



Emotions and Feelings

Being able to identify emotions and feelings (my subjective experience of that emotion) is vital.

My brain creates emotions to tell me what my body needs in that moment.

Usually that is based on my brain's prediction (based on past experiences) of what will happen next.

Without awareness, what happens to us in the present is based on what has happened to us in the past. But, things are not the same now. So if I act on my feelings without awareness of that, I will always be a slave to my past.

If I act on my emotions without consideration, I will always be a slave to circumstances and other people's behaviour. I will never give myself an opportunity to be myself.

My feelings influence 4 things:

- (1) New feelings based on initial feelings
- (2) What I pay attention to (and what I don't pay attention to)
- (3) How I communicate with others (facial expression, posture, body language, tone of voice, gestures)
- (4) What I do next

For many of us, our feelings stop us from doing things, or cause us to do things that are unhelpful (for example, being a people pleaser; being a perfectionist; or avoiding situations, people or activities).

In that sense, unexamined feelings can be destructive.

Developing healthy self-awareness can help to modulate my response to my emotions and feelings.

However, spending too much time analysing my feelings and where they come from can be counterproductive. Sooner or later we have to face the world and offer ourselves to it. That requires us to be courageous and make ourselves vulnerable. Despite the way we feel.

(1) Ask yourself:

What am I thinking; what am I feeling?

What is my brain trying to tell me?

Is it appropriate for this circumstance, or is it based in past experiences that no longer apply?

Notice that your feelings are not always based on immediate reality. Responses to them should be carefully considered. Sometimes that means acting, despite the way you feel.

(2) What would I tell a friend who told me they were feeling this way?

(3) Talk to a trusted friend or therapist

(4) Walk – it will teach you what your body feels like.

(5) Mindful activities (see attention) and mindful meditation can help break the cycle of feeling and reacting, allowing space between feeling and response so that responses are better considered.

(6) Do things despite the way you feel. Make a plan and stick to it.

(7) Do things with other people. Be accountable to somebody for your actions.

(8) Give of yourself to the world. Despite the way you feel, this builds self-esteem, a sense of agency (I have control over my life), and a sense that your life is meaningful.

(9) Acknowledge that you are human. You do not choose your emotions and feelings – they just arise. Often that is based in what has happened in the past. But, with self-awareness, you do choose how you respond to them. And that is the most important thing, because it determines what happens next. Will what happens next reinforce your brain's predictions because you keep repeating the same old reactions to your feelings, or will it update your brain's prediction with the consequences of your new, carefully considered behaviour?

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