

ARE YOU FEELING OR BEING EMOTIONAL?

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Expressing your feelings is therapeutic. How and when you express them can be either therapeutic or very destructive. If you use judgments, name calling, putdowns, threats, guilt trips, controlling, demanding and sarcasm, you are NOT expressing your feelings. Most of what people think of as expressing feelings is often nothing more than judgments. “I will tell you what I feel. I feel that you are irresponsible, lazy and non-caring. You don’t love me. You are narcissistic and self-centered.” Wow! Not a single feeling was expressed! Judgments are external; they are debatable and often start with “I feel **that** ...” Another way to determine a judgment: if you can substitute “I think” for “I feel” it is a judgment. Using judgments is often like putting out a fire with gasoline.

Feelings are internal reports. No one can tell you that you don’t feel that way. No one knows what you feel except you. “I feel used. You may not be using me, but I feel used.”

It is very important that you have someone or some place where you can express your feelings and be listened to without being judged or given answers. The rule is, *Feelings expressed verbally reduce in intensity and are free to change.* This rule is also expressed as, *Feelings need to be expressed as intensely as they are felt and then they will reduce in intensity and are free to change.* For some people, this has not been their experience with strong emotions. They have seen strong emotions make situations worse and even lead to injuries.

I believe that talking, sharing and expressing feelings has gotten a bad rap because, for many people, there is confusion between “feelings” and “emotions.” Unfortunately, the two words are often used interchangeably when, in fact, they are very different. **It is possible to be emotional and not express your feelings!** **When this happens, it is likely your judgments that are being expressed.**

Some people say that women are more *feeling* than men, but this is not necessarily true. However, it is true that some women are more *emotional* than men. All people feel. “Birds fly, fish swim and people feel.” There is not a single feeling that you have had that has not been felt by everybody else in this world, male and female.

Feelings are the labels we use to describe different internal states such as: joy, fear, excitement, anger, guilt, confusion, etc. While you were born with a wide range of feelings, you were not born with knowing the names of those feelings. Children have to be taught the names of things, chair, cow, grass, skin, shoes, etc., or they will not know what to call them. Children also need to be taught the names of their feelings or they will not be able to express them. If not taught these names, then when they grow up and their wife asks them what they are feeling, the answer will probably be “I don’t know,” or “nothing.”

Feelings are not good or bad they just are. The problem begins when you start to put judgments on feelings. Have you ever had a bad feeling? Some people place anger, shame, hate, sexuality, as some of the “bad” feelings. Then they teach their children that “nice girls don’t get angry,” “big boys don’t cry,”

or “sex is dirty, save it for the one you love!” In the case of this last one, the judgment is not always given directly, but by inference. “Don’t touch yourself down there (that’s dirty).”

Once you have categorized a feeling as bad, the tendency is to deny, manipulate and repress it. “**I’M NOT ANGRY, I’M JUST UPSET.**” “I’m not angry; you are the one that is angry.” “You don’t hate your sister, you love your sister.” Once a feeling has been repressed for some time, you will tend to lose awareness of that feeling. That is when you can no longer make a decision about it and you start to experience the phenomenon of delayed awareness. Six hours later, you are lying in bed thinking, “I should have said this...” Now, you are finally aware of what you should have, could have said.

Emotions are how you deliver your feelings and their purposes or intent (what you want to achieve in expressing them). Using threats, name-calling, putdowns and sarcasm is often connected with the emotional. That is NOT expressing your feelings and will only make your relationship worse. Emotions can either destroy or strengthen relationships. Being emotional is a choice; choose wisely how you express your emotions.

Types of Emotion

Matt Perelstein

Emotion, for the purpose of hurting others, getting them to 'like' you or for emotional blackmail = **MANIPULATION**

Emotion, for the purpose of changing people, and getting them to do things your way = **CONTROL**

Emotion, without content, or resolution = **DRAMA**

Emotion, in order to release, heal, not intended to manipulate = **VENTING**

Emotion, for the purpose of closeness, openness and intimacy = **SHARING**

Emotion, for the purpose of making things happen and changing the world = **PASSION**

Emotion, for the purpose of feeling fully and living fully = **EXPRESSION**

Emotion, for the purpose of building boundaries, expressing values, and keeping yourself and family safe = **PERSONAL POWER**

Emotion, for the purpose of loving, giving, understanding and healing = **COMPASSION**

As you look over Matt Perelstein’s uses of emotions, notice that there are two categories. There is nothing wrong with being emotional; it adds life and excitement to what could be a boring and drab existence. Emotions add music to your voice. Emotions are a reflection of your emotional health and internal state of being. Emotions can also be destructive and manipulative. Someone with a flattened emotional state (no music in their voice) is often experiencing some degree of depression or [Dysthymic Disorder](#). These types of people, if they use emotions at all, use them to manipulate, control or distract with drama. In therapy, the client will often acknowledge their anger but will then proceed to talk about their anger without emotion. It is as if they have lost the emotional component that should be connected to the anger. It was this connection that Freud saw when he talked about “Depression is anger turned inward.” He is the one who saw the benefit of VENTING to release the depression.

Emotion for SHARING and PASSION makes love real and believable. Without emotion, “I love you,” becomes a habit response with little or no meaning. “I love you too.” It is something you say because if you don’t, you will start a fight. Have you ever said or thought that the passion has gone out of your relationship? It is you who put the passion in the relationship in the first place and you who could put it back again instead of just accepting “I guess this is all there is after we have been together for so long.”

Emotions are what make you FEEL ALIVE. Some people try to get the excitement back into their life by doing physically dangerous or scary things like riding a roller coaster so they can feel alive. Teenagers, who cut themselves, often will tell you they are doing the cutting because they want to feel something; pain is one of the last feelings you will lose. There are much better ways of starting to feel again. New Directions is a weekend workshop run by Paula and Matt Perelstein that will help you reconnect to your feelings.

You are created with a full range of feelings from joy, happiness, excitement, love to anger, sadness, guilt, fear, anxiety, depression and a whole lot more. PERSONAL POWER comes from being able to access ALL of your feelings. If you see feelings as good or bad, then you will repress or lie about having them until you are no longer aware of the feelings that you do have. To have personal power simply means that you can pick and choose which feelings to empower and for what purpose in each situation.

Think about it as if you are the conductor of a large orchestra and each instrument is a different feeling. The conductor will point to a specific instrument and indicate either louder or softer depending on what he wants to achieve. You are the conductor of your life. You, whether you know it or not, direct which feelings you want to emphasize (or repress) in each situation with which you are faced. Imagine an orchestra where the violins and horns are not allowed to play. Then, you take a dislike to the piano and clarinets. Soon, there is very little of life’s music that you can play. If you see some of your feelings as “bad” then you are limiting your orchestra and what you might want to achieve. Feelings are not good or bad, it is what you do with them that will put you in jail.

The feelings of COMPASSION are meaningless without emotion. Bill Clinton’s “I feel your pain,” felt empty and trite for many people. Telling people “I know how you are feeling” is usually perceived as an empty and meaningless statement because it is often said without the emotional effect that lets them know that you have truly been where they are. Many people will often try to substitute answer giving for compassion. “I know this has been hard for you, but *I’m sure you will soon find someone new.*” Holding someone’s hand, saying nothing and crying with them would be much more meaningful.

Now it is time to conduct a survey of your own life:

- ✓ Where are you when it comes to knowing what you feel when you feel it?
- ✓ Where are you when it comes to judging yours and others feelings?
- ✓ Where are you when it comes to fearing being judged (rejected) by others?
- ✓ Where are you when it comes to wanting an open/honest relationship vs. not hurting someone?
(These two beliefs are contradictions.)
- ✓ Where are you when it comes to allowing yourself to be emotional? (The strongest man I know is the man who is strong enough to cry.)

Good communications is not just having a good vocabulary. Good communicators know how to use their emotions to sway audiences and the ones they love. Your emotions make you believable and appealing. Some people learned how to use their emotions in appropriate ways as they were growing up. Others have some catching up to do which will entail two major steps.

First, getting in touch with all of your feelings and taking the judgments off all of them (no good or bad feelings). Then, replace your judgments with “Isn’t that interesting. How do I want to express that feeling?”

Second, learn to express your feelings in acceptable ways, without putdowns, name calling, sarcasm, demanding, controlling, guilt trips, judgments and threats.

I once knew a preacher who could swear without cussing! Now, he didn’t need to do it very often but when he did it, it was always appropriate to the situation and no one felt threatened. The time I heard him, it came out, “**I AM SO ANGRY, I COULD SPIT NAILS!**” He was believable.

“But that is just not me,” you say. Do you want to be believable? You are the way you are not because you were born that way. When you were two years old you were very emotional. When you were happy, everybody knew it. When you were angry, everybody knew that also. You learned to be the way you are and what is learned can be unlearned, IF it is important enough to you.

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