

Reflection Questions: Experiencing Your Feelings

The seven primary emotions are love, joy, fear, sadness, anger, shame (or disgust), and surprise (or excitement). Love and joy are usually seen as positive feelings, while fear, sadness, anger and shame are experienced as negative; surprise or excitement is neutral—it could be experienced as positive or negative. In the practice of mindfulness, we try to let go of judging our emotions as good or bad and simply try to notice them without pushing them away or clinging on to them.

- 1) How good are you at noticing your emotional states? What clues you in to the fact that you are feeling one way or another? Do you have a good emotional vocabulary? Where did you learn this?
- 2) How easy is it for you to *tolerate* your feelings? Are there some emotions that are easier for you to tolerate than others? Which ones?
- 3) How did your use of substances impact your ability to notice your feelings? What role have substances played in tolerating feelings?
- 4) Now that you are not using substances, what do you notice about your experience of emotions?

Three Ways to Respond to Feelings

1. A Nurturing Response

- Accurately acknowledges and names the feeling
- Accurately identifies the stimulus for the feeling
- Does not judge the suitability of the feeling (“oh, you shouldn’t feel that way...”)
- Provides a healthy way of expressing the feeling (one that does not injure self or others, one that does not place blame for the feeling or responsibility for the feeling on another)
- Encourages the person having the feeling to experience and understand their feelings
- Communicates that the person having the feeling is *capable of managing the feeling in a constructive way*.

2. A Neglectful Response

- Denies the presence of the feeling
- Minimizes the presence of the feeling
- Dismisses the importance of the feeling
- Fails to respond to the feeling
- Implies that the person having the feeling (or those around her) is incapable of managing it constructively

3. A Hurtful Response

- Criticizes the person having the feeling
- Attacks the person having the feeling
- Punishes the person having the feeling
- Assumes that the feeling is an attack in itself