

The Focusing Long Form 25

Self-Awareness Module

It is unhealthy to be unaware of our feelings. When we are unaware of or deny our feelings, we don't understand who we are, how we are, or how we wish to become. It takes energy to deny or suppress feelings from self and others, energy we don't have for the people and things we value most. The more we are aware of and accept our feelings and appropriately express them to others, the more energy we will have. We do not manage our feelings by pretending they don't exist or by holding them inside. We manage them by accepting our feelings and why we feel that way, and expressing them to others when appropriate. Pleasant feelings can be a catalyst for continuing our actions, and unpleasant feelings can motivate change. Before we can change, we must be aware of our feelings and why we feel that way. Becoming aware of what we feel and why can be very difficult. Our feelings can be vague, and feelings like anger may only be a secondary feeling that masks deeper feelings. Feelings like anger may only be the tip of an iceberg and not reveal deeper feelings below the water line. We may have other feelings before we experience anger, which may trigger anger. What is important is that we identify all of our feelings in a given situation and determine why we feel that way. Focusing, a process developed by Eugene T. Gendlin, is a skill that helps us discover the full depth of what we are feeling and why we are feeling that way. It is best used when we aren't entirely sure what we are feeling, when we have a vague sense that something is not right, that we don't feel good, or when we use general terms like feeling depressed, bad, or unhappy, feelings that don't fully describe the extent of our emotions and why we feel that way. It can also be used when we are angry to understand the feelings that may have triggered our anger. It can be used when we are coping with feelings and personal problems in unhealthy ways, such as taking our feelings out on others, expressing our feelings violently, or when we are withdrawing from other people. It can also be used when we use other unhealthy coping methods such as denying and/or ignoring our feelings and problems, telling ourselves we shouldn't let this bother us (belittling a problem), trying to convince ourselves not to let it get to us and that it is no big deal (facing down the problem), telling ourselves we shouldn't feel that way (lecturing our self), or when we try to figure it out intellectually. Like all skills, learning the Focusing process takes time and practice to master. Below are the major steps in the Focusing process, adapted from Gendlin's book *Focusing: A step-by-step technique that takes you past getting in touch with your feelings—to change them and solve your personal problems*.

Steps in the Focusing Process

Find a time and a place to sit quietly for a while without any distractions. Stop after each question (when you see...). Don't try to answer the questions with your thoughts or thinking brain. Allow your answers to come from the place where you feel. At some point, you will feel the problem changing, like you are getting closer to figuring it out, like you are getting warmer, like remembering something you forgot. There will be a shift, a feeling like "this is right." Continue until you have an "ah ha" experience, that "yes, this is what I am feeling and why I feel this way." A problem is like an iceberg. You initially see the tip, but you must go very deep to discover the base, the part that is making you feel less than wonderful.

1. Ask yourself: "How do I feel? Why don't *I* feel wonderful right now? What is bugging me on this particular day? Stay quiet. Listen. Let what comes, come. Let all the problems come up and out, making a mental or written list. Don't get snagged on any one problem. Keep listing the problems until you hear something within you say, "Yes, except for those I'm fine." Make a mental or written list of everything keeping you from feeling wonderful right now...
2. Ask: "Which problem feels the worst right now? Don't try to make an intellectual choice. Let your body decide which problem feels the worst on this day. Let the answer come from the place where you feel. Ask: "Which problem feels the worst right now...?"
3. Ask: What does this whole problem feel like? Pay attention to that inner part of you where you feel things. Get a felt sense of what the whole problem feels like. Don't try to decide anything. Let the answer come from within, a felt sense of what this problem feels like.
4. Now ask yourself: What is the crux (central part) of this problem?" What is the worst of it? What is the main thing in it that makes me feel bad? Ask the question, then wait. Let the main crux of the problem come to you—not from your thinking brain—but from the felt sense itself. Ask: what is the main part of this problem (what is the worst of it)...?

5. Now, take what you consider the worst of it and check it to make sure it fits your felt sense of the problem. Ask yourself: "Do these words and the felt sense match the problem exactly? Wait for an answer to come from the place where you feel. Ask: Do these words and the felt sense match the problem exactly...?"
6. If the words and the felt sense don't exactly match the problem, go further. Ask yourself, what have I left out...?
7. Now, try to go further with the problem. Get the felt sense of what is under or behind this feeling—what is behind the crux of this problem. What is still bothering me about it? What other feelings do I have about this problem? Continue focusing until you have a felt sense that you have it all, like remembering something important that you forgot, like an ah-ha experience: "Yes, so that's it, that is the main part of this problem. This is why I feel this way". Remember, a problem is like an iceberg. You initially see the tip, but you must go very deep to discover the base, the part that is making you feel stuck. Continue to ask, what is the worst of this until you have a felt sense that, yes, this is why I feel this way. Ask: what is under or behind this feeling—what is behind the crux of this problem? What is still bothering me about it? What other feelings do I have about this problem...?
8. If you are still stuck, if you haven't had the "ah ha," this is what I am feeling (like remembering something you forgot), ask yourself the following questions and let the answers come from within.
 - What is the worst of this feeling?
 - What's really so bad about this?
 - What does it need?
 - What should happen?
 - What would it feel like if it was all O.K.?

If you still feel stuck, if you have not had that "ah ha" this is what I am feeling (like remembering something you forgot), you can