



## **TO FEEL OR NOT TO FEEL!**

**By Yvonne Thomas, Ph.D.**

We as human beings are gifted with the ability to think AND feel; however, for a variety of reasons, many people do not recognize, understand, and/or express their feelings. Across the world, males are still more socialized to NOT feel as compared to their female counterparts. Also, if a male or female person grew up in a home where feelings were discouraged and rarely displayed by one or both parents, he or she will probably be unfamiliar and uncomfortable with identifying one's own feelings and being able to express them. Conversely, if a person was raised in a home where feelings were too big and intense (i.e., having a rageful or overly-dramatic parent), he or she may be scared of feelings in general and repress oneself. In addition, an individual may be uncomfortable with and fearful of feelings due to the responses one typically received for vocalizing one's emotions while growing up (i.e., a person may have been ignored, criticized, or put down by one's parent/s and/or sibling/s).

Furthermore, misperceptions about feelings can make people apprehensive about emotions in general. Many people believe that feeling any emotion is weak and makes them vulnerable to getting hurt and/or mistreated. In reality, those individuals who feel their feelings are actually the HEALTHIER, EMOTIONALLY STRONGER people who are courageous and resilient enough to deal with their feelings. Recognizing, understanding, and expressing one's feelings are all actually very EMPOWERING, since feelings help one know oneself better, and, as a result, help a person gain more control in his or her life.

There are many SIGNIFICANT consequences of not feeling and/or expressing one's emotions. Firstly, the person will not be functioning with all parts of oneself involved; instead, there will be what I call a "head/heart disconnection," whereby the person will not be able to make a unified decision utilizing BOTH his or her logical and emotional sides. Also, since one's feelings can be used as "reference tools" or a "compass" to guide a person, not being able to recognize and/or express one's feelings can hinder a person in knowing exactly what he or she needs, likes, and wants in his or her life. Another consequence to not being able to know and/or express one's emotions is that a person will probably have some trouble EMPATHIZING with others, since one most likely will be unable to understand and relate to the feelings of another person. As a result, that person may not have any real close, deep relationships and connections with others.

There are several things one can try to unblock one's discomfort and inexperience related to recognizing, understanding, and vocalizing one's feelings. Each day, a person can do some deep breathing with his or her eyes closed for at least five minutes to relax oneself. Then, while continuing to breathe deeply, the person can ask him or herself WHAT feelings he or she is having and WHY one is having those feelings to begin with (also for around five minutes). Next, the person can write down a list of this information, so that one can get more experience and feel more comfortable giving oneself the permission to have emotions, to separate out different emotions from each other, and to literally FEEL ONE'S FEELINGS (hopefully over extended periods of time as one gets more practiced and comfortable with this exercise). Also, a person can try to consciously inject more emotion into his or her conversations with others AND be aware of others' emotions with the intention of trying to relate to and understand the other person's feelings so that a higher-quality connection can occur. However, if a person is still struggling to identify, understand, and/or express one's feelings, working with a Psychologist who specializes in this area could be very beneficial.

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