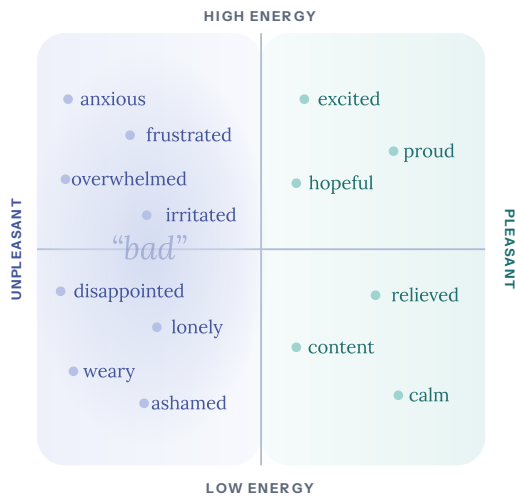


Emotional Granularity

The skill of naming feelings precisely

Emotional granularity, a term popularised by psychologist Lisa Feldman Barrett, is the ability to tell feelings apart with precision instead of lumping them into broad states like **“bad”**, **“stressed”** or **“fine”**. It is less about knowing clever words, and more about noticing the real differences in what you feel, so you can respond to what is actually going on.



LOW GRANULARITY

One foggy feeling

Many different experiences blur into a single broad label, like the haze over the left of the map.

“I just feel bad.”

HIGH GRANULARITY

Distinct, named feelings

Each feeling has its own place and message, which points toward a more helpful response.

“I feel disappointed, and a little embarrassed.”

Feelings can be placed by how pleasant they are and how much energy they carry (Russell, 1980).

01 Why precision matters

Different feelings point to different needs

THE FEELING	WHAT IT MAY BE TELLING ME	A RESPONSE THAT MIGHT HELP
Frustrated	Something is blocking a goal	Problem-solve, or ask for help
Disappointed	A hope wasn't met	Acknowledge the loss; adjust expectations
Lonely	A need for connection	Reach out to someone
Anxious	A possible threat ahead	Check the facts, plan, or soothe
Resentful	A limit may have been crossed	Consider speaking up or setting a boundary

02 What the research links it to

Using more ways to regulate emotions

Barrett et al., 2001

Less heavy drinking when distressed

Kashdan et al., 2010

Less aggression when angry

Pond et al., 2012

Less self-injury in borderline personality

Zaki et al., 2013

Lower granularity found in depression

Demiralp et al., 2012

These are associations, mostly for unpleasant feelings. Granularity varies between people and over time, and like other skills it can grow with practice (Kashdan et al., 2015).

03 Building greater granularity

01

Pause on the vague word

Treat “bad”, “stressed” or “fine” as a starting point, not the answer.

02

Place it on the map

Is it pleasant or unpleasant? High or low energy? That narrows it down.

03

Try three words

Name a few candidates and notice which fits best, or which feelings are mixed.

04

Ask what it needs

Notice the context: what happened, what matters, and what might help.

04 My feelings log

Try this a few times this week

THE VAGUE WORD bad, stressed, fine...	MORE PRECISE WORDS try two or three	WHAT IT MAY BE TELLING ME	WHAT I DID, OR COULD DO

SOURCES

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