

Connecting with Your Feelings

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Many people are taught not to feel their emotions, or only to feel certain emotions such as anger (more common for western men) or sadness (more common for western women). Some of the reasons people are not in touch with their emotions are:

- Believing unhelpful comments made by people in our lives, such as “You shouldn't feel that way” or “Don't be sad” (or angry or discouraged or...)
- Observing or growing up in a family in which emotions were *not* expressed or encouraged. (By not expressing them or encouraging the expression of those feelings, we learn that feelings are not valid or even present.)
- Being exposed to a trauma once or several times. (As a result we may decide either consciously or unconsciously that feeling those emotions is either not useful or is overwhelming, so we shut them down and become flat and emotionless. An example would be children after a trauma during which they lost family members, wandering around listlessly with no light in their eyes, and being very flat in their expression when they speak.)
- Deciding at an early age not to feel some or all emotions because to feel them seemed not helpful or too painful.

What happens, however, when we decide not to feel certain emotions, is a smothering or flattening effect for almost all other emotions – like a blanket has been placed over all of them.

Instead of suppressing our emotions, scripture encourages us to bring them to God and process them together with Him. (See Heb 4:15-16, Eph 4:26-27, James 1:19-20, Is 53:4, Matt 11:28-30, Gal 5:22-23, John 14:27, and various psalms.) As we come to God with our emotions, He helps us to process these and get His perspective on each situation. He also empowers us to control our actions and respond (from a heart level) in ways that are holy.

To bring our emotions to God, it helps to know what they are. If you're not presently in touch with how you feel, the following steps may help you.

Steps in learning to feel:

1. *Choose* that you want to feel as much as Jesus wants you to – at the root (if there is one) of why you decided it was better not to feel some or all emotions. (If you have previously made a choice or vow *not* to feel, give this to God and ask Him to now nullify it and replace it with your choice to feel.)
2. *Ask* Jesus to be the “screen door” regulating your feelings; and to help you process these together with Him, get His perspective on situations, and respond in a godly way. (Often people assume that the only choices are an open door – feeling everything – or a closed door – feeling nothing.)
3. *Learn:*
 - To recognize what your body is telling you about how you feel
 - Feeling words (see list below)
 - The meanings of these words
 - How to recognize these feelings in yourself and others.
4. *Practice* in community.
5. *Work through hindrances* (such as believing that it’s not okay to feel anger).

Related Learning Activities:

1. At the end of each day, take some time to reflect on how you felt at various times during the day. Refer to the lists of feeling words as desired.
2. It is important to find someone with whom you feel it is safe to express your feelings. Ask God to help you find this person (if you don’t already have someone like this in your life). Invite this person to help you, and share with them as God leads.

Note: Someone fully equipped to help others in this way will be a safe place to share any and all feelings—including those that are positive, negative, powerful and overwhelming, or seemingly insignificant. This person will be comfortable with feelings and see them as God-given gifts which enhance our lives and experience. If someone is not yet fully equipped to help in this way, these are areas in which they can grow.

3. As you become more in touch with how you felt at various times during the day, you may also want to add the following exercise: At the end of each day,
 - Take some time to reflect on how others may have felt at various times during the day. Refer to the lists of feeling words as desired.
 - Ask people (as appropriate and desired) how they felt during those times and compare their responses with your assumptions.
 - Seek to understand differences between your assumptions and their answers. (There may be multiple reasons for these.)

Appendix 1. VOCABULARY OF EMOTIONS¹

Part 1. "Positive" Emotions

A) Activation:			B) Moving Toward:		
Cheerful	Excited		Affection	Compassion	Loyal
Delighted	Hopeful		Tenderness	Accepting	
Joyous	Enthusiastic		Love	Brave	
Easy-going			Curious	Grateful	
C) Comfort:			D) Enhancement:		
Satisfied	Friendly	Appreciated	Confident	Proud	Passionate
Warm	Peaceful	Attractive	Secure	Eager	Youthful
Calm	Rested	Comfortable	Strong	Competent	
Awed	Hopeful		Accepted	Beautiful	
Creative	Quiet		Committed	Happy	

Part 2. "Harder" Emotions

E) Hyperactivity:			F) Moving Against:		
Anger	Fearful	Peeved	Dislike	Resentful	Bitter
Horrified	Confused	Desperate	Angry	Ticked-off	Livid
Frantic	Alarmed	Terrified	Betrayed	Vengeful	Cheated
Alert	Suspicious	Threatened	Critical	Furious	Cruel
Panicked	Disgusted	Pity	Hate	Contempt	Hostile
G) Tension:			H) Inadequacy:		
Tense	Nervous	Embarrassed	Needy	Tearful	Overlooked Self-Conscious
Irritated	Frustrated	Frigid	Awkward	Anxious	Dominated Unappreciated
Grouchy	Boiling	Guilty	Vulnerable	Used	Inadequate Manipulated
Jealous	Deprived	Pessimistic	Powerless	Helpless	Misunderstood
Impatient	Annoyed	Torn	Overwhelmed	Phony	Victimized Out-of-Control
I) Hypoactivation:			J) Moving Away:		
Bored	Depressed	Failure	Indifferent	Apathetic	Incomplete
Empty	Withdrawn	Dependent	Blah	Alienated	Lost
Slow	Isolated	Ignored	Lonely	Withdrawn	Cut-off
Shallow	Gloomy	Hopeless	Useless	Ugly	Insecure
Beaten	Closed	Paranoid	Uninterested	Defeated	
K) Discomfort			L) Incompetence/Dissatisfaction		
Grief	Pitiful		Regretful	Weak	Envious
Sadness	Hurt		Incompetent	Blamed	Indecisive
Heartbroken	Heavy		Put-Down	Defeated	Inferior
Aching	Disappointed		Depressed	Suicidal	Inhibited
Pained	Guilty		Dissatisfied	Stupid	Like-a-Loser
Persecuted	Remorseful		Possessive	Pressured	Rejected
Touchy	Repulsive		Shy		

¹ Contributed by DW. Used with permission.

Appendix 2. Feeling Words

Part 1. "Positive" Emotions

HAPPY

brisk	generous	restful
buoyant	glad	satisfied
calm	grateful	serene
carefree	hilarious	sparkling
cheerful	inspired	spirited
cheery	jolly	surprised
comfortable	joyous	thrilled
complacent	jubilant	vivacious
contented	lighthearted	
ecstatic	merry	<u>AFFECTIONATE</u>
elated	optimistic	appealing
enthusiastic	peaceful	close
excited	playful	loving
exhilarated	pleased	passionate
		tender
		warm

INTERESTED

absorbed
concerned
creative
curious
engrossed
excited
fascinated
inquiring
inquisitive
intrigued
<u>GENERAL</u>
alive
compassionate
humble
sympathetic

FEARLESS

bold
brave
confident
courageous
daring
determined
encouraged
hardy
heroic
impulsive
independent
loyal
proud
reassured
secure

EAGER

anxious
ardent
avid
cooperative
desirous
earnest
enthusiastic
excited
intent
keen
proud
zealous

Part 2. "Harder" Emotions

AFRAID

alarmed	shocked
anxious	terrified
apprehensive	threatened
cautious	timid
cowardly	wishy-washy
dread	worried
fearful	
fidgety	
frightened	
gutless	
hesitant	
horrified	
hysterical	
inhibited	
insecure	
jittery	
nervous	
panicky	
petrified	
scared	
shaky	

ANGRY

annoyed
appalled
belligerent
bitter
boiling
cheated
cross
disgusted
enraged
feisty
frustrated
fuming
furious
grumpy
horrified
hostile
impatient
indignant
inflamed
infuriated
irate

CONFUSED / DOUBTFUL

bewildered
distrustful
dubious
evasive
hesitant
indecisive
mixed-up
perplexed
questioning
skeptical
suspicious
torn
unbelieving
uncertain
wavering

GUILT / SHAME

ashamed
awkward
embarrassed
humiliated
ill at ease
inadequate
incompetent
inferior
insignificant
like a failure
remorseful
ridiculed
sinful
sorry
stupid
useless
worthless

HURT

aching
 afflicted
 crushed
 despair
 distressed
 heartbroken
 ignored
 in agony
 injured
 isolated
 pained
 torn up
 tortured
 upset

PHYSICAL

breathless
 empty
 hollow
 immobilized
 nauseated
 paralyzed
 repulsed
 sluggish
 stressed
 stretched
 sweaty
 taut
 tense
 tired
 uptight
 weak
 weary

SAD

blah
 choked up
 crushed
 depressed
 despondent
 disappointed
 discontented
 discouraged
 disillusioned
 dismal
 dismayed
 dissatisfied
 downhearted
 dreary
 dull
 flat
 gloomy
 grief-stricken
 grieved
 heartbroken
 heavy-hearted
 in the dumps
 low
 melancholy
 moody
 mournful
 out of sorts
 somber
 sorrowful
 sulky
 unhappy
 weepy

MISCELLANEOUS

aggressive
 alienated
 bored
 burdened
 cold
 concerned
 cruel
 defeated
 deprived
 desperate
 distant
 dominated
 dreadful
 envious
 helpless
 hopeless
 hypocritical
 jealous
 lonely
 manipulated
 misunderstood
 offended
 out of control
 overlooked
 overwhelmed
 persecuted
 pessimistic
 phony
 powerless
 preoccupied
 pressured
 prideful
 rejected
 repulsed
 restrained
 sorry for self
 suffering
 two-faced
 unappreciated
 used by others
 victimized