

Introduction:

In this activity, participants will discuss the concept of emotional labor and reflect on the emotional labor that they and others perform in various situations. They will first think of a situation where they felt intense feelings and then discuss what it would be like to have to either suppress those feelings or pretend that they shared those feelings with someone else. This will then lead to a discussion about coping with situations where emotional labor is required.

Facilitator Notes:

The facilitator will want to be prepared for the fact that this activity may demand emotional labor on their part if it triggers strong emotions in a participant. If it hasn't already been done, set the stage by inviting participants to take care of themselves, including by leaving the room, tuning out with music, etc., if that's what they need. The facilitator will also want to think about how to support participants if this situation arises.

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Define emotional labor.
2. Identify their own and others' emotional labor.
3. Reflect on coping skills and positive outcomes for emotional labor.

Time:

30 minutes.

Group Size:

Pairs.

Materials:

Optional: Emotion Wheel (in [Downloads](#)).

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Denial
- Polarization
- Minimization
- Acceptance

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:**Cultural Self-Awareness**

- To articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity; aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).

Empathy

- To interpret intercultural experience from the perspectives of own and more than one worldview.
- To demonstrate ability to act in a supportive manner that recognizes the feelings of another cultural group.

Other Skills:

Mentorship & Leadership; Emotional Resilience.

Activity Instructions:

1. Instruct participants to think of a work or school situation in which they would have strong feelings of hurt, anger, frustration, or fear. Instruct them to write down emotion words to indicate their feelings during the situation. Note emotion words to indicate what one or more other people would likely feel in the situation. Let them know they will not be asked to disclose the situation.

Note: The facilitator may want to offer the Emotion Wheel to participants at this point in the activity (in the [Downloads](#) section of this tool).

2. Ask participants to discuss the following with a partner or in small groups:
 - What are key emotions you would feel in the situation? How easy would it be for you NOT to show these feelings to the people involved?
 - What are key emotions someone else would have in the situation? How easy would it be to pretend you share that person's feelings?
 - How easy would it be to genuinely share someone's feelings in the situation?
3. Group debrief:
 - How was it to discuss how feelings get or don't get expressed?
 - What did you learn?
 - Based on this activity, how would you define emotional labor?
 - What general situations – work, home, or social – can you think of where emotional labor is required?
 - What are some success stories that you or someone you know has had with coping with situations that demand emotional labor? *Note:* If participants have smartphones, the facilitator might take 5 minutes to have people look up and share strategies for coping with emotional labor.
 - What strategies not yet mentioned could help you cope with situations that demand your emotional labor?
 - What can you do with what you learned in this activity?