

# Value of Negative Emotions

Valuing negative emotions means seeing them not as flaws or failures, but as essential signals, sources of meaning, and paths to growth. It's a mindset shift supported by research in psychology, leadership, trauma recovery, and theology. Here's how to think about it from multiple angles:



## 1. Understand Why You Have Negative Emotions

Negative emotions—like grief, sadness, anger, fear, guilt—have evolutionary and psychological purposes:

| Emotion | Functional purpose                                       |
|---------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Fear    | Signals danger; triggers protective behavior             |
| Sadness | Slows us down to process loss and recalibrate            |
| Guilt   | Encourages moral repair; maintains relationships         |
| Anger   | Highlights injustice; mobilizes boundary-setting         |
| Shame   | Promotes humility and course correction (when not toxic) |



## 2. Reframe Negative Emotions as Meaningful (Tsai et al., 2007; Selmi et al., 2024)



Instead of asking, “How do I get rid of this feeling?” ask:

- “What is this emotion trying to tell me?”
- “Is there a value underneath this pain?”
- “What needs healing, changing, or protecting?”

This shift from avoidance to inquiry opens the door to meaning and growth.

*“Painful emotions are messengers—telling us what matters.”—Susan David, Emotional Agility*

## 3. Create Space for ‘Hard’ Emotions in Relationships (Dempsey, 2017)

Valuing negative emotions includes making room for them in oneself, relationships, caregiving, and spiritual life: **In trauma-informed relationships:** Recognize that grief, fear, and anger often emerge as part of healing—not as signs of weakness.

**In spiritual communities:** Lament, mourning, and righteous anger are not failures of faith. They are biblical (see Psalms, Lamentations, Jesus weeping).

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”  
—Matthew 5:4



#### 4. Practice Emotional Integration, Not Suppression (Wong, 2011; Mendonça, 2022)

Psychologist Paul Wong (founder of existential positive psychology) argues that authentic wellbeing depends on integrating the dark side of life—not denying it.

##### Try this:

- When you feel a difficult emotion, name it specifically (e.g., “I feel helpless” not just “bad”).
- Ask: “What unmet need or value is underneath this?”
- Write or speak about it with someone safe—articulation reduces overwhelm.



#### ◆ 5. Use Cultural and Theological Resources



Different cultures and faiths offer practices to help hold space for difficult feelings (Bachem et al., 2024):

**Christianity:** Embraces grief, sorrow, and lament as spiritual practices—Jesus himself expressed anger, sorrow, and anguish.

**Japanese philosophy:** Wabi-sabi and mono no aware accept impermanence and beauty in melancholy.

**Narrative therapy:** Helps people re-story negative emotions as part of a heroic or redemptive arc.

#### ◆ 6. Teach & Model Emotion Values (Tsai, 2007; Omar et al., 2023)

In relationships, therapy, education, or parenting:

**Model emotional honesty:** “I felt really discouraged this week, and I took some time to reflect and reconnect with my purpose.”

**Create room for hard conversations:** Not just cheerleading, but grief, fear, and moral struggle.

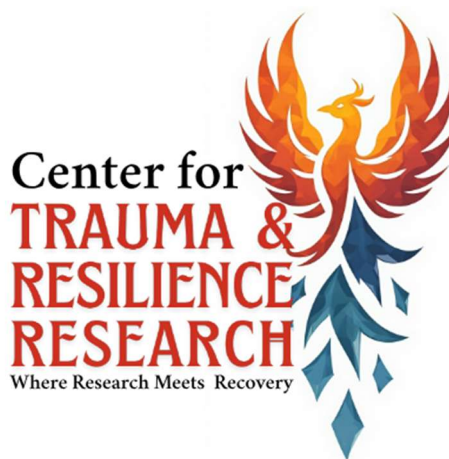
#### 📌 Reflection Questions (for personal or spiritual journaling)

- What “negative” emotion have I been avoiding?
- What does this emotion want for me—not to punish, but to protect or reveal?
- How have I grown through sorrow or struggle in the past?
- Where can I allow more space for emotion—in myself and others?

## References

- Bachem, R., Mazza, A., Eberle, D. J., & Maercker, A. (2024). A new approach to cultural scripts of trauma sequelae assessment: The sample case of Switzerland. *PloS One*, 19(4), e0301645-. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0301645>
- Dempsey, C. (2017). *The Antidote to Suffering: How Compassionate Connected Care Can Improve Safety, Quality, and Experience* (1st edition). McGraw-Hill.
- Mendonça, L. (2022). Transforming our emotional agility. *NASN School Nurse*, 37(2):62-63. [doi:10.1177/1942602X221077305](https://doi.org/10.1177/1942602X221077305)
- Omar, M. K., Rahman, A. H. M., Singh, B. S. B., Venkatasen, K., Mahmud, J., Abdullah, S. C., Roseley, N. R. N., & Manurung, Y. H. P. (2023). Learning agility, emotional intelligence and change adoption among teachers in Terengganu, Malaysia. *AIP Conference Proceedings*, 2571(1). <https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0115641>
- Selmi, W., Hammami, A., Hammami, R., Ceylan, H. İ., Morgans, R., & Simenko, J. (2024). Effects of a 6-week agility training program on emotional intelligence and attention levels in adolescent tennis players. *Applied Sciences*, 14(3), 1070-. <https://doi.org/10.3390/app14031070>
- Tsai, J. L. (2007). Ideal affect: Cultural causes and behavioral consequences. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 2(3), 242–259. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6916.2007.00043.x>
- Tsai, J. L., Miao, F. F., & Seppala, E. (2007). Good feelings in Christianity and Buddhism: Religious differences in ideal affect. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 33(3), 409–421. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167206296107>
- Wong, P. T. P. (2011). Positive psychology 2.0: Towards a balanced interactive model of the good life. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie canadienne*, 52(2), 69–81. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022511>

600 1st Ave Ste 330  
PMB 100974  
Seattle, Washington 98104-2246 US  
(541)630-3888; FAX: (360) 251-0821  
Website: [www.ctrinc.com](http://www.ctrinc.com)  
Nonsecure email: [trauma.resilience.research@gmail.com](mailto:trauma.resilience.research@gmail.com)  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-0661-3461>  
©2025



## Author Note

Dr. Meg Robertson  
I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.  
Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to  
Margaret Robertson

Email: [trauma.resilience.research@gmail.com](mailto:trauma.resilience.research@gmail.com)