

How to Talk About Emotions in English – Video

In this lesson, you can learn how to talk about emotions in English. You'll also see different examples of English conversation talking about emotions in English.

You'll see how to talk about positive and negative feelings, about strong emotions and low-level emotions in different ways.

This lesson has four parts. In each part, you'll learn five to six words related to two different main emotions, like anger, fear or happiness.

1. Happiness/Fear

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/happy-kids-scaled.webp>)

Liam: You look pleased! What's going on?

Stephanie: I finally passed my driving test! I'm so happy!

L: Wow! Congratulations!

S: Thanks... It was my sixth attempt!

L: Sixth?

S: Yeah. I was really stressed beforehand. I've been feeling nervous for days, and I haven't been sleeping well, but in the end it went well.

L: That sounds stressful. What made you so scared? I mean, it's not the end of the world to fail your driving test.

S: I don't know. I just built it up in my head, and it became this huge thing. I honestly can't remember feeling so worried about anything in my life before.

L: You must be relieved to get it over with.

S: For sure. If I'd failed again, I think I'd have just given up.

L: Well, no need to think about that now!

Look at six words to talk about emotions in English which you heard in the dialogue.

pleased

stressed

nervous

scared

worried

relieved

First, a question: three of these words relate to feeling **fear**. Which three?

'Nervous', 'worried' and 'scared' are all feelings of fear. Do you know how they're different?

'Nervous' and 'worried' are both low-level fear. 'Scared' describes a more intense feeling. To describe extreme levels of fear, for example if you're in a life-threatening situation, you could use adjectives like 'terrified' or 'petrified'.

What about the other three adjectives – 'pleased', 'stressed' and 'relieved'? One is different from the other two – which one?

'Stressed' is different, because it's an unpleasant emotion. 'Pleased' is similar to 'happy', but 'pleased' is a reaction to a situation.

What does this mean?

In English, there are many pairs of words with a similar meaning, but one is used to describe a general state, while the other is used to describe a reaction to a specific situation. 'Happy' and 'pleased' are an example of this.

So, you can be 'happy' generally, or for long periods of time. You could say: 'She was happy throughout her retirement.' However, 'pleased' can't be used like this.

You feel pleased at one specific time. For example: 'I was pleased with how my painting turned out.'

Here, you could also use 'happy'. 'Happy' can replace 'pleased', but not the other way round.

There are other pairs like this; for example: 'sad – upset' or 'angry – cross'. The first word has a general meaning, and the second describes your reaction to something specific.

Finally, what about 'relieved'? What does that mean?

You feel relieved when you're free from pressure or stress. If you have a problem, and the problem is solved, you might feel relieved. Or, if you have an exam, and you think you might fail, you'll feel relieved when you pass.

Learn more about exam vocabulary in this Oxford Online English lesson: Talking About Exams – Listening (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/talking-about-exams>).

Let's look at our next section to talk about Emotions in English.

2. Sadness/Confusion

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/sad-woman-scaled.webp>)

In this section, we have a challenge for you. You'll hear a dialogue, as usual. There are six words talking about emotions in the dialogue. Listen and try to write them down.

Stephanie: How's work going?

Liam: Urgh... Don't ask.

S: Going well, then?

L: Don't even joke about it. I feel miserable. I dread going in every morning, and every day feels like an eternity.

S: Yeah, you seem a bit down. But, a couple of months ago you said things were going OK?

L: They were. Or, I thought they were. That's the problem – I'm so mixed up! Working in the fashion industry was always my dream, and I worked so hard to get an opportunity. But then, reality started to bite.

S: What do you think went wrong?

L: I'm supposed to be an event manager, but they don't actually let me make any decisions. I spend all day doing menial work. We had a team meeting last week, and they asked me to go out and get coffee! I felt so humiliated.

S: So, what are you going to do? You can't stay there, surely...

L: I don't know. I'm torn. On the one hand, you're right – I can't stay there. But on the other hand, what am I going to do? I was out of work for three months, and I need the money right now.

S: It's a tricky situation.

L: The worst thing is that it's affecting everything else in my life, too. I don't go out or do anything after work or at weekends. I just feel kind of apathetic; I don't have the energy to go anywhere.

S: Well, I don't know, but it doesn't sound like you can go on like this.

Did you get the six words? If you want, you can go back and listen again.

Here are the six words you heard.

miserable

down

mixed up

humiliated

torn

apathetic

These words relate to feelings of sadness, shame and confusion. Can you put the words into three groups?

'Miserable' and 'down' are both feelings of sadness. 'Miserable' is a strong word, which describes a deep unhappiness. 'Down' is often used when you're going through a difficult time in your life, and you feel unhappy generally.

'Apathetic' is also a feeling of sadness, although it's a little different. If you feel apathetic, you don't care about anything or have any interest in things. Feeling apathetic means you don't have much energy, and it's difficult to motivate yourself (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/improve-motivation-study-english>) to do anything.

Be careful not to mix up 'apathetic' and 'pathetic' – they sound similar, but the meanings are not related.

Next, 'mixed up' and 'torn' are both feelings of confusion. They both mean that you're caught between different possibilities, and you don't know what to do. To remember the word 'torn', think about the verb 'tear'. If you tear a piece of paper, you rip it into pieces. If you feel 'torn', it's as if you're being pulled in two different directions.

'Humiliated' is a strong form of 'embarrassed', meaning a deep feeling of shame. It has a strong meaning, so you wouldn't use it often.

3. Shame/Nervousness

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/nervous-woman-scaled.webp>)

Liam: Any plans for this weekend?

Stephanie: No, not really. I had something, but it didn't work out.

L: 'Something?'

S: Well... I'm a little embarrassed to say... OK, fine, I had a blind date arranged.

L: Nothing wrong with that! But now it's not happening?

S: No, I cancelled it. I was feeling quite anxious. I've never been on a blind date, and I imagine it would be really awkward, so I called it off.

L: Sure, I guess it could be, but it could be fun, too. I think you should go! It's normal to feel apprehensive before you go on a first date. You shouldn't let it stop you.

S: Hmm... Too late now, though. I already cancelled it. Now I kind of regret it.

L: Well, maybe you can still make it happen. Why not make a call?

S: Eh... I can't. I feel guilty for cancelling.

L: You can't win, it seems!

Learn more about dating and relationship vocabulary with our lesson on Talking About Love and Relationships (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/talk-about-love>).

You heard five words related to feelings. Can you remember them? Try to complete the words!

e—r—s—

-nx—

-kw—

a—en-v-

-ui-y

Pause the video if you want more time. Remember that you can also go back and review the dialogue if you want to.

Ready? Let's see the answers.

embarrassed

anxious

awkward

apprehensive

guilty

These words relate to shame and nervousness. Can you put them into two groups?

'Anxious' and 'apprehensive' describe fear. Like the words 'nervous' and 'worried', which you saw earlier, they express a low-level fear, like you might feel before a first date or an important exam.

'Awkward', 'embarrassed' and 'guilty' relate to shame, but they don't have the same meaning. Could you explain the difference between them?

'Awkward' means you feel socially uncomfortable. For example, if you're trying to start a conversation with someone, but you don't know what to say, you might feel awkward.

'Embarrassed' is the feeling when you blush – your face turns red.

You feel 'guilty' when you think you've done something bad. For example, imagine that your friend asks you for some help, and you say: "Sorry, I can't, I'm too busy." Later, you learn that your friend really needed help; you might feel guilty for not helping.

Let's look at our last section to talk about emotions in English.

4. Anger/Frustration

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/angry-man-scaled.webp>)

S: Stephanie: Whoa, where are you going?

L: Liam: I'm going to walk into his office and tell him exactly what I think of him.

S: That's not a good idea. I know you're annoyed...

L: Annoyed? I'm seething! I'm fed up with this place. Let him sack me if he wants.

S: Let's just take a minute. Why don't you tell me what happened?

L: What happened? This isn't something new. I've been overwhelmed for weeks. I ask for help, and he doesn't even answer my emails or my messages. He's supposed to be in charge of this department, and he's not even doing his job.

S: Sure, I can understand that you're frustrated, but...

L: It's more than that. He still hasn't bought the design software we need. The deadline is next week. I've never seen such incompetence.

S: Look, I would be upset too, in your position, but getting into a shouting match with him is not going to solve anything. How about this: we go and have a cup of tea for ten minutes, and then you decide what to do? If you still want to march into his office and scream at him, I won't stop you, but just take ten minutes with me first.

L: OK, fine.

Here, you heard six words related to anger, frustration and sadness when we talk about emotions in English.

Here's a question: what does 'frustration' mean?

Frustration is a kind of anger, but it relates to situations where you can't get what you want.

For example, imagine you have to catch a train, and you're late. You're driving to the station, and someone in front of you is driving *really* slowly. You can't overtake, so you're stuck driving behind them. You might feel frustrated in this situation.

Apart from 'frustrated', you heard these words in the dialogue.

annoyed
seething
fed up
overwhelmed
upset

Do you know which emotions these words express? And, could you explain their meanings in detail? Think about it, and pause the video if you need some time!

'Annoyed' and 'seething' both express anger, but at different levels. 'Annoyed' is low-level anger. For example, if you have some mosquito bites (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosquito>), and they're itchy, you might feel a little annoyed, but you wouldn't – probably – be fully angry. You could also say 'irritated', which has the same meaning.

'Seething' means extremely angry. You could also say 'furious', which is similar.

'Fed up' expresses frustration. If you're fed up with something, a bad situation has gone on for a long time, and you can't take it any more. For example, if your neighbour plays loud music one evening, you might be annoyed, but maybe it wouldn't be a big problem.

However, if your neighbour plays loud music *every* evening, you'll feel angry and frustrated, and after a few days you'll probably feel fed up; you've had enough of the situation and you can't take any more.

'Overwhelmed' is hard to classify. Overwhelmed means something like 'defeated' or 'buried'. If you're overwhelmed, you have so many problems and negative feelings that you can't cope any more.

In the dialogue, we were talking about work, but you can be overwhelmed with other emotions and situations, too. For example, you can be overwhelmed with anger, overwhelmed with sadness, overwhelmed with stress, and so on.

It can even, sometimes, be positive; for example you can be overwhelmed with happiness. In this case, it means that you're so happy that you don't know what to do with yourself.

See more examples with this page explaining the meaning of 'overwhelmed'
(<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/overwhelmed>).

Finally, 'upset' is a feeling of sadness in response to a specific situation. If something bad happens to you, or someone says something unpleasant to you, you might feel upset.

We've mentioned many different words to talk about emotions in English in this video, but there are also many that we didn't talk about. Can you think of any? Share your ideas in the comments!

Thanks for watching and we hope you got some useful phrases to use when talking about emotions in English!