

Managing Feelings & Thinking Reading 25

[Self-Management Skills Module](#)

In order to manage and cope with our feelings and behavior, we must be aware of what we are feeling and thinking, why we feel and think that way, how we want to act on them, and the possible positive and negative consequences of our behavior. The process of becoming self-aware is a prerequisite for managing our feelings and thinking. However, becoming aware of what we are feeling and thinking and why can be difficult. Our feelings and thoughts can be vague, and a feeling like anger may be only an initial one that masks deeper feelings. Initial feelings may only be the “tip of the iceberg” and not reveal deeper feelings. When we are unaware of the depth of our feelings, we may take them out on others. We do not manage our feelings and thinking by pretending they don’t exist or by holding them inside. We manage them by accepting what we are feeling and thinking, why we feel and think that way, and, when necessary, changing our behavior, our situations, our environments, our relationships, and/or our thinking. If unpleasant feelings and unrealistic thinking are dealt with effectively, they will not linger.

Become Aware of What I Am Feeling & Thinking

1. Be aware of what I am feeling and thinking and why I feel and think this way.
2. Accept what I am feeling and thinking.
3. When feeling angry, determine the deeper feelings that the anger may be masking
4. Be aware of how my feelings affect my actions
5. Determine whether how I act on my feelings makes situations and relationships better or worse.
6. Determine what I need to do to feel better.
7. Take healthy and effective action to change myself, my situation, my environment, and/or my relationships.
8. Talk constructively with the person who is triggering the feelings. See [Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#) for an in-depth look at the skills needed to work effectively through misunderstandings, impasses, and conflicts with others.

Take Inventory of My Feelings

1. Take the time to become aware of what I am feeling and thinking and why I feel and think this way.
2. Use the Focusing [Self-Awareness Module](#) and Reality Checking [Self-Management Skills Module](#)
3. processes when necessary.
4. Keep a journal or use the Feelings Log ([Self-Awareness Module](#)) to track my feelings and thoughts and why I feel and think this way. Begin to notice if there are any patterns in the way I feel and think in my relationships, my environments, the situations I am in, and what I am doing.
5. When necessary, take healthy and effective action to change myself, my situation, my environments, and/or my relationships. Set goals to change myself, my environments, my situations, and/or my relationships. See the My Goals Log Learning Experience ([SES Projects Module](#)).

Watch For Signs That My Anger is Out of Control

Ask myself the following questions:

1. Do insignificant occurrences make me angry?
2. When I am angry, do I display aggressive behaviors such as yelling, screaming, hitting, or other violent behaviors?
3. Do I feel angry often?
4. Is my anger negatively affecting my relationships and/or other aspects of my life?
5. If I experience the above, it may be time to see a counselor.

Unhealthy Ways to Cope With Anger, Other Unpleasant Feelings, and Personal & Relationship Problems

1. Deny my feelings and problems.
2. Belittle the feeling or problem (telling myself the feeling or problem is too small to worry about).
3. Face down the problem (telling myself not to let it get to me)
4. Lecture myself (saying that I should not feel this way, have this problem, or that the problem is no big deal)
5. Drown in the feeling or problem (sinking deeper and deeper into the discomfort, hoping that it will make me feel better).
6. Let my feelings and problems get the best of me
7. Blame myself or others.
8. React out of anger (say, text, or email hurtful things)
9. Destroy things
10. Express my feelings violently (yell, scream, hit, or other violent behaviors)
11. Withdraw from others and thus reject the source of support and encouragement when I need it the most.
12. Blaming my feelings on others. Saying things like “he made me angry” or “She is irritating.”
13. Use tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, and/or other drugs to squash unpleasant feelings, to avoid feelings of inadequacy, personal or relationship problems, and/or because I feel depressed.
14. Avoid talking to the person who triggered the feelings.

Things to Avoid When Angry

1. Do not be aggressive (yelling, screaming, hitting, or other violent behaviors).
2. Do not text, email, or talk to the person who triggers the anger when angry.

Things To Do To Avoid Reacting Out of Anger

1. Count slowly to 10 before doing or saying anything.
2. Take 10 deep breaths, concentrating on each inhale and exhale.
3. Visualize a peaceful place.
4. If possible, remove myself immediately from the source of stress. Walk away.
5. If it involves another person, say something like, “I need to think about (what just happened, what you said, etc.), and I will get back to you.”
6. Remember, I do not have to respond immediately, and it is usually better not to. Give myself time to calm down and decide the most effective response. Take a break.

Techniques for Managing & Coping With the Negative Impacts of Emotions

1. Go for a walk or a run in a quiet place without distractions. Being in motion will help me calm down, process what caused the unpleasant feelings, understand the range and depth of my feelings, and decide on the most effective way to proceed.
2. Engage in other physical activities.
3. Meditate
4. Focus on my breathing. Sit in a quiet place and focus all my attention on my breathing. Focus on each inhale and exhale. If my mind wanders, bring my attention back to each inhale and exhale. Continue until I feel calm.
5. Visualize a peaceful or happy place. Imagine that I am in this peaceful/happy place. Focus on every detail of this place: the sights, sounds, smells, and weather. Continue until I feel fully immersed in it and stay there until I feel calm and relaxed.
6. Practice positive self-talk. Here are some examples:
 - “I will get through this.”
 - “I can make it through this.”
 - “I will figure out how to deal with this effectively.”
 - “I have been in difficult situations before and have gotten through them.”
7. Listen to music that will make me feel calm and relaxed.
8. Talk with someone about it. Share my feelings.
9. Write about it. Keeping a journal (or a Feelings Log) is an effective way to track my emotions and identify patterns that need to be addressed.

Do Something About the Causes of the Unpleasant Feelings

1. Figure out how to solve the problem and implement a plan. Determine what you need to do to change your behavior, thinking, situation, environment, or relationships.
2. Have a conflict conversation with the person who is triggering the feelings. See [Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#) and the [Conflict Resolution Skills Module](#) for in-depth explanations of the essential skills for working through misunderstandings, impasses, and conflicts in relationships. Outlined below are brief overviews of these skills,
3. Get help. If a problem persists or if solving the problem seems beyond what you are capable of doing, talk with a trusted adult or healthcare provider.

Prevent Stress In My Life By:

1. Get Enough Sleep
2. Exercise daily
3. Have fun. Take time for the things that make me happy
4. Eat a nutritious, well-balanced diet
5. Have a well-balanced life
6. Practice a stress reduction technique daily, such as deep breathing, yoga, visualization, guided imagery, or the Relaxation Response.

When I Need to Determine the Feelings That My Anger May Be Masking

If I am having trouble determining the depth of my feelings and the feelings that my anger may be masking, the Focusing Process ([Self-Awareness Module](#)) can help me identify the full range and depth of my feelings. Outlined below is a summary of the steps in this process:

Focusing

1. Ask yourself: How do I feel? Why don't I feel wonderful right now? Make a mental or written list of everything that is keeping me from feeling wonderful right now.
2. Ask: "Which problem feels the worst right now?"
3. Now take what I consider the worst of it and check that it fits my felt sense of the problem. Ask myself: "Do these words and the felt sense match the problem exactly? Wait for an answer to come from the place where I feel. Ask: Do these words and the felt sense match the problem exactly?"
4. If the words and the felt sense don't exactly match the problem, go further. Ask myself, what have I left out? "What is still bothering me about it?"
5. If I still feel stuck, if I have not had that "ah ha," this is what I am feeling (like remembering something I forgot), I can stop and come back to it at a later point.

See the Focusing Learning Experience ([Self-Awareness Module](#)) for a complete explanation of the process, the steps involved, and examples of how this skill is used.

When I Need To Determine How My Thinking Is Causing My Unpleasant Feelings

If my unpleasant feelings are caused by my thinking/interpretations/assumptions instead of being caused by actual events, situations, environments, and/or relationships in the present, use the Reality Checking ([Self-Management Skills Module](#)) process to determine whether my thinking/interpretations/assumptions are accurate, realistic, and/or rational. The steps in this process include:

1. Be aware of what I am feeling and thinking, why I feel and think this way, how my thinking may be causing these feelings, and how my thinking and feelings affect my behavior.
2. Accept what I am feeling and thinking
3. Understand the interpretations and assumptions I am making.
4. Determine whether my interpretations and assumptions are accurate, realistic, and/or rational, and identify the evidence that proves that they are accurate, realistic, and/or rational.
5. Let go of my interpretations and assumptions that are inaccurate, unrealistic, prejudicial, and/or irrational.
6. Replace my inaccurate, unrealistic, prejudicial, and/or irrational interpretations and assumptions with accurate, realistic, and rational ones.

See the Reality Checking Learning Experience ([Self-Management Skills Module](#)) for a complete explanation of the process, the steps involved, and examples of how this skill is used.

When I Need to Communicate My Feelings To Others

See the [Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#) and the [Conflict Resolution Skills Module](#) for readings and learning experiences that facilitate the development of the skills outlined below.

Our feelings of anger and other unpleasant emotions are often caused by others, and to resolve them, we need to have a conversation with that person. These conversations can be difficult and unpleasant, and can make situations worse if we have not mastered the skills to effectively communicate our feelings and work through misunderstandings, impasses, and conflicts in relationships. Outlined below are brief overviews of each of the essential skills. See [Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#) for a complete, in-depth explanation of each skill.

Major Skills Needed to Effectively Work Through Misunderstanding, Impasses, and Conflicts in Relationships

Essential Communication Skills

Learning to work through interpersonal conflict successfully may be the single most important skill for personal, family, and career success. It may also be the most difficult skill to learn and do well. These are complex skills that need to be practiced repeatedly until mastered. See [Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#) for a complete, in-depth explanation of each skill. Outlined below are brief overviews of each of these essential skills. To work through misunderstandings, impasses, and conflicts in relationships, we need to:

1. Be aware of what I feel and think and why I feel and think this way. Understand my needs and values (**self-awareness**)
2. Be a good listener to know and understand others (**passive & active listening**)
3. **Ask clarifying & inquiry questions** when I don't understand fully.
4. Speak in ways that will make others want to listen to me, understand me, consider what I have to say, and possibly change their behavior to help meet my needs (**I Statements**)
5. Have difficult conversations with people to work through misunderstandings, impasses, and conflicts in relationships (**interpersonal conflict resolution skills**)
6. **Assertively say no** when being pressured to do something I don't want to do.

Passive & Active Listening and Asking Clarifying & Inquiry Questions

Pay attention and show concern

- Give the speaker your full attention.
- Make direct eye contact if you feel comfortable with it.
- Lean forward toward the speaker.
- Be supportive; don't interrupt, judge, or criticize the speaker.

Use nonverbal skills and brief verbal responses to acknowledge the speaker

- Nod or shake your head as appropriate.
- Change your facial expression as appropriate (for example, show concern or excitement).
- Say things like "Yes," "I see," "Uh-huh," "Mm," or "Go on."

Ask clarifying & inquiry questions such as:

- "So, what happened that got you so upset?" (or "got you so excited," "made you so sad", etc., as appropriate).
- "How do you feel about that?"
- "What do you think is going on?"
- "What do you think about that?"
- "Help me understand why or what it is."
- "What do you want to do about it?"

Try to figure out the feelings indicated by the speaker's words and body language

- Ask how the speaker is feeling. ("How do you feel about that?")
- Take a guess at how the speaker is feeling, based on your observations. ("It seems to me you are frustrated?")

Actively listen to make sure you understand and to communicate that you are listening

Restate or paraphrase the content of the speaker's message and their feelings. Say it with a question in your voice:

- "It sounds like..."
- "It seems to me..."
- "It appears to me..."
- "I can see that you are..."
- "I get the impression that you are..."
- "Let me see if I understand...(your position, what you want me to do, why you are angry at me...etc.)."

- Ask, "Did I get that right?" "Did I hear you correctly?"

- When summarizing what the speaker said or what you believe they were feeling, always say it as a question. It gives them an invitation to continue and avoids you appearing to be an expert on their feelings. For example, "It seems you are frustrated because I didn't call last night when I said I would?"

Using I Statements to Share Your Feelings & Needs

“I” statements tell the person in a nonjudgmental way what you are thinking or feeling. You are not saying that you are right or correct; you are just saying this is how I feel. I statements tell the other person the impact of their behavior on you and how you would like them to be in the future.

- Begin the sentence with the pronoun “I.”
- State what you feel. “I felt disappointed...”
- Tell why you feel that way. “I felt disappointed when you didn’t call last night when you said you were going to because I was looking forward to talking with you.”
- Ask for what you need and if they are willing to do what you ask (when appropriate). “I was disappointed when you didn’t call last night when you said you would because I was looking forward to talking with you. In the future, I would appreciate it if you would call when you say you are going to. Are you willing to do that?”

In this situation, the person probably felt angry when her friend didn’t call as they said they would. Rather than calling them later that night and reacting in anger, they decided to give themselves time to consider the full range and depth of their feelings and decide how to approach the person. After considering the full depth of their feelings, they discovered that their primary feeling was disappointment. They could have shared their anger, but decided it was more honest to share their primary feeling of disappointment, and that doing so would probably be easier for the other person to hear, try to understand them, consider what they had to say, and possibly change their behavior in the future.

Interpersonal Conflict Resolution Skills

Below is a summary of a process for solving misunderstandings, impasses, and relationship conflicts. It first requires the skill of self-awareness and then utilizes communication skills such as passive and active listening, asking clarifying/inquiry questions, and using I Statements. For an in-depth understanding of these skills, examples of what to say during each step of the process, and the questions to consider before a conflict conversation, see the [Interpersonal Conflict Resolution Skill Card](#) in [Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#).

Steps in the Interpersonal Conflict Resolution Process

1. Before the conversation, determine what you are feeling and thinking, why you feel and think that way, and your needs in this situation.
2. Invite The Other Person into a Conversation at a Time that is Good for Both of You.
3. Whenever They Speak, Listen with Curiosity: Listen/Paraphrase/Summarize Their Perspective/Concerns/Needs to Make Sure You Understand and Communicate That You Understand and Are Taking Them and the Situation Seriously.
4. When You Don't Understand or Need More Information, Ask Clarifying and Genuine Inquiry Questions To Help You Understand Without Making Them Feel Threatened/Defensive
5. Summarize when You Think They Have Explained Their Perspective/Concerns/Needs.
6. Use "I Statements To Share Your Feelings, Concerns, Needs, and Solutions: Speak in a Way That Will Make Them Want to Listen to You, Understand You, Consider What You Have to Say, and Possibly Change
7. If both of You Have Different Needs, Then You must both Create Options That Meet Each Other's Most Important Needs. State what is Most Important to You and What You are willing to Do and/or Give Up. Negotiate for Needs, Not Positions.
8. If They Don't Agree With Your Initial Proposal, You Need to Continue to Negotiate for Needs, Not Positions.
9. When You Both Agree, Summarize What You Have Both Agreed To.
10. If There Is No Satisfactory Resolution, Calmly Walk Away And Tell Them You Would Like to Revisit The Situation in the Future.