

Fifty words

you were never given.

Five clusters of ten. Most adults use fewer than ten emotion words in an average week. These fifty are not advanced English — they are basic emotional vocabulary that was withheld from us. They are yours now.

On tenderness

Words for what it feels like to be received with care.

Cherished

Held in someone's mind as valuable, even when you are not in the room.

"I felt cherished by her — not impressive to her. There's a difference."

Seen

Looked at accurately, not as the role you play. Recognised.

"I felt seen for the first time in months. He wasn't trying to fix me."

Soothed

Calmed, in a way you didn't have to do yourself. Co-regulation.

"Her voice soothed me. I needed that, not solutions."

Received

Met, by another person, exactly as you arrived. Without translation.

"I felt received at the dinner. Nobody made me perform."

Accompanied

Not alone in something hard. Not fixed — accompanied.

"I felt accompanied through the diagnosis. That mattered more than advice."

Disarmed

Set down your defences without choosing to. Often the moment before tears.

"I was disarmed by the kindness. I didn't see it coming."

Safe

Not in danger, but more specifically: not braced. The body has dropped its guard.

"I feel safe with her. I don't have to manage how I am."

Tender

Open, careful, slightly raw — not as weakness but as the right response to something true.

"I'm tender today. Please be gentle without asking why."

Gentled

Brought down to softness by someone who knew how. A skilled tenderness.

"He gentled me when I was about to be reactive. That's a rare ability."

Met

Reached, exactly where you were. Not pulled up or talked down.

"She met me where I was. She didn't try to move me."

On relational rupture

Words for what happens between people, in the places no one taught us.

Unmet

Reached toward, but not reached back. A specific kind of relational hunger.

"I wasn't unloved. I was unmet. Those are different problems."

Unmoored

Loosed from what held you, without warning. Often felt before it is named.

"I've been unmoored since the move. The new place hasn't become home."

Invisible

Present but not registered. Distinct from being rejected.

"I was invisible in that meeting. I would have preferred a no."

Dismissed

Treated as not worth engaging with. The wound is in the dismissing, not the disagreement.

"I was dismissed, not corrected. That's why it sat with me for weeks."

Diminished

Made smaller in someone else's account of you. Often without their noticing.

"I was diminished in the way he talked about my work. He didn't mean to. It happened anyway."

Abandoned

Left, by someone whose presence you had counted on. Often quiet, not dramatic.

"I felt abandoned by her after the call. She didn't do anything wrong. She also wasn't there."

Betrayed

Hurt by someone who was meant to be safe. A breach of an unspoken contract.

"I don't feel hurt. I feel betrayed. I had trusted him with this."

Stranded

Left without a way back. The relational equivalent of being out of cell range.

"I felt stranded after the fight. Like there was no road back to her."

Forgotten

Held by no one's memory for that day. A small, real grief.

"I was forgotten on my birthday. Not by everyone. By the one who used to remember."

Severed

Cut from. The connection ended, often without ceremony.

"We were severed by something neither of us could name in time."

On self-witnessing

Words for the practice of meeting yourself without performance.

Spacious

Inwardly roomy. Enough space inside to receive what is happening without bracing.

"I feel spacious this week. Not happy — spacious. There's a difference."

Congruent

What you say and what you feel are the same thing. No translation.

"I felt congruent in the conversation. I didn't have to manage two layers."

Settled

Returned to ground, internally. Not because nothing is wrong — because you are no longer fighting yourself.

"I'm settled tonight. The problem isn't fixed. I'm just not at war with it."

Enlarged

Made bigger inside by an experience. Often without anyone noticing from outside.

"I was enlarged by that year. I don't look different. I am different."

Attuned

Reading the small signals — your own or another's — accurately and in real time.

"I'm attuned to her today in a way I haven't been in weeks."

Oriented

Aware of where you are, in the larger sense. Not lost in your own week.

"I am oriented again. I know what I'm doing and why. That's not always true."

Self-trusting

Able to take your own read on a situation seriously, without external confirmation.

"I am self-trusting on this one. I don't need everyone to agree."

Sovereign

Belonging to yourself. Not separate — but no longer governed from outside.

"I felt sovereign for the first time at forty. Not isolated. My own."

Steady

Reliable to yourself. The internal version of dependable.

"I am steady this week. I haven't been, this whole year. I notice."

Interior

Inside your own life, not narrating it. A state, not an activity.

"I was finally interior at the cabin. Not photographing it. In it."

On transition

Words for the in-between places no one names while you are in them.

Liminal

Between. After one thing has ended and before the next has named itself.

"I'm in a liminal year. I've stopped explaining it."

Ungrounded

Loosed from your usual anchors. Often the first signal of a transition.

"I feel ungrounded since the move. Nothing's wrong. Nothing's holding either."

Suspended

Held mid-motion, often by something outside your control.

"I'm suspended waiting on the diagnosis. I can't make a plan from here."

Transient

Passing through, not arriving. A description of where you are right now.

"I am transient in this city. I keep forgetting that. It explains a lot."

Ungrown

Not yet developed into the next shape. A description, not a failure.

"Parts of me are still ungrown at forty. I am no longer ashamed of that."

Threshold

At the door of a change. Not yet across.

"I'm at a threshold. I'm no longer the old thing. I am not yet the new."

Between

In the gap between identities, roles, or seasons. The plainest word for the place.

"I'm between things. That's the truest sentence I have right now."

Porous

Open at the edges. More affected by the world than usual.

"I'm porous this week. Small things are landing as big things."

Permeable

Letting more in than usual. Sometimes a vulnerability, sometimes a gift.

"I was permeable during the trip. Every conversation went deeper than I planned."

Becoming

In the middle of changing. Not finished. Possibly not even halfway.

"I am becoming someone the people who knew me at twenty would not recognise."

On the inside of grief

Words for the longest unspoken thing.

Hollow

Empty in a particular shape — the shape of what is missing.

"I feel hollow today. Not sad. Hollow. Those are different."

Empty

Not full of anything — including feeling. The state under numbness.

"I feel empty. I wish I felt sad. Sad would be something."

Heavy

Tired in a way sleep alone will not reach. The body knows.

"I'm heavy today. The weekend isn't going to be enough."

Vacant

Present but not occupying. Looking out from behind glass.

"I've been vacant in conversations for three weeks. I notice now. I didn't then."

Numb

Not feeling, because the feeling is too much to feel yet. A protection.

"I'm numb about my father. I will not be numb forever. I am for now."

Weighted

Carrying weight that is not visible. A precise emotional fact, not a metaphor.

"I'm weighted this week. Please do not ask me to be lighter."

Disassembled

Taken apart inside. The pieces are still there. They're just not connected.

"I'm disassembled this month. I'll come back together. I'm not back yet."

Stilled

Brought to quietness by something true. A pause the body chose.

"I was stilled by the news. I couldn't move for a minute. I needed to be stilled."

Disjointed

Out of sequence inside. The pieces of your day not connecting.

"I'm disjointed today. Things that usually fit aren't fitting."

Flat

Affect at zero. Not depressed in a dramatic sense — just flat.

"I'm flat this week. Nothing's wrong. Nothing's anything."

*These words are not advanced English.
They are basic emotional vocabulary
that was withheld from you.*

Use them out loud this week. Notice which ones your mouth resists. That resistance is the curriculum you never received, asking now to be filled in.

— *Mon*