

## Describing your internal weather

### What it is

To help people convey their inner state, many who provide pastoral care (e.g., therapists, teachers, parents) turn to weather metaphors<sup>1</sup>. This is not just a useful shortcut to finding the right terms and images to describe emotions that might otherwise be hard to summarise. It can also serve as a reminder that, just as clouds will eventually part and let the sun shine through, the way we feel at a given time is not permanent<sup>2</sup>. Describing 'internal weather' is therefore a means of reflection<sup>3</sup>, a method of supporting emotional intelligence<sup>4</sup> and building a metaphor-based emotional vocabulary<sup>5</sup>, and – as described below – an opportunity to be creative.

### Testimonials

Most of our workshops begin and end with a quick round-robin in which all participants describe their current mental weather. This is a relatively low-stakes way of sharing thoughts and feelings, since no further comment is required after the weather report is given. However, participants note that this introductory exercise often opens the door to more personal conversations as the workshops progress – with commiserations and sympathies shared with those who are feeling stormy and grey. Inevitably, weather conditions at the end are sunnier than those at the beginning, and bracketing the workshop in this way allows people to notice this change; they are often surprised, and always pleased, at the positive effect of the creative activities.

### Materials needed

This is a highly flexible activity that can take many shapes. At a minimum, it can be done mentally with no supplies at all; below are some suggestions for materials that could be used to create a more tangible output if there is time and interest.

- Pen and paper – to capture a written description of the internal weather
- Drawing implements (e.g., colouring pencils, markers, crayons, paints) and paper – to produce a visual representation
- Collage materials (e.g., old books/magazines/paper ephemera, coloured paper, wrapping paper, stickers) – to assemble a patchwork visual representation
- Images featuring weather, landscapes, or people with obvious facial expressions – to select as a means of expressing current emotions without creating the visualisations from scratch; these can act as reusable 'flashcards'

### Suggestions

- At the beginning of the day (or shift), take a brief timeout to tune in and identify your current internal weather. Consider making a record of this somewhere – e.g., a

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://creativityintherapy.com/2018/05/emotions-as-weather/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://inquiringmind.com/article/1602\\_39\\_mannschatz\\_practice-page/](https://inquiringmind.com/article/1602_39_mannschatz_practice-page/)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nursingtimes.net/clinical-archive/wellbeing-for-nurses/reflective-practice-3-making-it-meaningful-and-using-it-in-practice-20-06-2022/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-emotional-intelligence-2795423>

<sup>5</sup> <https://conflictcenter.org/expanding-your-emotional-vocabulary/>

journal, in the notes app on your phone. Think about why you feel this way, how it might affect you, and whether there is anything you can or need to do to support yourself before proceeding. This ‘thinking’ does not have to happen in words; it can be done creatively, using images.

- As above, but undertake the activity at the end of the day (or shift). This will be particularly impactful if you have also done an earlier reflection and have an opportunity to compare the before and after, and consider why things might have changed.
- Rather than engaging with this as a daily part of your routine, you might prioritise it for particular purposes – e.g., for preparing for a clinical supervision, working through an especially emotional response to something, or investigating complex feelings that you don’t recognise or can’t name.
- Incorporate this as a group activity before (or after, or both) interactions with colleagues, patients, students, family, etc. Depending on the context, it could be used as, e.g., an icebreaker, to start a conversation, to explore interpersonal tensions, to brainstorm solutions to workplace stressors.
- If you are implementing new routines, interventions, or other ways of working, use this exercise to gauge the effects of these changes.
- If you are working with someone who is struggling to communicate how they feel, or what impact something is having on them, use this exercise to help them convey their experience visually.
- Instead of thinking about what your current internal weather is, visualise the weather you’d like to have – or even just conditions that are better than where you are now, even if they still aren’t the ideal. As you create this visualisation, or perhaps afterwards, reflect on what would be needed to achieve this incremental improvement. Can this be incorporated into the image in some way, as a sort of ‘action point’ or source of inspiration?

Examples of ways that internal weather was visualised as a series of skiescapes by one person at different points over the work week:



