



GUESS/ALAMY IMAGES

Feeling blech?
You're not
the only one!

THE UPSIDE OF FEELING DOWN

BOREDOM. LONELINESS. ANGER. STRESS.

There can actually be a surprising power lurking under your 🤢 emotions. Read on to learn teen-tested tricks for flipping your feels.

By JOEY BARTOLOMEO

IT'S PROBABLY SAFE TO SAY that 2020 hasn't been a nonstop party. Odds are the coronavirus and all that came with it (social distancing, remote learning, waaay more family time than you might be used to) has made you angry, stressed, lonely, and bored—sometimes all in the same day. Those emotions can be uncomfortable, even scary. But want to hear something crazy? All those feels can actually be good for you. "Negative experiences and emotions can drive us toward creative expression and a desire to make changes," says Dr. Eugene Beresin, executive director of the MGH Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds in Boston.

Think about it: If you felt totally content all the time, you'd never be motivated to make positive changes in your life. Plus, experiencing negative emotions helps you develop the skills to handle adversity, which means the next time you're feeling down, you'll be better equipped to deal with it. The trick is learning to harness those big, powerful feelings to make positive changes in your life and your world. Read on to find out how.

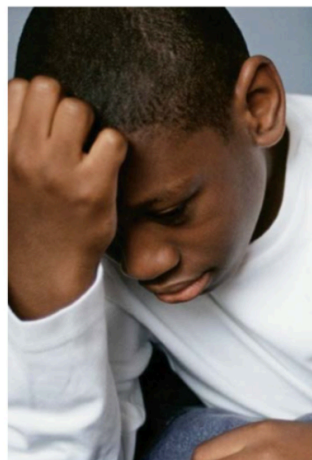
● YOUR LIFE

LONELINESS

What's Going On: Ever feel like no one really gets you? No matter how popular you are, you can feel lonely if you're not making meaningful connections with other people (even your friends!). And that really does hurt: Research has shown that the brain registers emotional pain like loneliness in the same places as physical pain.

The Upside: When you're by yourself you can focus on yourself. "Loneliness allows you to get to know who you really are," says family therapist Jaynay Johnson. For example, Isabel, 15, from Florida, says, "The sheer amount of time I spent alone in my room led me to start a journal." Plus, studies have shown loneliness makes you more empathetic to other people.

Put It to Work for You: Use loneliness to connect with others. Reach out to someone who might be lonely too—you'll immediately have that in common! Volunteer to call a senior once a week, or just chat with a relative. To make it meaningful, go beyond small talk—ask, "If you could be anywhere in the world right now, where would you be?" or "At what time in your life were you happiest?"



STRESS

What's Going On: Your shoulders are tense, your heart is racing, you might even feel like you want to throw up. Feeling stressed or anxious is your body's instinctual way to prepare to either fight or flee a perceived threat. This instinct was necessary back in caveman days, when your ability to react quickly meant the difference between staying alive and being an animal's lunch, but that fight-or-flight response is less helpful when you're confronting

an upcoming test or just thinking about the state of the world.

The Upside: "Facing anxiety can make you into a stronger person," says Beresin. And stress about a future event can actually help your performance. When you're stressed, your body produces a hormone called cortisol, which helps with focus and makes you able to react quickly, so you can perform tasks (like taking a test) efficiently.

Put It to Work for You: Use that nervous energy to motivate yourself. First, separate things you can control from what you can't. For example, if you're stressed about that test, you can't control what questions will be on it, but you can control whether or not you prepare for it. Next, come up with a concrete plan for addressing the parts of the situation you can control (like studying 30 minutes a day for the test).

BOREDOM

What's Going On: Are you so desperate for entertainment that watching paint dry would be a welcome diversion? Here's a surprise: You may be bored not because you have nothing to do but because you're accustomed to having too much to do. Your brain is so used to constant stimulation that when you find yourself without internet access or isolated from your friends and classmates, you feel antsy or bored.

The Upside: Boredom can be the spark you need to get creative

and try something new. According to psychologist Sandi Mann, author of *The Upside of Downtime: Why Boredom Is Good*, when your brain isn't stimulated by what's happening around you, it will be forced to create its own stimulation and entertainment.

Put It to Work for You: Challenge yourself to try something new. *Choices* teen advisers who had quarantine-induced boredom picked up new hobbies, including cooking, blogging, and jewelry making. What will you do?



ANGER

What's Going On: Your face feels hot. You want to shout or stomp your foot or punch the wall. Remember how stress causes your body to have an instinctive fight-or-flight reaction? Anger works much the same way, minus the flee part. That's because both feelings cause your body to release adrenaline, a hormone that gives you a rush of energy.

The Upside: Learn to focus your anger, and it can drive you to stand up for what you believe in. "When I went on strike I didn't understand what being an activist was," says teen climate activist Alexandria Villaseñor. "I just knew I was angry about what was happening to our planet." When you harness your anger for good, you make all that powerful energy work for you instead of against you.

Put It to Work for You: The first step is to acknowledge that anger is OK. Then figure out what you can do about what's making you so mad. If it's another person, try to (calmly) explain your point of view. If it's something in society, make a plan for a concrete action you can take, like writing a letter to a congressperson or joining a protest.

THE ART OF FEELING DOWN

Countless works of music, art, and literature have been inspired by negative emotions. For example:



LONELINESS: This famous painting by Edward Hopper, titled *Nighthawks*, depicts urban loneliness and isolation.



STRESS/ ANXIETY: Stress about family, school, and the state of the world haunts this novel's main character, Holden Caulfield.



ANGER: In this best seller by Angie Thomas, which was made into a movie, the protagonist, Starr Carter, must cope with feelings of rage following the police shooting of her best friend.



BOREDOM: In his 2019 song "Boredom," Tyler, the Creator sings about being bored in your room, perfectly describing the monotony of social distancing we've all been feeling in 2020.

JUST A BAD MOOD . . . OR MORE? There's no upside to feeling bad all of the time. If you can check one or more of these boxes, it's time to tell a trusted adult like a parent or therapist.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> The feeling has lasted for a week or more. | <input type="checkbox"/> It's affecting your sleep. (You can't sleep, or all you want to do is sleep.) | <input type="checkbox"/> It's affecting your appetite. (You have no interest in food, or are eating a lot more than usual.) | <input type="checkbox"/> You've lost interest in things that bring you pleasure. |
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