



# Summary of Letting Go

## Original book by David R. Hawkins

Are you often bogged down by negative emotions? Does this keep you from getting what you want from life? In *Letting Go*, David R. Hawkins explains how to move from feeling stuck to being happy and at peace. He argues that if you release negative emotions and welcome positive emotions, you can improve your mental and physical health, strengthen your relationships, and invite greater success in all areas of life.

In this guide, we'll look at common ways we avoid dealing with difficult emotions. Then, we'll explore Hawkins's strategies for identifying, accepting, and releasing unhelpful emotions and discuss the benefits of this process. Finally, we'll examine how the energies of different emotions affect our lives. In commentary, we'll explore alternative perspectives on dealing with emotions from psychology and neuroscience. Additionally, we'll explore commonalities between Hawkins's ideas and those from various spiritual traditions.

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## 1-Page Summary

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Hawkins (1927-2012) was a psychiatrist who specialized in treating schizophrenia and addiction. He founded or cofounded [numerous organizations](#) for psychiatric care, and he received many [awards and citations](#) for his contributions to medicine. Despite his prolific medical career, Hawkins is best known for his work in philosophy and spirituality. He spoke at many conferences and appeared on talk radio shows—including *Oprah Radio*—to discuss his research into the nature of human consciousness, as well as holistic health care practices that encompass physical, mental, and spiritual wellness. His other books include *Power vs. Force*, *Healing and Recovery*, and *Truth vs. Falsehood*.

In this guide, we'll look at common ways we avoid dealing with difficult emotions. Then, we'll explore Hawkins's strategies for identifying, accepting, and releasing unhelpful emotions and discuss the benefits of this process. Finally, we'll examine how the energies of different emotions affect our lives. In commentary, we'll explore alternative perspectives on dealing with emotions from psychology and neuroscience. Additionally, we'll explore commonalities between Hawkins's ideas and those from various spiritual traditions.

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### How We Avoid Dealing With Emotions

According to Hawkins, most of us carry unhelpful emotions because we fear them. **Instead of confronting them, we avoid dealing with the emotions, so they stay with us.** This harms our mental and physical well-being.

(Shortform note: In *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F\*ck*, Mark Manson argues that [you also lose out on valuable feedback when you repress or ignore your emotions](#). Emotions aren't something to fear—their purpose is to let you know when something is good or bad for you. When you ignore those feelings, you block feedback that could help you solve the problems in your life. Thus, you continue to struggle with the same issues, and you find it difficult to be happy. Other experts elaborate on [the potential mental and physical consequences of avoiding difficult emotions](#). For instance, these can manifest as digestive issues, depression, and greater susceptibility to infections. In relationships, you might struggle with conflict and intimacy.)

Hawkins says that every emotion has an energy frequency, and the higher the frequency, the more positive the emotion. Furthermore, similar energy frequencies are attracted to each other. Therefore, if you're constantly avoiding or feeding negative emotions, those emotions will attract more negativity. You'll be unhappy and less successful in all aspects of life: relationships, finances, and health.

(Shortform note: This concept of the energy you put out coming back to you is similar to the Law of Attraction, as described in Rhonda Byrne's *The Secret*. However, Byrne focuses on thoughts instead of emotions—she states that [your thoughts have an energetic frequency that beckons other sources with the same energetic frequency](#). When you focus on a thought and send its energy out, the universe sends the same frequency back to you. Therefore, it's important to focus your thoughts on what you want to happen. If you focus your thoughts on what you *don't* want—or you're holding on to negative emotions—the

universe will send you a negative outcome.)

In this section, we'll examine the three most common—and ineffective—ways we avoid confronting our emotions:

1. Distracting ourselves from our feelings
2. Burying our feelings
3. Sharing our feelings with others

### **Method #1: Avoiding Emotions Through Distraction**

**Hawkins says some people avoid unhelpful and uncomfortable feelings using external distractions.**

In today's world, there's no shortage of distractions that allow us to ignore our inner worlds. For example, you might open Instagram whenever you feel sad—scrolling for hours prevents you from diving into that feeling and thinking about why you're sad.

Though distraction may provide short-term relief from negative emotions, it ends up taking more energy from us than addressing the feeling would. Even if we ignore the feeling, it doesn't go away, so we end up carrying its negative energy around with us. Over time, this hurts us mentally and physically (ideas we'll explore later in the guide). Ignoring our feelings also prevents us from connecting deeply with other people and improving ourselves, as we're spending all our energy avoiding our emotions instead of opening ourselves up to positive opportunities and relationships.

#### **Further Drawbacks and Benefits of Distraction**

As Hawkins suggests, the advent of smartphones and other digital devices has introduced countless distractions that interrupt daily life. These technological diversions don't just help you avoid your emotions—[some research indicates that they can also impede your ability to concentrate](#). When your attention is always divided, your brain is in a state of constant alertness because your body produces more of the stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline. Your brain becomes used to looking for new stimuli, and there's a constant temptation to check your devices.

Not all distractions are bad, though—[some experts argue that temporary, healthy distractions can help you cope with difficult emotions](#), especially when those emotions arise from mental health disorders such as anxiety and PTSD. When you're feeling an emotion that's too strong for you to cope with at that moment, healthy distractions can divert your attention long enough for the feeling to ebb to an intensity you're better able to manage. Additionally, such distractions can prevent you from turning to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as drugs and alcohol. Healthy distractions might include reading a book, calling a loved one, meditating, or doing a chore.

This distraction strategy is a form of down-regulation, which is [a type of emotion regulation wherein you lessen the intensity of an emotion](#) to make it easier to handle. Rather than making connecting with others more difficult (like unhealthy forms of distraction), down-regulation can help prevent you from doing or saying things that hurt your relationships because you're too emotional to act constructively.

### **Method #2: Burying Emotions Deep Inside Ourselves**

**Another method we use to avoid dealing with uncomfortable emotions is burying them inside or deeply internalizing them.** Hawkins explains that we typically do this when we're unsure what to do with a

feeling, we're afraid of it, or we feel guilty about it. For example, you might bury your jealousy of your friend's success because acknowledging the emotion makes you feel like a bad friend.

(Shortform note: To recognize when you're internalizing your negative emotions, [notice when you engage in the following behaviors](#): First, you frequently talk badly about yourself. You might blame or punish yourself for perceived failure, engage in negative self-talk, or withhold things that bring you joy. Internalizing behavior may also manifest as self-isolation, frequent nervousness, or difficulty concentrating.)

Hawkins notes that burying feelings can happen with or without our conscious awareness. When it's conscious, we endure the feeling but act as if it isn't there. Despite our efforts, the feeling usually manifests later as mental and physical problems such as irritability and headaches.

(Shortform note: Pretending that a negative feeling doesn't exist provokes a physical response because [it signals to your brain that the feeling is dangerous or unwelcome](#). When your brain senses danger, it prepares your body for fighting or fleeing through effects such as tense muscles, a fast heart rate, and shallow breathing. Staying in the fight-or-flight state for too long can lead to chronic pain (like frequent headaches) and mental health issues (like anxiety and depression) that cause chronic stress and irritability.)

When we *unconsciously* push away a feeling, it's typically because we feel too much shame and anxiety to experience it consciously. To protect us, our minds deny the feeling before we're even aware of it.

(Shortform note: Some experts argue that [many Americans feel anxious and ashamed about negative feelings because they equate good self-esteem with happiness](#). They feel that if they're unhappy, there's something wrong with them. However, dismissing your negative feelings is dismissing an important part of who you are and how you experience the world, which actually worsens your self-esteem. To maintain a better relationship with yourself, you must accept all of your feelings—and consequently all parts of yourself—not just the happy ones.)

### Method #3: Sharing Feelings With Other People

Finally, Hawkins argues that **we sometimes avoid dealing with feelings by sharing them with others**. This sharing might happen verbally or through our body language. We often do this because we think it will make us feel better.

However, sharing an unhelpful emotion doesn't actually release us from it, contrary to what many people believe. Instead, it relieves just enough of the feeling's weight to allow us to bury the rest of it and avoid dealing with its root cause. Additionally, putting our feelings on others can damage our relationships, as the other person then has to find a way to deal with the feeling as well. The negative feelings can build up and strain our connection with the other person.

#### Sharing Negative Emotions Can Make You Feel Worse

In *Chatter*, Ethan Kross also warns that sharing emotions and [seeking support from other people can sometimes make you feel worse](#), adding that doing so increases your negative self-talk (your inner voice). Support-seeking often results in what psychologists call *co-rumination*: when the person supporting you asks too many questions about your challenge. Excessive questioning makes you re-experience the pain of the challenge *and* related, painful memories.

This is because brains process thoughts by making associations: When you recall one negative memory, your brain resurfaces other, related negative memories. When you re-experience all these memories, your negative self-talk grows louder, intensifying your negative emotions.

Likewise, other research supports the idea that [venting negative emotions can have mixed results](#). It can make you feel better by alleviating some of your stress and garnering sympathy and reassurance from the person you're venting to. However, *frequently* venting to people can wear them out emotionally (as Hawkins suggests), making them feel stressed and resulting in them responding with less empathy each time. To avoid damaging your relationships through venting, show appreciation for others' support, pay attention to cues that they're emotionally fatigued, and offer to reciprocate when they need someone to talk to.

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## How to Release Unhelpful Emotions

If the above strategies represent problematic ways to deal with difficult emotions, what is Hawkins's solution? **He argues that the best way to handle unhelpful emotions is to completely release them**, a process that we'll explore in this section. Once you learn how to do this, you'll feel less attached to external experiences and objects. You'll be free to enjoy things without depending on them for joy and fulfillment—if something goes how you want it to, that's great; but if it doesn't, you know you'll be all right. This means you'll no longer rely on anyone or anything other than yourself to feel happy and at peace.

(Shortform note: Hawkins's process of release and acceptance is similar to [the Buddhist process of attaining non-attachment](#). Non-attachment involves letting go of your desires for and feelings about all things, including your thoughts and emotions, relationships with others, and material belongings. This is based on the idea that everything is impermanent, so maintaining attachments inevitably leads to suffering—when the things you're attached to eventually disappear, you suffer. Mindful practices such as meditation can help with cultivating non-attachment and inner peace. Such practices help you consider your feelings as an outside observer instead of attaching to or identifying with them.)

### The Process of Releasing Unhelpful Emotions

Hawkins's first step for releasing an unhelpful emotion is to recognize the emotion and allow yourself to feel it fully. **As you experience a feeling, don't try to alter it, push back against it, or ascribe moral value to it.** Fighting the emotion is what gives it power and allows it to grow. When you release all your opposition toward and associations with an emotion by recognizing that it's no more than a passing feeling, you allow the energy of that emotion to leave you as well.

**If you start experiencing the same emotion later on, it means that you're still holding on to some of its energy.** You may require a continual practice of release to free yourself from the emotion because you've spent most of your life ignoring it or burying it. Alternatively, especially intense emotions are sometimes made up of lesser emotions, and you have to release the lesser emotions until you get to the root. In this case, continue releasing the layers of emotion until you get to the root.

### Additional Strategies for Recognizing and Accepting Emotions

Some people have trouble recognizing emotions. If this sounds like you, start by learning to recognize the physical sensations different emotions produce. [Your mind and body are intimately connected, so you feel emotions in the body](#). For example, you might get flushed and experience muscular tension when you're angry or feel shaky and sick to your stomach when you're anxious. Once you recognize these physical sensations, you can use them to identify when you're feeling their corresponding emotions.

Mindfully accepting negative emotions can also feel difficult at first. If you struggle with Hawkins's technique, consider following some experts' suggestion to [practice acceptance of negative emotions by watching a movie or a TV show](#). You may feel safer feeling difficult emotions about the characters' experiences than your own. As you watch a show or movie, take note of what emotions come up and allow yourself to experience them fully. By practicing on a smaller scale, you can begin incorporating the technique into your everyday life.

If there are negative emotions you persistently struggle to release or that you've been holding on to for a long time, you might benefit from speaking to a therapist who specializes in [Emotion-Focused Therapy \(EFT\)](#). EFT is based on a lot of the same premises as Hawkins's techniques—namely that avoiding negative emotions harms you and emotional awareness is vital for mental health. An EFT therapist will listen empathetically and ask reflective questions to help you increase your emotional awareness. They provide a safe space and an objective perspective you can use to work through confusing emotions. Finally, they'll teach you techniques for accepting and regulating your emotions.

#### **Example: Finding the Root of Anger**

For example, say you feel anger toward your loved ones whenever you perceive that they're pulling away from you. This means you often lash out at them, even though you know it isn't fair. You start by trying to release your anger in these situations instead of acting on it, which works for a while. However, it still comes up sometimes, so you examine your emotions further.

Underneath the anger, you find sadness and loneliness that comes from feeling like people don't want you around. You release those feelings as well, but the anger still arises occasionally. Finally, underneath the loneliness, sadness, and anger, you recognize that you fear you're not worthy of other people's love. To fully release the anger, sadness, and loneliness, you must release this fear too.

(Shortform note: If you're unsure you've found the root of an intense emotion, [try sorting your emotions into primary and secondary categories](#). Primary emotions are the first emotion you feel in response to a situation, and secondary emotions are the ones that follow. Therefore, primary emotions represent the root of your feelings, while secondary emotions are the layers you must release before getting to the root. To identify secondary emotions that still need to be released, look for emotions that are protective or push others away, such as anger. These protect you from the primary emotion (such as fear), which is harder to accept. If you're still experiencing a lot of secondary emotions, you have more layers to release.)

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## **The Benefits of Releasing Unhelpful Emotions**

Now that we've discussed some of the broad benefits of releasing unhelpful emotions—such as less attachment to external experiences and a greater sense of control—let's explore some of the more specific, tangible benefits that Hawkins cites. In this section, we'll dive into three of them:

1. How releasing negative emotions rids you of self-imposed limitations
2. How it improves your relationships
3. How it reduces your vulnerability to health problems

### **Benefit #1: Ridding You of Self-Imposed Limitations**

**According to Hawkins, releasing negative emotions rids you of the limiting thoughts and beliefs that accompany them.** Our thoughts are rationalizations of our feelings—therefore, if your feelings are always

stuck in a negative state, your thoughts will reflect a pessimistic outlook. When you're no longer mired in negative thoughts and feelings, you learn that nothing can stop you from doing anything you want. You can be brave and bold instead of fearful and inhibited.

For example, say you've always wanted to run a marathon, but you convinced yourself you'd never be in good enough shape. You don't want to completely give up, though, so you practice releasing the fear of failure that drives these unhelpful thoughts. Once you've successfully released your fear, you realize that nothing is stopping you from pursuing your dream. You start training and exercising every day, and you sign up for a marathon that's a year from now. You know that when the time comes, you'll be able to do it.

(Shortform note: In *Designing the Mind*, Ryan A. Bush offers a different perspective on the relationship between thoughts and emotions. He argues that emotions originate from thoughts, not the other way around. Between every stimulus and emotional response, there's a thought pattern provoking that feeling. If you're satisfied with the outcome of a situation, you'll experience positive emotions. If you don't get what you want, you'll feel negative emotions. To change your feelings and behaviors, you must first change your faulty thought patterns and underlying beliefs.)

### **Benefit #2: Improving Your Relationships**

Hawkins argues that **releasing unhelpful emotions can also improve your relationships**. As we've discussed, this is because your emotions affect the people around you, regardless of whether you consciously express them. Therefore, the things you feel about another person affect how they feel about you. To avoid negatively influencing someone's feelings toward you, you must release the emotions that might invite that person's negative energy.

(Shortform note: There's scientific support for Hawkins's idea that you can unconsciously influence the emotions of the people around you. [The psychological phenomenon of unconsciously influencing and being influenced by others' emotions is called emotional contagion](#). Emotions can spread through tone of voice, body language, and facial expressions. Support for the idea of emotional contagion came from studies of the responses of participants who observed someone else's facial expression. After observing, participants had an emotional response that mirrored the emotion shown in the other person's facial expression.)

For instance, pride is a common unhelpful emotion that can hurt relationships. When you're prideful—feeling like you always have to be perfect, or like you're superior to others—it's often because you have an unconscious desire to gain others' respect and approval. Instead of getting the respect and admiration you desire, however, you most likely get jealousy and competitiveness from others in return. When you can release your pride, you recognize that you don't need the approval of others to feel worthy, and others will naturally come to appreciate and respect you when you respect yourself.

(Shortform note: Instead of holding on to pride, which is based on external praise and accomplishments, [try to cultivate a feeling of dignity](#). According to some experts, dignity is a feeling of self-compassion and humility that's separate from external successes and failures. It's not dependent on any specific outcome—when you embody dignity, you don't feel the need to be perfect, and you no longer compare yourself to others. Likewise, forgoing pride teaches that all humans deserve to feel dignity, regardless of their strengths and weaknesses.)

### **Benefit #3: Reducing Your Vulnerability to Health Issues**

Finally, Hawkins asserts that **releasing negative emotions can protect you from diseases and other health issues**. He argues that beliefs take form in the physical body, and you're only as vulnerable to health problems as you believe you are.

(Shortform note: Though there's little research supporting the idea that getting sick is entirely related to our emotional state, [there's abundant evidence to suggest that many health conditions are related to emotional stress](#). For instance, chronic stress can suppress your immune system, leaving you more vulnerable to viruses such as the common cold. Additionally, stress can cause flare-ups of existing health conditions, such as irritable bowel syndrome.)

According to Hawkins, your beliefs determine your physical health because emotions, thoughts, and beliefs have energy, and the more we focus on them, the more likely they are to appear as physical symptoms. If you perceive the world as full of danger and disease, then you'll get sick more often.

For example, if you're constantly afraid that you have cancer, then every ache and pain you feel will be magnified as you attribute it to that fear. You'll frequently feel physically ill because you're already convinced that you're going to get sick, and you're giving your stress enough energy that it appears in your body the way you think it will. However, if you let go of your fear and anxiety, you'll likely find that your health issues begin to disappear.

(Shortform note: In *The Mindbody Prescription*, John E. Sarno offers a different explanation for why emotions manifest in the body. He argues that [the mind chooses to express emotional distress through physical symptoms](#) because physical conditions are more socially acceptable. As diagnoses for a physical condition increase, doctors treat it as more "real," which validates it as a socially acceptable condition. This is why chronic pain diagnoses change over time according to what's popular (despite the root cause being emotional distress).)

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## The Energy of Emotions

Now that we've discussed the mechanisms and merits of releasing negative emotions, let's take a closer look at the energies of specific emotions. In this section, we'll examine three unhelpful emotions with low energy frequencies and three beneficial emotions with high frequencies. We'll also explore how to apply Hawkins's advice on releasing emotions to these specific feelings.

(Shortform note: Rhonda Byrne's best-selling self-help book *The Secret* goes into more detail about the [energetic frequencies of thoughts](#) (as opposed to emotions, as Hawkins describes). However, while Hawkins describes energetic frequencies in terms of how high or low they are, Byrne describes them in terms of how positive or negative they are.)

### Low-Frequency Emotions

As we discussed earlier, Hawkins states that low-frequency negative emotions attract negative experiences and hinder personal growth and success. Let's take a closer look at three of the most common negative emotions: grief, fear, and anger.

#### Grief

Hawkins argues that **grief arises when you believe that you need something external to complete you, and then you lose that thing**. You might typically associate grief with losing people, but it could also come from losing a relationship, a worldview, or a dream you have for yourself. When you place a lot of importance on external attachments, every loss you experience feels like losing a part of *yourself*.

(Shortform note: To identify unprocessed grief, [consider whether you've experienced unexplained sadness or irritability recently](#). Have you felt depressed and unmotivated? These are ways hidden grief can manifest. If you haven't recently lost someone or something tangible that you care about, think about whether

anything you hoped would happen failed to happen. For example, maybe you hoped your health would be better by this point in your life, and you're grieving what your life could look like if it were.)

You may be tempted to bury your grief or ignore it because it feels overwhelming. Instead of protecting you, however, your unwillingness to accept the feeling keeps you in a state of grief. Staying in this state leads to hopelessness and regret.

(Shortform note: If you're struggling to deal with grief and loss on your own, [you may benefit from grief counseling](#). This involves working with a licensed therapist to progress through the stages of the grieving process and the complex emotions surrounding grief. You can choose one-on-one or group counseling.)

To release grief and move into a state of acceptance, you must allow yourself to grieve fully. Recognize that you're capable of handling the feeling and that you can love and care for people and things without attaching them to your sense of self.

(Shortform note: In *Bittersweet*, Susan Cain offers a counterpoint to Hawkins's idea that grief must be released, arguing that [you don't have to let go of your grief to take positive steps forward after a loss](#). Grief is just love in a different form, so it stays with you as long as you still love the people who are gone. You can find new connections and happiness while carrying the pain of loss. The grief you carry means you feel a constant, bittersweet awareness of impermanence, where joy and love are always intertwined with sadness. This awareness of impermanence gives everything in your life more meaning.)

## Fear

According to Hawkins, another emotion with a low frequency is fear. Because fear has been connected with survival throughout our evolution, it's highly pervasive, and it manifests in many different ways.

(Shortform note: As Hawkins states, we evolved to feel fear to protect ourselves from danger. [We're particularly sensitive to fears in the following categories because we must avoid them to survive](#): violence, contamination, loss of social status, predation, and environmental dangers. Our fears also develop differently depending on the environments we grow up in. For example, if you live in a rural, wooded area, you might fear being attacked by a bear or mountain lion. If you live in the middle of a city, it makes more sense to fear getting hit by a car.)

**Some fears seem small and insignificant, while others can prevent you from living the kind of life you want to.** For example, a fear of spiders likely won't affect you often, but a fear of leaving the house will prevent you from connecting with others and being adventurous.

(Shortform note: [An extreme, irrational fear of something that most people consider harmless is called a phobia](#). People often change their lifestyles to avoid the circumstance or thing that triggers their phobia, and their daily existence may be restricted because of it. Luckily, phobias can be treated with professional help, cognitive behavioral therapy, and self-exposure.)

As we touched on before, fear is also problematic because its energy draws in the things you're afraid of—if you believe something is going to happen, it often does. Once the thing you're afraid of comes to pass, it acts as evidence of the fear, keeping the cycle of fear going. For example, let's say you're afraid to be vulnerable with others because you think that they'll abandon you if you show the messier sides of yourself. Because you won't show any vulnerability, people do often give up on getting to know you, and you feel more alone. Though your fear is actually what's driving this loneliness, you take others pulling away from you as confirmation that the feeling is valid.

(Shortform note: Joseph Murphy also explores the self-fulfilling nature of fear in his book *The Power of Your*

*Subconscious Mind*. He argues that [every time you think negative thoughts, you block your subconscious mind](#) from accessing both the useful information you have stored in your mind and the positive energy flowing from the universe that creates positive experiences. As a result, your subconscious mind creates negative experiences that align with your fears and worries.)

To free yourself from fear, Hawkins says to start by recognizing that you don't need to be afraid of being afraid. As with any other negative emotion, you must learn to sit with fear if you are to release it. Recognize that it's not protecting you, but rather holding you back. **You can also shift your mindset by making decisions out of love instead of fear.** For example, don't eat a strict diet just because you're afraid of developing a disease later on in life. Instead, choose to eat nourishing food that makes you feel good because you love yourself, and you deserve to be well taken care of.

### Further Perspectives on the Roles of Fear

Fear isn't always something to get rid of—it [serves several necessary functions](#). First, fear can be an indicator that you have a limitation you need to break free from. Overcoming a limiting fear—such as a fear of driving—can make you feel empowered and free. Alternatively, sometimes fear *does* protect you—in truly dangerous situations, your fear can prompt you to act shrewdly and quickly. Finally, small doses of fear can be enjoyable and invigorating. Temporary increases in the hormones adrenaline and oxytocin make you feel less stressed and more alive.

Despite the benefits of temporary experiences with fear, other experts agree with Hawkins that [making decisions out of love is better than making them out of fear](#). When you make decisions with love, it means opening yourself to vulnerability, uncertainty, and fear, but choosing what you love anyway. This helps you discover what you really want and opens up new possibilities. If you make solely fear-based decisions instead, you'll always end up going with the safest option and likely miss out on what you truly want and need.

### Anger

Hawkins argues that anger can be useful, though it's still an ultimately destructive emotion. You might bury your anger because you feel guilty or think it's undesirable. **However, keeping anger inside leads to long-term health problems and harms relationships.** Even if you don't express your anger, it draws negative energy toward you.

(Shortform note: Anger that you've buried can manifest in unexpected ways. You may not recognize it until you lash out, causing problems in your relationships. [Signs you might have repressed anger](#) include difficulties with confrontation and boundary-setting, using sarcasm and passive aggression, self-isolating when you're upset, feeling resentful of others, and engaging in frequent negative self-talk. These harmful patterns of communication can make it hard for you to get close to people and often lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. Effects on your physical health may include insomnia, high blood pressure and cardiovascular issues, and chronic stress.)

Anger isn't all bad, though—it can energize you and propel you to action, and you can direct that energy toward a good purpose. Instead of subduing your anger or unleashing it on the people around you, use it as motivation to improve your situation or yourself. For example, say you hold a lot of anger against your parents for the ways they treated you as a child. Instead of holding that anger inside or lashing out and damaging your current relationships, use it as motivation to go to therapy and learn to treat others better than your parents do.

(Shortform note: In addition to its broad usefulness as a motivational tool for improving your circumstances, anger can give you short-term energy. Some studies indicate that [anger prompts your body to produce norepinephrine](#), a neurotransmitter involved in the fight-or-flight response. This prepares your muscles, lungs, and heart for action, giving you a boost of energy. You can channel this body response productively to complete physical tasks like cleaning your house or exercising.)

### High-Frequency Emotions

Hawkins states that to reach an ultimate state of peace where you're unencumbered by negativity, you must release unhelpful feelings and make room for beneficial ones. These positive emotions attract success and fulfillment with their high frequencies, and they help you become less attached to external sources of joy and acceptance. Now, we'll examine three of the most powerful positive emotions: courage, love, and peace.

(Shortform note: Hawkins first detailed his emotional vibration chart explaining the frequencies of different emotions in his book *Power vs. Force*. Though he ascribes numerical values to the frequencies of different emotions, [there's currently no method backed by scientific research](#) to truly measure the vibrational frequencies of emotions. That being said, there's a lot of research to support the idea that [positive emotions and thoughts encourage better physical and mental health](#).)

#### Courage

According to Hawkins, **courage represents the transition from a mindset of limitation to a mindset of capability**. You no longer think of all you *can't* do and instead turn your attention to what you *can* do.

(Shortform note: Courage is one of the four cardinal virtues of the philosophy of Stoicism, meaning the Stoics also believed it was essential for living a good life. In *Courage Is Calling*, modern-day Stoic philosopher Ryan Holiday describes courage in terms of action and capability, like Hawkins. [He defines courage as doing the right thing even though you're scared](#). Embodying this virtue means acting to help yourself or someone else in need regardless of potential negative consequences.)

When embodying the energy of courage, you're able to be joyful, centered, and self-assured. You have faith that you can get the things you want and need with abilities you already have, and you learn to respect yourself. When you invite courage in, you're willing to take risks and make mistakes to grow.

(Shortform note: Every time you show courage and take on fear, [you feel more powerful and your fears become less powerful as you learn how to manage them](#). One way to exercise courage is by [doing something scary every day](#). It can be something small, such as trying a new type of food or asking someone out on a date. Over time, the evidence of your capabilities that you gain from successfully facing your fears and taking small risks builds up into higher self-esteem.)

#### Love

Hawkins asserts that love is more than just a high-frequency emotion—it's a way of life. Whenever you offer love and kindness to other beings, you're improving the world around you. Putting out love freely also means that it'll come back to you freely.

(Shortform note: In *The Secret*, Byrne [suggests offering praises and blessings](#) to show love to the people and the world around you. Do this for everything and everyone, even people you view as enemies. One way to act on this advice is [loving-kindness meditation](#), a common Buddhist practice. Visualize someone you love, someone you feel neutral about, and someone you dislike, and offer the same blessings to each. For example, you might offer the blessing "May you experience joy, safety, love, and peace" to each person.)

**Once you're no longer holding on to your negative emotions, you realize that love is everywhere, just waiting to be discovered, and it can manifest in countless ways.** For example, love can be found in a teacher letting a tired student sleep in class because the student's struggling at home, or a friend taking the time to listen to your favorite song. When you exist in a state of love, your presence and actions encourage the people around you to be better, too—to be calmer, more considerate, more patient, and so on.

On an individual level, love makes it easier for you to forgive yourself for perceived faults. You're able to accept yourself as you are. Additionally, it becomes easier to feel grateful to be alive and thankful for the things that bring you joy and happiness. Thus, your life becomes better, and you make other people's lives better.

(Shortform note: Some studies indicate that [practicing gratitude every day is linked to a lower risk of depression, anxiety, and addiction](#). Likewise, research suggests that it makes people more resilient after experiencing a traumatic event. Finally, expressing gratitude (and thus love) is linked to better connections with loved ones and increased relationship satisfaction.)

### The Power of Self-Love

Byrne argues in *The Secret* that [the most important manifestation of love is self-love](#). When you don't treat yourself the way you want others to treat you, you're sending a powerful message: "I'm not worthy. I'm not deserving." You'll broadcast those messages to the world, and the people, situations, or events that are drawn to you will reflect those thoughts. Therefore, to see love everywhere, you must offer it to yourself.

To practice self-love, [consider choosing a hobby that you can dive into](#). Take time to explore your interests, creativity, and joy without the pressure of having to be good at it. Additionally, show yourself love by paying attention to your body. Instead of constantly pushing your limits, thinking of your body as a tool, and only making changes when something goes wrong, take care of it at all times. This might mean planning more rest every day, eating healthy, nourishing foods, or incorporating more movement into your routine.

### Peace

Hawkins names peace as the highest, most evolved emotional state. **Peace is the ultimate goal of emotional release, wherein you've freed yourself from all negative energy.** In many spiritual traditions, someone who's achieved true peace has reached enlightenment.

(Shortform note: Hawkins's definition of peace aligns with the [Buddhist definition of enlightenment](#). When you're enlightened, you're no longer bound to *samsara*, or the continuous cycle of death and rebirth. Additionally, you're free from all earthly attachments, which are the source of suffering. Just as peace is the ultimate emotional state, enlightenment is the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice.)

When you're at peace, you feel inner stillness, unity, and contentment. No outside force can disturb this internal quiet, and you no longer experience earthly suffering because your sense of self is no longer tied to your physical body.

(Shortform note: In *The Power of Now*, Eckhart Tolle describes this state of peace and unity as being connected to your true Being. [He states that your true Being is your deepest self](#), which you can connect to only when you're wholly present in the current moment. It's your life energy, which is unaffected by your

physical body, mind, ego, and any external factors. Every living thing has a true Being, and all Beings are connected by a unifying life energy. Your true Being is indestructible, even in death—your body is merely the physical form it takes. Connecting with your true Being is the only way to attain true happiness.)

Finally, true peace also means you no longer experience desire. You don't need to covet anything because the energy that you put out is so strong and positive that anything you need automatically arrives in your life.

(Shortform note: Tara Brach states in *Radical Acceptance* that [you don't need to completely eliminate desire](#) to experience peace and reduce suffering. She argues that some desire is inevitable because you'll always want certain things to live (such as food). Instead of trying to eliminate your desires, strive to not be ruled by them. When you encounter desire in any form—whether it's a desire for food, companionship, a new gadget, or anything else—you should meet it without resistance and without letting it possess you. Instead, meet it with mindful acceptance. In doing so, you can experience desire but live freely despite it.)

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## Exercise: Practice Releasing an Unhelpful Emotion

In *Letting Go*, Hawkins describes many benefits and strategies for releasing unhelpful and negative emotions. Practice these techniques using an emotion you've experienced recently.

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Think of a negative emotion you've experienced recently. How did it affect your life? (For example, maybe you've been angry about your circumstances lately, and it's harming your relationships with the people around you. Or, maybe you've been grieving the loss of a dream job, and you can't seem to move on and find a new position.)

Which of Hawkins's three unhealthy methods for avoiding emotions (distracting from, burying, or sharing) do you use, and what effect has it had? (For example, you try to push the anger down, but instead of making it go away, you just feel irritated all the time. Or, you try to distract yourself from your job grief by playing video games all day, which keeps you from finding a new position.)

What's one technique you could use to release instead of avoid that emotion? (For example, instead of ignoring your anger, you might use it as fuel to change the parts of your life that are leaving you unsatisfied. Or, you might give yourself the space to fully grieve for the path you thought that job would take you on, and remind yourself that you're strong enough to handle it.)

What's one way releasing the emotion might benefit your life? (For example, releasing your anger could strengthen your connection with your family and friends. Or, releasing your grief could reveal new career opportunities you wouldn't have seen before.)