

# Understanding Feelings

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

The focus of today's workshop will be on understanding feelings. Use this worksheet to follow along with the facilitator.

## Feelings

Most people have learned that there are two types of feelings: Good and Bad. However, there is no such thing as a bad feeling since all feelings are an expression of an experience. When we feel, we communicate. Additionally, the expression of feelings serves as a release of the energy that is associated with the feeling.

Good Feelings	Bad Feelings

When we categorize feelings as good or bad, we also categorize the people who have them as good or bad. Instead of referring to feelings as good or bad, we can group them into feelings of comfort and feelings of discomfort. In this way, it's the feelings we are labeling and not the people who have the feeling.

What are examples of feelings of comfort?

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What are examples of feelings of discomfort?

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Feelings such as hate, envy, jealousy, anger, frustration, sadness and rejection create an unsettled feeling inside. The goal is not to deny these feelings because they are feelings you will experience at different times in your life whether you choose to or not. The goal is to manage the feelings so the feelings do not take over your life.

## **How to Manage Feelings**

There are three steps to managing feelings:

### **1. Awareness**

The first step in managing something is an awareness of what it is you are wanting to manage. The awareness phase has three parts.

- **The way your body responds to a feeling.** Being aware of your body is a key factor in being able to manage feelings.
- **The name you give the feelings.** Different feelings influence us in different ways.
- **Awareness of the situation or similar situations that generate specific feelings.** Such awareness can empower a person to avoid such situations, or realize that past similar situations have resulted in specific feelings of discomfort.

### **2. Acceptance**

The second step in managing feelings is a general acceptance that whatever you are feeling is OK, and that you are not a bad person for having such feelings. This step is more difficult than it seems. Instead of accepting a feeling, many people deny, pretend or mask the feeling.

### **3. Communication**

Communication is the process of expressing feelings and thoughts. When it comes to expressing feelings, such communication can either be verbal or non-verbal. All feelings have energy which gives the feelings life. The key is how people use their personal power to express the energy of their feelings. Three helpful rules in expressing energy are:

- **Respect yourself** - don't hurt others.
- **Respect others** - don't hurt others.
- **Respect the environment** - don't destroy property, animals, or nature.

Sarcasm, ridicule, verbal abuse, hitting people and objects, throwing things, and any kind of self-injuring behavior are all unacceptable ways to express the energy of the feelings. Finding acceptable ways to release the energy is the goal.

## **Hiding Your Feelings**

When past experiences in our lives have been very painful, there is a tendency for many of us to avoid dealing with the pain. Since we do not want to, or are unable to, deal with the pain, somehow we have to get rid of it. Some examples of a painful experience could be the death of a loved one, the breakup of a meaningful relationship, a bad investment of money, or some painful experience in childhood.

In these instances, and many others like them, we will either try to forget the experience altogether, or we will attempt to get rid of the painful feelings by stuffing them inside. Neither works very well in the long run. The painful feelings do not go away; they are just out of sight.

## **Letting Go of Past Pain**

Think of experiences that you have had in your childhood or are having now that are very painful. Now think of that experience as a big spring, the kind you find in box springs or cushioned couches.

An unpleasant experience we had that we are unwilling or unable to deal with acts as a giant spring that we have to squash by applying pressure to it. And since we don't ever want to feel the pain of the experience, we constantly have to keep applying pressure on the spring to keep it down.

The moment we let up on the spring, it becomes fully extended, just like the painful feelings that come leaping into our mind. When that happens, we relive the experience again.

Because some of the springs have become so big, using our energy to deal with the pain rather than to keep the spring down might seem really scary. The effort involved in feeling free and being able to nurture yourself and others may not be easy, but it is certainly worth it. The feeling of emotional freedom and growth is unlike any other feeling.



The risk to share yourself with others is the next step, and the biggest. When family members take the steps together, the world you and your family live in now will never, ever be the same. The very act of letting go of past pain is often all that is needed to feel better about yourself and others.

## **Helping Children Handle Their Feelings**

How we prepare our children to handle their feelings will affect the quality of their life more than any other element of parenting. Feelings are that powerful. The worst thing we can do as parents is to not prepare children for the tasks and challenges of life.

What are some feelings children have to deal with?

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## Children and Their Feelings

Learning how to handle feelings, especially feelings of discomfort, is one of the great lessons of childhood, and one of the greatest challenges facing parents in their quest to raise healthy children.

You have two choices: help children handle their feelings, and the world is theirs. Or, let them struggle in their ways to recognize, express and handle their feelings, and difficulty will be theirs. Children that learn to handle their feelings develop a sense of competence.

Children who think they are competent are easier children to parent and to be around. Children who cannot control the intensity of their feelings, and who lack the competence to manage their behavior generally take a lot more work to parent. Stress and burnout are often the outcomes when parenting high-intensity children.

What do you think is meant by emotional competence?

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## Ways to Build Emotional Competence

- **Let children know all feelings are okay.**

Children have to believe that all feelings are good and useful in communicating. However, it is HOW the feelings are communicated that can either be okay or not okay.

- **Label the feeling you see or think you see.**

For example, “You look angry,” or “proud,” or “happy.” This will give the child a feeling of being believed and respected.

- **Do not dominate the conversation.**

Let the child do the talking. Encourage sharing by looking interested in what your child is saying. Children can think better when someone is not advising, blaming or criticizing.

- **Promote rationale behind feelings.**

Ask the question, “Why?” For example,  
“Why do you think he is feeling that way?”  
“Why are you feeling so sad?”

This is a wonderful way to teach children If-Then, the formula for logical cause and effect.  
For example:

“If children get hit, then they feel bad.”  
“If you never share your toys, then your friends won’t share their toys either.”

Understanding why others feel a certain way is another sure way of building empathy.  
For example:

“If a baby cries, then she needs something.”

- **Brainstorm with the child what, if anything, needs to be done.**

Sometimes comforting a child is all that needs to be done, or simply just listening.

- **When a child wants something, honor their desire.**

If you are in the store and your child wants a CD, rather than saying, “No,” tell him you wish you could get him the CD. For example, “If I had the money, I would buy you that CD.” Or, “That toy is fabulous! Show me how it works. Wow! I know you really like that toy and really want it, but we don’t have the money to get it right now. Maybe this could be one of your birthday presents.” This can have a magical effect on a situation because you have joined the child, not forbidden him or her. Children feel you understand and appreciate their desires. Once children realize that their feelings are honored, they are more open to listening to the logic why they cannot have what they want.

- **Teach children how to express their emotional energy.**

All feelings have energy that need expression. Feeling energy ranges from mild to moderate to severe. Mild and moderate feeling energy can generally be released through talking. It is the high moderate and severe energy levels that get children into trouble. At this level, children often need a physical outlet for their energy. Brainstorm a list of physical things children can do to release their energy. Remember, do not condone actions that can hurt one’s self, others or the environment.

- **(29) Praise, praise, praise.**

When children are expressing their feelings appropriately, let them know you like what you hear. Remember, the behaviors you pay attention to are the behaviors that are being reinforced. Catch your children behaving well.

**Contact Information:**

You probably met a lot of people today that you may want to contact later. Below is an area for you to write down each other’s names, phone numbers, or e-mail addresses.

Name	Phone	E-mail