

Befriending your Emotions

To live more authentically, we need to be consciously aware of our own thoughts, emotions and bodies. Emotions carry important information that help to inform our actions. They tell us what we need in a given moment; when a boundary has been breached; what decisions to make; how to shape a life that reflects who we really are.

However, emotions can feel challenging or overwhelming to experience in our bodies, so we try to control or repress them. We may fear they'll take over, or we may not be ready to face the truth of what they're telling us. Yet, it takes huge energy to repress feelings and try to keep them at bay, and this can lead to great stress, frustration, outbursts, chronic physical symptoms or illnesses, unhealthy relationships or behaviors.

Often as children, all our feelings were not welcomed or met in a positive way by early caregivers, for many different reasons. Parents may not have had the capacity to hold our emotions, or been in a position to manage their own feelings. Some emotions may have been more welcome or acceptable than others, for different genders, or families.

Learning to recognise and allow our own feelings is an important part of becoming whole as a person, creating healthy relationships, and a vital foundation for authentic, satisfying, joyful living. This can be challenging in families, workplaces, cultures and societies that are uncomfortable with the truth of emotions. However:

~ Joy, sadness, happiness, despair, fear, anger, disgust, guilt, shame, jealousy, confusion, hope, surprise, contentment, appreciation, gratitude... when we can learn to *actually feel* these natural emotions as they arise, without judgment, acknowledge them, and allow them space to be in us, they *can* flow and pass.

When young children haven't yet been given any negative feedback or ideas about their feelings, and are supported to recognise them, they simply feel their feelings as they arise, often expressing great sadness one minute, and great joy the next. Full-spectrum, whole-human living! Emotions are a vital part of being human, that we deny. It's the stories, judgments, or evaluations our *minds* make about emotions, that keep them frozen in us, causing imbalances, and seeking release.

Working skillfully with emotions

Feeling your own feelings is not complicated - in theory - once you commit to the ongoing practice of staying open to it, and start to grow your capacity. It's 'simply' **allowing them space to be there, and to move and process as they need to**. Accepting that feelings are natural, gradually releasing all the mind's stories and judgments about them, and dropping down within, to sense them in your body.

Connecting more with your physical sensations, and inhabiting your own body more, is a vital part of this work. Anything that helps connect you more with your physical self can help you to feel your feelings, and vice versa – they can develop in tandem.

In particular, **feeling your own belly and legs, grounding in your lower body, and feeling connected to the Earth**, creates an important source of support, for you to explore and befriend your emotions. It makes it easier to feel safe, and avoid overwhelm.

You can **experiment with different embodiment practices**, and ways to start sensing and identifying your feelings, and allow them more space to flow. It's important to find what works best for you, and not to assume that what helps others will help you. Try out different ways to grow a deeper connection with what's happening in your body. And then weave this ongoing connection to yourself, into your day.

Be discerning and take care of yourself when trying out new practices. If you feel overwhelmed or dizzy for example, focus on whatever helps you to orient to your surroundings, and stay grounded, first, before exploring the feelings.

Working with someone in a trusted, professional healing relationship, can also offer an important container for emotions to be processed and emotional capacity to grow, safely. This is especially important if you feel dissociated or very overwhelmed, and have experienced developmental traumas (which many of us have, without realizing it).

Finally, it's important in this work is to remember to **practice radical self-compassion**. Remember you're dealing with your early developmental history, and your inner child. No matter what is going on, how good or bad you feel, in each moment there is an opportunity to soften towards yourself and with kindness, as you would be with a dear friend. That's where real change and growth can happen.

Some practices & resources to check out:

In this video I describe '**How our Emotional capacity gets undermined in childhood**' - <https://youtu.be/1RJ4Ose4dyw>

And here is the follow-up video I recorded, '**Befriending your Emotions: How to start feeling your feelings, so they can guide your life**' - <https://youtu.be/G-dBSfiyjpQ>

~~~

**Irene Lyon** has produced an extensive library of video & blog resources on **embodiment and nervous system health**. She explains the science and practice in accessible, bite-sized chunks: [www.irenelyon.com](http://www.irenelyon.com)

Article: <https://irenelyon.com/2019/01/15/9-common-human-experiences-that-can-be-traumatic-but-are-often-seen-as-not/>

**Karla McClaren** – download the '**Emotional Vocabulary**' pdf from her site / check out her books and resources: <https://karlamclaren.com/>

**Rachelle Lamb** – download the '**Needs and Feelings list**' pdf from her site, and other resources: <https://www.rachellelamb.com/free-tools>

'**Feel ~ Kiss ~ Flow**' practice:

**Chameli Ardagh**, of Awakening Women institute, offers a beautiful practice to create space for meeting your emotions in the body, away from associated thoughts or stories, when they are ready to flow. She explains the 'Feel, Kiss, Flow' practice here (2 min):

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u\\_DpzLwq49Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_DpzLwq49Y)

**Feel** it as a sensation in your body

**Kiss** it gently with your breath, from the inside

Allows it to be there, gives it more space to **flow**

**Tara Brach**'s '**RAIN**' of self-compassion, or 'four steps to stop being so hard on ourselves.' A simple but powerful practice for befriending yourself, when you need it most (<https://www.tarabrach.com/>). She outlines her own journey with it here:

<https://www.mindful.org/tara-brach-rain-mindfulness-practice/>

**Recognize** what is going on;

**Allow** the experience to be there, just as it is;

**Investigate** with kindness;

**Natural awareness**, which comes from not identifying with the experience.

**Guy Winch** offers some ways to practice '**emotional first aid**' in his article & Ted talk:

<https://ideas.ted.com/7-ways-to-practice-emotional-first-aid/>

[https://www.ted.com/talks/guy\\_winch\\_the\\_case\\_for\\_emotional\\_hygiene/up-next](https://www.ted.com/talks/guy_winch_the_case_for_emotional_hygiene/up-next)

**Kristen Neff**'s resources, research and practices on **self-compassion**:

<http://self-compassion.org/category/exercises/#exercises>

<http://self-compassion.org/the-three-elements-of-self-compassion-2/>

"To allow an unpleasant emotion to pass in its own time, move your attention from your thoughts and onto the physical sensation that accompanies the emotion. The physical sensation will fade and the emotion with it, if you don't keep it alive with your thoughts."

~ Padraig O'Morain

"According to the thinking self, negative emotions are giant, dangerous demons. However, the observing [mindful] self reveals them for what they are: relatively small and harmless (even if they're ugly)."

~ Russ Harris