

Emotional Volume

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll learn how the intensity of an emotional display is different from the intensity of an emotion itself by discussing:

1. Emotional Volume
2. Emotional Volume in Conflict Resolution

1. Emotional Volume

Emotions are unpredictable, and they can sometimes feel elusive to the point that we don't even know what we're feeling.

However, emotions are key to getting at the real needs that parties bring into a conflict. When considering these emotions, we must also consider **emotional volume**, or the intensity with which an emotion is expressed.

We all display emotions differently; not all of us express even intense emotions like anger or sadness in the same way.

IN CONTEXT

When some people are sad or grieving, they may cry and become very emotional. Other people may retreat and just become silent. It doesn't mean they're feeling the sadness any less; they simply have a different means of expressing it.

Anger is the same way. When some people are angry, they can become volatile and perhaps exhibit blaming behavior. Others may turn the anger inward and become depressed, or maybe a little more passive-aggressive in the way they express what they're feeling.

While those are extremes, people express positive and negative emotions differently even in more moderate circumstances.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** You have a friend who just returned from a vacation, and he appears elated because he's very effusive in the way he talks about the wonderful time he had. Another friend may return from a vacation, and have had just as good a time, but she's more contained in the way she express her feelings.

All of us express things differently, and we're capable of experiencing multiple emotions at the same time.

➡ **EXAMPLE** Imagine you are about to make a big decision, such as buying a home. You probably feel very excited about buying this home, but in the next moment you might feel scared.

Those seem like contradictory emotions, but fear and excitement can be like two sides of the same coin. Both have energy involved, and they can flip back and forth: "I'm so excited about this home. I can't believe what I did. Can I afford to pay for it?"

At other times, we may feel that we have a series of emotions, almost like a journey or a thread. We might start with anger, but underneath that there's sadness, and then there's hurt, then loneliness or fear.

As we follow and experience all of those emotions, perhaps after an event such as the death of a loved one, we realize that our emotions are fluid; they can and will often change.



TERM TO KNOW

Emotional Volume

The intensity with which an emotion is expressed.

2. Emotional Volume in Conflict Resolution

Because our emotions are fluid, the emotion that we are expressing with the most volume in whatever way we express it might not be at the heart of what we're really feeling. It's key to recognize this in a conflict resolution setting.

In other words, the emotion that a party expresses the loudest may not necessarily be the emotion that is really the most intense for that person.

If you are a conflict-resolver, it is your role to help the parties:

- Explore what they're feeling
- Name the emotion(s)
- Express the emotion(s)

This may mean taking a moment at the beginning of the process to acknowledge the emotion that's being displayed with the most intensity.

This emotion could be anger, fear, grief, or anything else; acknowledging that emotion, by perhaps asking questions to explore it with the party, may help you find that other emotions exist behind the loudest one.

➡ **EXAMPLE** You are resolving a conflict in which a family is arguing over what to do with heirlooms. There's been a death in the family; family members are dividing things up, and there's anger over how this is being handled, and who's getting what.

This is the presenting issue, but as you begin to talk to these family members, there are other issues that come through. Underneath the anger, there are hurt feelings that have stemmed from some of the interactions.

There may be embarrassment on the part of some, and there may be sadness or even fear. Any of those emotions may be underneath the anger, and any one of them can be the emotion that's most intense for an individual, and thus needs the most attention.



BIG IDEA

As a conflict-resolver, you are there to acknowledge, be present, and help parties explore what it is they're feeling, knowing that the emotion in the room with the most volume may not necessarily be the emotion with the most intensity for the person who's experiencing it.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **emotional volume** is the intensity with which an emotion is expressed, but not necessarily the intensity with which it is felt. You now understand how **emotional volume is involved in the conflict resolution process**. It is the conflict-resolver's job to acknowledge all the emotions in the room and understand that the loudest emotion may not be the most important or intense one for the person expressing it.

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



TERMS TO KNOW

Emotional Volume

The intensity with which an emotion is expressed.