

Get to Know an Emotion Cycle

Identify a recent emotional experience that you want to reflect on. In a couple sentences, describe what happened:

Name the emotion and the degree of intensity you experienced:

Describe

1. Prompting event: What event triggered this cycle? This is the who, what, when, and where.

2. Interpretation: How did you interpret the event? This is the why.

3. Physical response: What happened in your body?

4. Urge to act: What did you want to do?

5. Action: What did you actually do? What did you say? Be specific.

6. After effects: What was the consequence of what happened and how you responded?

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Reflect:

Where in your cycle do you think you could most easily make a change and steer your experience in a different direction?

Look at how you interpreted the event—stage 2 - What other ways are there to see the situation? How might a different way to interpret the situation shift your emotional experience?

If you had an intense physical response (for example, you got a pounding headache, burst into tears, or started shaking), you most likely need to start with the physiological aspect. When your body is in high alert, you won't be able to think rationally. What could you do in the moment when you're experiencing an intense physical response?

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Example of Getting to Know an Emotion Cycle

What happened: *I got really frustrated because my principal did a surprise observation, and it was only the first week of school. The emotion was frustration (or anger), and the level of intensity was a 6.*

Describe

1. Prompting event: What event triggered this cycle? This is the who, what, when, and where.

My principal showed up in my classroom, unannounced, on the fifth day of school this year to do a formal evaluation.

2. Interpretation: How did you interpret the event? This is the why.

I interpreted this as she wanted to check up on me because my evaluation last spring wasn't great. She moved me to kindergarten, and I've never taught this before, and I feel like every move I make is being watched.

3. Physical response: What happened in your body?

I felt my stomach tighten. I felt my breath get shorter.

4. Urge to act: What did you want to do?

I wanted to either run from the room or tell my principal to get out.

5. Action: What did you actually do? What did you say? Be specific.

I kept teaching. I ignored her. I focused on my kids. I wasn't as relaxed as usual, but I moved on in the lesson. My hands were shaking, though. I think I appeared really nervous.

6. After effects: What was the consequence of what happened and how you responded?

I felt sick all day. I felt exhausted and also angry. I feel like she's trying to catch me messing up so she can get rid of me.

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Example of Getting to Know an Emotion Cycle

Reflect

Where in your cycle do you think you could most easily make a change and steer your experience in a different direction? *To start with, I think I could intervene in my physical response.*

I got so nervous that I wasn't at my best.

Look at how you interpreted the event. Is there any other way of seeing the situation? If so, might taking that stance change the rest of your emotional experience?

Maybe she came in because she wants to help me. When we had our debrief conversation a couple days later, she actually had some useful ideas. She used to be a kindergarten teacher. I also know that she observed everyone in the first two weeks, so I guess I wasn't being singled out. But I didn't know this when she came in. Maybe I need to give her more of the benefit of the doubt.

What could you do in the moment when you're experiencing an intense physical response?

Taking really deep breaths always helps me. I think I'll put up a sign in my classroom that says, "Breathe!" That might help me remember when I get anxious.