

Chapter 2

EXPLORING THE SCOPE OF FEELINGS Self-Responsibility

INTRODUCTION

TOO OFTEN individuals prevent themselves from exercising self-responsibility because they act before they are aware of everything they feel. In other words, they're acting without critically important information about themselves. In any situation or experience, it is important to be aware of the entire range of your feelings, not just the most immediate and most powerful of them. Very often you will find that your complete awareness of how you feel will lead you to behave quite differently than if you acted on your immediate impulses. It stands to reason that if there are other feelings beneath those impulses, you 'll want to know about them.

GOAL

We want you to be able to examine your reactions to experiences and discover the scope of your feelings so you can act self-responsibility. In this chapter, you will take the first steps toward this goal. Given a situation, you'll be asked to place yourself in the situation and imagine what your own feelings would be. It's not so important that you list the same feelings we do as it is that you become aware of the vast scope of feelings possible in any situation.

DEFINITION

A feeling is an emotional or physical reaction to an experience. The scope of feeling in any situation is all of the emotional and physical reactions and body sensations experienced by the individual.

ELABORATION

Emotional and Physical Feelings

Feelings are reactions to experiences. These reactions can be emotional and physical. For example, suppose you've had a very bad day nothing has gone the way you planned. Physically, your reactions may be fatigue, headache, and generalized tension. Emotionally, you may feel frustrated, irritable, or depressed. Every day of your life you will experience physical and emotional reactions to things going on around you and inside of you.

The Scope of Emotional and Physical Reactions

In most situations, you are likely to experience more than one feeling at the same time. Often, it may seem that there is only one powerful emotion. But if you look deeper, you are likely to find that your feelings are more complex than you first realized. They may even contradict each other. For example, suppose your partner spends a lot of time at a party talking to an attractive member of the opposite sex. Your most powerful feeling might be jealousy. If you assume that jealousy is the only feeling you have, you're probably not in touch with everything you feel. You may feel hurt that your partner seems to be choosing someone other than you to talk to. You may be *fearful* that an intimate relationship might develop. On the other hand, a part of you may feel *pleased* that your partner is having a good time. You may feel *freer* to wander around and talk to whomever you like. As you can see, some of these feelings are contradictory, but it is important to be aware of their existence. If you assume that jealousy is your only reaction, you are likely to behave quite differently than if you are aware of the full range of your feelings.

Censoring or Judging Feelings

Censoring and judging feelings are not constructive activities, and here are some reasons why:

Feelings are facts and as facts are not good or bad. It is usually easier for individuals to accept that physical feelings are facts. A headache or a sore throat is accepted as a fact. People don't typically think of themselves as good or bad because they have a physical ailment. They may try to ignore it to some degree, but they don't usually behave as though it didn't exist. Physical feelings give us information about our bodies. In the same way, emotional feelings tell us about our psychological condition and it is not constructive to censor or judge them.

For example, many people believe jealousy is a "bad" feeling. But if you're feeling *jealous*, it's not going to do you any good to judge yourself as "bad." The feeling is a fact. It tells you something about where you are right now: In the

present moment. You don't have to like it, but telling yourself that *jealousy* is bad won't make you stop feeling jealous neither will be attempting to ignore it. In censoring feelings, you may act without important information about yourself and, therefore, you may make an inappropriate decision for yourself without realizing it. If you are not aware of the full scope of your feelings, it is difficult to act in your best interest.

As we become aware that we are experiencing an emotion, most likely that emotion is accompanied by a thought and a body sensation. We become masters of not being aware of the sensation and instead act upon the thought.

Sensations in the Body

Recall a moment you were angry. Turn your attention inward, into your body. In that moment of anger, what was your heart rate doing? What was your breathing doing? What was your blood pressure doing?

You've probably answered that they all went up or in the case of heart rate and respiration, maybe you said they are faster. But further observation, you might also notice that certain muscles tense, maybe your teeth clench, maybe your face flushes and your temperature goes up or your hands get hot or your ears get hot.

What you have observed is a physiological, sensorimotor, fight or flight response coupled with the emotion of anger. Our bodies, emotions, and thoughts are constantly interacting with and influencing each other. This concert of thoughts, emotions, and sensations can literally shift states that less than a heartbeat.

Quick Lesson of the Brain

Our brains are physically structured into three primary regions. Thoughts, emotions, and sensations are processed predominately in one of the three regions. Many refer to this structure as the triune brain. The three brain regions will be discussed from most recent to most primitive. In other words, from top down.

The neo-mammalian brain, consists of the thinking parts of the brain: the cortex; the neo cortex; prefrontal cortex; and others. You're reading and processing the words and ideas in this sentence, paragraph, chapter in your neo-mammalian brain.

The mammalian region is also referred to as the paleo mammalian brain or limbic region. This region consists of many structures and performs complex functions. One of these functions is this feeling of emotion. A limbic structure that is highly important to having emotion is the amygdala, an almond shaped structure deep in the center of the brain. At times of sudden intense emotional reaction, this region takes over brain processing and in essence takes the higher level brain functions of line. In other words, we lose the ability to think straight. Daniel Goleman coined the term "Emotional Hijacking"¹ to describe this complex, nearly instantaneous reaction.

The foundation of our existence resides in the most primitive region of the brain,

¹ Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. New York: Bantam. ISBN 0-553-37506-7.

the brainstem. The area we are concerned with is often referred to as the reptilian brain. This area of the brain is largely autonomic. It controls heart rate, blood pressure, respiration, temperature and release of certain hormones. The reptilian brain is also responsible for instinctual forms of aggression.

Triune Brain in Action

- Sit in a position that is comfortable and dignified.
- Take two deep cleansing breaths. Breathe in through your nose in out through your mouth. Totally filling your lungs with each in-breath.
Bring into your awareness a positive memory. A memory from anytime from throughout your life. One that when you recall this memory it tends to bring a smile to your face.
- Identify a moment of that memory that resonates strongest in you.
- If possible, recall what your first thought might have been when the events of that memory originally occurred
- What emotions did you feel at that time?
- As you hold this positive moment in your awareness, and you recall thought you had and you are aware of an emotion, turn your attention inward. Where in your body do you sense it now? See if you can describe the sensation.
- What emotion would you say you are experiencing now? What is that sensation telling you?

You are not responsible for your feelings. Even though you are responsible for your behavior, you cannot directly control your feelings. Your feelings are triggered by the current situation and the depth and nature of those feelings is based on your previous experience which is personal and unique to you. Feelings are based more on your preceding experience than on the current trigger itself. This form of remembering is called sensorimotor memory. We store our experiences throughout our entire being².

Suppose, for example, that a woman has grown up with an alcoholic father who became violent when drunk. Her partner is normally a moderate drinker, but one evening he gets drunk at a party. When they get home, she locks herself in their room for the night and the next day she hardly speaks to him. Her feelings of fear, hurt, resentment, and anger are triggered more by her experiences with her father than by what actually happened. Another individual with different experiences would probably have felt and reacted quite differently. Because emotional reactions reflect each individual's unique experience, they are not subject to question or criticism.

Asking why or judging feelings as good or bad is destructive and pointless. It creates anxiety and wastes emotional energy. Since feelings are facts and since you have no direct control over them, it is wisest to take them at face value as useful information about yourself.

² Van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The body keeps score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. New York: Viking Penguin. ISBN 978-0-670-78593-3.

Another important point is that since you are not responsible for your feelings, neither is anyone else. No one can be blamed for the way you feel about some- thing. This is a difficult point for most people to understand and accept, but look at it this way: Since your feelings are a product of a current event coupled with all of your preceding experience, it is extremely difficult for someone else to accurately predict how you will feel about something. You have probably found it difficult to predict your own feelings. Since it is almost impossible for someone else to know exactly how you will feel about something, that person cannot be held responsible for your feelings.

Acceptance of your feelings means more than not censoring, judging, or analyzing them. Acceptance means that you acknowledge your feelings as facts and realities. It doesn't mean you have to like all of your feelings. You can accept the fact that you are fat without liking it. Once you accept it as a reality though, you are better able to begin doing something about it. If, instead of accepting your weight, you condemn yourself for being ugly, inadequate, or weak, you're more likely to choose a course of action that is not in your best interest, like eating a box of chocolates.

Positive feelings can also be difficult to accept. When you are extremely happy, you may be tempted to ask yourself questions like, "How long can this last?" or "When will it end?" Accepting the feeling without judging or analyzing it will usually help positive feelings last longer. The minute you worry that you won't be happy forever, you are no longer as happy as you were a moment ago. Accept happy feelings and enjoy them.

It is equally important to accept the feelings of others, whether you like those feelings or not, and even if they hurt you deeply. Those feelings are as factual and real as your own and need to be accepted as such.

THE VOCABULARY OF FEELINGS³

There are hundreds of words to express or describe feelings. In this book we'll be using only a fraction of them. The following "Vocabulary of Feelings" presents a great variety and number of words used to describe feelings. You may want to study the list and use it to help you expand your own vocabulary so you can speak about your feelings more specifically.

Levels of Intensity	Happy	Caring	Depressed	Inadequate	Fearful
Strong	thrilled on cloud nine ecstatic overjoyed excited elated sensational exhilarated fantastic terrific on top of the world turned on euphoric enthusiastic delighted marvelous great	tenderness toward affection for captivated by attached to devoted to adoration loving infatuated enamored cherish idolize worship	desolate dejected hopeless alienated depressed gloomy dismal bleak in despair empty barren grieved grief despair grim	worthless good for nothing washed up powerless helpless impotent crippled inferior emasculated useless finished like a failure	terrified frightened intimidated horrified desperate panicky terror-stricken stage fright dread vulnerable paralyzed
Moderate	cheerful light-hearted happy serene wonderful up aglow glowing in high spirits jovial riding high elevated neat	caring fond of regard respectful admiration concern for hold dear prize taken with turned on trust close	distressed upset downcast sorrowful demoralized discouraged miserable pessimistic tearful weepy rotten awful horrible terrible blue lost melancholy	inadequate whipped defeated incompetent inept overwhelmed ineffective lacking deficient unable incapable small insignificant like Casper Milquetoast unfit unimportant incomplete no good immobilized	afraid scared fearful apprehensive jumpy shaky threatened distrustful risky alarmed butterflies awkward defensive
Mild	glad good contented satisfied gratified pleasant pleased fine	warm toward friendly like positive toward	unhappy down low bad blah disappointed sad glum	lacking confidence unsure of yourself uncertain weak inefficient	nervous anxious unsure hesitant timid shy worried uneasy bashful embarrassed ill-at-ease doubtful jittery on edge uncomfortable self-conscious

³ Vocabulary of Feelings reprinted with permission of the publisher.

From: Hammond, D. Corydon, Hepworth, Dean H., and Smith, Veon G. Improving Therapeutic Communication: A Guide for Developing Effective Techniques. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977.

Levels of Intensity	Confused	Hurt	Angry	Lonely	Guilt-Shame
Strong	puzzled baffled bewildered perplexed trapped confounded in a dilemma befuddled in a quandary full of questions confused	crushed destroyed ruined degraded pain(ed) wounded devastated tortured disgraced humiliated at the mercy of cast off forsaken rejected discarded	furious enraged seething outraged infuriated burned up pissed off lightning mad nauseated violent indignant hatred bitter galled vengeful hateful vicious	isolated abandoned all alone forsaken cut off	sick at heart unforgivable humiliated disgraced degraded horrible mortified exposed
Moderate	mixed-up disorganized foggy troubled adrift lost troubled at loose ends going around in circles disconcerted frustrated flustered in a bind ambivalent disturbed helpless embroiled	hurt belittled shot down overlooked abused depreciated overlooked criticized censured discredited laughed at mistreated ridiculed devalued scorned mocked scoffed at exploited slammed slandered cheapened used	resentful irritated hostile annoyed upset with agitated annoyed mad aggravated offended antagonistic exasperated belligerent mean vexed spiteful vindictive	lonely alienated estranged remote alone apart from others remote insulated from others	ashamed guilty remorseful crummy to blame lost face crummy demeaned
Mild	uncertain unsure bothered undecided	put down neglected overlooked minimized let down unappreciated taken for granted	uptight disgusted bugged turned off put out miffed irked perturbed ticked off teed off chagrined cross dismayed impatient	left out excluded lonesome distant aloof	regretful wrong embarrassed at fault in error responsible for blew it goofed lament

EXAMPLES

THIS SECTION contains four examples. For each example, there is a scenario that begins to describe the situation and the most powerful reaction experienced by the individual. Following the scenario, the further description is given as to the feelings of the individual might be experiencing. This section is titled “Scope of Feelings”, and the physical and emotional reactions are listed. The order is of no particular importance. The commentary at the bottom of the page provides some useful comments about the scenario and the feelings elicited. Study only as many examples as you need, to be able to list the various reactions an individual might have took particular situation or experience.

NOTE:

As in the previous chapter, we are using other individuals as examples to demonstrate the definition. Outside of this text, we recommend that you do not go around second-guessing other people’s feelings. Put yourself into the situation or experience imagine what your own feelings would be.

EXAMPLE 1

Scenario

Anna's youngest son has just left for college and won't be home again until Christmas vacation. There are no younger children, and the older kids all live out of town. Anna's most powerful reaction when the son leaves is *depression*.

Scope of Feelings

In the days after her son's departure, Anna looks more closely at her feelings and finds them to be somewhat complex. She feels *lonely* because she now spends most of the day all by herself, *worried* about her son's health and well-being. *Regretful* of any arguments they had in the past year and appreciative of his personality because she misses him. She's *excited* for him because he's starting his own life of independence yet relieved that she doesn't have to pick up after him all the time. She's tired from the pressure that steadily built up until his actual departure. Anna is *nostalgic* about her own days in college.

COMMENTARY

Included above are:

physical feelings: fatigue.

positive emotional feelings: appreciation, excitement, relief.

negative emotional feelings: loneliness, worry, regret.

EXAMPLE 2

Scenario

Howard buys Janice a new refrigerator for Christmas. She thanks him for his thoughtful gift but later tells him it isn't the color she had wanted and it doesn't have an icemaker.

Howard's initial reaction is anger. He tells Janice to return the refrigerator herself and that he doesn't care what she does.

Scope of Feelings

After calming down, Howard examines his feelings more closely and finds that he also feels:

- *hurt* that she hadn't entirely liked the refrigerator he chose.
- *frustrated* that he had gone to so much trouble to get something that wasn't quite right.
- *fearful* that the present model could not be exchanged or that the new model might be significantly more expensive.
- *glad* that she told him what she really wants because he wants her to have it. *fearful* that he'll have to go to a lot of trouble to exchange the refrigerator. *irritated* that she couldn't be satisfied with it as it was.
- *insecure* because she might see him as unable to do anything right.
- *hopeful* that they can get a refrigerator with an icemaker after all, because that's what he really wants too, even though it seems economically impractical.
- *unhappy* that he can't provide her with all the things she would like to have.

COMMENTARY

Included above are:

positive emotional feelings: gladness, hope.

negative emotional feelings: hurt, frustration, fear, unhappiness, insecurity.

EXAMPLE 3

Scenario

Chuck works a lot of overtime, both voluntary and mandated. Consequently, Chuck often works varied hours and during scheduled days off. One particular weekend, Chuck has some free time. He decides to spend it with his two children. The youngest is in Little League, and Chuck wants to help him practice batting. The older child is a teenager, and Chuck wants to take her shopping for a gaming system that she's been saving for. These activities with his children will probably exhaust Chuck's free time for the weekend. Betty's initial reaction is jealousy because it seems he is choosing the children over her.

Scope of Feelings

Examining her feelings more deeply, Betty finds that she also feels:

- *guilty* about her jealousy of her children.
- *happy* that he cares for his children enough to take time for them.
- *proud* that he is practicing with his young son.
- *angry* because he isn't taking time to spend with her.
- physically tired due to the burden of making almost all household decisions herself.
- *fearful* that when the kids grow up and move away he won't ever take time for her.
- *thankful* that Chuck, busy as he is, takes more time for his children than her father did for her.
- *resentful* that she gets all the drudgery and he gets to have fun with the children.
- *fearful* that the children will like him more than her.

COMMENTARY

included above are:

physical feeling's: fatigue.

positive emotional feelings: happiness, pride, thankfulness.

negative emotional feelings: guilt, anger, fear, jealousy, resentment.

EXAMPLE 4

Scenario

After eighteen years with Tony, Karen is finding time to indulge in her artistic hobbies. She becomes quite good in a very short time and starts having her own shows and selling her artwork at respectable prices. Tony is a police supervisor who worked his way through college school and worked hard at building a strong and committed reputation. He vacillates between two very powerful reactions. He feels extremely *proud* of her talents and accomplishments. At other times he's *resentful* and grumbles about how much it's costing him to support her business.

Scope of Feelings

Thinking about it more, Tony realizes that he also feels:

- *resentful* that it's been so much easier for her than it was for him.
- *resentful* because she can work at home and when she feels like it, while he must work many hours day and night in the field.
- *left out* because he can't really participate in her work.
- uncomfortable around the friends she's met as an artist fearful that she will become more prominent than he.
- *fearful* that she will meet interesting people and become bored with him.
- *left out* because she is busy with her career and no longer waits on him as much as she used to.
- very *loving* toward her because she is growing as a person and becoming more and more interesting and confident in herself.
- *anxious* for her to do well and succeed for her sake.
- *insecure* because she no longer depends on him the way she used to, *nostalgic* about senses of emotional security he used to have; *proud* of her achievements and ability.
- *worried* that she might not be able to handle her success or failure.

COMMENTARY

included above are:

positive emotional feelings: love, pride, nostalgia.

negative emotional feelings: resentment, fear, feeling of being left out, discomfort, anxiety, worry, insecurity.

PRACTICE

FOLLOWING ARE five practice items. For each there is a scenario that briefly describes a situation. You are to describe the scope of feelings that the person involved might be experiencing. Include positive, negative, emotional, and physical feelings. Feel free to interpret the situation as imaginatively as you wish. You may find it especially helpful to use your own feelings in a similar situation as a guide.

On the page following the practice item is the feedback for the item. In the feedback, we list the feelings we came up with. If you came up with a different list, your answer is not wrong. We'd like you to be able to list at least four feelings for each item, but list as many more that you can.

After completing each practice item, study the feedback. If you feel you've done the first couple well, go on to the next chapter. If you have any trouble with the practice, refer to the definition, elaboration, or examples for help. Then try the practice again.

FEEDBACK 1

Scope of Feelings

Listed below are the other emotional and physical feelings we thought Mike and Christina could be experiencing. Your list may differ, but don't be concerned as long as you listed at least four reactions. They might be:

- *relieved* when she finally came home.
- very *happy* that nothing had happened to her.
- *hurt* because she hadn't called to let them know where she was.
- *frustrated* while she was gone because they didn't know whether to call around at her friends' houses and risk embarrassing her or to call the police.
- *fearful* while she was gone that something terrible had happened to her.
- *irritated* because they had asked her repeatedly to call when she was late.
- having *headaches* and *stomach* upset due to the intensity of their stress.
- physically *tired* due to the late hour and tense due to their anxiety.
- *frustrated* because this has happened several times and they don't know how to prevent it.

COMMENTARY

Included above are:

physical feelings: fatigue, tenseness, headache, stomach upset.

positive emotional feelings: relief, happiness.

negative emotional feelings: fear, hurt, irritation, hysteria, frustration.

FEEDBACK 2

Scope of Feelings

Listed below are the other emotional and physical feelings we thought Don could be experiencing. Your list may differ, but don't be concerned as long as you listed at least four reactions. Don might feel:

- *resentful* that the nursing home payments prevent him from spending as much as he'd like on his family.
- *pleased* that he can support his father financially now that he needs him, particularly since his father has helped him out frequently over the years.
- *happy* on the many days when his father is in good spirits and coherent. *sad* and *depressed* on the days when his father is incoherent or nasty.
- *nostalgic* about the many good times he remembers having with his dad when he was well.
- *fearful* of the day when his father will die.
- *fearful* that the same thing will happen to him when he reaches his father's age.

COMMENTARY

Included above are:

positive emotional feelings: happiness, pleasure.

negative emotional feeling: resentment, sadness, depression, fear.

FEEDBACK 3

Scope of Feelings

Listed below are the other emotional and physical feelings we thought Richard could be experiencing. Your list may differ, but don't be concerned as long as you listed at least four reactions. Richard may feel:

- *love* for his child who is having trouble.
- *fearful* that his son's behavior will continue and cause trouble for him later in life.
- *helpless* because his son won't listen to him.
- *frustrated* because he doesn't know how to stop it.
- *disappointed* that the boy isn't living up to his expectations. *guilty* that maybe he hasn't spent enough time with the boy.
- *being amused* because he remembers similar instances from his own childhood.
- *inadequate / ineffective* as a parent.
- somewhat *proud* of his son's spirit.
- *hopeful* that Laura is correct in her less strict approach because the problem isn't as serious as he sometimes feels it is.
- *tired* and *irritable* after a long day at work.
- *depressed* that he doesn't seem to be able to solve the problem.
- *protective* of his child because he feels the school system and the teachers are cold and indifferent.

COMMENTARY

Included above are:

physical feelings: fatigue.

positive emotional feelings: amusement, pride, love, hope, protectiveness.

negative emotional feelings: worry, frustration, guilt, irritability, inadequate, ineffective, depression, helplessness.