

EMOTIONAL AWARENESS TOOL FOR FORMANDUS

Introduction

Human formation begins with the ability to know oneself honestly. Among the many dimensions of self-knowledge, emotional self-awareness is especially important because our emotions influence the way we think, pray, relate to others, make decisions, and respond to God's call. When emotions remain unnoticed or misunderstood, they can quietly shape our attitudes and behaviours in unhealthy ways. When they are recognized, accepted, and integrated, they become valuable guides for personal growth and vocational maturity.

This Emotional Awareness Tool is a practical resource designed to help formandus become more attentive to their inner experiences. By reflecting on situations, thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and bodily sensations, they learn to understand themselves with greater honesty, compassion, and freedom. The tool also encourages them to bring these experiences into prayer and accompaniment, allowing God's grace to transform everyday experiences into opportunities for growth.

Used regularly, this practice nurtures emotional maturity, strengthens interpersonal relationships, deepens spiritual discernment, and equips formandus to live their missionary vocation with greater authenticity, resilience, and Christ-like love.

The “5 Aspects of Life Experience” model

The “5 Aspects of Life Experience” model, developed by Christine A. Padesky in 1986, is a practical framework used in cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) to help individuals understand how their experiences are interconnected. According to this model, every life event or situation can be explored through five key dimensions:

1. **Situation** – What is happening externally (time, place, people, context)?
2. **Thoughts & Images** – The interpretations, beliefs, or mental pictures we form in response to the situation.
3. **Moods / Emotions** – The emotional responses that arise, such as sadness, anger, fear, or joy.
4. **Behaviours** – The actions we take or avoid as a result of our thoughts and feelings.
5. **Body / Physical Sensations** – The physiological responses or sensations in the body (e.g., tension, heartbeat, fatigue).

This model helps individuals increase self-awareness, identify unhelpful patterns, and develop healthier responses by recognizing how these five aspects influence one another. It's widely used in therapy, formation, and personal development contexts to foster emotional and psychological integration.

How to use:

- Best done in personal prayer/journaling once a week or after a significant emotional event.
- Formators can review reflections in accompaniment sessions if agreed.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE (For Formandus)

Use this in personal prayer/journaling. Pick any recent experience you want to understand better.

1. SITUATION

Write what happened, with details.

Prompt questions:

- Where did it happen?
- When?
- With whom?
- What exactly happened?
- How did it unfold?

Example 1 (Conflict with peer): “After lunch on Wednesday in the recreation room, I argued with a classmate about community duties. He said I was lazy and I snapped at him.”

Example 2 (Homesickness): “Last night alone in my room, I felt really sad remembering my family celebrating my father’s birthday without me.”

Example 3 (Ministry frustration): “Saturday morning during catechism class. The kids were noisy. I shouted and lost control of the group.”

Example 4 (Spiritual dryness): “During morning prayer in chapel, I felt nothing. I kept staring at the wall, distracted.”

2. THOUGHTS & IMAGES

Record what was going through your mind.

Prompt questions:

- What thoughts came up?
- Any memories or images?
- What did you tell yourself about the situation?
- What did those thoughts mean about you or others?

Example 1: “He’s so unfair. He doesn’t respect me. I’m useless at defending myself.”

Example 2: “They’re happy without me. I don’t belong here. I’m missing out.”

Example 3: “I’m a failure as a teacher. They’ll tell the formator I can’t handle kids.”

Example 4: “God isn’t listening. Prayer is pointless. Maybe I’m not holy enough.”

Alternative thoughts (positive): “I tried my best.” “He might be stressed too.”

3. MOODS / EMOTIONS

Name the feelings.

Prompt questions:

- What emotions did you feel?
- Were there mixed or secondary feelings?
- How strong were they (0–100%)?

Example 1: Anger (80%), hurt (70%), frustration (60%).

Example 2: Sadness (85%), loneliness (75%), longing (60%).

Example 3: Frustration (90%), shame (50%), regret (40%).

Example 4: Emptiness (70%), doubt (60%), irritation (40%).

Emotion words to help:

- | | | |
|-----------|---------------|------------|
| • Angry | • Hurt | • Grateful |
| • Sad | • Embarrassed | • Joyful |
| • Anxious | • Lonely | • Hopeful |

- Confused

4. BEHAVIOURS / WHAT I DID OR DIDN'T DO

Describe your actions or reactions.

Prompt questions:

- How did you respond?
- What did you avoid?
- What automatic reactions did you have?
- What helped you cope?

Example 1: "I shouted back, then stormed out. Later I avoided him all day."

Example 2: "I cried alone, didn't talk to anyone, avoided joining recreation."

Example 3: "I yelled at the kids. I gave up teaching them properly."

Example 4: "I kept sitting in chapel but didn't pray. Pretended to be fine."

Positive coping examples: "I took deep breaths. I wrote about it in my journal. I prayed slowly. I asked a friend for help."

5. BODY / PHYSICAL SENSATIONS

Notice and describe body signals.

Prompt questions:

- What did you notice in your body?
- Where did you feel it?
- How did it change over time?

Example 1: "Tight chest, clenched fists, hot face."

Example 2: "Heavy chest, tears, lump in throat."

Example 3: "Heart racing, shallow breathing, tense shoulders."

Example 4: "Slumped posture, sighing, dull headache."

Other examples: Butterflies in stomach, dry mouth, shaking hands.

6. REFLECTION / INTEGRATION

Make sense of the experience.

Prompt questions:

- What did I learn about myself?
- What patterns do I see?
- How could I respond differently next time?
- What might God be saying to me?

Example 1: "I overreact when I feel attacked. I want to learn to speak calmly."

Example 2: "I miss home deeply. I need to share this with my spiritual director."

Example 3: "I need better classroom strategies. I could ask for help."

Example 4: "I'm in a dry spell. God may be inviting me to patient trust."

Spiritual integration example: "I offer my anger to God. I ask for humility and charity."

Quick Formandus' Summary Template

You can journal like this:

1. Situation:
2. Thoughts & Images:
3. Moods / Emotions (0–100%):
4. Behaviours / What I Did:
5. Body / Physical Sensations:
6. Reflection / Integration:

Pro-Tip for Formandus

“Try to be honest, gentle, and non-judgmental toward yourself. Emotions are not sins; they are signals.”

ADDITIONAL TOOL

APPRECIATIVE EMOTIONAL AWARENESS TOOL

Finding the Gift Hidden in Every Emotion

Introduction

The Emotional Awareness Tool introduced in the previous section helps formandus become attentive to their inner experiences by recognizing the relationship between situations, thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and bodily sensations. This is the first step toward emotional maturity. However, emotional awareness does not end with identifying what we feel. Genuine formation invites us to discover the deeper meaning hidden within every emotional experience.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) offers a complementary approach that enriches emotional self-awareness. Rather than viewing emotions as problems to eliminate or weaknesses to overcome, it invites us to approach them with curiosity, gratitude, and openness. Every emotion—even painful ones such as anger, fear, sadness, loneliness, or shame—contains valuable information about what we deeply value, need, or long for. Emotions are not obstacles to formation; they are invitations to greater self-understanding, deeper relationships, and a more authentic response to God's call.

For missionary disciples, emotional awareness is also a spiritual practice. Our emotions often reveal where our hearts are attached, where our wounds need healing, where our values are being challenged, and where the Holy Spirit may be inviting us to grow. Learning to listen to emotions without fear or self-condemnation enables formandus to respond with greater freedom, discernment, and charity.

This Appreciative Emotional Awareness Tool helps move the focus from asking: **"What is wrong with me?"** to asking: **"What is this emotion revealing about what matters most to me?"** When approached in this way, emotions become teachers rather than enemies, and every emotional experience becomes an opportunity for human, spiritual, and missionary growth.

Core Philosophy

Appreciative Inquiry is founded on the conviction that growth occurs more effectively when we discover and build upon existing strengths rather than concentrating exclusively on weaknesses. Applied to emotional awareness, this means that every emotion—even the most uncomfortable one—contains a hidden gift waiting to be discovered.

Instead of asking: *"Why am I so angry?"* we ask: *"What is this anger protecting?"*

Instead of asking: *"Why am I afraid?"* we ask: *"What is so important to me that I want to protect it?"*

Instead of asking: *"Why do I feel lonely?"* we ask: *"What does this loneliness reveal about my desire for genuine communion?"*

This shift from self-judgment to appreciative curiosity transforms emotional awareness into a journey of discovery.

Every Emotion Has a Gift

Every emotion point toward something valuable within us.

Emotion	The Hidden Gift
Anger	Desire for justice, respect, dignity, or healthy boundaries
Sadness	Capacity to love deeply and value meaningful relationships
Fear	Desire for safety, security, wisdom, or responsible preparation
Shame	Commitment to integrity, goodness, and belonging
Loneliness	Longing for authentic communion and meaningful relationships
Jealousy	Recognition of personal aspirations and unrealized potential
Anxiety	Desire to do well, to be faithful, or to fulfil important responsibilities
Joy	Awareness of God's gifts and life's blessings
Gratitude	Recognition of grace received and relationships that nourish life

The question is no longer whether an emotion is "good" or "bad." Rather, the question becomes: **"What important value is this emotion pointing toward?"**

Emotional Awareness in the Light of Faith

Scripture repeatedly reminds us that God speaks to the human heart. "Search me, O God, and know my heart." (Psalm 139:23)

Jesus Himself experienced the full range of human emotions—joy, compassion, sorrow, righteous anger, fear, and deep anguish. He never denied His emotions, nor was He controlled by them. Instead, He allowed them to become places of encounter with the Father and occasions for faithful love.

For those in formation, emotional awareness therefore becomes an act of discipleship. Naming emotions honestly before God allows them to become places where grace can enter, wounds can heal, and love can mature.

Purpose of this Tool

The Appreciative Emotional Awareness Tool helps formandus to:

- recognise emotions without fear or self-judgment;
- discover the values and needs hidden beneath their emotions;
- appreciate the strengths they already possess;
- respond to emotions in healthy and constructive ways;
- integrate emotional awareness with prayer and discernment;
- develop greater freedom for community life and missionary service;
- cultivate emotional resilience and vocational maturity.

How to Use This Tool

This tool may be used:

- during personal prayer;

- in daily journaling;
- after emotionally significant experiences;
- during monthly recollections;
- in spiritual accompaniment;
- in formation interviews;
- during annual retreats;
- within small-group sharing when appropriate.

Unlike the previous Emotional Awareness Tool, this exercise begins not by analysing what went wrong but by discovering what every emotion is trying to teach.

The guiding attitude throughout the exercise is one of **curiosity, gratitude, honesty, and trust in God's grace**.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE (For Formandus)

The Appreciative Emotional Awareness Tool invites you to become a compassionate observer of your own inner life. Rather than reacting impulsively to your emotions or judging yourself for having them, you learn to listen to them with openness and discernment. Each step helps you move from awareness to understanding, from understanding to integration, and from integration to a life that is more free, loving, and faithful to your vocation.

The five steps are not intended to eliminate emotions but to help you recognize them as valuable messengers that can deepen your relationship with yourself, with others, and with God.

STEP 1. PAUSE AND NAME

"What am I feeling right now?"

Every journey of emotional growth begins by slowing down. Before trying to solve a problem, explain your feelings, or defend yourself, simply pause. A brief moment of silence creates the interior space needed to notice what is happening within you.

Many emotional reactions become unhealthy because we move immediately from feeling to action without awareness. A pause interrupts this automatic cycle and allows us to respond with freedom rather than impulse.

The goal of this step is not to analyse your emotion but simply to recognize and acknowledge it.

How to Practise

Take a slow, deep breath. Become aware of God's loving presence. Ask yourself: **"What am I experiencing right now?"** Name the emotion as accurately as possible.

Avoid vague descriptions such as:

- I feel bad.
- I feel strange.
- I feel okay.

Instead, choose specific emotions:

- angry
- disappointed
- joyful
- anxious
- hopeful
- embarrassed

- grateful
- lonely
- peaceful
- frustrated

Remember that several emotions may exist together. For example: "I notice disappointment, but also gratitude." Or "I notice both fear and excitement."

Prompt Questions

- What emotion is most present right now?
- What other emotions accompany it?
- How strong is each emotion? (0–100%)
- Has this feeling been growing gradually or did it appear suddenly?
- What name best describes what I am experiencing?

Formation Examples

Example 1 – Community Correction

During the community meeting, the superior corrected my behaviour in front of everyone. Instead of immediately defending myself, I pause and notice: "I feel embarrassed (80%), hurt (70%), and angry (40%)."

Example 2 – Apostolic Ministry

After teaching catechism, I feel discouraged because the children seemed uninterested. Instead of saying, "I'm a terrible catechist," I simply observe: "I notice disappointment and frustration."

Example 3 – Prayer

During meditation, my mind keeps wandering. Rather than judging myself, I recognize: "I notice restlessness and impatience."

Appreciative Insight

Naming an emotion is already an act of courage. When we name our emotions honestly, they begin to lose their power to control us. We move from being overwhelmed by feelings to becoming attentive observers of our inner experience. An emotion that is acknowledged can become an invitation to growth.

Spiritual Reflection

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus never denied His emotions. He acknowledged compassion for the crowds, sorrow over Jerusalem, joy in the Holy Spirit, anger at injustice, and anguish in Gethsemane. His emotions became pathways through which He remained united to the Father's will. Similarly, emotional awareness allows us to present our hearts honestly before God.

Prayer

Lord Jesus,
help me to pause before reacting.
Give me the courage to recognize what I truly feel,

without fear,
without shame,
and without pretending.
Teach me to welcome every emotion as an opportunity
to know myself better
and to love more faithfully.
Amen.

STEP 2. LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

"Where do I experience this emotion in my body?"

Our emotions are not experienced only in the mind; they are also expressed through the body. Long before we become consciously aware of an emotion, our body often signals that something important is happening. A racing heart, tense shoulders, clenched fists, shallow breathing, or a heavy feeling in the chest are not merely physical reactions—they are part of the body's wisdom.

In formation, learning to pay attention to these bodily signals helps formandus become more aware of their emotional life before emotions become overwhelming. Rather than viewing the body as an obstacle to spiritual growth, we learn to appreciate it as a gift through which God has created us to experience, communicate, and discern. Listening to the body is therefore an important step toward greater emotional integration.

How to Practise

After naming your emotion, gently turn your attention to your body. Without trying to change anything, simply notice where the emotion is being experienced. Describe the physical sensation as accurately as possible.

For example:

- tightness in my chest
- heaviness in my shoulders
- lump in my throat
- tension in my stomach
- warm face
- clenched jaw
- shallow breathing
- trembling hands
- tears in my eyes
- relaxed breathing
- lightness in my body

Do not judge the sensation. Simply observe it with curiosity.

Prompt Questions

- Where do I notice this emotion in my body?
- Is the sensation warm or cold?
- Is it heavy or light?
- Is it moving or still?
- Does it become stronger or weaker as I observe it?
- What might my body be trying to communicate?

Formation Examples

Example 1 – Before Giving a Reflection

A formator asks me unexpectedly to lead the evening reflection. I notice: "My heart is beating rapidly, my hands are cold, and my breathing has become shallow."

Instead of assuming that something is wrong with me, I simply acknowledge that my body is responding to a challenging situation.

Example 2 – Community Conflict

Following a disagreement with another formandus, I notice tightness in my jaw and shoulders. As I become aware of these sensations, I realize how much tension I have been carrying without noticing it.

Example 3 – Eucharistic Adoration

While praying quietly before the Blessed Sacrament, I gradually notice that my breathing becomes slower and my shoulders relax. My body tells me that I am entering a deeper experience of peace.

Appreciative Insight

Your body is not your enemy. It is a faithful companion that continually communicates important information about your emotional and spiritual life. Every bodily sensation has meaning. Rather than fighting your body's responses, learn to thank it for trying to protect, guide, and inform you. Listening to your body with kindness often reveals emotions that words alone cannot express.

Spiritual Reflection

The human body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Our bodily experiences are not separate from our spiritual life but are often places where God gently speaks to us. Throughout Scripture, people encounter God not only through thoughts but also through bodily experiences—kneeling, weeping, embracing, resting, walking, fasting, and rejoicing.

Paying loving attention to your body helps you become more fully present to yourself and to God's presence.

Prayer

Loving Father,
You created me as a unity of body, mind, and spirit.
Help me to listen respectfully to the wisdom of my body.
May every heartbeat,
every breath,
every tear,
and every moment of peace
draw me closer to You
and help me grow in freedom and love.
Amen.

STEP 3. DISCOVER THE GIFT HIDDEN IN THE EMOTION

"What is this emotion telling me that I deeply care about?"

This is the heart of the Appreciative Emotional Awareness Tool. After recognizing the emotion and listening to your body, the next step is to discover the deeper meaning hidden beneath the feeling. Appreciative Inquiry invites us to move beyond asking, "*Why am I feeling this?*" to a more life-giving question: **"What important value, need, relationship, or desire is this emotion protecting?"**

Every emotion carries a message. Anger often arises because something we value has been violated. Sadness reminds us of the people or experiences we cherish. Fear points toward something we want to protect. Shame reveals our desire to live with integrity. Loneliness reminds us that we are created for communion.

Seen in this light, emotions are not enemies to suppress but guides that reveal the deepest movements of the human heart. They help us understand what is truly important to us and where God may be inviting us to grow.

For a missionary disciple, this discovery is especially significant. Our emotions often reveal not only our personal needs but also the Gospel values that shape our vocation. They can uncover our longing for justice, truth, compassion, reconciliation, service, and authentic relationships. By listening appreciatively, we begin to see that even difficult emotions can become pathways to holiness and mature discipleship.

How to Practise

After naming your emotion and noticing its effect on your body, spend a few moments in silence before God. Then gently ask yourself: **"If this emotion could speak, what would it tell me?"** Or **"What does this emotion reveal about what matters most to me?"**

Do not rush to answer. Allow the emotion to unfold naturally. Complete the following sentence: **"I am feeling _____ . This feeling tells me that I deeply care about _____."**

There are no right or wrong answers. The goal is not perfection but honest discovery.

Discovering the Hidden Gift

The following table may help you identify the values often hidden beneath different emotions.

Emotion	The Hidden Gift	What It May Reveal
Anger	Justice, dignity, healthy boundaries	Something important feels violated.
Sadness	Love, gratitude, meaningful relationships	I have lost or miss someone or something precious.
Fear	Wisdom, safety, responsibility	I want to protect something valuable.
Shame	Integrity, goodness, belonging	I desire to become the person God calls me to be.
Loneliness	Communion, friendship, acceptance	I long for authentic relationships.
Anxiety	Faithfulness, competence, responsibility	I care deeply about doing well.
Frustration	Growth, effectiveness, purpose	I want to make a meaningful contribution.
Joy	Gratitude, fulfilment, God's blessings	I recognize the goodness present in my life.
Compassion	Love, mercy, solidarity	Another person's suffering has touched my heart.

Remember that the emotion itself is not the gift. The gift is the value, relationship, or virtue that the emotion is protecting.

Prompt Questions

Reflect prayerfully on the following questions:

- What does this emotion reveal about what I value?
- Which need is asking for attention?
- What relationship is important to me?

- What personal value feels threatened or affirmed?
- What desire has God placed within my heart?
- What virtue is this emotion inviting me to develop?
- What does this emotion teach me about the kind of missionary I desire to become?

Formation Examples

Example 1 – Community Conflict

A fellow formandus speaks harshly to me during recreation. Initially I notice anger. Instead of asking: *"Why does he always make me angry?"* I ask: *"What is this anger protecting?"*

Reflection: "I realize I value mutual respect. I believe every member of the community deserves to be treated with dignity."

The gift hidden within the anger is not hostility but a longing for respectful relationships.

Example 2 – Homesickness

As Christmas approaches, I feel unexpectedly sad. Instead of criticizing myself for being emotionally weak, I reflect: "This sadness tells me how deeply I love my family and how grateful I am for everything they have given me."

The sadness reveals gratitude, love, and strong family bonds. Rather than suppressing the feeling, I bring it into prayer.

Example 3 – Fear Before Preaching

Tomorrow I have to preach during the community Eucharist. I notice fear. Instead of concluding, *"I am incapable."* I ask: *"What is this fear telling me?"*

Reflection: "I care deeply about proclaiming God's Word faithfully. I want to serve God's people well." The fear becomes evidence of commitment rather than incompetence.

Example 4 – Jealousy

Another formandus receives appreciation for his pastoral work. I notice jealousy. Rather than feeling ashamed, I ask: *"What is this jealousy revealing?"*

Reflection: "It tells me that I also long to use my gifts generously and fruitfully in mission." The emotion reveals a desire for meaningful service rather than selfish competition.

Example 5 – Prayer Dryness

For several weeks I experience little consolation in prayer. I become discouraged. After reflecting appreciatively, I realize: "My disappointment tells me how deeply I desire intimacy with God." Even spiritual dryness reveals the depth of my longing for communion with the Lord.

Appreciative Insight

Every emotion is rooted in love.

Anger exists because something valuable matters to you.

Sadness exists because you have loved.

Fear exists because something precious deserves protection.

Loneliness exists because you were created for communion.

Shame often exists because you desire integrity and goodness.

Instead of fighting your emotions, begin listening to the values they reveal.

The more deeply you understand what you truly care about, the more intentionally you can live your vocation.

Spiritual Discernment

Having discovered the hidden gift, bring it into dialogue with the Lord.

Ask yourself:

- Lord, what are You revealing to me through this emotion?
- Is this emotion leading me closer to You or away from You?
- Which Gospel value is emerging from this experience?
- What invitation is the Holy Spirit placing before me?
- Which virtue do You desire to cultivate within me?
- How can this emotion become an opportunity to grow in love?

Remember that God often speaks through the deepest desires of our hearts. When purified by grace, these desires become powerful guides for vocational discernment.

What Scripture Says

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus consistently revealed the values hidden within His emotions.

- His compassion for the crowds revealed His love for those who were "like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36).
- His tears at the tomb of Lazarus revealed the depth of His friendship and love (John 11:35–36).
- His righteous anger in the Temple revealed His zeal for His Father's house (John 2:13–17).
- His anguish in Gethsemane revealed both His humanity and His unwavering desire to accomplish the Father's will (Luke 22:42–44).

Jesus did not suppress His emotions. He allowed them to reveal what He loved most and transformed them into faithful action.

Prayer

Lord Jesus,
You know the deepest movements of my heart.
Help me to discover the gifts hidden within every emotion.
When I feel anger,
teach me to seek justice with charity.
When I feel sadness,
deepen my capacity to love.
When I experience fear,
strengthen my trust in You.
When I feel lonely,
remind me that You are always near.
May every emotion become a path toward greater freedom,
deeper compassion,
and more faithful discipleship.
Amen.

Personal Journaling

Complete the following sentences prayerfully:

1. Today I am feeling _____
2. This emotion tells me that I deeply care about _____
3. The value hidden within this emotion is _____
4. God may be inviting me to grow in _____
5. The Gospel value that this emotion points toward is _____
6. One grace I ask from the Lord today is _____

STEP 4. REMEMBER YOUR STRENGTHS

"When have I faced a similar situation before and responded well?"

Having discovered the value hidden within your emotion, the next step is to remember that you are not beginning from nothing. God has already been at work in your life. Throughout your journey, there have been moments when you faced similar emotions with wisdom, courage, patience, or faith. These experiences are signs of the strengths and graces that God has already planted within you.

Appreciative Inquiry calls this the **Discovery** phase. Instead of concentrating on failures or weaknesses, it invites us to remember our best experiences and the personal resources that enabled us to respond well. These experiences become a source of hope and confidence for facing present challenges.

For those in formation, this step is especially important. Many formands tend to judge themselves by their mistakes while overlooking the many occasions when they have responded with maturity and generosity. Remembering past successes nurtures gratitude, builds confidence, and strengthens vocational identity. It reminds us that growth is already taking place and that God's grace has been quietly shaping us throughout our formation journey.

How to Practise

Take a few moments of silence. Recall another occasion when you experienced a similar emotion. Ask yourself: **"When have I felt this way before and responded in a way that reflected my best self?"** Remember a specific event rather than a general idea.

Describe:

- What happened?
- What emotion did I experience?
- How did I respond?
- What helped me?
- Which strengths did I use?
- How did God's grace sustain me?

Do not look for a perfect response. Even small victories reveal important strengths.

Prompt Questions

Reflect prayerfully on these questions.

- When have I experienced this emotion before?
- What helped me remain calm or hopeful?
- Which personal qualities did I use?
- Who accompanied or supported me?
- What did I learn from that experience?
- Which virtues became evident?

- How was God present during that situation?
- What strengths can I bring into today's situation?

Discovering God-Given Strengths

Often, we underestimate the strengths that have already been formed within us. Some examples include:

Personal Strengths

- Patience
- Courage
- Perseverance
- Self-control
- Humility
- Compassion
- Hope
- Gratitude
- Honesty
- Flexibility
- Creativity
- Responsibility
- Faithfulness

Relational Strengths

- Listening
- Forgiveness
- Empathy
- Collaboration
- Respect
- Clear communication
- Reconciliation
- Hospitality
- Encouragement

Spiritual Strengths

- Trust in God
- Fidelity to prayer
- Hope during trials
- Openness to guidance
- Desire for holiness
- Love for Scripture
- Capacity for silence
- Discernment
- Missionary generosity

These strengths are gifts entrusted to you by God. Formation helps them mature through continual practice.

Formation Examples

Example 1 – Community Conflict

Today I feel angry after a misunderstanding with another formandus. Instead of focusing only on today's conflict, I remember a similar incident last year. At that time, I chose not to react immediately. I went to the chapel, prayed quietly, and later spoke calmly with my companion.

Reflection: "I realize I already possess the ability to pause before reacting. I have learned that respectful dialogue brings reconciliation."

Strengths discovered:

- Patience
- Emotional self-control
- Respectful communication
- Trust in prayer

Example 2 – Apostolic Ministry

After giving catechism, I feel disappointed because the children were distracted. Then I remember another occasion when I faced the same difficulty.

Instead of giving up, I changed my teaching method, involved the children in activities, and sought advice from an experienced catechist.

Reflection: "I have the capacity to learn, adapt, and persevere."

Strengths discovered:

- Creativity
- Humility
- Perseverance
- Openness to learning

Example 3 – Prayer Dryness

Today my prayer feels empty. Then I remember another period of spiritual dryness. Although I experienced no consolation, I remained faithful to daily prayer. Months later I realized that God had quietly strengthened my trust.

Reflection: "I already know that faithfulness is more important than feelings."

Strengths discovered:

- Fidelity
- Hope
- Perseverance
- Trust in God's hidden action

Example 4 – Fear Before a New Ministry

I have been assigned a new apostolic responsibility. I feel anxious. Then I remember my first pastoral assignment. Initially I doubted myself, but with prayer, preparation, and support from my community, I gradually gained confidence.

Reflection: "God has guided me through unfamiliar situations before. He will accompany me again."

Strengths discovered:

- Courage
- Adaptability
- Confidence in God
- Willingness to learn

Appreciative Insight

Growth becomes visible when we remember where God has already been at work. Our memories are not only records of past events; they are reminders of God's faithfulness. Every challenge you have faced has also revealed strengths you may not have recognized at the time.

Instead of asking, **"Why can't I handle this?"** begin asking, **"What strengths has God already helped me develop that can guide me now?"**

Hope grows when we remember our previous victories. Confidence grows when we recognize God's continuing presence.

Spiritual Discernment

Spend a few moments in prayer. Reflect on these questions.

- Lord, when have You helped me through similar experiences?
- Which gifts have You been quietly developing in me?
- Which virtues have grown through previous struggles?
- How are You inviting me to trust these gifts today?
- Which grace do I need to strengthen further?

Notice that God rarely asks us to begin from nothing. He usually invites us to build upon the strengths He has already nurtured within us.

What Scripture Says

Throughout salvation history, God repeatedly invited His people to remember. Before asking them to face new challenges, He reminded them of His past faithfulness.

"Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you." (*Deuteronomy 8:2*).

David remembered how God had helped him defeat the lion and the bear before confronting Goliath (1 Samuel 17:34–37).

Mary remembered God's mighty deeds and proclaimed them in her Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55).

St. Paul encouraged believers to remember the grace they had received and to build upon it (2 Timothy 1:6–7).

Remembering is therefore an act of faith. It strengthens hope and renews confidence in God's continuing work.

Prayer

Lord,
Thank You for walking with me throughout my journey.
Help me to remember not only my failures
but also the many ways
You have strengthened,
guided,
healed,
and sustained me.
Open my eyes to recognize
the gifts You have already planted within me.
May the memories of Your faithfulness
give me courage for today's challenges
and confidence for tomorrow's mission.

Help me to use my strengths
not for my own glory
but in loving service of others.
Amen.

Personal Journaling

Complete these reflections.

1. The present emotion I am experiencing is:

2. A previous occasion when I experienced something similar was:

3. What happened?

4. What helped me respond well?

5. Which personal strengths did I discover?

6. Which virtues became visible?

7. How was God present in that experience?

8. Which of these strengths can I use today?

Integration Exercise

At the end of each week, review your journal and complete the following table.

Situation	Emotion	Strength I Used	Virtue That Grew	Grace Received
-----------	---------	-----------------	------------------	----------------

Over time, this practice will help you recognize recurring strengths, appreciate God's faithful presence, and develop greater confidence in your capacity to respond to life's challenges with maturity and hope.

STEP 5. CHOOSE A LIFE-GIVING RESPONSE

"What is one small, loving action I can take today that honours what I truly care about?"

The first four steps of the Appreciative Emotional Awareness Tool have helped you become aware of your emotions, listen to your body, discover the values hidden within your feelings, and remember the strengths God has already cultivated in your life. Awareness, however, is only the beginning. Genuine formation leads to transformation.

The final step invites you to move from reflection to action. Every emotion calls for a response. The question is not whether we will respond, but **how** we will respond. We can react impulsively, allowing emotions to control us, or we can respond intentionally, allowing our values, virtues, and relationship with God to guide our actions.

Appreciative Inquiry refers to this as the **Design** phase. Once we recognize what truly matters and remember the strengths we already possess, we intentionally choose one concrete action that reflects our deepest values. This action does not have to be dramatic. Lasting growth usually begins with small, faithful choices made consistently over time.

For missionary formation, this is particularly important. Emotional maturity is not measured by the absence of difficult emotions but by the ability to respond to them in ways that foster communion, deepen discipleship, and strengthen our missionary commitment. Every small, life-giving response becomes an opportunity to grow in freedom, charity, and vocational integrity.

How to Practise

After completing the previous four steps, ask yourself: **"What is one small action I can take today that honours what this emotion has revealed?"** Choose an action that is:

- realistic;
- achievable today;
- consistent with your Christian values;
- respectful of yourself and others;
- inspired by love rather than fear.

Remember that small actions often produce profound transformation.

Prompt Questions

Spend a few moments in prayer and reflect on the following questions:

- What action would best express the value I have discovered?
- What response would Jesus choose in this situation?
- What would help me grow in virtue?
- Which action would bring greater peace rather than more conflict?
- What small step can I take today?
- Who may need to be included in this response?
- What grace do I need from God to carry out this action?

From Emotion to Mission

The following examples illustrate how emotions can lead to constructive responses.

Hidden Gift	Life-Giving Response
Respect	Calmly communicate your feelings or establish healthy boundaries.
Love	Express gratitude or reconnect with the person you value.
Justice	Address the situation respectfully instead of reacting impulsively.
Safety	Seek guidance, pray, and prepare wisely before acting.
Integrity	Admit your mistake, seek forgiveness, and begin again.
Communion	Reach out to someone rather than withdrawing into isolation.
Compassion	Offer encouragement or practical help to someone in need.
Peace	Spend time in silence, prayer, or Eucharistic adoration before making important decisions.
Growth	Seek feedback, learn a new skill, or ask for accompaniment.

Formation Examples

Example 1 – Conflict in Community

I realize that my anger reveals how much I value mutual respect. Instead of avoiding my companion or speaking harshly, I decide to meet him after evening prayer.

I begin by saying: "I would like us to understand each other better because our relationship is important to me."

One respectful conversation becomes my life-giving response.

Example 2 – Feeling Lonely

My loneliness reveals my desire for genuine fraternity. Instead of isolating myself in my room, I decide to join the community recreation and have a meaningful conversation with one confrere.

A simple act of presence becomes an act of healing.

Example 3 – Anxiety Before Ministry

My anxiety shows that I care deeply about serving God's people well. Instead of worrying throughout the day, I prepare carefully, pray before the Blessed Sacrament, and entrust my ministry to the Holy Spirit. Preparation replaces anxiety. Trust replaces fear.

Example 4 – Shame After Making a Mistake

After speaking impatiently to another formandus, I experience shame. Rather than hiding or justifying myself, I decide to apologize sincerely. This small act strengthens humility and restores communion.

Example 5 – Discouragement in Prayer

My disappointment in prayer reveals my longing for intimacy with God. Instead of abandoning prayer, I decide to spend ten quiet minutes before the Lord without expecting emotional consolation. Faithfulness becomes my response.

Appreciative Insight

Growth does not occur because we never experience difficult emotions. Growth occurs because we repeatedly choose responses that are consistent with our deepest values.

Every loving response strengthens the kind of person we are becoming. Every small act of charity forms the heart. Every courageous conversation strengthens relationships. Every sincere apology deepens humility. Every faithful prayer strengthens trust.

Transformation happens one choice at a time.

Integrating Virtue into Action

As missionary disciples, every emotional experience invites us to grow in virtue.

Emotion	Hidden Gift	Virtue to Cultivate	Concrete Action
Anger	Justice	Patience and Charity	Speak respectfully after calming down.
Fear	Protection	Courage and Trust	Take the next faithful step despite uncertainty.
Sadness	Love	Hope	Share your feelings with a trusted person and pray.
Shame	Integrity	Humility	Accept responsibility and seek reconciliation.
Loneliness	Communion	Fraternity	Initiate a conversation or participate in community life.
Anxiety	Responsibility	Prudence	Prepare well, then entrust the outcome to God.
Joy	Gratitude	Generosity	Share your joy and encourage another person.

Formation is not simply learning to manage emotions but allowing emotions to become occasions for growing in Christ-like virtues.

Spiritual Discernment

Before making your decision, remain quietly in God's presence. Ask yourself:

- Lord, which response reflects Your love most clearly?
- Which action will build communion?
- Which response helps me become more like Christ?
- What is the most loving thing I can do today?
- Which virtue are You inviting me to practise?
- What grace do I need to carry this out faithfully?

Allow your response to emerge from prayer rather than impulse.

What Scripture Says

Jesus consistently transformed His emotions into loving action. When He felt compassion, He healed the sick and fed the hungry (Matthew 14:14). When He experienced sorrow over Jerusalem, He continued to invite its people to conversion (Luke 19:41–44). When He encountered injustice in the Temple, His zeal led Him to restore reverence for God's house (John 2:13–17). Even in Gethsemane, where He experienced profound anguish, His final response was complete trust in the Father's will: **"Not my will, but yours be done."** (Luke 22:42)

Jesus teaches us that emotions become holy when they lead us to loving and faithful action.

Prayer

Lord Jesus,
Thank You for revealing
the deepest movements of my heart.
Give me the wisdom
to choose responses
that reflect Your love,
Your compassion,
and Your truth.
When I am afraid,
give me courage.
When I am angry,
teach me patience.
When I am discouraged,
strengthen my hope.
When I feel alone,
help me seek communion.
May every emotion
become an opportunity
to love more deeply,
serve more generously,
and follow You more faithfully.
Form my heart
according to Yours.
Amen.

Personal Journaling

Complete the following reflection.

1. The value I discovered today is:

2. One strength God has already given me is:

3. The virtue I want to practise today is:

4. One small life-giving action I will take is:

5. When will I do it?

6. Who might benefit from this action?

7. What grace do I ask from God?

Weekly Growth Review

At the end of each week, review your journal and notice how your responses are shaping your formation.

Emotion Experienced	Hidden Gift	Strength Used	Action Taken	Virtue That Grew	What I Learned
---------------------	-------------	---------------	--------------	------------------	----------------

As you review your experiences, thank God for every small step of growth. Notice recurring patterns, celebrate moments of faithful response, and identify areas where you seek greater freedom.

Concluding Reflection

Every emotion is an invitation. It invites us to pause, to listen, to understand, and finally to choose love. The Appreciative Emotional Awareness Tool reminds us that our emotions are not obstacles to holiness but opportunities for grace. When we welcome them with honesty, discern them in the light of faith, and respond with wisdom, they become instruments through which God forms our hearts.

Emotional maturity is not the absence of struggle; it is the growing ability to let every emotional experience draw us closer to Christ and shape us into compassionate, resilient, and missionary disciples. Each small, faithful response becomes another step in the lifelong journey of becoming "conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29).

FORMATOR'S ACCOMPANIMENT GUIDE

Purpose: To help formandus **name, own, and integrate** their emotional experiences for personal and vocational growth.

1. Setting the context

- Normalize the practice: "We all have emotions. Recognizing them helps us live our vocation more freely and maturely."
- Emphasize confidentiality and trust.

2. Reviewing reflections

- Invite formandus to share only what they are comfortable sharing.
- Focus on understanding before advice: "Tell me more about what you felt."

Tips:

- Affirm honesty.
- Gently clarify vague emotions (e.g., “Can you say more about what ‘bad’ felt like?”).

3. Exploring meanings

- Help them see patterns: “Does this remind you of other experiences?”
- Discern beliefs: “What did that mean about you in your eyes?”

Example guidance: “You felt incompetent—where do you think that message comes from?”

4. Supporting integration

- Encourage alternative responses: “How might you react differently?”
- Bring in spiritual perspective: “What might God say to you about this?”

Example guidance: “What grace do you want to ask for around this?”

5. Ensuring emotional safety

- Be attentive to distress.
- Refer to professional help if needed (e.g., persistent severe anxiety).

Sample Session Flow (for Formators)

1. Prayer/quiet start
2. Invite formandus to share one recent reflection
3. Go step by step (Situation → Body)
4. Explore meanings and learnings
5. Conclude with prayer or blessing

Suggested Use in Formation Program

- Personal journaling weekly
- Monthly group or one-on-one review
- Annual deeper self-awareness retreat

Final Note for Formandus: “*Emotions are a gift. Naming them helps us grow in freedom, empathy, and Christ-like love.*”

DAILY EMOTIONAL AWARENESS FORM (Short Version)

Use this each evening or after any meaningful moment you want to reflect on. Write briefly but honestly.

1. SITUATION**What happened today?**

- Where? With whom?
- One or two sentences.

Example: “Talked with a friend about my struggles in class.”

2. THOUGHTS**What did you think?**

- Words or images in your mind.

Example: "He'll think I'm weak."

3. EMOTIONS (0–100%)

Name and rate your main feelings.

Example: "Anxious (70%), relieved (50%)."

4. BEHAVIOUR

What did you do or avoid?

Example: "I shared carefully, but avoided saying everything."

5. BODY

What did you feel physically?

Example: "Tight chest, slight headache."

6. REFLECTION (Optional)

What did you learn? How do you want to respond next time?

- Or: *What grace do you ask from God?*

Example: "I want courage to be more open. Lord, give me trust."

Tip for Formandus: *"If you're short on time, just pick one strong emotion and write about that!"*

Appendix

1. LIST OF EMOTIONS

Positive	Negative
Comfortable	Uncomfortable
Accepted	Rejected
Acknowledged	Ignored
Appreciated	Unappreciated
Loved	Resentful, Bitter
Lovable	Unloved, Hated
Desirable	Unlovable, Undesirable
Happy	Angry, Sad, Hurt
Aware	Unaware, Confused
Satisfied	Unsatisfied, Frustrated
Supported	Unsupported, Squelched, Thwarted, Obstructed
Encouraged	Discouraged
Optimistic	Pessimistic, Hopeless
Respected	Disrespected, Insulted, Mocked
Safe, Secure	Afraid, Insecure
Peaceful, Relaxed	Tense, Frustrated
Motivated	Bored, Lethargic, Unmotivated
Focused	Lost
Free	Trapped, Controlled, Forced, Obligated
Independent	Dependent, Needy
Confident	Nervous, Worried, Scared
Competent, Capable	Incompetent, Inadequate, Dumb, Stupid
Proud	Guilty, Embarrassed, Ashamed

Worthy, Deserving	Unworthy, Undeserving, Inadequate
Excited, Energetic	Depressed, Numb, Frozen
Fulfilled	Empty, Needy
Validated	Invalidated
Connected	Disconnected, Isolated, Lonely

2. LIST OF BODY SENSATIONS

Examples of what you might notice in your body:

Tight chest	Sweating
Heart racing / pounding	Dry mouth
Shallow breathing	Nausea
Sighing	Weak knees
Stomach knots / butterflies	Yawning
Headache	Fidgeting
Clenched jaw	Slumped posture
Hot face / blushing	Sighing deeply
Tears / lump in throat	Tingling
Heavy chest	Chills
Tense shoulders	Restlessness
Shaking hands	

Prompt for journaling: *“Where in my body did I feel this?”*

3. LIST OF POSSIBLE THOUGHTS / IMAGES

<i>Common unhelpful thoughts:</i>	<i>More positive or balanced thoughts:</i>	<i>Types of mental images:</i>
“I’m not good enough.” “They don’t like me.” “I always mess up.” “Nobody understands me.” “I shouldn’t feel this way.” “This is hopeless.” “God is silent.” “They think I’m incompetent.” “I don’t belong here.” “I’m failing.” “I can’t do this.”	“I did my best.” “I can ask for help.” “This will pass.” “God is with me even now.” “Everyone struggles sometimes.” “I am learning.” “He might be stressed too.” “I can try again.”	Memories of past failures or hurts Images of rejection or conflict Visualizing success or safety Remembering supportive people Flashbacks to childhood moments Scenes of being alone / abandoned Pictures of God (comforting or distant)

Prompt for journaling: *“What went through my mind or what did I see in my head at that time?”*

SIMPLE CHECK-LIST FOR FORMANDUS

When filling the Emotional Awareness Tool, use these prompts to help name your experience:

- Emotion? → (Pick from the list)
- Body? → (Where did I feel it?)
- Thoughts/Images? → (What went through my mind?)

Final Note (for Formandus): *“Naming your feelings, thoughts, and body sensations helps you understand yourself and opens you to God’s grace. Don’t judge what you find—just notice it honestly.”*

EMOTIONAL AWARENESS TOOL FOR GROUP SHARING

A guide for small groups of formandus to share personal emotional reflections in a respectful, supportive way.

PURPOSE OF GROUP SHARING

- To help each other **recognize, name, and integrate** emotions.
- To **deepen self-knowledge** and **foster fraternity**.
- To **practice listening** and **empathy**.

1. GROUP AGREEMENTS

Before starting, agree together on these principles:

Confidentiality: *“What is shared here stays here.”*

Respect: *“We listen without interrupting, judging, or advising unless asked.”*

Freedom: *“You choose what and how much you share.”*

Presence: *“We pay attention and support one another.”*

Non-fixing: *“We don’t try to fix someone’s feelings. We let them be heard.”*

Prayerfulness: *“We recognize God is present in our sharing.”*

2. SUGGESTED GROUP STRUCTURE (45–60 minutes for 4–6 people)

1. **Opening Prayer (2–5 min):** *Invite God’s Spirit of honesty, trust, and compassion.*
2. **Silent Reflection (5 min):** *Each person completes the short form quietly:*
 1. Situation
 2. Thoughts
 3. Emotions (0–100%)
 4. Behaviour
 5. Body
 6. Reflection / Integration
3. **Sharing Round (30–40 min):**
 - Each person shares (5–7 min each).
 - Listeners **do not interrupt**.
 - After each sharing, pause in silence or offer a simple word of thanks or prayer.
4. **Optional Response (2–3 min each):**
 - Listeners may offer *one supportive, reflective question or affirmation*.
 - Example: *“Thank you for sharing. What do you feel God might be inviting you to in this?”*
5. **Closing Prayer (5 min):**
 - Pray for each person’s intentions.
 - Entrust the group’s reflections to God.

3. FACILITATOR’S ROLE (If present)

- Set a **gentle, safe tone**.
- Remind everyone of **confidentiality**.
- Encourage **honest sharing**, but respect anyone who passes.
- **Keep time** so all can share.
- Model **non-judgmental listening**.
- Invite prayerful silence after each sharing.

SAMPLE GROUP SHARING PROMPT

“I’ll share my reflection using these steps. Feel free to use the list of emotions, thoughts, and body sensations to help you name what you experienced.”

4. GUIDELINES FOR SHARING

Speak in **first person**: *“I felt...” instead of “you should...”*

Be **specific but concise**: Focus on one experience.

- Don’t over-explain or justify feelings.

Allow vulnerability:

- Share honestly—even if it feels messy.
- It’s okay to feel strong emotions.

Use the structure:

1. Situation
2. Thoughts/Images
3. Emotions (0–100%)
4. Behaviour
5. Body sensations
6. Reflection/Integration

Example short sharing: *“My situation was a conflict with a classmate yesterday. I thought he doesn’t respect me. I felt anger (80%) and hurt (60%). I snapped at him, then avoided him. My chest felt tight. I see I overreacted and I want to learn to speak calmly. I ask God for humility.”*

5. GUIDELINES FOR LISTENING

- Listen silently.
- Avoid interrupting.
- Don’t judge or minimize.
- Don’t offer solutions unless asked.
- Respond only if invited (e.g., *“Thank you for sharing.”*).
- Respect **silence** after sharing.

6. CLOSING THE GROUP

Invite brief reflections: *“How was this sharing time for you?”*

Pray for each other: *Simple prayer of gratitude and blessing.*

Remind the group: *“Let’s respect confidentiality.”*

FINAL NOTE (for Formandus): *“Emotional awareness is a gift for our growth and for community life. Sharing our hearts helps us walk humbly and love one another more like Christ.”*

Overall Conclusion

Emotional self-awareness is not merely a psychological skill; it is an essential dimension of human and vocational formation. A missionary who understands his own inner world is better prepared to understand others, build healthy relationships, discern God’s will, and serve with greater freedom and compassion. Throughout this module, we have seen that emotions are neither obstacles to holiness nor signs of weakness. Rather, they are valuable signals that reveal our needs, values, desires, strengths, and the areas where God continues to shape us.

The practical tools presented in this module, the **5 Aspects of Life Experience Model** and the **Appreciative Emotional Awareness Tool**, offer complementary pathways for cultivating this awareness. The first helps us recognize and understand our emotional experiences by exploring the interplay between situations, thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and bodily sensations. The second invites us to move beyond awareness by discovering the gifts hidden within our emotions, recognizing our God-given strengths, and choosing life-giving responses rooted in the Gospel. Together, these tools encourage formandus to approach their emotions not with fear or self-judgment, but with honesty, curiosity, gratitude, and hope.

For formators, these tools are equally valuable. They provide practical ways of accompanying formandus with empathy and wisdom, creating a safe environment where emotions can be explored, integrated, and transformed. Emotional growth is rarely achieved through advice alone; it develops through attentive listening, reflective dialogue, prayerful discernment, and consistent practice. By modelling emotional maturity themselves, formators become credible witnesses and guides in the journey of integral formation.

Ultimately, emotional self-awareness is a lifelong discipline. It requires patience, humility, and the willingness to return repeatedly to one's inner experience in the presence of God. As formandus grow in emotional awareness, they also grow in self-knowledge, freedom, resilience, and the capacity to love. These qualities prepare them not only for community life but also for the demands of missionary service, where emotional maturity becomes a source of credibility, compassion, and fruitful ministry.

May this module encourage every formandus to embrace his emotions as places of encounter with God's grace and every formator to accompany others with understanding and hope. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, may we learn to recognize the movements of our hearts, listen attentively to the voice of the Lord within our experiences, and allow Him to transform them into a deeper commitment to His mission. In doing so, we become missionaries whose hearts are not only well formed but also deeply attuned to the Heart of Christ, ready to proclaim the Gospel with authenticity, wisdom, and love.