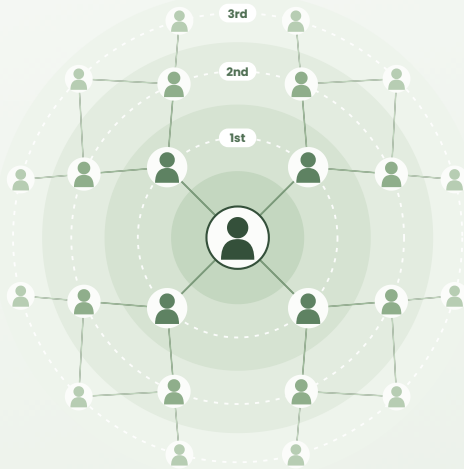


Emotional Contagion

HOW FEELINGS SPREAD FROM PERSON TO PERSON

Our tendency to automatically "catch" the emotions of people around us — through faces, voice, posture and energy — often without realising it. Developed by Elaine Hatfield, John Cacioppo and Richard Rapson in *Emotional Contagion* (1994).



HOW A FEELING TRAVELS

1

Automatic mimicry

We subtly copy others' facial expressions, voice, posture and movement — largely below conscious awareness.

2

Feedback from the body

Those mimicked expressions and postures feed back into our own emotional state.

3

A shared feeling

We begin to feel something similar — and pass it on to the next person.

● Source

● Direct contact

● Second-hand

● Further out

Three-step model adapted from Hatfield, Cacioppo & Rapson (1994)

Understanding the Effect Where it shows up, why, and who feels it most

HOW IT SHOWS UP

Everyday Ripples

A tense meeting where everyone's shoulders creep up. Laughter spreading through a room. A calm caregiver settling an anxious child — or the reverse.

THE BIOLOGICAL BASIS

Shared Brain Responses

Watching someone's emotion activates some of the same brain systems involved in feeling it ourselves. The role of "mirror neurons" in humans is still debated.

WHO IS MORE SUSCEPTIBLE

It Varies by Person

Susceptibility differs between people. It tends to be higher in those who are more empathic, and in close or trusted relationships.

What the Research Shows Key studies — and what they can and can't tell us

2014

STRESS

Stress can be "caught"

Some people watching a stranger go through a stressful task showed their own cortisol rise — more so when watching a romantic partner.

2014

PARENTS

From parent to infant

After mothers experienced stress, their infants' physiological stress responses rose in step with their mothers'.

2008

NETWORKS

Happiness clusters

A long-term study found happiness clustered in social networks up to three degrees apart.
Observational — shared circumstances may also explain it.

2014

ONLINE

The Facebook study

Reducing positive posts in ~690,000 users' feeds led to slightly fewer positive posts of their own.
Effects were very small, and consent was widely criticised.

Living With It Using contagion well, and protecting yourself

WHY IT MATTERS

- Shapes team morale, family atmosphere and group dynamics
- Can spread calm and warmth as well as stress
- Operates online as well as face to face

WAYS TO USE IT WELL

- Notice your own state before entering a room
- Be intentional about the tone you bring
- Seek out people and places that leave you steadier

WAYS TO PROTECT YOURSELF

- Ask: "Is this mood mine, or did I pick it up?"
- Create space from chronically high-stress settings
- Curate your digital feeds with the same care

We don't just witness each other's emotions — we catch them.

WHOSE MOOD TENDS TO INFLUENCE MINE MOST?

WHAT EMOTIONAL "TONE" DO I OFTEN BRING INTO A ROOM?

WHERE MIGHT I NEED MORE DISTANCE FROM A CONTAGIOUS STATE?

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