



Spending Time with Our Feelings

July 2021

What exactly are feelings?

When we talk about feelings we are really talking about emotions. At the most basic level, researchers define emotions as the flow of energy (energy in motion) or states of activation through the brain and body. To understand what we feel, we need to tune into the emotion internally that is connected to the feeling (i.e I feel happy, mad, sad, tired).

To spend time with our feelings is not easy. Some feel comfortable and some feel incredibly uncomfortable. In only the last decade or so, science has shown that many are sensitive “super feelers” and experience their environment and emotions even stronger than others.

As well, there are many cultural influences at play that make it challenging to be with our feelings. To some degree, western culture has trained us to avoid our feelings and to only feel the “good” feelings and avoid the “bad”. In reality, as human beings, we are designed - and need - to feel and experience a range of emotions.



Why is it important to feel our feelings?

Dr. Marsha Linehan, Founder of Dialectical Behavior Therapy, asserts that “being able to experience your emotions is critical to have an effective life”. When emotions run high, there are many destructive behaviours to avoid them such as substance use, perfectionism, criticizing ourselves and others, and excessive busyness.

When emotions continue to be unaddressed, research shows a significant decrease in wellbeing and an increase in physical symptoms of stress such as headaches or more serious ailments. Your emotions help you make sense of the world. When we become more open and curious about our emotional experience (the signals from our internal world), we slow down, become more mindful and grounded in ourselves. We can listen to the wisdom and feedback our bodies give and use it as a guide and our most helpful tool.

Emotions point to values underlying them too. Thus, after feeling the emotion and letting it go we can learn. Additionally, it is important to remember feelings come and go; we are not our emotions, and it is just physical sensations that can feel overwhelming. It can be helpful to say: “I feel anxious” instead of “I am anxious”.

Tuning into our emotions can also help in our relationships. For example, instead of always seeing someone as angry, we can notice times when this person might be feeling worried or frustrated. Moreover, when we name an accurate feeling for another, it immediately activates the part of their brain that brings regulation. We can respond to others with more empathy and without getting angry ourselves. Keep in mind positive emotions need attention too such as feeling excited for a new job as well as nervous can help with anxiety. This is a very individual process that takes time, courage and patience.

How Can We Practice?

It is important to have self-compassion in this work and embrace the idea that learning how to feel at deeper levels is a lifelong journey.

Studies show that practices such as the ones below are linked to improved self-regulation, problem solving, flexible thinking, perspective taking and social skills.

Typically, every emotion feels differently in the body. Just like when we are thirsty and our throat feels “scratchy”. In short, emotions are like thirst, our body tells us what we need. For example, our temperature and our breath are different depending on how we feel.

- Consider a simple practice of closing your eyes and asking what do you feel inside?
For example:
 - ✓ Is your heart beating fast or slow?
 - ✓ Are your muscles tense or loose?
 - ✓ How do your feet feel touching the floor? How does your chest feel?
- Spend time with your emotions. Start to work on labeling what you think you are feeling. There are many feeling charts online that can help.
Then ask yourself for example “**How do you know you are sad?**” You may find for example your stomach feels hollow or your chest feels tight. This question can be applied to all feelings.
- After feeling the emotion and finding it easier to let it go we can learn from it. We can **listen to hear its message and ask ourselves questions and what we might need to attend to**. We can learn a lot just by noticing and describing what we feel.
- There is a strong connection between writing and emotional processing; particularly in emotionally charged experiences. The point with writing is the thoughts and feelings move from inside onto the paper **Consider setting a timer 20 minutes and just freely right about a difficult experience**.
- Yoga and meditation practices are great ways we can get back in touch with our bodies and be with our feelings. A mindful walk focusing on what you see, hear, and smell is also helpful.



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Simply phone one of the numbers listed below. One of
our administrative assistants will be pleased to help
you arrange your appointment.**



305 - 394 Duncan St
Duncan, BC V9L 3W4

Vancouver Island Counselling

Duncan: 250 746 6900
Nanaimo: 250 754 8222
Port Alberni: 250 723 7001
Victoria / Gulf Islands / Lower Mainland
1 877 746 6911



Online Resources

Yoga with Adrienne – free high quality online yoga
<https://www.youtube.com/user/yogawithadriene>

Dr. Kristen Neff Guided Meditations:

<https://self-compassion.org/guided-self-compassion-meditations-mp3-2/>

Book Resources

with activities to practice feeling emotions

Interception: The Eighth Sensory -- Kelly Mahler

Listening to My Body: A guide to helping **kids** understand the connection between their sensations and feelings so that they can get better at figuring out what they need. – Gabi Garcia