STRESS AND EMOTION · ONE PAGE EXPLAINER

Emotion granularity

The more precisely you can name a feeling, the more you can do with it.

Emotion granularity is the ability to distinguish between similar feelings with precision. Someone with high granularity does not just feel bad. They feel disappointed, or rejected, or embarrassed, or bored. It sounds like a vocabulary lesson. It is closer to a regulation skill.

WHY GRANULARITY MATTERS

Names change the signal
The brain uses your labels to build the feeling. A more specific label produces a more specific signal, which is easier to respond to than a vague pull.

Names guide action
Sad points to comfort. Angry points to boundary. Anxious points to a threat check. Bad does not point anywhere.

Names shrink intensity
Studies show that accurately naming an emotion reduces the reactivity linked to it. It is not a magic trick. It is the shift from being the feeling to observing it.

It predicts wellbeing
Higher emotion granularity is associated with less depression, less anxiety, better relationships, and better response to therapy in multiple studies.

It is a skill, not a trait
You can build it. Reading and writing about emotions expands the vocabulary. Paying deliberate attention to inside your body sharpens the discrimination.

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

- When you notice a feeling, try to name it more precisely than your first attempt. If you land on "upset," try again. Is it hurt, angry, disappointed, ashamed?
- Keep a feelings word list somewhere accessible. When words are missing, granularity is capped by what you can access.
- Notice the body signature that goes with a name. Pairing name to sensation is what makes the label real.

Developed and studied extensively by Lisa Feldman Barrett and colleagues, building on constructionist theories of emotion.

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