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[Psychometric tests](#)

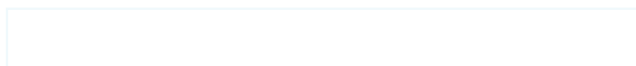
Toronto Alexithymia Scale

Last updated on May 11, 2022

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The **Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20)** is a **20**-item, self-administered questionnaire that measures difficulty in identifying and describing emotions, which is a big part of **alexithymia**.

Basic information

Statements: **20**

Duration: **5–10 minutes**

Type: **screening tool**

Authors: **Michael Bagby, James D. A. Parker, Graeme J. Taylor**

Publishing year: **1994**

Seminal paper: The twenty-item Toronto Alexithymia Scale-I. Item selection and cross-validation of the factor structure (Bagby, Parker & Taylor, 1994).

Scroll down below discussion to take the test:

TAS-20

Dr. Engelbrecht's rating:

Appropriate & respectful wording



Clarity & lack of ambiguity



Testing accuracy



Who the test is designed for

- **Adults** (age **16+**) of average or higher intelligence.
-

Versions & translations

- The English version of TAS-20 has been translated into many different languages:^[1]
 - Arabic.^[2]
 - Chinese.^[3]
 - Croatian.^[4]
 - Portuguese (Brazil).^[5]
 - Greek.^[6]
 - Dutch.^[7]
 - Turkish.^[8]
 - Peruvian.^[9]
 - Mexican.^[10]
-

Taking the test

The Toronto Alexithymia Scale consists of **20** items, giving you **5** choices for each item:

1. Strongly disagree.
2. Disagree.
3. Neither agree nor disagree.
4. Agree.
5. Strongly agree.



Scoring

- Total scores can range from **20–100**, with higher scores indicating greater impairment/challenges.
- Each item is scored on a **5**-point Likert-type scale (**1** = strongly disagree; **5** = strongly agree).
- Five of the items are reverse-scored: **4, 5, 10, 18, and 19**.

The total alexithymia score is the sum of responses to all **20** items, while the score for each subscale factor is the sum of the responses to that subscale.

The TAS-20 uses cutoff scoring:

- Scores equal to or less than **51** = no alexithymia.
- Scores of **52–60** = possible alexithymia.
- Scores equal to or greater than **61** = alexithymia.

The TAS-20 has **3** subscales:

- Difficulty Describing Feelings: **5** items (**2, 4, 11, 12, 17**).
- Difficulty Identifying Feelings: **7** items (**1, 3, 6, 7, 9, 13, 14**).
- Externally-Oriented Thinking: **8** items (**5, 8, 10, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20**).

Your highest average score on the subtypes shows what part of alexithymia you have the greatest challenge with.

Validity

The TAS-20 is one of the most commonly used measures of alexithymia.

- **Reliability:** Demonstrates good internal consistency and test-retest reliability.
- **Validity:** Research using the TAS-20 demonstrates adequate levels of convergent and concurrent validity. The **3**-factor structure was found to be theoretically congruent with the alexithymia construct.

In addition, it has been found to be stable and replicable across clinical and non-clinical populations.

Discussion

Dr. Natalie Engelbrecht:

I score **48**, which means I do not have alexithymia. I used to have severe alexithymia, but have worked very hard through therapy to overcome it. Why? Well, because many of the challenges we have as autistic individuals come from alexithymia, not autism.

- **Empathy:** Alexithymia, not autism, causes reduced affective empathy. As autistic people, our intrinsic empathetic accuracy is superior.
- **Eye contact:** Autistic people avoid eye contact when overstimulated, while alexithymic people avoid eye contact due to negative emotions.
- **Emotion recognition:** Autism was unrelated to facial expression recognition ability, regardless of the extent of autistic traits. Problems with identifying facial expressions are seen only in alexithymia.
- **Affect display:** Reduced facial expressions in alexithymia constitute a defense mechanism against negative affect.

I would say that many of the challenges associated with my alexithymia have reduced, making my life much better. I am happier.

In terms of the TAS-20, I like that it is short and quick to take. However, I wish that a **7**-point Likert scale was used instead of a **5**-point scale. Going from *agree* or *disagree* to *neither agree nor disagree* is too significant a jump for myself. I would like to see *slightly agree* and *slightly disagree* included.

Kendall:

The statements in the TAS-20 are clear and easily understood, though a few are difficult for me to answer. For example, number 10—*Being in touch with emotions is essential*. I agree intellectually and see the importance, but in practice, I don't rely on the connection. So, how do I answer? The only way possible is **(3)** neither agree nor disagree, but it's not altogether correct. Others are difficult because—I'm unsure how I feel about the statement! Some, I have no experience on which to base a response. That seems to be a lot of issues in only **21** **20** statements, but the total Alexithymia score does appear to be accurate, in that it reflects the challenges I deal with.

Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20)

Choose one response that best describes how each item applies to you:

1. I am often confused about what emotion I am feeling.

- a. ☐ Strongly Disagree
- b. ☐ Disagree
- c. ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. ☐ Agree
- e. ☐ Strongly Agree

2. It is difficult for me to find the right words for my feelings.

- a. ☐ Strongly Disagree
- b. ☐ Disagree
- c. ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. ☐ Agree
- e. ☐ Strongly Agree

3. I have physical sensations that even doctors don't understand.

- a. ☐ Strongly Disagree
- b. ☐ Disagree
- c. ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. ☐ Agree
- e. ☐ Strongly Agree

4. I am able to describe my feelings easily.

- a. ☐ Strongly Disagree
- b. ☐ Disagree
- c. ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. ☐ Agree
- e. ☐ Strongly Agree



5. I prefer to analyze problems rather than just describe them.

- a. ☐ Strongly Disagree
- b. ☐ Disagree
- c. ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. ☐ Agree
- e. ☐ Strongly Agree

6. When I am upset, I don't know if I am sad, frightened, or angry.

- a. ☐ Strongly Disagree
- b. ☐ Disagree
- c. ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. ☐ Agree
- e. ☐ Strongly Agree

7. I am often puzzled by sensations in my body.

- a. ☐ Strongly Disagree
- b. ☐ Disagree
- c. ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. ☐ Agree
- e. ☐ Strongly Agree

8. I prefer to just let things happen rather than to understand why they turned out that way.

- a. ☐ Strongly Disagree
- b. ☐ Disagree
- c. ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. ☐ Agree
- e. ☐ Strongly Agree

9. I have feelings that I can't quite identify.

- a. ☐ Strongly Disagree
- b. ☐ Disagree
- c. ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. ☐ Agree
- e. ☐ Strongly Agree

10. Being in touch with emotions is essential.

- a. ☐ Strongly Disagree
- b. ☐ Disagree
- c. ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. ☐ Agree
- e. ☐ Strongly Agree

11. I find it hard to describe how I feel about people.

- a. ☐ Strongly Disagree
- b. ☐ Disagree
- c. ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. ☐ Agree
- e. ☐ Strongly Agree

12. People tell me to describe my feelings more.

- a. ☐ Strongly Disagree
- b. ☐ Disagree
- c. ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. ☐ Agree
- e. ☐ Strongly Agree

13. I don't know what's going on inside me.

- a. ☐ Strongly Disagree
- b. ☐ Disagree
- c. ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. ☐ Agree
- e. ☐ Strongly Agree

14. I often don't know why I am angry.

- a. ☐ Strongly Disagree
- b. ☐ Disagree
- c. ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. ☐ Agree
- e. ☐ Strongly Agree

15. I prefer talking to people about their daily activities rather than their feelings.

- a. ☐ Strongly Disagree
- b. ☐ Disagree
- c. ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. ☐ Agree
- e. ☐ Strongly Agree

16. I prefer to watch “light” entertainment shows rather than psychological dramas.

- a. ☐ Strongly Disagree
- b. ☐ Disagree
- c. ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. ☐ Agree
- e. ☐ Strongly Agree

17. It is difficult for me to reveal my innermost feelings, even to close friends.

- a. ☐ Strongly Disagree
- b. ☐ Disagree
- c. ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. ☐ Agree
- e. ☐ Strongly Agree

18. I can feel close to someone, even in moments of silence.

- a. ☐ Strongly Disagree
- b. ☐ Disagree
- c. ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. ☐ Agree
- e. ☐ Strongly Agree



19. I find examination of my feelings useful in solving personal problems.

- a. ☐ Strongly Disagree
- b. ☐ Disagree
- c. ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. ☐ Agree
- e. ☐ Strongly Agree

20. I look for hidden meanings in movies or plays.

- a. ☐ Strongly Disagree
- b. ☐ Disagree
- c. ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. ☐ Agree
- e. ☐ Strongly Agree

Score

Recommended next steps

After the TAS-20, consider taking one of the tests below.

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Online Alexithymia Questionnaire

Like the TAS-20, it measures difficulty in identifying and describing emotions and feelings.



Toronto Empathy Questionnaire

Measures your emotional ability to understand and respond to others.

CAT-Q

Measures camouflaging, and can account for lower scores on other autism tests.

Online autism tests can play an essential role in the process of self-discovery, and may inform your decision to pursue a formal diagnosis. For a formal assessment, please see a knowledgeable medical professional trained in assessing autism.



If you are looking for an autism assessment,
Dr. Natalie Engelbrecht can offer help!
You can find more information here:

Online autism assessments



References

- 1 Psychometric Properties of the 20-Item Toronto Alexithymia Scale in the Chilean Population (González-Arias et al., 2018)
- 2 Cross-validation of the 20-item Toronto Alexithymia Scale: Results from an Arabic multicenter study (El Abiddine et al., 2017)
- 3 Cross-cultural validation of a Chinese translation of the 20-item Toronto Alexithymia Scale (Zhu et al., 2007)
- 4 Kocijan et al., 2015
- 5 Yoshida, 2007
- 6 Tsaousis et al., 2010
- 7 Meganck et al., 2012
- 8 Gülec et al., 2009; Bolat et al., 2017
- 9 Loiselle and Cossette, 2001
- 10 Pérez-Rincón et al., 1997; Moral, 2010

Tags

Affect display_(1).

Alexithymia_(29).

Describing feelings_(2).

Emotion recognition_(1).

Emotions_(10).

Empathy_(19).

Externally-oriented thinking_(2).

Eye contact_(3).

Identifying feelings_(1).

[Michael Bagby_\(1\)](#)

[Reliability_\(statistics\)_\(1\)](#)

[Toronto Alexithymia Scale \(TAS-20\)_\(2\)](#)

[Validity_\(statistics\)_\(17\)](#)

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This article
was written by:

Dr. Natalie Engelbrecht

I'm a dually licensed registered psychotherapist and naturopathic doctor, and a Canadian leader in trauma, PTSD, and integrative medicine strictly informed by scientific research. And not only do I happen to be autistic, but my autism plays a significant role in who I am as a doctor and how I interact with and care for my patients and clients.

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21



21 comments



Nya 7 months ago

I'm not sure if its my difficulty recognizing my emotions or the difficulty feeling them. 90% of the time I am emotionally and personality void. I don't know if anyone else experiences this but I am completely unable to sympathize/empathize with human beings... but I can (to a certain extent) with animals. Not all the time, but I would feel something similar to sadness, at least I think, if my dog passed rather than a family member. Or sometimes when I cam watching a show and my favorite character dies, I can enter this moment of hysterical crying (like I'm pretty sure I'm not that upset, but I can momentarily laugh/cry for about 15 seconds). Even so, I also find it extremely difficult to pretend to feel anything or maintain relationships- like I am incapable of putting in the effort to talk to anyone. Also, I do not know if I am on the spectrum. I've never gotten tested but for a while I truly believed it could have been Schizoid Personality Disorder. If there is such a huge overlap between the three, is it easier to just assume its alexithymia? Even though, just because someone may be unable to identify their own emotions, what would that have to do with their personality or want to be close (doesn't have to be emotionally) with anyone. From what I understand alexithymia is the inability or difficulty in describing or being aware of one's emotions or moods whereas people



with schizoid personality experience a complete a lack of feeling and don't desire or enjoy close relationship.

So... do I have high level of alexithymia or is there something else going on? And if it's something I developed- why would that be the case if I've never experienced any sort of emotional trauma?

 1  Reply

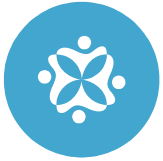


Nolan  7 months ago

I feel emotionally disconnected from the world, sometimes when sad things happen I do not express nor feel empathy or grief. it is like a state of neutral emotions, and the certain times I do feel emotions I either don't know how to express or describe my emotions to myself or other people. usually, when I do express my emotions to others I end up expressing a totally opposite expression or an in-between expression, in some cases annoying the person or totally confusing them. an example is this message, so far it has taken 30 minutes just to write this much and it is confusing me just writing this. I scored a 55 on the TAS-20 but I would like to know if you can tell from what I have tried to describe if I have alexithymia.

 1  Reply





Nicole 8 months ago

I feel like somehow I'm lying about what I feel. I try to evaluate the situation to see if there is a logical reason for why I would lie to myself or to others (maybe for attention or anything I could get from them), but even when I can't think of a reason the feeling is still there. "I don't think I'm lying but what if I subconsciously am?" I feel like the feelings come and go, and once they go it's like I forget how they feel like, and they seem fake.

Do you think it's a symptom of Alexithymia?

 1  Reply



Emma 9 months ago


This was interesting as it was a new concept to me. I scored 42, so no alexthymia. What I found tricky about it, however, is that I go through higher-functioning phases and lower-functioning phases, and answers to many of these questions will change when I'm in a low-functioning phase. I answered based when I'm doing better, but overstimulation will lead to a shut-down of these abilities. And life is frequently overstimulating. I suspect I'm sometimes also dealing with trauma responses that would



also drastically lower the score. It isn't easy to say which of these states is more typical for me.

 0  Reply




Jac  9 months ago

I'm not sure how this influences my responses/results on this test, but learning about alexithymia and taking tests on it, particularly questions on if I know why I am upset or what has made me upset has made me realize that when I am upset I almost always feel angry at myself even when I am only tenuously involved in the situation that made me upset which makes me wonder whether that is the true emotion I am having.

 0  Reply



Lilith  9 months ago

"8. I prefer to just let things happen rather than to understand why they turned out that way."

This question feels a little vague. Could an example maybe be provided?

 0  Reply





Issha Abaid ⌚ 10 months ago

Hello I want to use This scale for my upcoming research project so how to get permission?
Kindly guide thanks.

 0  Reply



Melanie Stephens ⌚ 1 year ago

This is the first time I am learning about Alexithymia and am quite surprised to see how well it describes me. My mother was very depressed when I was a child and suicided when I was 7 years old. I know that I did not express much grief and have always been troubled by that. My husband complains about how emotionally out of touch I am. I would like to know more and how I can get more in touch.

 1  Reply



Gordon ⌚ 1 year ago

What does “Externally-Oriented Thinking” mean? And what could a score significantly lower in that category than the other two be interpreted as?

 2  Reply



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