

Member's Quarterly

Fall 2025 Edition

Feature

The Power of Words

Language patterns and emotions



Eleanor Kibrick
MSc

We all get 'upset' from time to time. The word 'upset' is a very generalized term. Are we angry, fearful, sad or apathetic? Our word patterns give us valuable information to know what emotions we're dealing with. We can also use this awareness to empathize with our colleagues and friends. Our professional and personal lives will benefit from this understanding.

"The names of things matter because the images shape our thoughts and feelings, which in turn affect our bodies. Expectation plays a major role. For example – placing the label "heartbroken" on an emotional response can cause actual physical distress," as Barbara Hoberan Levine quotes in "Your Body Believes Every Word You Say".

Anger

Common word patterns that describe anger are often words of denial. For examples, "I'm not angry, I'm just frustrated." or "I'm not angry, I'm just irritated" or "I'm not angry, I'm just annoyed." Frustration, irritation and annoyance are all expressions of anger.

Once we identify the emotion expressed in those words, we can explore ways to de-escalate the intensity. Expressing anger is human. Staying in a state of habitual anger is hard on our mental, emotional and physical health.

So, what can we do? First of all, it's important to pull back and give ourselves time – time to have compassion for ourselves, to forgive and accept ourselves.

Then, we can wait for a time to address the anger by connecting with the person or situation causing the anger. We can say, for example, "I apologize for being angry with you. I do want to hear what you have to say and understand where you're coming from. Let's begin again and work together."

Fear

We can also recognize fear by our language patterns. We can think/say, for example, "what if it doesn't work" or "what if I fail" or "I feel nervous/shaky." These express fear. Or we can deny our fear with statements like "I want to go for it, I'm not afraid" or "let's talk about something else" or "what you're saying is making me nervous."

What can we do as a practice to calm ourselves, to encourage a positive outcome?

If possible, we can take the time to be alone and — in our imagination — experience being happy and victorious at overcoming our fear. We can choose to be courageous and imagine overcoming the obstacles. This may take a number of repetitions — a worthwhile practice.

Sadness

The language of sadness is often expressed through the words 'always' and 'never.' When we hear ourselves saying "you never call me," this tells us we are sad. Another expression would be "I always have to call you." This may sound like blame and, underneath, this tells us we're sad.

Once we understand that we're feeling sad, we can dive deeper and find out what we regret or what has disappointed or dissatisfied us.

Member's Quarterly

Fall 2025 Edition

Feature continued

One major antidote is to remember what we're grateful for. Another is to remember and do what makes us happy. We can meet a friend for dinner, or we can join a group of like-minded people or call someone and invite them over.

Apathy

The language of apathy includes thinking/saying things like "I can't" or 'it's too hard' or "I don't care" or "it doesn't matter."

These word patterns sap energy, leaving us feeling helpless or hopeless. It's hard to get up in the morning and face a new day. The antidote to those feelings is using words of action like "I can," "I will" or "I choose."

Understanding the language of emotions can enhance and sustain us in our personal and professional well-being.

"The world we see that seems so insane is the result of a belief system that is not working. To perceive the world differently, we must be willing to change our belief systems, let the past slip away, expand our sense of now, and dissolve the fear in our minds," as stated by Gerald Jampolsky, M.D. in "Love is Letting Go of Fear".

Eleanor Kibrick is a certified coach and group facilitator who works with individuals, business teams and other groups to work effectively using clearer communications. She can be reached via email at eleanor@eleanorkibrick.com.