

Reach Out!

A Center Linking College and Community Mentors with Children and Teens

Understanding Feelings & Emotions Workshop Preview

Introduction

We are responsible for what we do with our own feelings. That sounds good. The catch is that many of us do not know much about feelings, so how can we be responsible for them?

Fully accepting and experiencing our feelings can be difficult and challenging. During childhood, adolescence, and early adult stages of development, we can sense, express, and be controlled by a wide array of feelings. Feelings can swing from being painful to extremely delightful in a single day! To complicate matters, seasons of hardship or struggle can tend to magnify our feelings. Bottom line: feelings are an essential part of being fully human.

Mentoring partners have a wonderful opportunity to come alongside one another to encourage learning about feelings. Together, we can name, claim, and understand feelings.

Concept of Feelings

Feelings are our personal and internal reactions to our own experiences and interpretations of people, events, and life experiences.

We often hear people use the word “feel” when they are actually talking about an opinion, belief, judgment, or instruction. To grasp the concept of feelings, we can look at examples and non-examples. Try to think of a few of your own non-examples and examples of feeling statements.

Non-Example of Feeling Statement	Example of Feeling Statement
I feel life is really hard right now. <i>Really “belief” statement.</i>	I feel anxious about starting new classes. <i>“Feeling – anxious”</i>
I feel this is the best essay I’ve ever written. <i>Really “evaluation/judgment” statement.</i>	I feel confident about my essay. <i>“Feeling – confident”</i>
I feel Mrs. Jones is a bad teacher/professor. <i>Really an “opinion” statement.</i>	I feel confused in Mrs. Jones’ class. <i>“Feeling – confused”</i>

I feel you better be at the game tonight!
Really a "command/instruction" statement.

I feel excited you might go to the game!
"Feeling – excited"

Principles and Facts About Feelings

Some fundamental and guiding principles about feelings:

- Feelings change over time—they come and they go.
- Feelings are not "good" or "bad." They are just feelings.
- Feelings come from within ourselves—no one can make us feel one way or the other.
- Feelings are not under our conscious control.
- Feelings result from how we see or perceive our world.

These are just a few facts about feelings:

- Intense feelings of grief, sadness, or hurt can soften with time.
- Feelings can offer many benefits and positively impact our lives.
- Feelings can lure us into making bad decisions or taking destructive paths.
- In healthy relationships, our feelings for one another change as months and years pass.

Kinds of Feelings

There are many ways to try to categorize and make sense of feelings. For example, we might try to lump them into "enjoyable" and "difficult" feelings. Or we could ponder "positive feelings" and "negative feelings." Still another way of diving into the world of feelings is to think about "primary feelings" and "secondary feelings." During our workshop, we will examine all these options for gaining insights about feelings.

A key to feelings lies in knowing what they are, recognizing and owning them when we are experiencing them, and then deciding what to do or not to do with them!

Let us consider a couple of benefits from feelings.

- **Warning or Well-Being Signs:** Physical pain, emotional pain, and negative feelings can help us stop and consider what we are doing to cause us to feel those feelings. We may see a need to pull away from, or make different choices about, activities we

are in or people we are spending time with. If we are feeling joy, peace, and contentment, we may choose to spend more time in certain activities or with certain people.

- **Source of Motivation:** Feelings often motivate us to take action and make decisions. If we feel anger at seeing an injustice, we may work to change something for the better for ourselves or someone else. If we feel loved and accepted, we may choose to spend more time with someone that we have been putting off in our schedules and routines. Feelings of fear may help us stop unhealthy behaviors or motivate us to get out of a relationship.

Now let us examine some negative consequences from feelings.

- **Making Bad Decisions:** We can make bad or unwise decisions while we are in the midst of certain feelings. The pain of depression and sadness can lead us to despair or even suicide. We can hurt ourselves or someone else verbally, emotionally or physically when we are feeling anger.
- **Physical Problems:** Research abounds with examples of how feelings can affect our health and our body systems. For example, worry and anxiety are linked to ulcers, high blood pressure, and cardiovascular illness. Difficult and bottled-up feelings may impact recovery from an illness, surgery, or injury. Positive feelings seem to speed up recovery and healing and even lessen the need for pain medications.

Conclusion

Feelings are highly personal. Feelings are a critical part of being fully human. A key to understanding feelings lies with knowing what they are and when we are having them! We often can help one another “name, claim and share” feelings.

Mentoring partners have a precious opportunity to share and grow in the whole area of feelings. Relationships become more real, genuine and caring when we can be safe to express our feelings. Listening to one another’s feelings can be a foundation for building trust.



To help you “name and claim” feelings, here is a feelings word list. We tried to divide feeling words into categories to also help you reflect on our **Reach Out** definition of “growing and learning together in academic, emotional, social, spiritual, and physical realms.” Add some more “feeling” words to each column that you “feel” or have “felt”!

<i>Academic</i>	<i>Emotional/Social</i>	<i>Spiritual</i>	<i>Physical</i>
Alert	Afraid	Alive	Aroused
Ambivalent	Aggressive	Apathetic	Brave
Fascinated	Angry	Committed	Energetic
Interested	Anxious	Despairing	Exhausted
Intrigued	Aroused	Downhearted	Exhilarated
Perplexed	Bitter	Enlightened	Famished
Puzzled	Calm	Fearful	Fatigued
Surprised	Disappointed	Guilty	Hot
Uninterested	Downcast	Hopeful	Hurt
Vexed	Frightened	Peaceful	Invigorated
Worried	Joyful	Whole	Restless
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

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Worksheet: Understanding Feelings & Emotions

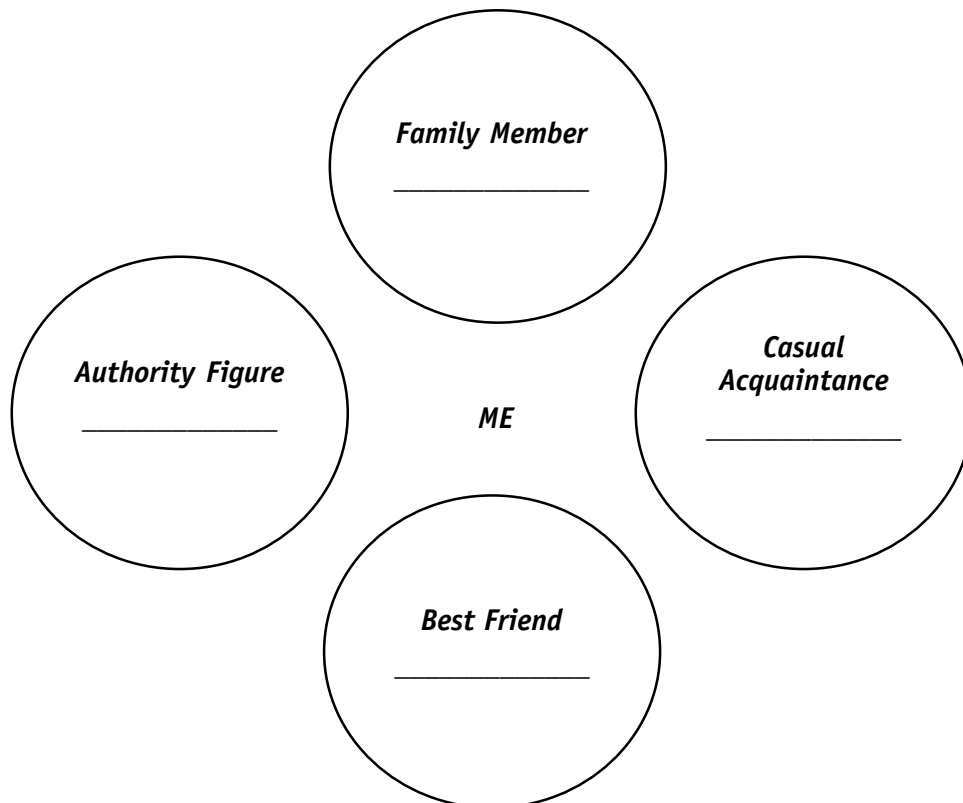
Name: _____ Date: _____

Partner: _____

1. We often have recurring feelings with different people.

Do a simple sociogram to name and claim feelings you typically have with different kinds of people in your life. Write down the first name of these people in their “circles.”

2. Use the feeling words in our list. Try to pick at least two feelings from each column that you experience pretty regularly with these people. Write the feeling words down within that person’s circle.



3. Reflect and share with a partner the range of feelings you experience with different people in your life.