

Specific Affect Coding System Manual

5-Code Version

Any scientific reference should be to:

Lougheed, J. P., & Hollenstein, T. (2014). *Specific Affect Coding System Manual: 5-Code Version*. Unpublished manual.

Adapted from the Simple Affect Coding System (Jabson, Venkatraman, & Dishion, 2003) and a 10-code modification of the Specific Affect Code (original by Gottman, McCoy, Coan, & Collier, 1996; adapted for children by Granic and Hollenstein (Granic, O'Hara, Pepler, & Lewis, 2007; Hollenstein, Granic, Stoolmiller, & Snyder, 2004).

SPAFF5 Crib Sheet

All codes in the SPAFF5 are scored based primarily on affect demonstrated. Some codes like Interest/Curiosity rely more heavily on verbal content than others. The gestalt of cues used to score the emotions that are observed will include vocal tone, facial affect and body posture and/or orientation.

(99) Positive Affect

- Caring/Affection
- Laughter/Smiling
- Enjoyment
- General Positive Affect

(77) Interest/Curiosity

- Non-Verbal Attentive/Positive Energy
- Elaboration/ Clarification Seeking
- Opinion question
- Paraphrasing
- Validation

(55) Neutral

- Resting Affect
- Shock
- Surprise

(11) Internalizing Negative Affect

- Resignation/Passivity
- Crying
- Feels Hurt
- Slow Sighing
- Fear/Tension
- Fidgeting
- Fear Face
- Nervous Avoidance
- Speech Disturbances
- Nervous Laughter

(33) Externalizing Negative Affect

- Raised Voice
- Irritation/Annoyance
- Constrained Anger
- Physical cues of anger (jerks, twitches)
- Physical cues of interpersonal disgust (nose wrinkle)
- Invalidation
- Lecturing/patronizing
- Contempt

(m) Missing

- Talking to experimenter
- Speaking in another language

(99) Positive Affect

The positive affect code is comprised of happiness and surprise attributes. This code is characterized by a general appearance of a positive emotional state. This is an active code, as opposed to one's resting emotional state. Look for smiles, happy eyes, raised cheeks, lips apart or together and turned up.

Attributes:

- **Caring/Affection:** This attribute is characterized by a positive, warm, loving expression during interaction. Look for a dreamy, happy face. This may also appear as love with a small smile or an affectionate touch. This attribute also includes loving or caring statements such as "I love you" or "I care about you" and compliments that communicate pride in one's partner, when accompanied by a warm, affectionate, or otherwise positive tone.
- **Laughter/Smiling:** This attribute includes the clear and often audible laughter that can erupt during an interaction. The cheeks are raised and the lips may or may not be parted in a smile.
- **Enjoyment:** Often when participants are experiencing enjoyment they demonstrate happiness, smiles, laughter, or amusement.
- **General Positive Affect:** This attribute can include anticipation, positive surprise, and joy/happiness, which are characterized by smiles or bright, beaming, positive expressions.

Considerations:

- To differentiate from interest, look for expressions of delight or pleasure.
- Not all laughter indicates Positive Affect. For the Positive Affect code, look for expressions of amusement or enjoyment during laughter. Laughter does not need to be shared with one's partner to be coded as Positive Affect. Laughter that appears tense, displays signs of nervousness or fear, or lacks enjoyment may indicate Internalizing Negative Affect. In rare cases, laughter may also indicate a Neutral code (please refer to the considerations under these codes for more detail).
- Compliments that communicate pride in one's partner are only coded as positive if they are accompanied by a warm, affectionate, or otherwise positive tone. Otherwise, they may be coded as another category, such as Neutral, if the behaviour meets those criteria.
- When observing affection sandwiched by negative codes, code affection as long as there is a clear change in the energy and/or voice tone coupled with the affectionate context. If the voice tone continues to be negative, even if the context is affectionate, do not code affection. Often the change in energy will not be noticeably warm, but will no longer be negative; in those cases it is appropriate to code affection.

(77) Interest/Curiosity

There must be a positive/active energy in relation to what the other participant has said or done—a definite involvement on the part of the listener. The voice can be relaxed and calm here. The observer scans for increased amplitude, tempo, rhythm, less pause time between people’s utterances, pitch changes, and people interrupting or finishing each other’s sentences. The participants demonstrate active interest and curiosity. These are not passive states, but active ones. The participant must easily be communicating an active interest and curiosity to the other.

Attributes:

- **Non-Verbal Attentive/Positive Energy:** To code interest on the basis of this attribute alone, there must be very strong physical cues such as leaning forward in the chair, a warm, questioning voice tone, and change in energy from passive to active listening.
- **Elaboration/Clarification Seeking:** The individual questions in order to seek clarification, additional information or elaboration on something related to or brought up by the participant. It is important that there is attentiveness on the part of the listener and that he or she is open and receptive. This can happen in the middle of a conflict discussion, but be careful that the tone is not negative. This attribute does not have to be in the form of a question, for example, “Tell me your big news!”
- **Opinion Question:** This can be any question that elicits the opinion and thoughts of the partner. Be sure this is not a defensive response.
- **Paraphrasing in a Question Format:** The partner paraphrases the other’s statement in a question format, as if to seek further clarification.
- **Validation:** Statements that convey understanding of the other, such as “I see where you are coming from”, “That must be difficult”.

Considerations:

- There must be eye contact on the interested person’s part (though it does not have to be reciprocated). In general, eye contact is used to help distinguish active listening and interest (coded as Interest/Curiosity) from other codes (e.g., Neutral), but if there is a behavioural sequence in which Interest/Curiosity cues are present (e.g., nodding to encourage the other to elaborate) and eye contact is made and broken multiple times in a short period of time (e.g., 5 seconds), code one instance of Interest/Curiosity if the Interest/Curiosity cue is maintained.
- There is always a pause after a real interest question to allow the partner to respond (though the partner does not need to respond).
- An example of a question that is NOT coded interest is an exchange of general factual information that is not subjective to the partner and is not in response to something or an idea that the partner has brought up.

Dialogue Examples:

When did you go to work today? (*Interest/Curiosity*)

What time do you want to go to the movies tonight? (*Interest/Curiosity*)

What time does the movie start tonight? (exchange of factual info.; *Neutral*; unless the partner just brought up wanting to go to the movies, then it would be *Interest/Curiosity*)

Do they have horses in Australia? (*Neutral*; unless the partner just brought up horses in Australia)

Is it nice in Australia? (opinion question; *Interest/Curiosity*)

Did Jim call about the boat today? (*Neutral*; has nothing to do with the partner; simply asking a factual question.)

Did you call Jim about the boat today? (*Interest/Curiosity*)

“Tell me more.” “Yea?” “Really?” “Huh?”

(55) Neutral

Neutral is sometimes thought of as the dividing line between negative and positive codes. It is recognized as being non-emotional in content and voice tone. The voice has an even, relaxed quality, without marked stress on individual syllables and within a comfortable pitch range. When observing something that cannot be defined by the SPAFF5 or it is too subtle to recognize immediately, then code neutral. Become familiar with the participants resting face. Participants may naturally have turned down lips, or other permanent features that may appear to be emotional expressions.

Attributes:

- **Statements/Information Exchange:** Matter of fact, non-emotional content.
- **Non-Codable Interactions:** Any affective behavior that is not defined by the code or does not adequately fit into the described code categories.

Considerations:

- Laughter that is completely without affect may be coded as Neutral. For example, a participant may end a sentence with a brief laugh that is similar to a sigh or quick exhalation of breath. In these cases and *only* if the participant does not show any positive affect (e.g., smiling) or internalizing negative affect (e.g., tension, nervousness), laughter may be coded as Neutral.

(11) Internalizing Negative Affect (Sadness/Fear/Tension)

The Internalizing code is marked by a decrease in energy and a passive resigned countenance. The participant demonstrates “withdrawal behaviours” that indicate avoidance or turning inwards. It can be expressed in a very subdued, quiescent state or in a plaintive, poignant way. This code is generally displayed with a low volume of the voice and a slowness of speech. It may resemble fear, sound tense, or appear as sadness.

Attributes:

- **Resigned/Passive:** Sometimes there is evenness in the tempo (a kind of monotony) with lowered amplitude. The participant may behave as if resigned or hopeless. They may appear unable to cope with the other participant’s behavior. They lack energy, may be sorry for themselves, feel a minor loss, or miss something/someone. Sometimes this is characterized by long pauses between phrases or words—as if it takes extra effort to speak.
- **Poignant/Crying:** Code all crying as sadness if the context suggests grief, remorse, regret, rejection, or hopelessness. Sometimes this also looks like someone trying *not* to cry.
- **Feels Hurt:** The participant demonstrates grief, remorse or desolation. There may be a quavering voice tone and it may be either abnormally high or low in pitch. There may also be a sense of depression or hopelessness.
- **Slow Sighing:** Slow sighing (as opposed to quick exhalations of air) is coded as Internalizing. Look for the deep intake of breath and slow droop to the shoulders as they let the air go. They may appear tired.
- **Worry/Tension/Fear:** Worry can result from the feeling of anxiety, worry, concern, or uncomfortable. The expression of fear may include wide eyes or raised eyebrows that are drawn together. The expression of tension may include resignation, tense body posture with shoulders up, and frequent breaks in eye contact. Concern can be expressed by a furrowed brow and changes in the tempo speech. The general appearance may be tense or difficulty sitting still.
- **Fear Face:** The mouth may or may not be open but the lips are stretched back. The upper eyelids are raised giving the eyes the appearance of bulging. The eyebrows may also be raised and/or drawn towards the center of the forehead.
- **Nervous Avoidance:** The individual focuses on something trivial in order to avoid eye contact with the partner. Fidgeting includes excessive or repeated plucking at clothing and/or hands, or rubbing areas of the face or lip biting. Code fidgeting behaviour as Internalizing when there is at least one other Internalizing attribute being simultaneously displayed. During nervous avoidance, the listener is conveying, “I’d rather not be here right now”.
- **Speech Disturbances:** The speaker is obviously having a difficult time expressing what it is they want to say. This may include several incomplete statements or unfinished thoughts within one speaking turn. Stuttering or repetitive utterances of “uh” or “uhm” may also be indicative of fear or tension.
- **Nervous Laughter (not shared):** Often laughing or smiling will act as an icebreaker when a situation becomes very tense. These smiles and attempts at laughter look forced and often do not ‘fit in’ with the context of the conversation. A listener may smile when another participant is discussing a very sensitive issue. The smile or laughter may look pasted on, as if it were an effort, not a revelation of happiness. Nervous laughter is coded when a participant laughs while displaying one other Internalizing Behaviour code (e.g., nervous avoidance, passivity, fear, etc). The key feature of nervous laughter is a lack of enjoyment.

Considerations:

- If laughter is not positive, rule out that it is not Neutral laughter (see code description) before coding it as Internalizing.
- If changes to vocal quality resemble those associated with Internalizing but actually seem to indicate tiredness, the behaviour may be Neutral.

(33) Externalizing Negative Affect (Anger/Disgust/Contempt/Domineering)

Lowered brows and a slight hint of tension in the jaw and clenched teeth characterize anger. The vocal quality is raised beyond the limits of a normal tone. The angry person may sound fed up, like they've 'had it up to here'. Words may be biting or abrupt with one word or syllable more strongly stressed. The disgusted person is repulsed and completely disgusted by something that the other participant has said or done. The individual may be displaying affect to dominate the other person and control the conversation or force the partner into compliance.

Attributes:

- **Raised Voice:** This is an open anger, often with a loud voice tone, while in the midst of confronting, scolding, or accusing. The speaker may sound irrational or show evidence of being upset with involuntary twitches or jerks.
- **Irritation/Annoyance:** The speaker is frustrated and will employ changes in the rhythm of speech and the way certain words are stressed. The speaker may also demonstrate fast exhalations or signs of exasperation. Eye rolls can also indicate irritation or annoyance.
- **Constrained Anger:** Attempts made to control being angry. An example of this is the lowering of the voice and speaking in an even, staccato rhythm, as if to communicate to the partner that the speaker is at the end of her/his rope.
- **Physical Cues:** Voice is raised or lowered beyond the limits of a normal tone, there may be involuntary jerks or twitches, a tight jaw and/or clenched teeth. The brows are drawn together and lowered, the upper eyelids may be lowered and lips are pressed or tight. This can also manifest as a negative touch (e.g, a slap).
- **Physical Cues of Disgust:** Disgust must be directed at the other person. The disgust face is usually easy to recognize. It is characterized by the wrinkling of the nose and the drawing up of the upper lip. In extreme displays the cheeks may raise and the eyelids narrow. The mouth may be open or closed.
- **Contempt:** Contempt is the attempt to insult or otherwise communicate a lack of respect toward someone else. Contempt is entirely different from a simple disagreement. There is a distance with contempt—an icy quality with a suggestion of superiority—as if looking down one's nose at another person. This includes derision, disdain, exasperation, sarcasm, mockery, insults, hostile humour, and communicating that the other person is absurd or incompetent. Contempt can include, but is not limited to, mockery of the present participant, eye rolls, and lip smacking/teeth sucking.
- **Invalidation:** The partner actively denies the validity of previously expressed feelings of their partner. Note that invalidation is not the absence of validation, but rather the presence of a statement that says, in effect, "you are wrong". E.g., "Bull shit!". Note that a participant can disagree with their partner without being invalidating. Code invalidation if the participant denies or invalidates the *feelings* of the partner.
- **Lecturing/Patronizing:** Lecturing can involve talking over the partner in an attempt to actively control or dominate the conversation. In domineering, look for platitudes, clichés, and quotes from authorities or the ambiguous "everyone" (as in "everyone knows"). Lecturing can also have a distinctly patronizing quality, as if doing one's best to talk patiently to a child.

Considerations:

- If changes to vocal quality resemble those associated with Externalizing (e.g., changes to rhythm and volume) but are actually being used only for emphasis (i.e., no other Externalizing cues are present), the behaviour may be Neutral.
- Similarly, disagreement accompanied by emphasis but no other Externalizing cues may indicate Neutral.

(m) Missing

The Missing code is used only for the following circumstances:

- The participants are addressing the experimenter
- The participants go off screen
- The participants are speaking in a language, in which the coder is not fluent.

Considerations:

- Going off-task is not considered Missing.