



# The Whole Process of Emotion Coaching

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When your client is feeling upset about something, suggest the following to him or her:

### **Listen to your body.**

Pay attention to the basic sensations in the trunk of your body, stomach, chest, arms, and throat, and pay attention to your face. Ask yourself, “What is it like inside? What am I feeling in my body?”

### **Let yourself feel the emotion.**

Welcome the feeling. Do not negatively evaluate the feeling. Accept it.

### **Name the feeling.**

Put words to your feeling. Find words that help you articulate what it is like inside. Let the words come from the feeling as much as possible.

### **Identify your most basic feeling.**

Ask yourself

- Is this what I truly feel at rock bottom?
- Is this my most core feeling?

To test this, ask

- Do I feel something else that comes even before this?
- Do I feel something in addition to what I am most aware of feeling?
- Am I trying to accomplish something with this feeling?

If the client responds “yes” to any of the last three questions, the feeling is probably not a core feeling. Then ask the client to listen again to his or her body and go through Steps 1 and 2 once

more. Otherwise, continue on.

### **Establish whether your feeling is adaptive or maladaptive.**

Ask yourself

- Is this feeling helpful? Will it enhance my self or my bonds with others?
- Is this feeling a response to other past experiences rather than mainly a response to what's happening now?
- Is there a pattern of recurrent, bad feeling here?
- Is this a familiar, stuck feeling?

If the client's answers to these questions are "yes," then it is probably an unhealthy feeling, and therapist and client should proceed to Step 6. If the client's answers to the above questions suggest that this is a fresh, new, healthy feeling in response to the present situation, then proceed to Step 7.

### **Identify the negative voice and destructive thoughts.**

- First, fully acknowledge the unhealthy emotion. Feel it and name it: "I feel shattered," "I feel enraged," or "I feel humiliated." Accept the feeling. Welcome it. Let it come in.
- If the feeling is intense and scary, soothe yourself and say "It's OK. I know you feel so ashamed, so angry. It's all right. I'll take care of you. You're OK."
- As you pay attention to the sensations, put the thoughts associated with the bad feeling into words. Get at your core beliefs, such as:
  - "I feel unworthy or worthless"
  - "I feel I can't survive on my own. I feel I will die without support"
  - "I am useless, unlovable, and not good enough."

These are the negative voices and dysfunctional beliefs that help maintain this unhealthy emotional state.

- Put the hostile, negative thoughts against the self into "you" language. Say them

to yourself:

- “You are worthless”
- “You can’t survive on your own.”

Elaborate these criticisms, and make them as specific as possible. These are the destructive voices that cause so much trouble.

### **Identify the need or goal in your primary painful feeling.**

Identify your most basic unmet needs or your primary concerns or goals. Articulate these. For example if you feel anxiously insecure, you need comfort or soothing; if you feel sad and lonely, you need closeness; if you feel shame, you need validation. These needs will provide you with the will to survive and the capacity to grow. Note that this is not an intellectual process; it is a feeling process. You must experience a heartfelt need and a sense of having deserved to have the need met.

Identify these needs: the unmet need in the unhealthy feeling or if you are experiencing a primary adaptive feeling the need in this feeling. Both needs can help you remobilize yourself to change. Feel a new, healthier feeling emerge from the feeling of having deserved to have the need met. For example, you feel may feel the healthy sadness of grief that facilitates acceptance and moving on, or compassion for the wound of having an unmet need, or empowered anger at having been so invalidated or mistreated.

To help identify your need, ask yourself the following questions:

- What do I need? Let an answer come from your emotional state.
- What is my goal here?
- What do I want changed or different?
- What do I want to do?

Here are some guidelines as to what your needs or goals might be:

- If you are angry, is it protection against an offense?

- If you are sad, is it contact and comfort?
- If you are afraid, is it safety and escape, or soothing?
- If you are ashamed, is it privacy or validation?
- If you are feeling disgust, is it to get rid of something bad?
- If you are feeling pain, do you need nurturing and healing?

Now ask

- How can I get my need met?
- What am I prepared to do to get it met?
- Are my feelings and needs prompting any action that conflicts with any of my values?
- What are the consequences, the costs, and benefits of this course of action?
- Will this action help me express my feeling now, or should I put it on hold?

Make sense of what the feelings and needs are telling you. Clarify this by asking yourself

- What about the situation makes me feel this way?
- What is the real issue?
- Who is responsible for what?

Help the client decide what to do, and help him or her identify blocks in the basic process. If a client gets stuck in the previous process, you might find that the client has hit one of the very basic problems, named next, that cause these blocks.

**Now search for your healthy voice that is based on adaptive primary feelings and needs that might be there, in the background.**

Identify your healthy core feelings in response to your unmet needs. Figure out what the healthy feelings are telling you. The following are examples of healthy emotions.

- Anger tells you that you are being violated.
- Sadness tells you that you have lost something.

- Fear tells you that you are in danger.
- Shame tells you that you are overexposed.
- Disgust tells you that what you are experiencing is bad for you.
- Pain tells you that your sense of yourself is being shattered.

Accept the feeling and use it as a guide to the action for which it has organized you:

- anger to protect a boundary
- sadness to cry or withdraw
- fear to flee
- shame to hide
- disgust to expel
- pain to not repeat the painful event.

To further help articulate what you want or need, and what you wish to do, ask yourself

- “When do I feel the opposite of my unhealthy feeling? When do I feel worthwhile, safe, competent, and more integrated?” Focus on that state of being. Feel the emotion of this alternate state. This, too, is you. Then, ask again, “What do I need?”
- “What can I do to help get my need met?” or, simply, “What can I do to help myself?” See if you can give yourself what you need.
- “To whom else can I turn to get some of what I need?”

If your primary feeling is pain, then face it, live through it, and learn that you will survive it. If you are suffering, respond to the need in your suffering. Imagine yourself as a child experiencing the unhealthy feeling. What can you give to or do for this child?