

‘Meta’ States

What you are thinking and feeling about what you are feeling.

As human beings we can wrap one emotional state around another, and then another and then another, so that our emotions become intertwined and tangled.

When something happens in the outside world, we might feel angry, upset, or scared about it. If we then get mad or disappointed about our emotional response, we are having an emotional response about our emotional response. These ‘Meta States’ can either magnify or reduce negative feelings. For example, if I feel anxious, then start feeling scared about feeling anxious, then start feeling panicky about feeling scared about feeling anxious, then start feeling self critical about feeling panicky about feeling scared about feeling anxious, the negative feelings grow and grow.

Very often our Meta State is driven by what we tell ourselves (often unconsciously) about what we are feeling. When we think differently about what we are feeling, the intensity changes. Notice how feeling anxious might change if I am:-

- accepting about it (“it’s OK to feel like this, it will pass”) or
- curious about it (“I wonder what I’m doing on the inside that is making me feel this way”) or
- self amused (“What am I like feeling anxious about that 😊!”)