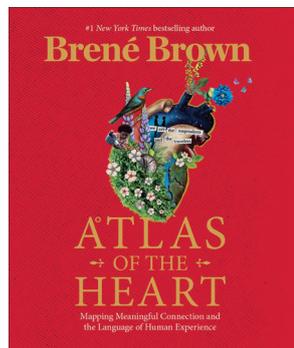




ATLAS OF THE HEART:
MAPPING MEANINGFUL CONNECTION AND THE LANGUAGE OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE
BY BRENÉ BROWN



THE BOOK


Atlas of the Heart
by Brené Brown


INTRODUCTION

Do you want to know and understand your emotions? Does a map of your feelings, an atlas of emotions, sound like a helpful tool? Five times #1 New York Times bestseller, Brené Brown thought so. The result is *Atlas of the Heart*, Brown's fifth and possibly most insightful book.

Take a journey through human emotions as Brown maps out your feelings and explains how they relate to each other. As Brown says, naming your emotions gives you power over them. By the end of the book, you will have a deeper understanding of yourself and your emotions.

As much a guidebook as a psychological primer, *Atlas of the Heart* deserves a place on everyone's bookshelf (digital or otherwise). The message will come in handy any time you need a reminder of what's actually going on in your head.



5 BEST QUOTES

"Avoidance will make you feel less vulnerable in the short run, but it will never make you less afraid."

"Hope is a function of struggle—we develop hope not during the easy or comfortable times, but through adversity and discomfort."

"There are too many people in the world today who decide to live disappointed rather than risk feeling disappointment."

"Science is not the truth. Science is finding the truth. When science changes its opinion, it didn't lie to you. It learned more."

"Do I have enough information to freak out? The answer is normally no. Will freaking out help? The answer is always no."



7 BIG IDEAS

1. NAMING EMOTIONS

Early in her research, Brown surveyed several thousand people over five years and asked them to list the emotions they recognised as they experienced them. The average answer resulted in only three emotions, happy, sad, and angry. These three emotions do very little to cover the enormous range of human feelings. How can you be in control of your emotions if you can't even name them?

Brown describes how language is your portal to making meaning. By knowing the correct names and terms for the emotions you are feeling, you can make sense of them and put them in their palace. You need to know the names and differences to understand if you are feeling rage or frustration. You can feel sadness without the extreme hopelessness that categorises despair. If the only word you have for despair is sadness, you are failing to identify the depths of your feelings appropriately.

Once you can name your specific emotion, research shows you are on the road to conquering it. Language can even shape the emotions you feel. Finally, emotions are how you make sense of your surroundings, so the better you can label them, the better you can manage yourself and your responses to others.

2. EMOTIONS

Atlas of the Heart has 13 chapters dedicated to emotion clusters.

Brown uses thorough research to break down each emotion and explain how it is defined. According to the latest research, she breaks through misconceptions and clearly outlines how you should think about every emotion. For instance, she explains the difference between happiness and joy:

- **HAPPINESS:** Stable, longer-lasting and normally the result of effort
- **JOY:** Sudden, unexpected, short-lasting and high-intensity

These clarifications and many more help to unravel the complexity of emotions. In all, Brown examines and defines almost 90 emotions. From the giddiness of joy to the depths of despair, Brown's 'atlas' guides you through every emotion you might experience in your lifetime.



7 BIG IDEAS

3. NEAR ENEMIES

Understanding near enemies is at the crux of Atlas of the Heart. Near enemies are two emotions that seem similar but are actually contrary. While far enemies are easy to spot and understand (ill-will is a far enemy of kindness, for instance), near enemies are more insidious.

Near enemies are insidious because they can be easily mistaken for their more positive counterparts. For example, it is easy to mistake pity for compassion, but pity is a passive and non-effective emotion, while compassion drives one to act. Identifying whether we are experiencing a positive emotion is crucial.

4. GROUNDED CONFIDENCE

Grounded confidence is when you lose the armouring behaviour that keeps you from moving forward. Brown believes that these armouring behaviours, even more than fear, stop you from showing up in ways that align with your values.

Grounded confidence is driven by learning and curiosity. It is about getting out of your head and embodying a commitment to learning and improving. Brown says the near enemy of grounded confidence is knowing and proving. This form of confidence means that you don't need to prove yourself right to others at all times. It frees you from such self-worth driven impulses and allows you to focus more on feeling embodied and connected to the self.

5. THE COURAGE TO WALK ALONGSIDE

The near enemy of walking alongside, according to Brown, is controlling the path. Having the courage to walk alongside means that you work with people. You don't set out to control them or even steer them. Your job is to be there with your student or loved one, without butting in.

As an example, Brown talks about when a child is upset about getting in trouble at school. "I want to be with you in this," turns into, "You need to email your teacher and apologise right this minute. What were you thinking?"

Walking alongside means relinquishing control and not seeking power over others.



7 BIG IDEAS

6. STORY STEWARDSHIP

Story stewardship is about how you communicate with other people. There are two main ways that people fail in their communication:

- **NARRATIVE TAP-OUT**
- **NARRATIVE TAKEOVER**

A narrative tap-out is the swift dismissal of what the other person has to say. It can be as simple as a quick redirection: “That’s a shame. So what’s for lunch?” or more complex as in “Yeah, everyone feels that way sometimes.” Both of these signal to the other person that their feelings are of no concern to you.

A narrative takeover can also happen in different ways.

- “I had a run-in with a coworker today.”
- “That jerk, I’m going to go sort him out.”

You may feel like you are helping, but you have made the story about yourself and not taken the time to hear your friend’s story.

There is also this widespread and insidious version:

- “I had a run-in with a coworker today.”
- “Tell me about it. Earlier I saw such and such and he blah blah blah...”

You may feel you are commiserating, but you have taken over and not given the time to your friend to hear them out.

It’s essential to be aware of story stewardship and check yourself when you fall into these traps. You might be surprised how often simply listening to your loved one is a solution in itself. In cases when action is needed, story stewardship will help you identify the correct steps to take.

7. THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

All of this brings Brown back to the importance of language. Once you explore and understand your own emotions, you can begin to practice grounded confidence, courage to walk alongside your students, family and partner, and lead with story stewardship. These come together to cultivate meaningful connections.

You can’t discuss and explore your emotions without the correct language. As Brown says, “The limits of not being able to explain result in an unbearable level of frustration.” Nuance is unavailable without the proper language. Shaping experience and emotion to fit what you know is the near enemy of knowing and applying language. The language must come first.

As Atlas of the Heart explains, when you take the time to understand the language of emotions, you’ll become a rounded person who can enjoy more fulfilling relationships at all levels.



3 ACTION STEPS

1. KNOW YOUR EMOTIONS BUT UNDERSTAND YOUR LIMITS

Learn to know your emotions. Be able to name them and label them. By doing so, you will have power over them and be able to harness them for your own purposes.

At the same time, keep in mind that emotions are complex and ethereal. Complete knowledge of your emotions is all but unachievable, and knowing the emotions of another is impossible.

2. TARGET NEAR ENEMIES

Counterproductive emotions that feel intuitively similar to more positive emotions are dangerous. For instance, don't mistake attachment for love.

Identify, examine, and combat near enemies when you can. Replace them as best as possible with their more productive and positive counterparts.

3. SECONDARY SCHOOL SUPPORT

Cultivating meaningful connection with others means practising three things:

- GROUNDED CONFIDENCE
- THE COURAGE TO WALK ALONGSIDE OTHERS
- STORY STEWARDSHIP

It is hard work but ultimately will result in more satisfying relationships with your loved ones and those around you.

Successfully cultivating connections will lead to better communication and higher commitment levels and help you be an all-around better human being. If everyone worked on cultivating meaningful connections at work and home, life would rapidly become exponentially more manageable and more satisfying!



1 KEY TAKEAWAY

The key takeaway of Atlas of the Heart is that, without understanding emotions, they will always have power over you. Learning is the key to emotional wellbeing.

Brené Brown says, "I want this book to be an atlas for all of us, because I believe that, with an adventurous heart and the right maps, we can travel anywhere and never fear losing ourselves."

Identifying and naming your emotions is the most powerful way to harness them. By mapping your emotions you can know them, understand them, and explore them without fear.



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