Functions of Specific Emotions

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Fear: Fear organizes our responses to threats to our life, health, or well-being. It focuses us on escape from danger.

Anger: Anger organizes our responses to the blocking of important goals or activities or to an imminent attack on the self or to important others. It focuses us on self-defense, mastery and control.

Disgust: Disgust organizes our responses to situations and things that are offensive and contaminating. It focuses us on rejecting and distracting ourselves from some object, event, or situation.

Sadness: Sadness organizes our responses to losses of someone or something important, and to goals lost or not attained. It focuses us on what is valued and the pursuit of goals, as well as on communicating to others that we need help.

Shame: Shame organizes responses related to personal characteristics or our own behaviors that are dishonoring or sanctioned by our own community. It focuses us on hiding transgressions and, if these are already public, engaging in appeasement-related behaviors.

Guilt: Guilt organizes responses related to specific actions that have led to violation of values. It focuses us on actions and behaviors that are likely to repair the violation.

Jealousy: Jealousy organizes responses to others who threaten to take away relationships or things very important to us. It focuses us on protecting what we have.

Envy: Envy organizes our responses to others' getting or having things we do not have but want or need. It focuses us on working hard to obtain what other people have.

Love: Love organizes our responses related to reproduction and survival. It focuses us on union with and attachment to others.

Happiness: Happiness organizes our responses to optimal functioning of ourselves, others we care about, or the social groups we are part of. It focuses us on continuing activities that enhance pleasure and personal and social value.