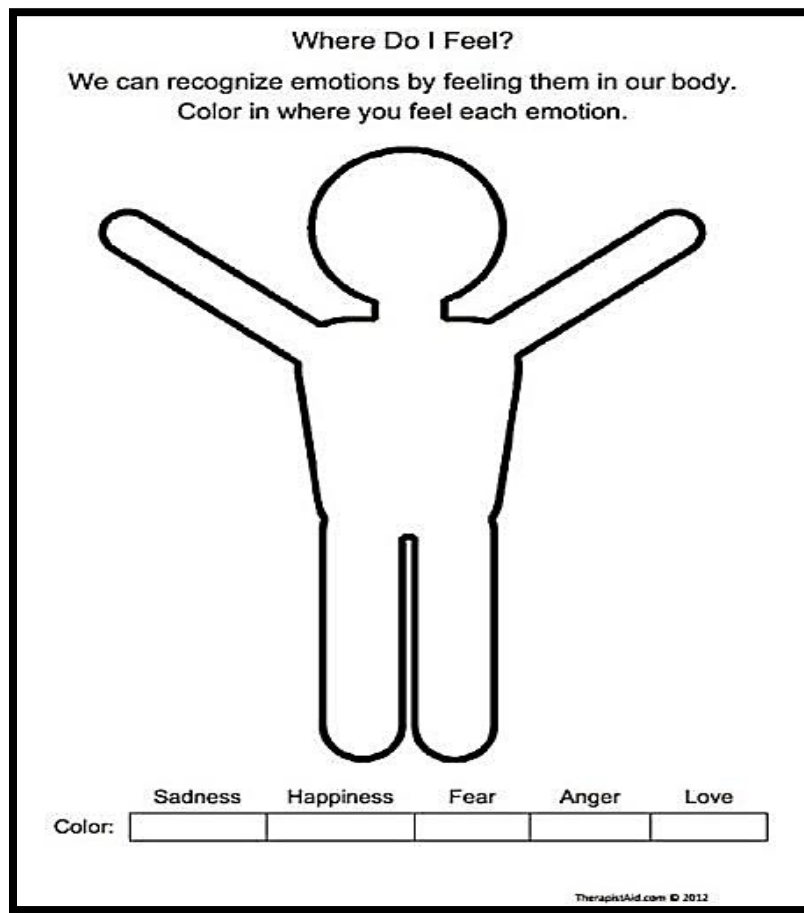
Tools for Identifying and Coping with Feelings/Emotions & Overstimulation

Feelings Person

I often have a hard time knowing what a body signal is indicating. A nurse introduced me to this tool which helped me identify my feelings and connect them to sensations in my body.

Here is how it worked: First, the “instructor” would tell me a feeling and give an example of when she felt that way. Second, she would label it with a color and say where and how she felt it in her body. Third, she asked me for a time when I felt that emotion, and if I was unable to identify a time she would tell me of a time she witnessed me feeling the emotion. Fourth, I was asked to describe how my body felt during that feeling (what sensations and where). Fifth, I was instructed to chose a color to represent the emotion and shade in on a person diagram where I felt it in my body.

For me we used a good old fashioned home drawn stick figure as our person, but you can find sample diagrams (like the one below) on the internet.



Feelings Blocks

What are They?

My blocks served as a visual tool that helped me as I was learning to pair my feelings with coping strategies. I also used them as a communication aide when I wasn't able to verbalize my thoughts. They are a great tool because they are tactile and visual, can be manipulated, limit the number of choices to choose from, provide a reference of feelings and strategies, and don't require talking to use. Plus, they are homemade!

How to Make Them?

You need two sets of blocks. Paint each set a different color. On set one (green/yellow below) write an emotion/feeling per surface. On set two (orange/blue below) write a coping strategy per surface. Hint: It is ok (and actually helpful) to repeat feelings and strategies on multiple surfaces.

How to Use Them?

These can be used in several different ways. The possibilities are endless. Here are a few examples of how I used them:

1. I had a habit of running away when overstimulated, which caused concern. So, I used my blocks to communicate when overstimulated. When I could not be found people knew to look on my table to see what I had set my blocks to. If I had set them to "overstimulated" and "time alone" they knew not to worry about my disappearance because I would return when I was better regulated.
2. If I was feeling an emotion and needed something, but was unable to verbally articulate it, I could lead the person I was trying to communicate with to my blocks and show them what I needed.
3. Sometimes I had difficulty identifying what I felt or what strategy I needed to do. When this happened someone would help me identify the feeling, coping strategy, or both. The person would for example flip a block to "frustrated" and then wait for me to find the coping strategy to do with that feeling. With this method no, or very few, words were spoken which was especially helpful at times when I was having difficulty with auditory processing.

Examples



*The feeling that is hard to read it misunderstood



Feelings Log

What is a Feelings Log?

I've learned that many times my behaviors or reactions are not consistent with what others recognize as a particular feeling. This has led to many misunderstandings. I created this tool when I was in the hospital and was frequently misunderstood. One of the nurses took the time to understand me. Together we made this tool which has been an invaluable reference and decoder to my emotions. Over the years I have shared it with my teachers, parents, therapists, friends, and boyfriend. It has helped them to better be able to identify what I am feeling based on what I am doing. It also provided guidance on how they can best help me when I am experiencing certain feelings.

I have 12 feelings listed in my feelings log notebook. Each feeling has a different page. I am providing a sample of a few pages from my notebook.

Samples

MISUNDERSTOOD

What it feels like/how it affects me	I feel stuck and unable to move, I will eventually shutdown
What it may look like-but is often not	Argumentative, defiance, disagreeable, stubborn, bossy, insisting on my way, defensive, angry
How others can tell	Repeat the same thing but in several different ways, over explaining, tone in voice increase, wave my arms, yell, tense my body, close my fists, stutter, stiffen my body, become wound up
What others can do to help	Ask me to write it out, listen without interrupting, repeat back what you think I am saying so I can let you know if you are hearing me correctly, be patient, don't personalize loud abrasive verbalizations, don't assume, you be quiet and ask me to be quiet so we can both gather our thoughts, remember my definitions for words may be different than yours

HURT

What it feels like/how it affects me	Distract through excess activity, shut down, wanting to sleep more, depressed mood, tightness in chest and throat
What it may look like-but is often not	Angry, willfulness, disengaged, avoidant
How others can tell	Cry, curl up, shut down, quiet, stare, distract through activity, more sensitive to touch-may yell if you touch me, wanting to be alone, isolate, excessive movement, journaling a lot
What others can do to help	Give me a tight hug (ask first), let me cry, help me identify cause of hurt and other feelings, suggest listening to music, doing art or journaling



Feelings Log (sample continued)

INTERNALLY DISORGANIZED

What it feels like/how it affects me	My atoms are scattered, urges to throw-up, jumping and fragmented thoughts, shooting energy
What it may look like-but is often not	Mania, panicked, defiance, not listening, confusion, anxious
How others can tell	Unable to focus, difficulty starting a goal oriented task, more fragmented speech, laying on the ground/bed for a long time, pacing, impulsive, difficulty verbalizing thoughts sequentially, refusal to eat, pacing, waving hands, nervous energy, excessive unfocused activity , unable to complete tasks or carry out simple directions
What others can do to help	Give me deep pressure, lead me to a quieter location, suggest inverted positions, give me a simple task to complete that is repetitious but give me a time limit, give a structured schedule- make it visual

OVERSTIMULATED

What it feels like/how it affects me	Shooting lasers coming out of my body, painful, eyes and ears burn, blank thoughts, everything is too loud, disassociate/ blackout, like I need to run away
What it may look like-but is often not	Childish, scared, frightened, throwing a tantrum, crazy, defiance, willfulness, passive aggressive, stubborn, irrational, anger, extremely anxious
How others can tell	Covering my ears, curl up, hitting things, yelling, pacing, stuttering, mutism, waving my arms, rocking, increase in fidgeting, unable to follow directions, refusal to eat, repeat things, stare off into space, more obsessive, squeeze my eyes shut, tense my body and become very still, become overly hyper, unable to calm down, excessive movement, may become hyper fixated on small details
What others can do to help	Take me out of current environment and to somewhere with little noise and low lighting, limit verbiage, give me one step directions, suggest I use earplugs or headphones, suggest I use sunglasses, hand me my coping tools if unable to execute on my own, deep pressure, suggest I listen to music, allow me to do what I need in order to calm down before asking me to engage in task or conversation, assure me its ok to use coping strategies, don't judge me, don't interrupt me if I am taking a sensory break.. let me finish, don't personalize my abrupt or loud behaviors



What do I do When you Feel...

This tool can be used to help in relationships. It is made together with another person and serves as a guide to help one know what to do when his/her friend, spouse, parent, or etc. is feeling a certain way. Below is a sample of what this tool can look like.

Feelings	What it can look like (person w/o autism)	What I need to do (person with autism)
Focused	Scott is reading or writing. He may answer my questions in one or two word answers and can seem abrupt	If I need to say something write it down and place it on his desk. I can also say "Can I tell you something?" or "When you have a moment I need to tell you something." If he needs some time to finish before listening ask "How much time do I need to give you?"
Proud of an accomplishment	Scott smiles. He will often express he finished a particular activity and will talk a little bit about it.	Smile and give him a hug. Say "I am proud of you!" Ask Scott follow up questions about his accomplishment. Try to keep the conversation focused on him and his accomplishment. Give him a card or write a note that expresses that I am also proud for what he has done.
Angry	Scott may raise his voice and become red in the face. He may isolate himself and refuse to talk.	Give him, or both of us, time to calm down. Say "We need to talk about this when we are calmer." Use written communication to express self if needed.
Hurt	Scott becomes quiet and isolates himself in the room. He may cry, cover his head, or refuse to eat. His face has a big frown on it.	Ask: "Are you ok?" and "What is wrong?" If I said or did something that upset him ask for clarification and listen to his reply. Acknowledge his hurt feelings by saying "I understand how that could have been hurtful and I am sorry you feel that way." If Scott is hurt for another reason ask "What can I do to help?" and give him a hug.



Understanding my Emotions Worksheet

This came out of the workbook Living Well on the Spectrum by Valerie L. Gaus, PHD

Understanding My Emotions




For use when evaluating an upsetting event.

Fill this out soon after an event during which you found yourself very upset.

Date and time of event: _____

1. Briefly describe the event: *I was upset when* _____

2. Now look at the words, pictures, and synonyms below. On the top row are the basic negative emotions, and underneath are some common words that have similar meanings. Which of these emotions do you suspect was involved in your reaction to the event? Circle the relevant emotion. You can circle more than one.

Sadness 	Anger 	Fear 
Depressed Miserable Devastated Down	Enraged Annoyed Frustrated Irritated	Terrified Anxious Tense Nervous

3. *I felt* _____, *which may be a signal that I needed something.*

4. *Maybe I needed* _____

5. *Feeling* _____ *is a natural part of life and I accept that I felt that way.*

6. *Now think about what was around you that may have helped you meet your need. This could be an object or a person. I could have used* _____

to help me meet my need.

7. *In circumstances like these, I may* _____

to address my need.

From *Living Well on the Spectrum* by Valerie L. Gaus. Copyright 2011 by The Guilford Press.

