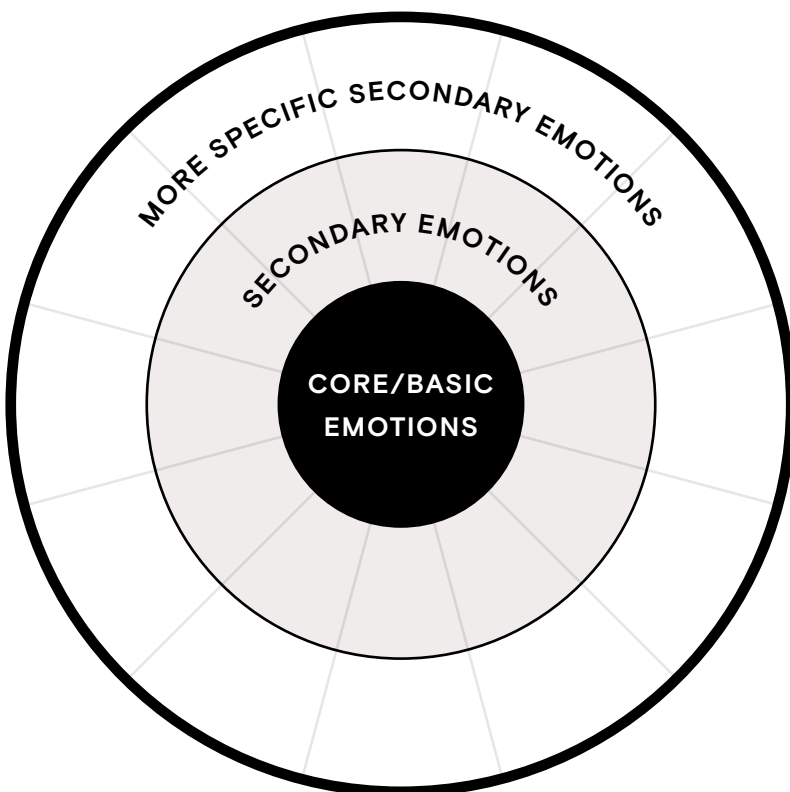


What is a Feelings Wheel?

A Feelings Wheel is a practical tool used to help recognize and communicate feelings. Although it may seem a bit extra, a Feelings Wheel is a way to work smarter, not harder, with teenagers when identifying and managing emotions.

To get a better picture, a Feelings Wheel is a circle that at the center has “core” or “basic” emotions (emotions that are more easily identified or expressed) and more complex or “secondary” emotions on the outer edge:



Why use a Feelings Wheel in church?

By talking about feelings, and increasing your students emotional vocabulary, you're helping students realize that God has created us with complex and powerful emotions. In Scripture—there are incredible examples of very real people experiencing very raw emotions.

When you help students learn to identify and manage those emotions well, they'll gain a deeper understanding of how they can love God and others as themselves.

You don't have to be reminded that students are walking through hard stuff, and experiencing a range of emotions and feelings. They need to be reminded that God is big, and God can handle their emotions. More than that, they need to know that they're not alone in their emotions. God is with them, and there are people by their side along the way.

How a Feelings Wheel Works

The more specific your student can be in labeling their emotions, the more understanding you will have for them and they will have for themselves.

To use the Feelings Wheel:

- 1 Start in the center circle and choose the core emotion you think you are feeling.
- 2 Move outward to the middle circle where it breaks down that feeling even more.
- 3 Finally, identify and select the more specific emotions that you connect with on the outer edges of the circle.

Each circle informs the next outer circle as you get more specific with your feelings. Your goal is to break down general feelings into more specific feelings.

These more specific emotions are what you can explain to others so that they have a deeper understanding of what you are experiencing. That's way better than the "frustrated" answer, right?

Not only is it helpful for others to understand what is going on inside of us, it is helpful for us to know what is going on inside of ourselves. When we identify our feelings specifically, we're able to learn how to respond and take care of those emotions more accurately.



Here's an example:

We might often say the feeling that we're experiencing is "frustrated." But "frustrated" might just be a blanket answer for being hurt, anxious, insecure, disappointed, or powerless. "Frustrated" can just be an answer to explain negativity without having to be vulnerable.

Aren't those other secondary emotions more honest and accurate though?

A Feelings Wheel allows us to open up instead of hiding behind what is the easy or standard answer. Increased relief comes with increased specificity in identifying our emotions and empathizing with them.

Core Emotions vs. Secondary Emotions

Core emotions can be seen as the eight-pack of crayons and secondary emotions are the 64-pack. The eight-pack gets you by with the necessities, while the 64-pack can be a blend of multiple emotions that provide a more specific label (for example, yellow vs. macaroni yellow).

Core emotions are happiness, sadness, disgust, fear, surprise, and anger. Secondary emotions encompass any other emotion.

With a Feelings Wheel, the core emotions are at the center of the circle—which is the easiest place to start.

Using the Feelings Wheel during Small Group

Model it!

When you participate in using a Feelings Wheel, you are modeling appropriate ways to process and communicate emotions as well as giving them an opportunity to share without feeling targeted or in the spotlight. When you share, your students will be able to see concrete examples of these feelings playing out in someone else's life. This will not only show them how to use the Feelings Wheel for themselves, but it will normalize talking about their feelings as well.

Use it regularly or randomly.

Add the Feelings Wheel to conversations about the highs and lows of each person's day. This allows greater insight into what your students day has been like as well as normalizes talking about real emotions instead of using just the easy or go-to answer.

Use it creatively.

Send a screenshot of the Feelings Wheel to students in their group periodically. They can post it on Snapchat, send it in a text, put it in an Instagram DM, or use it as a Zoom background for a virtual meetup. Include a simple question like, "How are you feeling?" so students can use the Feelings Wheel to respond.

Empathize.

Remember, there is no "wrong" emotion. When we say things like "don't cry" or "don't be sad," it is indirectly telling a kid it's wrong to feel that way. We all respond to situations differently, and our emotional response is no exception. By being specific in how we use our emotions, we can pinpoint a common shared experience that will allow us to understand what each other may be feeling. Empathizing with where they are allows them to feel accepted even if you do not agree. (That is a conversation for another time!)

Don't force sharing (especially with middle schoolers).

Your goal is to create a safe place for students. Some may not feel comfortable sharing openly. That's okay! Encourage them, but don't pressure them. A great alternative for middle schoolers is to close your eyes and point to a feeling. Ask them if they have ever felt that way. Or, ask if they have ever seen someone (even a character in a movie) feel that way. Ask them to tell you about it. It's often easier for a middle schooler to talk about someone else's feelings than their own because self-awareness is still developing.

Alternate your questions.

Asking specific questions can give students a more concrete starting place for the conversation.



Questions to Ask

- Which of these feelings did you feel a lot this week?
- Which of these feelings is hard for you to admit you feel?
- Which of these feelings do you have the hardest time dealing with in other people?
- Which of these feelings do you seem to never feel?
- Which of these feelings have you never heard of?
- Which of these feelings do you never want to feel?
- Which of these feelings do you not understand?
- Have you ever seen someone else feel that emotion?
- What's your favorite song to listen to when you're feeling that way?

The Feelings Wheel

