Emotions as Teachers

Exploring Curiosity, Learning, and Change

A 30-minute interactive session for instructors, students, and everyone — no matter your role

Kerri Weishoff, MS, CCC-SLP, NBC-HWC

University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

WELCOME



Take a moment, and one easy breath, before we start.

OUR TIME TOGETHER

1

Why Emotions Matter

Information and a guide

2

Acknowledgement

The value of acknowledgement

3

Practice

Listening and reflecting

4

Reflection & Close

Reflection and application

Interactive throughout — you are invited to participate at whatever level feels right.

WHO THIS IS FOR

Is this presentation for instructors or students?

Yes… AND all who are in attendance

Invite
To invite you to approach emotions with curiosity and to explore their value in the teaching and learning process and daily life.

Model
As instructors, we model it: noticing how our own emotions set the emotional tone of the room. This applies to all situations.

Extend
Then we extend it: inviting those around us to notice what they feel and what it tells them about where they are at in their day or learning.



Emotions are part of the daily weave of life for all individuals

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Explain

how emotions serve as powerful teachers that provide information and influence decision-making, learning, and behavior change.

Demonstrate

skills for approaching emotions with curiosity and the value of acknowledging and reflecting them.

Apply

strategies to create a safe, mindful learning environment that encourages curiosity about noticing and being with emotions to support learning and everyday life.



WHAT ARE EMOTIONS?

**“Emotions give us Information,
fuel our actions, help us take care of
and navigate our human concerns.”**

“They are a guide.”

- Dan Newby

A WORLD OF EMOTIONS

The origin of the word emotion can be translated as “the energy that moves us.”






Emotions are our fuel for action, the link between our thinking and our doing.

How many emotions do we have? **150**

How long does an emotion last? **1.5 minutes**

Nothing happens without them.

EMOTIONS HAVE RANGE



- Each key and each emotion has a unique pitch
- Some we employ often, some rarely
- They can be loud or soft, short or sustained
- They can be played singly or in chords
- Some are consonant, others are dissonant
- Their speed of occurrence varies

HOW EMOTIONS SHOW UP

Emotions show up in many ways, in many situations.



They tell us what we are thinking and feeling about an area of our life.



Emotions are teachers. They bring insight.



Acknowledge and inquire: the deeper message is where the insight lives.



Honor them. Be with them. Normalize them.

THE BENEFIT OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

When you acknowledge an emotion and allow it to be seen, it will do one of three things:







Dissipate

Shift

Set Free

ACKNOWLEDGING EMOTIONS

EMOTION (hear – see – sense)	ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF EMOTION
JOY	“Your eyes look bright and you are smiling”
ANGER	“You're holding your hands very tightly.”
SMILING	“Tell me about that smile?”
TREMBLING VOICE	“I hear emotion in your voice.”
SADNESS	“You looked down and became very quiet…”
UPLIFTED POSTURE	“You lifted your head up and sat up taller just now.”

NOTICE THE EMOTION







~~I am angry.~~

I am noticing that I am feeling angry.

A little space opens up.

NOTICE THE EMOTION — DON'T BECOME IT

Instead of: **“I am angry.”**

The emotion becomes my identity — and it runs the moment.

Try: **“I am noticing that I am feeling angry.”**

A little space opens. I can observe the feeling instead of being swept up in it.

Same move works with students: “What are you noticing right now?”

~~**I am angry.**~~

I am noticing that I am feeling angry.

A little space opens up.

JUST BREATHE

just breathe



How Can We Support Ourselves When Emotions Present?

Pause and describe or name it

"I am noticing frustration." Naming lowers the intensity and restores access to thinking.

Ground the body first

Slow the exhale, feel your feet, unclench the jaw. Regulation comes before reasoning.

Get curious, not critical

Ask "What is this emotion asking for?" instead of "What is wrong with me?"

Offer yourself compassion

Speak to yourself with kindness, as a good friend would.

Choose one small next step

Decide from values, not from the peak of the feeling.

Reach for connection

Say it out loud to someone safe, emotions move when they are witnessed.

The goal is not to get rid of the emotion — it is to stay in relationship with it.

Breakout Practice: Listening for the Emotion Underneath

In dyads — practice acknowledging, reflecting, and listening for underlying emotions, while noticing your own reactions.

Ask your partner:
“Tell me about a decision you have to make, or something else that you may have a bit of emotion around.”

1. ACKNOWLEDGE

Describe what you observe, without interpreting: “Your voice shifted just then.”

2. REFLECT

Offer the emotion back: “It sounds like there’s some emotion there.”

3. EXPLORE

Invite the story: “What are you noticing?” “What does that feeling want you to know?”

Partner A shares ~2 minutes • Partner B listens, reflects, inquires, no advice • Switch roles • Then pause — let silence do the work.

Curiosity over judgment. What is shared here stays here.

INSIGHTS AND TAKEAWAYS

Emotions are information

They give us information, fuel our actions, and guide our concerns.

Notice it — don't become it

“I am noticing that I am feeling angry.” Naming opens a little space.

Acknowledgement changes it

When an emotion is seen and allowed, it can dissipate, shift, or be set free.

Honor them, be with them, explore them

Describe what you observe, reflect it back, then ask: “What does it want you to know?”

Take one thing with you — and practice it this week.

THE GUEST HOUSE

THE GUEST HOUSE

This being human is a guest house.

Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a sorrow, a meanness,
some passing awareness arrives
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and attend them all —
even if they sweep your house empty
of its furniture. Still, treat each guest
honorably; each may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice —
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
for each has been sent as a guide.

— Rumi

"Welcome and entertain them all…
treat each guest honorably."

Every emotion is a visitor with something to say. We do not have to like the guest to learn from it.

As we close, which guest has been knocking lately, and what might it be here to teach you?

ABOUT THE PRESENTER

Kerri Weishoff is a Speech Pathologist with over 25 years of experience and a National Board-Certified Health and Wellness Coach.

She integrates a clinical health coaching approach emphasizing emotional awareness, self-compassion, and behavior change to support meaningful outcomes.

Kerri taught Whole Health and health coaching within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for nine years, developing both Veterans and healthcare teams.

She currently teaches complementary and integrative health at UW–Milwaukee and health and wellness coaching at the University of Houston and is a team member with the Institute of Behavior Change.

Known for her authentic presence and creative teaching style, she guides learners toward deeper insight, growth, and purpose-driven lives.