

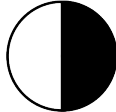
EXERCISE: EMOTION MAPPING

Your home isn't just physical clutter - it's also emotional clutter. Different spaces and situations trigger different feelings. This exercise helps you understand which parts of your home (or which situations) affect you emotionally so you can prepare for them, avoid them when possible, or tackle them strategically.

Why this matters: When you know WHAT triggers you and WHY, you can make better decisions about where to focus your energy and how to protect yourself emotionally.

Time Needed

20-30 minutes



Energy Level

Medium-High (requires emotional awareness and honesty)



What You'll Need

- Paper and something to write with
- Optional: Colored pencils or markers

When to Do This

When you want to understand your emotional reactions better, or when you're trying to figure out what to tackle first

How It Works

You'll create a map of your home and label different spaces or situations with the emotions they trigger. Then you'll use that information to make decisions about how to navigate your daily life.

Step 1: Draw a Simple Map of Your Home

On your paper, draw a basic floor plan of your house/apartment. Don't worry about it being perfect—just rough outlines.

Include:

- Your bedroom
- Bathroom(s)
- Kitchen
- Living room/common areas
- Hallways
- Any other important spaces
- Outside areas if relevant (porch, yard, driveway)

Mark:

- Where your room is
- Where the worst clutter areas are (shade them in or mark with X's)
- Paths you use to get around

Step 2: Identify Your Emotional Zones

Now, think about how you FEEL in each space. Go room by room and ask yourself:

“When I’m in this space, how do I feel?”

Common emotions you might experience:

- Calm
- Stressed
- Anxious
- Angry
- Sad
- Embarrassed
- Overwhelmed
- Trapped
- Safe
- Unsafe
- Frustrated
- Numb
- Hopeless
- Peaceful
- Suffocated
- Guilty
- Ashamed
- Depressed

Label each space on your map with 1-3 emotions you feel there most often.

Use colors if you want:

- Red = Intense negative emotions
- Yellow = Moderate stress/discomfort
- Green = Neutral or positive feelings
- Blue = Sad/depressed feelings

Step 3: Identify Specific Triggers

Now dig deeper. Within each space, what SPECIFICALLY triggers those emotions?

For each room, ask yourself:

What do I see that triggers me?

- Piles of stuff
- Specific items
- Mouse poop
- Clutter blocking pathways
- Dirt or mess
- Bugs
- Something that shouldn’t be there

What do I smell that triggers me?

- Mold or mildew
- Rotting food
- Stale air
- Animal smells

What situations in this space trigger me?

- Trying to find something I need
- Someone else entering my space
- Needing to use the space but can't
- Having to explain the space to others
- Being reminded of how bad it's gotten

Write these triggers next to each room on your map.

Example:

Kitchen: Stressed, Overwhelmed, Frustrated

- Trigger: Can't find clean dishes when I'm hungry
- Trigger: Counters are covered, nowhere to prepare food
- Trigger: Mold in the fridge
- Trigger: Smell of old food in the sink
- Trigger: Embarrassed if someone sees it
- Trigger: Bugs in the pantry

Step 4: Identify Your Safe Zones

Look at your map and find any spaces that feel neutral or good.

These are your safe zones: places where you can breathe, reset, or escape emotionally.

Ask yourself:

- Is there ANY space in my home that feels okay?
- Where do I go when I need a break?
- Is there a space I've managed to keep somewhat under control?
- Are there times when certain spaces feel better?
(Time of day, or when certain people aren't home?)

Mark these safe zones clearly on your map.

If you don't have any safe zones at home, add:

- Places outside your home where you feel safe
(library, friend's house, park, car, school)

Example:

- My bedroom (when the door is closed) - Mostly calm
- This is the one space I have some control over
- I feel safer when it's just me in here

Step 5: Map Your Daily Emotional Journey

Draw a line on your map showing your typical daily path through the house:

- Morning: Bedroom → Bathroom → Kitchen → Out the door
- After school: Front door → Kitchen (snack?) → Bedroom

Along this path, mark how your emotions change as you move through spaces.

Example:

- Wake up in bedroom (Okay)
- → Walk through living room to bathroom (Stressed: have to navigate clutter)
- → Bathroom (Frustrated: hard to use, messy)
- → Kitchen (Overwhelmed: can't make breakfast easily)
- → Leave house (Relief)

This shows you: Where the emotional toll is highest in your daily routine.

Step 6: Analyze Your Map

Now look at your completed emotion map and answer these questions:

- **Which space triggers the most negative emotions?**
- **Which space do I HAVE to use regularly that causes me stress?** (Example: If the bathroom is a major trigger but you need it daily, that's a priority problem.)
- **Which negative emotions come up most often?** (Embarrassment? Anger? Overwhelm? Anxiety?)
- **Are there any patterns?**
 - Do certain types of clutter trigger me more than others?
 - Are certain times of day worse?
 - Do my emotions change when certain people are/aren't home?
- **Do I have at least one safe zone?**
 - If yes, how can I protect it or spend more time there?
 - If no, how can I create one?
- **What's the emotional cost of my daily routine?**
 - Am I starting every day stressed because of my morning path through the house?
 - Am I ending every day drained because of what I face coming home?

Step 7: Make a Plan Based on Your Map

Now use this information strategically.

Priority 1: Protect or Create a Safe Zone

If you have one safe space, protect it fiercely. If you don't have one, creating even a tiny safe zone becomes your top priority.

Action steps:

- What's one space (even just a corner) I could make feel safer/calmer?
- How can I maintain my safe zone so it stays safe?

Priority 2: Reduce Exposure to High-Trigger Zones

You can't avoid everywhere, but you might be able to minimize time in the worst spaces.

Action steps:

- Can I change my daily route through the house?
- Can I use certain spaces at specific times when they're less overwhelming?
- Can I limit how often I go into the most triggering rooms?

Priority 3: Tackle High-Impact Triggers

Pick ONE trigger that, if addressed, would make the biggest difference in your daily emotional experience.

Action steps:

- What's one small change I could make in a space I use daily?

Example: If you're triggered by not finding clean dishes, could you keep one clean dish/cup in your room?

Priority 4: Prepare for Triggering Situations

If you know certain spaces or situations will trigger you, prepare emotionally.

Action steps:

- Before entering a triggering space, take three deep breaths
- Remind yourself: "This is temporary, I won't always live like this"
- Have a plan to exit quickly if needed
- Use grounding techniques (count objects, focus on breathing)

Using This Exercise

Update your map as things change. Emotions shift. Spaces get worse or better. Your safe zones might move. Re-do this exercise every few months.

Share it with a trusted person if helpful. Sometimes it helps to show someone: “This is what my daily emotional experience is like.”

Use it to advocate for yourself. If you’re working with a counselor, social worker, or trying to explain to a family member why this is hard, this map makes it visible.

Reference it when making decisions.

“Should I try to clean the kitchen or my bedroom first?” → Check your map - which impacts your daily emotional experience more?

“Where should I do homework?” → Check your map - where do you feel calmest?

Accessibility Considerations

This exercise asks you to draw a map and move through spaces. Adaptations include: describing your home layout verbally or in writing instead of drawing, having someone else draw while you direct, taking photos of spaces instead of drawing, or using a floor plan if available. If you have mobility limitations and can’t access all spaces in your home, map only the spaces you DO access and note which spaces you can’t reach. If moving through spaces is physically difficult, you can do this exercise from memory or with someone else walking through and reporting back to you. The goal is understanding emotional triggers in your accessible spaces.

Important Reminders

- **Your emotional reactions are valid.** You’re not being “too sensitive” or “dramatic.” Living in a hoarded home IS emotionally exhausting, and your feelings make sense.
- **Emotion mapping isn’t about fixing everything.** You can’t control most of these spaces. This exercise is about understanding your experience so you can navigate it more strategically.
- **Some emotions might surprise you.** You might discover you’re angrier than you thought, or more embarrassed, or more hopeless. That’s important information. It’s okay to grieve. When you do this exercise, you might feel sad about what your home isn’t. You might feel jealous that other people don’t live like this. Those feelings are legitimate.
- **You’re not stuck with this map forever.** When you move out, you’ll create an entirely new emotion map—one where rooms feel calm, safe, and under your control.

Real Talk

Most people don't think about the emotional impact of their physical space because their homes feel neutral or positive. For you, your home is an emotional minefield.

You're constantly managing:

- Embarrassment (what if someone sees?)
- Anger (why can't they just clean up?)
- Frustration (I can't find what I need)
- Overwhelm (there's too much stuff)
- Sadness (this isn't how homes should feel)
- Anxiety (what if it gets worse?)

That's exhausting. And you're doing it every single day.

This exercise doesn't take away those feelings. But it does help you:

- Understand them
- Predict them
- Prepare for them
- Make strategic choices about where to put your energy

Your emotions are data. They're telling you something important about your environment and your needs.

Listen to them. Map them. Use them.

And remember: One day you'll create a completely different map—one where your home supports you instead of draining you.