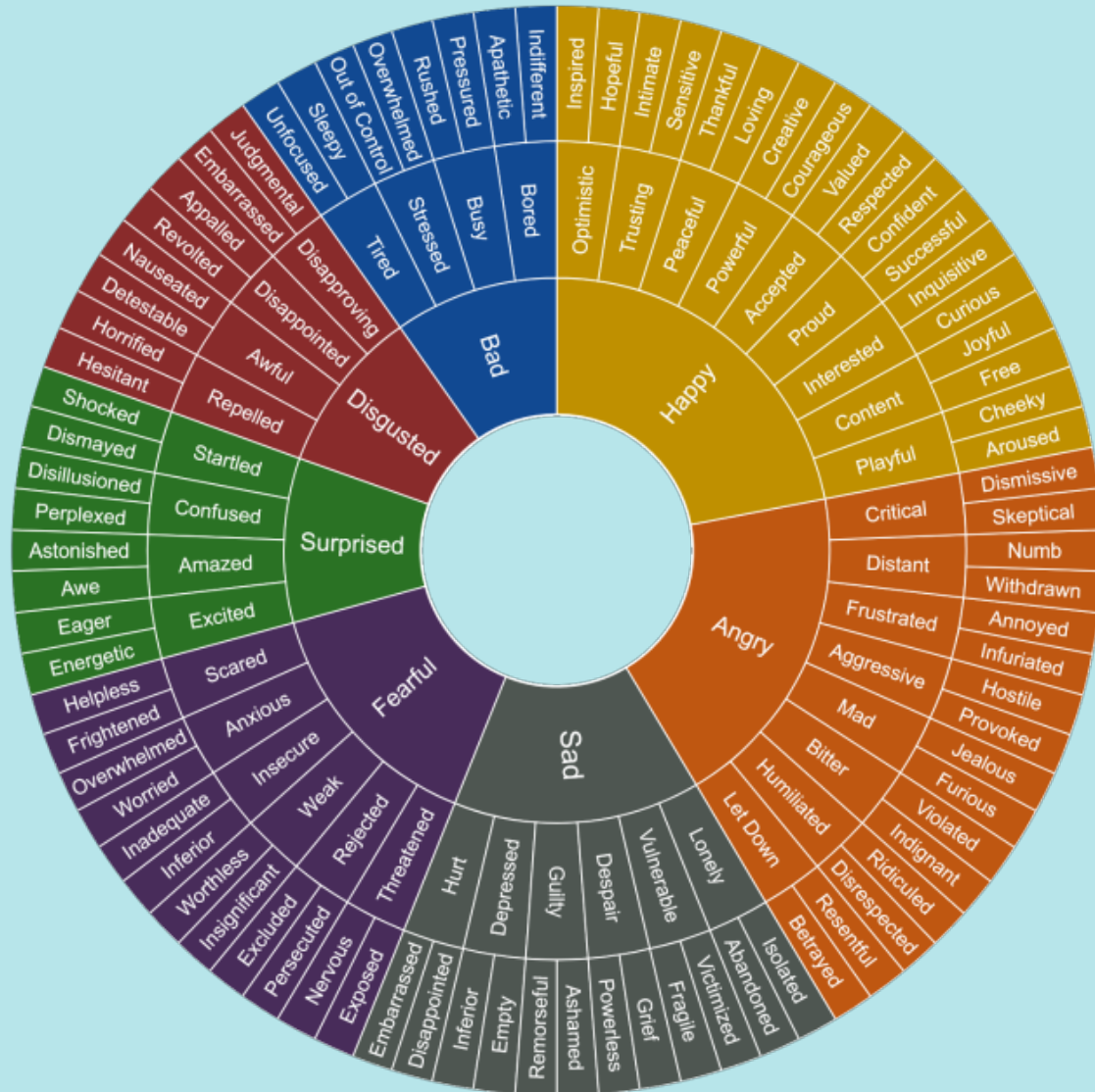




Building an Emotional Vocabulary

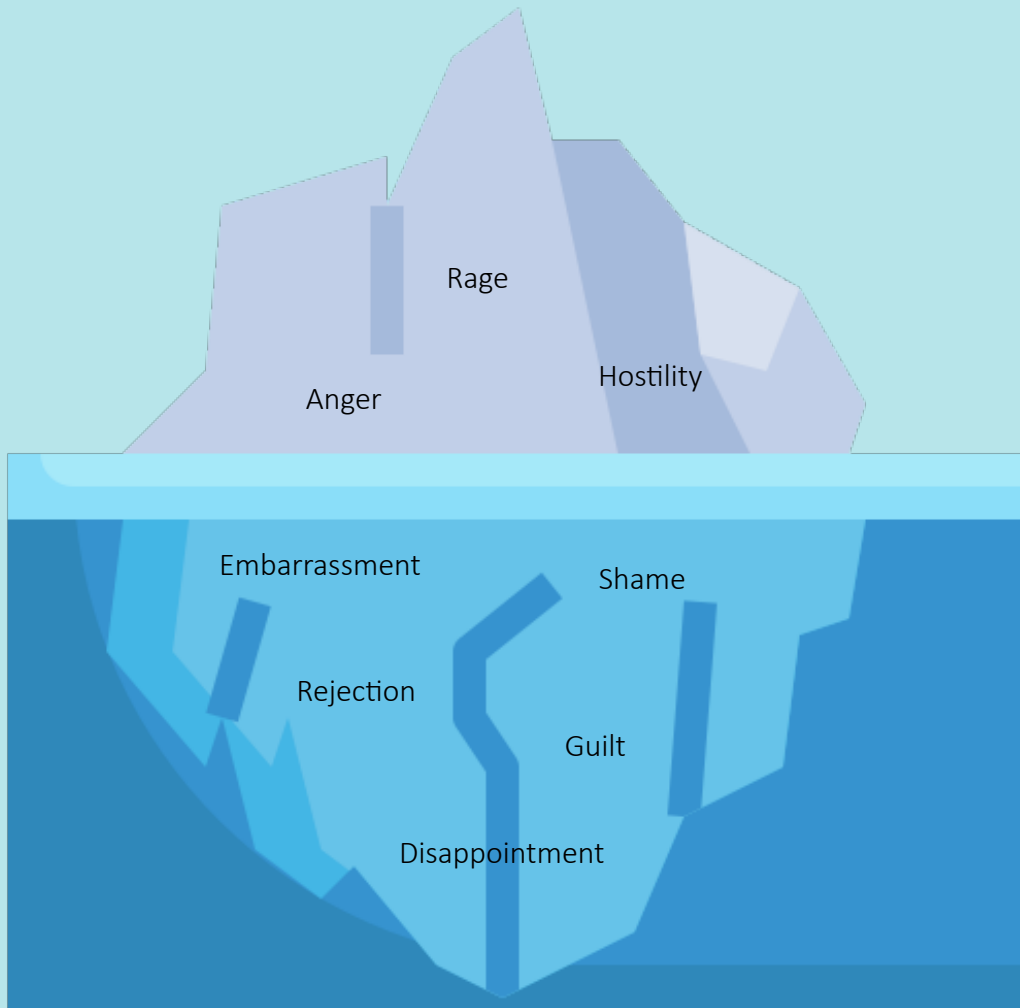
Most of us are familiar with the “big” emotions (sad, mad, happy) and can identify when we’re feeling a certain way. However, most of the emotions we’re commonly able to label are not the true root of what we’re feeling. Below is one example of a *feelings wheel*, which shows us primary emotions, or the most common feeling words in the centre ring, secondary emotions in the middle ring, and tertiary, or more specific emotions on the outer ring. Take a look at the wheel and spend some time reflecting on the different rings and labels you see.



What did you notice while reflecting on the different emotion words listed in each ring? You’re likely most familiar with the emotions in the centre and middle rings, and less familiar with the terms in the outer ring. This is common for most people who are seeing a feelings wheel for the first time. There are many different versions of this tool that utilize different labels, so feel free to explore other versions and find one that feels most fitting for you.



Another way we can begin to understand our emotions more clearly is by understanding what might be lying underneath our most noticeable feelings. A helpful exercise we can use to practice this is called the *emotional iceberg*. Oftentimes, we'll identify with bigger, more familiar emotions such as anger, when there is something more vulnerable or uncomfortable underneath, such as rejection. An example of an emotional iceberg is shown below.



Consider your most recent experience with strong emotions. What labels might have been on the surface for you, and what else might have been lurking underneath? The more we are able to connect and identify with the underlying emotions, the better we can understand our reactions and give ourselves what we might need in challenging moments. Having a more robust emotional vocabulary and a stronger understanding of our feelings can also make communication easier, as we have more of a handle on why we are responding in a certain way, and what needs we might have. Getting in touch with these underlying emotions can take a great deal of vulnerability and discomfort, but can open the door to a new connection with yourself and a greater sense of emotional intelligence.