

EMOTIONS 101

BUILDING SKILLS
FOR EMOTIONAL CONNECTION



BY MELISSA HAAS



Melissa Haas, MAMFT, LAPC

Melissa Haas serves as a counseling associate and the Director of Restoration Groups at HopeQuest, as well as a counselor at First Baptist Woodstock's counseling center.

Melissa earned her master's degree in marriage and family therapy and is currently working toward becoming a licensed professional counselor and marriage therapist. Passionate about spiritual community, emotionally healthy marriages, and intimacy with God, Melissa regularly facilitates small groups and teaches and speaks on these topics in order to help the Body of Christ grow relationally with God and each other.

Melissa and her husband Troy have been married for twenty-five years and have three children. The family resides in Woodstock, Georgia, a suburb north of Atlanta.

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CHAPTER ONE

How are you feeling today?

Does it drive you crazy when I ask you that?

I remember my first counseling and group sessions. There, prominently displayed on the wall was this thing called *"The Feeling Wheel."* And, of course, just like I'd seen once in a cheesy counseling scene on TV, somewhere in the beginning of every session was that same question for me.

"Well, how are you feeling today?"

The first time I tried to respectfully answer the question. The second time I rolled my eyes. The third time, I sighed audibly. What could identifying and naming my feelings possibly do to help my situation? Wasn't it obvious how I was feeling? I mean, how would you feel if your life was so out of control that you ended up in counseling?

The problem was that over the years I had worked hard to escape from feelings — especially the negative ones. Somehow I had come to believe that feelings like anger, fear, and sadness were bad public relations for God. That if I was feeling anything other than joy and peace, then somehow I was failing in my Christian life. I had this huge fear of failure — of not measuring up — so I worked hard to distance myself from those feelings—reading my Bible, working hard, helping others, praying. Of course, there were the not-so-spiritual ways of avoiding my painful emotions as well, like watching TV, reading novels, and fantasizing about everything from a perfect house

to a perfect man. Many of those novels and fantasies were not G-rated, and I had a lot of shame about that. Somehow my sexuality had gotten tangled up in escaping emotions that I didn't want to feel. So I constantly lived in this place of trying hard to avoid painful emotions so that I could *"let my light so shine"* for God and ending up behaving in ways that actually hurt Him.

Then things became really tricky. I got married. Now I had both mine and my husband's negative emotions to deal with and manage. I won't tell you the whole sad story, but let's just say that it didn't go well – which is why I ended up in a counselor's office.

My counselor, fortunately, was very determined. She listened carefully as I talked, pointing out feelings that were hiding behind my words. Gradually, I began to acknowledge my feelings, to learn how to identify and express them to myself, God, and others. I learned to give myself grace for being human. (After all, God does.) And when I did, I discovered something truly amazing. Feelings – even the painful ones – are a gift from God.

God is a God who feels. He created us to feel, and it is our capacity to feel that allows us to relate to Him and others. If we are not feeling, we are not relating. And if we are not relating, there is no hope for healing. Feelings are the tools God gives us to show us when something is wrong and when things are okay. If I acknowledge painful feelings, then I can deal with the problem that is causing them. If I escape from my feelings, then I won't have healthy relationships with myself, God, or others. And without healthy relationships, I will become isolated and vulnerable to a host of problems and sinful behaviors – which, by the way, has been the enemy's plan for me all along.

But God has a better plan for my life... and yours.

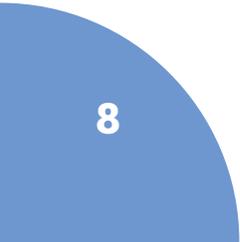
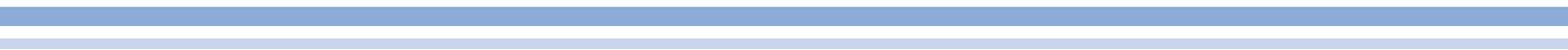
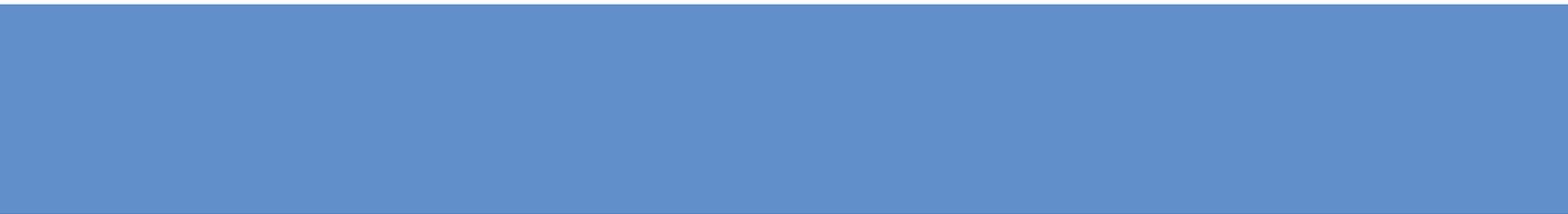
I'm not sure where you are today – if being disconnected from your feelings has resulted in behavior that has hurt you and others or if you have so many emotions swirling in your heart that life seems overwhelming. Whatever is happening that has brought you to a place of asking for help, know that learning to identify and express your feelings is the first step toward healing.

So, how are you feeling today?

If you are having trouble identifying your emotions, don't worry. This booklet is all about helping you recognize, identify, and express your emotional experiences in ways that create opportunity for healing and change – both in your life and in your relationships.

Ready to get started?

Probably not – but let's dive in anyway.



CHAPTER TWO

Have you ever stopped to think about why you do things?

I feel hungry, so I head to the fridge or my favorite place to eat.

I feel bored, so I turn on the TV and start flipping through the channels.

I feel anxious, so I take a shot of liquid courage or make a list to get some relief.

I feel lonely, so I fantasize about the perfect relationship or look at porn.

I feel afraid, so I lie or spin the truth about my actions.

Your turn to try one.

I feel overwhelmed, so I _____

Emotions are the fuel that drive our actions. So if we are going to have any chance of changing unhealthy or hurtful behaviors, we have to pay attention to our feelings.

Many of us – especially those of us who have been impacted by addiction – are disconnected from our emotions. We have feelings and they are fueling what we do, but we are completely unaware of them or the way that they are motivating our behaviors. Instead, we just fly through life blindly, reacting to people and circumstances without any thought of what's going on inside of us.

And then we wonder how life gets so unmanageable.

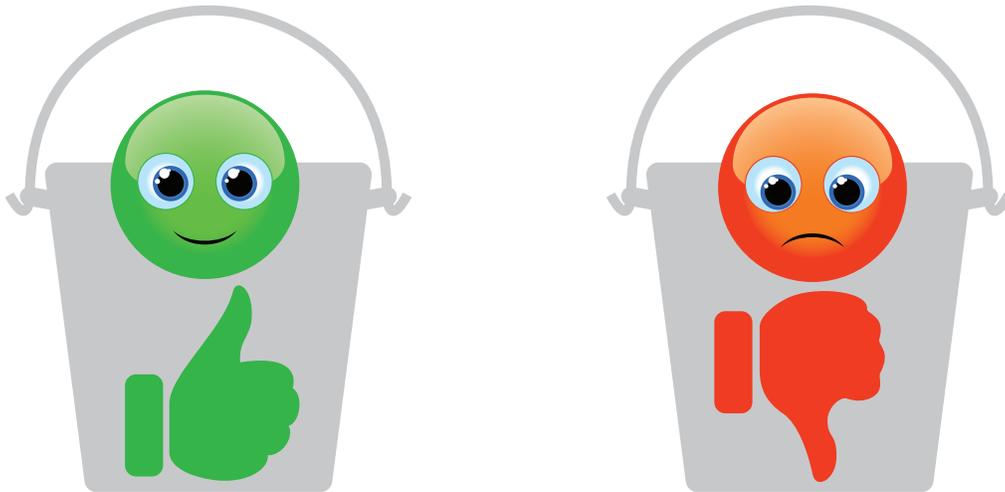
So, the first step in reclaiming your life is to re-connect with your emotions. In recovery work, we call this emotional awareness.

Now, for some of us, this can be a little tricky because we don't know what to call the emotion we are experiencing. We were probably never taught feeling words or how to communicate with them. We never became fluent in the language of Emotion. Sure, we may have picked up a few words here and there, but talking about our feelings is like trying to have a conversation in Spanish when the only Spanish words we know are taco, enchilada, and burrito.

Learning a new language is challenging, but it's not impossible. Let's start with some basic ideas about emotion.

All emotions can be categorized into two big buckets: emotions we generally enjoy feeling and emotions we would rather not experience – ever.

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In the “thumbs up” bucket we have emotions like joy, peace, and confidence, and in the “thumbs down” bucket we have emotions such as sadness, anger, and fear.

Sometimes we refer to these as positive emotions and negative emotions, but the truth is that all emotions serve a useful purpose, even if some of them are very uncomfortable to experience.

Emotions like joy and peace tell us that all is well. We can take a deep breath, relax, and enjoy the moment. Emotions like fear and anger tell us that something is wrong. There is some kind of danger, and we need to take action in order to protect ourselves or someone we love.

Of course, there are lots of different words to describe the intensity of various emotions. Let’s take *FEAR*, for example. On one end of the fear spectrum, I might feel *anxious*, and on the other end, I could feel *terrified*. Somewhere in between – like *afraid* – is also an option.

(ANXIOUS)------(AFRAID)------(TERRIFIED)

You try one with the emotion of *ANGER*. On the lower end of the anger spectrum, you might feel *annoyed*. What are words you could choose to describe a moderate level of anger and really intense anger?

(*ANNOYED*)----- (_____)----- (_____)

So what words did you choose?

Frustrated and Furious? Irritated and Mad? When it comes to emotion, there is usually more than one answer that fits.

When we are learning to recognize and identify our feelings – a.k.a. emotional awareness – we begin by thinking about the general bucket it goes into. Is this an emotion I am enjoying feeling or would I rather it went away? That gives us a clue as to the broad category it falls into (Joy, Peace, Confidence or Fear, Anger, Sadness). From there we can choose a word that best fits the intensity of the emotion.

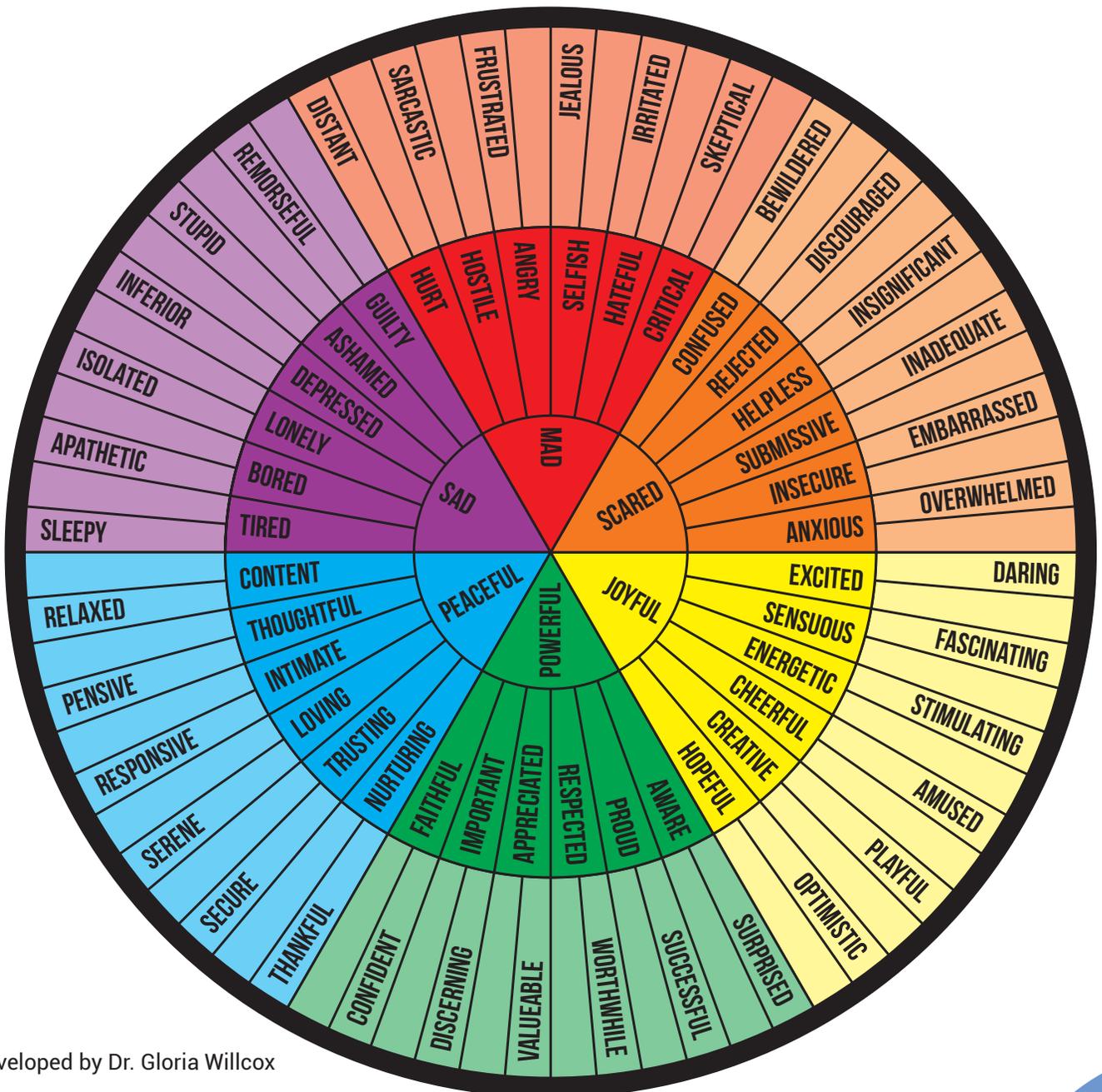
Easier said than done, you say? You're right. But don't give up yet.

There are so many words to describe our feelings that it can be overwhelming – especially for those of us who are just beginning to learn how to recognize and identify our emotions. To make it a little easier to begin learning a "*feeling word*" vocabulary, I've got the perfect tool for you.

I give you the infamous... (drum roll, please)

Feeling Wheel!

THE FEELING WHEEL



Developed by Dr. Gloria Willcox

P.O. Box 48363

St. Petersburg, FL 33743

If you are anything like me, learning to use the Feeling Wheel will initially cause a lot of emotions in the “thumbs down” bucket. I felt irritated, skeptical, frustrated, inadequate, anxious, embarrassed, discouraged, and generally overwhelmed.

And I told my counselor so. With an attitude.

My counselor just grinned and said, *“Great job! You just told me exactly how you were feeling. How do you feel about that?”*

(A word to the wise. Counselors are RELENTLESS in their pursuit of your feelings. You might as well just surrender to the process.)

Okay, so I need to take a moment to be honest, authentic and real. One of the reasons that the feeling of “inadequate” was coming up for me is because one of my greatest fears is failing. Growing up I came to believe that failure would result in rejection (lots of back story there that I won't share right now), so heading into an unfamiliar task like identifying emotions really stirred up anxiety for me. When I get anxious, it becomes really hard for me to focus. I'll read words several times and nothing gets in, or sometimes I can't remember the meaning of a word.

So just in case your story is similar to mine, you'll find the definitions of all of the feeling words on the following pages. If you see a word on the feeling wheel you don't understand, you can look up the definition and make sense of it. You can also ask your counselor to explain a word you don't know.

By the way, these aren't all the feeling words — if you can believe it. But, they are a good start to building your emotional vocabulary as you begin recognizing and identifying your feelings.

Take a few moments to read through the feeling words and their meanings. Try to remember a time when you felt that feeling. If you can't find a memory to match a feeling word, move on to the next one. This is your first exercise in practicing emotional awareness.

Feeling Wheel Definitions

SAD (*affected with or expressive of grief or unhappiness; downcast*)

- Sleepy – ready to fall asleep, lethargic, drowsy, sluggish
- Apathetic – having little or no interest or concern, not caring, indifferent
- Isolated – separated from others, alone, solitary
- Inferior – less valuable, lower ranking, sub-standard, lower quality
- Stupid – slow of mind, unable to learn
- Remorseful – great sadness and distress arising from guilt over past wrongs
- Tired – weary, fatigued
- Bored – uninterested in or weary of something, devoid of interest
- Lonely – sadness from being without others, solitary, sense of bleakness or desolation

- Depressed –a state of being sad (dejection); a psychoneurotic disorder marked by sadness, inactivity, difficulty in thinking, concentration and feelings of dejection
- Ashamed – feeling shame, guilt, disgraced, unworthy, or defective
- Guilty –feeling of responsibility or remorse for an offense, crime, or wrong—either real or imagined

MAD (*carried away by intense anger; furious*)

- Distant – reserved or aloof in personal relationships, cold
- Sarcastic – desire to use irony to degrade, cut, or inflict emotional pain
- Frustrated – blocked or discouraged in some endeavor, disappointed; feeling deep insecurity, discouragement, or dissatisfaction
- Jealous – suspecting rivalry or unfaithfulness; afraid to lose another's exclusive devotion or love
- Irritated – impatient, angry or displeased; annoyed
- Skeptical – having an attitude of doubt, distrustful
- Hurt – mental distress or anguish, suffering
- Hostile – overt antagonism or aggression, unfriendly toward
- Angry – strong feeling of displeasure, full of wrath, strong resentment
- Selfish – concerned excessively or exclusively with oneself; seeking or concentrating on one's own advantage, pleasure or well-being

- Hateful – intense hostility and aversion, extreme dislike, full of hate, malicious
- Critical – inclined to find fault with or judge severely and unfavorably

SCARED (*thrown into or living in a state of fear, fright or panic*)

- Bewildered – perplexed or confused
- Discouraged – lacking courage or confidence, disheartened
- Insignificant – lacking meaning or importance, inconsequential, unimportant, not worth considering
- Inadequate – insufficient, lacking in what is necessary or required
- Embarrassed – a state of self-conscious distress, ashamed, mortified
- Overwhelmed – overcome completely in mind or feeling, buried beneath something, overloaded
- Confused – unclear, uncertain, perplexed
- Rejected – unaccepted, rebuffed, discarded as useless or displeasing
- Helpless – lacking protection or support, defenseless, lacking strength or effectiveness, powerless
- Submissive – unresisting, humbly obedient, willing to yield oneself to the authority or will of another
- Insecure – not confident or sure, uncertain, not adequately guarded or sustained

- Anxious –extreme uneasiness of mind, overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by doubt concerning the nature of the threat, and by self-doubt about one's capacity to cope with it

JOYFUL (*a state of happiness evoked by well-being, success, good fortune or by the prospect of possessing one's desires; delight*)

- Daring – venturesome, boldness
- Fascinating – extremely interesting or charming
- Stimulating – exciting, arousing
- Amused – pleurably entertained or occupied, made to laugh
- Playful – full of play, light-hearted, humorous
- Optimistic –anticipating the best possible outcome, hopeful
- Excited – stirred emotionally, aroused
- Sensuous – attuned to and affected by the physical senses (taste, smell, sight, hearing, touch)
- Energetic – possessing or exhibiting an abundance of energy
- Cheerful – full of good spirits, happy
- Creative –imaginative skill, ability or power to create
- Hopeful – full of positive expectation, optimistic

POWERFUL (*having great power, prestige, or influence*)

- Surprised – struck with wonder or amazement
- Successful – sense of achievement or accomplishment
- Worthwhile – valuable, important, significant
- Valuable – having desirable or esteemed characteristics or qualities
- Discerning – showing good judgment or insight
- Confident – characterized by assurance and conviction, belief in one's ability or competence, certain
- Aware – having or showing realization, perception, or knowledge
- Proud – feeling of pleasure or satisfaction over an accomplishment; having or showing self-respect or self-esteem
- Respected – feeling esteemed, valued, honored
- Appreciated – feeling valued and noticed for one's actions
- Important – of significant worth or consequence; valuable
- Faithful – steadfast in affection or allegiance, loyal, trustworthy

PEACEFUL (*Untroubled by conflict, agitation or commotion; tranquil, quiet*)

- Thankful – aware of benefit received, grateful
- Secure – a sense of safety, something that can be depended upon not to fail, firmly established, free from anxiety

- Serene – calm, peaceful, tranquil, quiet
- Responsible – answerable or accountable, reliable or dependable
- Pensive – dreamily thoughtful
- Relaxed – being free of or relieved from tension or anxiety
- Nurturing – caring, fostering growth and health in others
- Trusting – feeling of safety and security based on the character, ability, strength, love, or truth of someone or something
- Loving – strong affection for another arising out of strong personal ties or kinship; unselfish loyal and benevolent concern for the good of another
- Intimate – belonging to or characterizing one's deepest nature; feeling of being emotionally, spiritually or physically connected to another in a close relationship
- Thoughtful – characterized by careful reasoned thinking, considerate, attentive.
- Content – satisfied with what one has

CHAPTER THREE

So you're beginning to recognize and identify your feelings. Now what? Now you get to express them to others.

How do you feel about that? Check all that apply.

- Anxious
- Skeptical
- Hostile
- Apathetic
- Thankful
- _____.

Okay, so usually when someone starts talking about expressing feelings, people start experiencing some predictable reactions. I've heard everything from *"You've got to be kidding me"* to *"No (bleeping) way!"*

The fact that most people are so resistant to expressing their feelings should be a clue about how terrified we all are about being rejected or

being seen as weak. It's also usually a huge sign that no one really knows us and that we are very, very alone.

Alone enough to find yourself in need of professional help.

Remember, without healthy relationships, we don't change and we don't heal. So, learning to express our feelings to others in ways that they can hear us and know us is the next step in our trek toward recovery.

First, we recognize and identify our feelings—EMOTIONAL AWARENESS.

Then, we share our feelings with others—EMOTIONAL INTIMACY.

It's important to know, though, that how we share our feelings can either promote emotional connection or sabotage it.

Let me illustrate.

Say that someone has asked you to do something and you forgot to do it. The other person is understandably frustrated and disappointed, so they say to you,

"You make me so angry! You don't respect me and you never listen to me. You can't even take care of a simple task. I feel like I can never count on you."

So what feelings are coming up for you as you read those words?

(Check all that apply):

- Defensive
- Angry
- Misunderstood
- Judged
- Ashamed
- Worthless
- Hopeless
- Inadequate
- Unloved
- _____

When we use “*you*” statements to communicate our feelings, the normal reaction other people have is to get defensive. They might get angry back, begin explaining what happened, minimize the problem, or tell the offended person that he/she is over-reacting. “*You*” statements trigger a person’s deepest fears – fear of failure, fear of abandonment, fear of rejection, fear of worthlessness, etc.

So, “*you*” statements are out. Let’s see what happens when we use “*I*” statements.

The same scenario again – you forgetting to do something – but the other person responds in the following way:

"I feel really frustrated and disappointed about you forgetting to do that because I was counting on you to help me. Sometimes I feel insecure about our relationship because I don't know if I'm important to you, and I feel really hurt about that because I care about you a lot."

As you read those sentences, what do you begin to feel?

(Check all that apply):

- Sad
- Guilty
- Regretful
- Remorseful
- _____

See the difference?

The first response causes defensiveness and a desire to move away from the other person, while the second response creates a desire to move toward the other person and repair the relationship.

The tool we use to communicate for connection and healing is called the **IFAB Statement – I feel...about...because...**

When we need to talk about our feelings, we always start with the words *"I feel,"* followed by a feeling word. Then we use a short phrase describing the situation and end our sentence with the reason we feel that way.

I feel _____ (Feeling Word)
about _____ (Situation)
because _____ (Reason)

Yes, it really is that simple.

One word of caution, however. Sometimes instead of using a feeling word, we say things like *"I feel **like**..."* or *"I feel **that**..."* These statements are really beliefs masquerading as feelings, and they will interfere with emotional connection.

For example, in the first example when the person said, *"I feel like I can never count on you,"* that was a **belief** – not a **feeling**. When someone says a belief about you (disguised by *"I feel like"* or *"I feel that"*), you will likely begin to feel defensive, frustrated, and hopeless. In that moment, there is nothing you can do or say to change that person's belief. The other person will see your defensiveness and feel dismissed or unheard. Both of you will feel hurt and disconnected, and emotional intimacy is weakened.

However, *"I feel insecure"* or *"I feel hurt"* are authentic feeling statements that you can hear and validate. You will likely feel regret that your actions have caused these feelings. You will probably express sorrow over the ways you have hurt the other person. As the other person hears you validating his/her feelings (*"I can understand why you would feel that way"*) and expressing regret (*"I'm so sorry I let you down"*), he/she feels heard and valued. Emotional intimacy is strengthened.

So, let's practice a few.

I feel _____ about being in counseling because _____

I feel _____ about being in counseling because _____

I feel _____ about being in counseling because _____

The reason I used the same “*about*” for each of the prompts is because we often have many feelings about something. You may feel inadequate about being in counseling because you could not handle your problems on your own. You may feel sad because you have hurt people or been hurt by people you love. You may feel anxious because you don’t know if counseling will result in any real change. You may feel grateful or hopeful about being in counseling because you have a safe place to get help.

Writing **IFABs** every day in a journal is a great way to practice recognizing and identifying your emotions – EMOTIONAL AWARENESS. You can also start using **IFAB** statements with your counselor or in your support group in order to practice sharing your feelings with other people – EMOTIONAL INTIMACY.

CHAPTER FOUR

So far we've talked about two crucial growth areas as it relates to our recovery.

Let's see if you've been paying attention.

The first way in which we must grow has to do with recognizing and identifying our feelings. This is known as _____.

The second step toward growth and healing is all about learning to share our feelings with others in a way which allows them to feel connected to us emotionally. We call this _____.

Were you able to fill in the blanks? Hopefully, you remembered that **EMOTIONAL AWARENESS** is the ability to recognize and identify feelings and **EMOTIONAL INTIMACY** is sharing our feelings with others so that we can be truly known in relationship.

There is one more critical area of growth we are aiming for on our recovery journey, and it is called *EMOTIONAL MATURITY*.

What do you think *EMOTIONAL MATURITY* means?

- I grow to a place that I no longer experience negative or challenging emotions like anger, fear, sadness, or shame.
- I learn how to focus on the facts rather than my feelings.
- I maintain control of my emotions – never allowing them to surface.
- All of these.
- None of these.
- _____.

Don't you hate questions like these? Here's a good **IFAB** about this one:

I feel frustrated about having "*all of these*" and "*none of these*" as choices because I can no longer use a process of elimination to figure out the answer.

The correct answer, in case you are wondering, is "*none of these.*"

As long as we are alive, we will experience the full range of emotions that God created us to feel. Like we have talked about before, all emotions serve a purpose in helping us navigate life safely. If we no longer felt fear, for example, we would be very vulnerable to unsafe people and dangerous situations. So, emotional maturity is not about reaching a place in our personal growth in which we no longer feel negative or challenging emotions.

What about focusing on facts instead of feelings? While it is true that we can confuse our feelings with reality and act on a feeling rather than what is best for us, if we stay in our heads, we will never grow in relationship with others. Remember, emotional awareness requires that we acknowledge, recognize, and identify our emotions. Once we are aware of what we are feeling, we are able to express our feelings to others and find connection through emotional intimacy. Healing and change always take place in the context of relationships. We can focus on the facts all day long and still choose to behave in ways that are hurtful to ourselves and others.

Maintaining control of our feelings – stuffing them, suppressing them, or dismissing them – might seem like the best way to handle life, but ultimately underlying emotions will leak out into our lives in different ways.

Think about it this way.

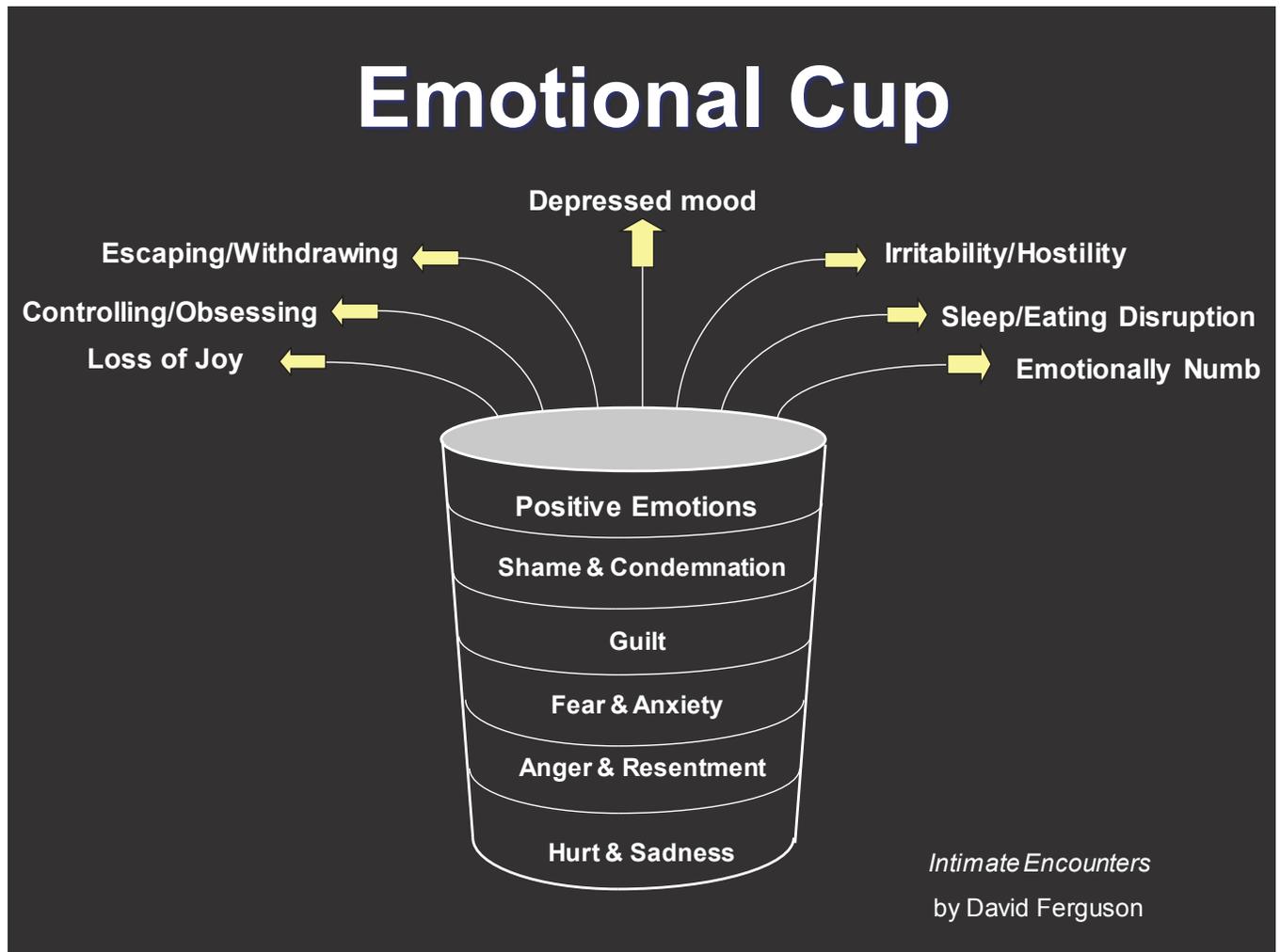
Our hearts are like a cup which has a limited emotional capacity. If our hearts are full of heavy emotions like hurt and sadness, anger and resentment, fear and anxiety, guilt and shame, there will be very little room left for emotions like peace, joy, and happiness.

Emotional Cup



Intimate Encounters
by David Ferguson

These unacknowledged and unexpressed emotions will inevitably begin to impact our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Stomach issues, headaches, sleep disorders, and fatigue may be present. Depression and anxiety disorders, irritability, and outbursts of anger may be evident. Addictions and compulsive behaviors may develop. Persistent feelings of shame and worthlessness may cause us to isolate from God and other people.



So what is EMOTIONAL MATURITY?

Emotional maturity has developed when I can:

- acknowledge, accept, and identify my feelings,
- share my feelings with others in ways that strengthen relational connection,
- empathize with others about their feelings, and
- choose appropriate and healthy behaviors, even when I am experiencing intense or painful emotions

In other words, when I am emotionally mature: I am aware of my emotions; I am connected to others in emotionally intimate relationships in which I know others and they know me; and my emotions no longer control my behaviors.

What does that look like?

Great question.

Let's say I have a perfectionistic boss who gives no grace for mistakes and generally does not have any empathy for what is going on in my life. I make an error on some paperwork, and the boss reams me out in front of all of my co-workers before storming back to his office and slamming the door.

You better believe I'm experiencing some pretty intense emotions in that moment.

I feel disrespected, embarrassed, inadequate, and very, very angry.

In the past I might have vented out loud with some name-calling or profanity. I may have thrown my pen and stomped out of the office. Then I would have probably had a ridiculously strong urge to find relief in some way. (These are usually unhealthy and sometimes sinful coping strategies – go get a drink, eat a favorite “*comfort food*,” surf the internet, fantasize about a better boss or a better job, play a game on my phone or computer, pop a pill, look at porn, go shopping, etc.)

What cravings or desires overtake you when you are experiencing painful emotions? What would you be tempted to do in this situation?

Now that I am growing in emotional maturity, my response is different. I take a walk down the hall to clear my head and think about what I'm feeling. I call one of my safe friends to talk through my feelings about what just happened, and I acknowledge how much I want to numb out those feelings in some way.

Then I try to put myself in my boss's shoes. What is going on in his life that makes him behave in this way? He may be over-reacting, but there might be something I don't know that is stressing him out even more than usual. Or he could just need counseling. Either way, right now he is experiencing his own challenging emotions, and I wonder if anyone really knows him or if his behaviors always isolate him from others. As angry as I am at the way he disrespected me, I feel sad for him. It can't be fun living with all the pressure he puts on himself to be perfect.

Next I think about how I want to handle the situation. Because I've expressed my feelings to my friend and thought about what it must be like in my boss's shoes, my emotions feel less intense, but I'm not sure I've cooled down enough to handle myself appropriately if I go talk to my boss. I decide to correct the mistake I made on the paperwork, finish my

other tasks for the day, and take some time to consider my options for addressing the hurtful way my boss reacted. Since I know that I am still vulnerable to old coping strategies because of the emotional trigger, I focus on a plan for healthy self-care after work. (Maybe I'll call a friend to keep me accountable, go to a support group, spend some time journaling about my feelings, or talk to my spouse about what happened.) While some of the emotional residue from the blow-up is still present, I am able to focus on my work and follow through with my plans the rest of the day.

Sound hard?

Emotional growth is a process. It will feel uncomfortable at first, but if you are intentional about recognizing and identifying your emotions and sharing them with others, you will grow in emotional maturity. There will come a day when your emotions no longer have the power to hijack your behaviors.

It's a goal worth working towards.

CHAPTER FIVE

Anger. Fear. Shame. These emotions can be particularly tricky to navigate in recovery, and I want to take some time to talk about each of them.

We'll start with anger.

What's your relationship with anger like? (Check all that apply)

- I am very comfortable with anger. I like the way I feel when I am angry – safe, in control, powerful.
- Sometimes I feel ashamed about my anger because of the way my words and actions have hurt others.
- Other people in my life have told me I get too intense or that I intimidate them when I'm angry.
- I feel very uncomfortable with anger and do not want to be seen as an angry person.
- I feel afraid when others are angry with me because I am scared of getting hurt or disappointing others.
- I work hard not to get angry because I think it is sinful or wrong to be mad.
- I feel confused about my relationship with anger because sometimes my anger seems to help me make good choices, and sometimes it seems to sabotage my progress.
- _____.

Anger is an emotion God gave us to enable us to move to protect ourselves or others from danger or harm when something hurtful or scary has happened. Anger is accompanied by a physical rush of adrenaline and other neurochemicals which impact us physiologically. Our senses are more acute, our muscles tense, preparing for action, and our facial expression and body language communicate to others to back off.

So, here is the important part to remember. Anger is always a secondary emotion that arises because of some kind of hurt or fear of being hurt.

It can be physical pain that triggers anger.

Have you ever hit your thumb with the hammer while trying to nail in a nail? The impulse to curse, throw the hammer, or hit something is almost reflexive. It's your body screaming, *"Do something! I'm hurt!"*

Emotional pain can also trigger anger.

Someone you believe is a friend deceives and manipulates you to get something from you. When you realize what has happened, you just want to hit something or someone. You pace the floor, cursing under your breath, furious with yourself for trusting and mad at your friend for using you. Your heart is shouting, *"I'm in pain! Do something about it!"*

And here is the tricky part. Because anger is always a secondary emotion meant to protect ourselves from hurt, it is often expressed in hurtful or intimidating ways to others. When others feel hurt or scared, they generally either try to calm us down, withdraw from us, become defensive, or get angry back. This can throw the relationship into a very negative cycle in which we are constantly reacting to each other's anger instead of

talking about the hurt and fears underneath it. Instead of fighting for emotional connection and intimacy, we end up fighting each other.

Anger can be expressed in many unhealthy and unhelpful ways (Black, 1996).

- Passive Aggressive** This is under-cover anger. On the outside you look okay, but because you don't express anger openly, your anger presents itself in subtle ways – i.e. *"accidentally"* doing something hurtful, being consistently late, saying you will do something and then never following through.
- Sarcasm** Speech designed to cut and hurt. This is another way we express anger indirectly.
- Verbal Abuse** Name calling, belittling, and saying intentionally cruel things to wound another – i.e. *"Can't you do anything right?"* or *"You stupid idiot!"*
- Blaming** Everyone but you is to blame for your problems. Blaming anger says, *"You make me so angry!"*
- Guerrilla Humor** Attacking someone verbally then smiling and saying something like, *"Can't you take a joke?"* or *"I was only kidding."*
- Retaliatory Anger** Acting in a way to get even with someone who has hurt you – i.e. giving someone the silent treatment, deliberately slighting or ignoring the other person, spending money on you that was meant for the relationship

Blind Rage

Intense anger that is usually acted on in some physical way – i.e. hitting someone, smashing an object

Isolation

Anger permeates your heart and clouds your perception. You withdraw from others altogether.

Depression

Anger turned inward. It is blind rage acted out towards yourself.

Anger as an Excuse

Secretly, you want to leave or act in a particular way, so you find a way to provoke a fight in order to leave or justify a wrong behavior.

See if you can identify the unhelpful expression of anger in the following examples.

_____ During an argument, I feel suddenly overwhelmed, so I leave the house and take off in my car.

_____ After hearing the news that I've been fired, I throw my cell phone into the wall and it shatters into a million pieces.

_____ *"You are a B_____!" I yell. "I must have been high or drunk when I said that I loved you. Go to hell."*

_____ *"You don't really love me. Why don't you just leave me and find someone better than me," I say as I slam the door behind me and leave the house to go to my favorite bar.*

_____ After a fight, I "accidentally" forget about something I promised I would do.

_____ I think about the money that we've been saving for a vacation and smirk. I book reservations for one at a resort, thinking, *"I'll show you how it feels to be alone."*

_____ *"I guess I should look on the bright side," I say. "At least you are spending our money on counseling instead of prostitutes."*

_____ I'm angry with my spouse as we head out to a social gathering. When we are with all of our friends talking about marriage, I say, *"My spouse gives me lots of sound advice—99% sound and 1% advice."* As everyone laughs, I look over and say *"What's the matter, babe? Can't you take a joke?"*

_____ I hate to get out of the bed in the mornings, and I feel like my life is over. I wish I could just die and not have to deal with any of this anymore.

_____ *"What do you mean stop yelling at you!"* I protest. *"You're the reason I'm angry! You deserve to be yelled at!"*

So how can we express anger in a way that is healthy and actually helpful in strengthening emotional intimacy?

Great question.

If we use the types of anger I have listed above as opposites of what we want to demonstrate in our relationships with others, then we can define helpful anger as:

- Honest** I use an **IFAB** statement to express my anger (*"I feel furious with you right now about your behavior because it was disrespectful and hurtful."*)
- Kind** I do not use cutting or sarcastic remarks.
- Responsible** I recognize that no one other than me has power over my emotions; others can't *"make"* me angry.
- Fair** I do not use humor to attack others (in public or in private).
- Contained** I don't get back at others or hurt others when I am angry. I trust God to deal with them.
- Controlled** I invite God to help me manage the expression of my anger.
- Interactive** I express my anger in safe relationships where it can be talked through and worked out.
- Expressed** I deal with my anger by acknowledging it and expressing it appropriately instead of stuffing it or obsessing over resentments toward others.
- Authentic** I express anger in order to repair relationships instead of to manipulate the emotions of others.

Let's be honest. Hanging onto healthy and helpful expressions of anger when we are triggered can be really challenging — especially if we have grown accustomed to letting our anger control and define our behaviors.

This is particularly true for those of us who have experienced physical or sexual abuse, emotional neglect, or trauma. Because of our past experiences we may be hyper-vigilant — always looking for danger, always distrustful of others — and we may be very sensitive about how others relate to us.

So, a co-worker walks past me and seems not to even care that I exist — no greeting, no eye-contact, no nothing. If feeling ignored, unvalued, and unimportant is a familiar hurt from my past, I may be very offended and find myself feeling increasingly angry. Once my anger is activated, old protective reactions start happening reflexively. (I don't even realize what I am doing.) I may decide to ignore the co-worker the rest of the day or cut off all communication forever. I might lash out verbally at the person in some way. I may tell others how rude the co-worker was to me in order to get validation and sympathy.

What I probably won't do once my old wounds are triggered is hit the pause button and take a moment to question my perception or put myself in my co-worker's shoes. My anger has clouded my ability to have empathy or to think about the situation in any other way than from my self-protective stance.

That's why anger is so tricky. If my emotional thermostat is not calibrated correctly because of past abuse or hurt, I may believe that others are out to get me or that they are intentionally hurting me when they are not.

So what about you? What are thinking and feeling about your anger right now?

- I have to admit that I have expressed my anger in unhealthy and unhelpful ways like _____.
- If I think about the hurt underneath my anger, it is usually about feeling _____.
- I have some past hurts that may be fueling some of the anger I experience in my relationship with others.
- I know my anger is a problem, but I don't know how to deal with my anger in healthy and helpful ways.
- _____.

If you realize that anger is one of the tricky emotions that has the potential to sabotage emotional intimacy with others and hijack your recovery, then it may be helpful for you to journal about your anger.

The first step is to acknowledge that you are angry about something. Write it in an **IFAB** statement: I feel _____ about _____ because _____.

Then, it might be helpful to note what the intensity of your anger is – say on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being annoyed and 10 being enraged. You can just write it in the margin “7/10” or “3/10,” so that you have a sense of how big your anger feels right now to you.

Paying attention to your intensity is a way to recalibrate your emotions, as you get feedback from others. When you tell others that your anger feels like a “5” and they say something like, “Really? I was experiencing you at an “8” or a “9,” it helps you to understand the impact you have on other people. Then you can work on expressing your anger in ways that strengthen emotional connection instead of overwhelming others.

Third, think about anger words that fit the intensity of what you are experiencing so that you can communicate effectively with your counselor and others in your support group. Here are a few words to consider:

Annoyed	Irritated	Aggravated	Frustrated	Angry	Mad
Hostile	Hateful	Irate	Furious	Enraged	

Next comes the hard part – identifying the hurt underneath the anger.

I can remember my counselor encouraging me to explore the feelings beneath my anger. At first, it was really hard. All I could feel was the anger. But with intentional practice, and some great help from my counselor and others in my support group, I began to recognize and acknowledge what was fueling my rage. I had lots of hurts to address:

Feeling alone and unprotected

Feeling disconnected from others, unknown and unseen

Feeling different from others, not belonging

Feeling rejected

Feeling undesired

Feeling betrayed

Feeling inadequate and not able to measure up

Some of you could also add to your list:

Feeling unsafe

Feeling shame and confusion about sexual abuse you experienced

Feeling dismissed, unimportant, unvalued

Feeling helpless or powerless

I want you to hear me say that it makes sense why we have been so angry. Of course, we're mad. And it's time to deal with the hurts in the only way that can bring healing, change, and growth.

We've got to face them – instead of trying to protect ourselves in unhealthy ways that destroy us and our relationships with the people that we love.

That's a scary endeavor, so now is as good a time as any to talk about fear.

CHAPTER SIX

What are you afraid of?

Snakes? Bugs? Closed in spaces? The dark?

Being alone? Being rejected? Feeling helpless? Failing? Losing?

We experience fear on a spectrum. On a scale from 1 to 10, we might go from feeling nervous about something – butterflies in our stomach – to feeling utterly terrified – peeing-your-pants kind of fear. Just like anger, fear can be a secondary emotion that kicks in when our senses tell us that we are in physical danger. Our bodies take over and we instinctively do one of three things: fight, flee, or freeze.

Also like anger, our fear indicator can get calibrated incorrectly when we have experienced life-threatening situations or trauma in the past. Sometimes a disorder called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can develop with symptoms like these: nightmares, flashbacks, avoidance of situations that remind us of the event, refusing to talk about what happened, beginning to distrust all people, isolating from others, feeling keyed up and jittery, and being hyper-vigilant for signs of danger.

It's understandable with these kinds of symptoms why up to 75% of people who have survived abuse or trauma report that they have a drinking or substance abuse problem (National Center for PTSD, 2016).

One of the things we need to be honest about with ourselves and with our counselor as we begin our recovery journey is the presence of some kind of trauma in our past that is causing us to want to numb out or find relief from the emotional pain we are experiencing. Our issues and struggles will not get better if we don't deal with the underlying causes.

So let's check in.

Is there an underlying traumatic event(s) that may be fueling your behaviors or problems in your relationships? (Check any that are true for you.)

- Yes, but I don't want to talk about it.
- Yes, but I don't buy into all of this psychobabble stuff. I don't think my problem has anything to do with my past experiences.
- No, nothing really bad has ever happened to me.
- Maybe. I'm not sure what would be considered "*traumatic*."
- Not sure. I can't remember anything traumatic that happened to me as an adult, but I don't have many memories of my childhood.
- _____.

I imagine some feelings have gotten stirred up for you thinking about past hurtful or scary experiences, so let's do a quick **IFAB** about what you are feeling right now in this moment.

Right now I feel _____

About thinking about past hurtful or scary experiences

Because _____

_____.

You might be feeling triggered right now, so hang in there, and let's talk this through.

If you are triggered, you may suddenly feel very angry – like so angry you want to hit something or throw this booklet. You may just have the urge to run, like you have to get out of the room and away from people. You might feel overwhelmed by a desire to drink or use or act out in some way. Your body may be physically responding to your memories – sweating, racing heartbeat, tightness in your chest, feeling like you are going to throw up. Or you may just feel yourself shutting down, like you are disconnecting from the world around you.

So, if one or all of those experiences is happening for you in this moment, put the booklet down and go talk to someone about what is going on inside of you right now. Call your counselor or a safe friend. Reach out to someone in your support group. No matter what your heart is telling you right now, it is okay to ask for help.

In terms of an emotional experience, crippling fear is the worst. There is probably nothing more distressing to a person than feeling completely helpless and powerless. But that is not the only kind of fear that can trip us up in recovery.

Anxiety is a huge trigger for unhealthy coping or addictive behavior.

What exactly is anxiety? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it in the following way:

Painful or apprehensive uneasiness of mind; an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by physiological signs (as sweating, tension, and increased pulse), by doubt concerning the reality and nature of the threat, and by self-doubt about one's capacity to cope with it.

So, anxiety has these four components:

- Feeling of uneasiness, agitation, or discomfort
- Some physiological sign (specific to each individual but can be things like sweating, increased heart rate, tightness in chest, butterflies in stomach, restless movement – pacing, moving foot, clicking a pen, etc.)
- Uncertainty about the reality or nature of the threat (I don't know exactly what I am dealing with – fear of the unknown)
- Self-doubt about my ability to cope or deal with the problem effectively (I don't know if I can do this)

We live in a world that is focused on performance – being the strongest, fastest, smartest, most beautiful, and most successful. Even the church, which is supposed to be a place of acceptance and grace, a safe community in which we can take a deep breath and relax and just be, is often instead another place we feel pressured to perform. *“Don’t do that,” “yes, do that,”* and *“you need to do more of that”* is what we hear.

Is it any wonder why so many people – including Christians – suffer from anxiety and depression?

So, let’s be honest. If we think about the times when we did something we knew was wrong, something that was against our personal values or beliefs, how often were those times triggered by some kind of anxiety?

See if you can make a more concrete connection.

Think about the last time you acted out or behaved in a way you regret. Now think about the circumstances before that event. What was going on inside of you at that time?

I felt _____ About _____ Because _____

I felt _____ About _____ Because _____

Did you use any “fear” words in your **IFAB** statements?

Nervous	Agitated	Anxious	Insecure	Inadequate	Confused
Scared	Worried	Helpless	Overwhelmed	Fearful	Afraid
Uneasy	Panicked	Apprehensive			

One of the critical growth areas for our recovery is to begin connecting the dots between our emotions and our behaviors. Since anxiety is such an uncomfortable emotion to experience, it can be pretty persuasive in motivating us to seek relief.

Learning to address our anxiety in healthy ways becomes a core component of a healthy lifestyle as we move ahead in recovery.

You’ll learn a ton of tools for dealing with anxiety through counseling – beginning, of course, with identifying it and expressing it to others in safe community.

Journaling is also a great way to start making the connections between your anxiety and your unwanted behaviors. You can write an **IFAB** statement choosing an appropriate word to match the intensity of your anxiety. You can rate your anxiety in your journal on a scale of 1 to 10 so that you and your counselor can have a sense of how big your anxiety is in a given moment. It may also be helpful to record what you want to do when you start experiencing anxiety.

Do you feel like you need to do something physical – walk, exercise, pace? Are you craving a drink or thinking about getting high? Are you wondering

if masturbating would take the edge off? Do you want to distract yourself in some way – watch TV, get busy with a chore, do something helpful for another person? Do you find yourself irritated and critical with others, even raging at them? Do you want to isolate yourself from people or just go to sleep?

Once you've acknowledged all of this to yourself, you can think about a different, more relational, way to deal with the anxiety.

Try an entry here for a start.

I feel _____ About _____ Because _____

On a scale of 1 to 10, the intensity of my feeling is about a(n) _____.

What I want to do right now is _____.

One thing I could do to manage my anxiety in a helpful way is _____

_____.

As we learn how to experience our emotions and express them to others without behaving in ways we later regret, we grow in our ability to tolerate discomfort – a huge factor in emotional maturity.

So that leaves us one last tricky emotion to address – the feeling of shame.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Shame is a complicated emotion. In a very healthy way we can feel ashamed of something we have done because our behavior doesn't match up with what we value or believe. We sense that there is a disconnect between who we are and what we do – an experience common to every human on the planet. And it is this same experience that helps us to realize how much we need a Savior to help us successfully navigate this thing called life. Without Him, we are doomed to fail at loving ourselves and loving others well.

On the other hand, shame can become an emotion infected by toxic beliefs about ourselves which results in an overwhelming sense of defectiveness and worthlessness. We feel that we are uniquely screwed up, and therefore there is no hope for change.

Sandra Wilson (2002) in her book *Released from Shame* says it this way:

“Shame leaves a person feeling uniquely and hopelessly flawed, and therefore different from and worth less than other human beings. Shame is different than guilt. Guilt tells me I made a mistake. Shame shouts that I am a mistake. If my behavior is wrong, I can correct it and change. If my very being is flawed, I am without hope for change” (p. 10).

Shame holds us captive by convincing us that the following beliefs are completely and utterly true about us (Carnes, 2001).

1. I am a bad, unworthy person.
2. If you really knew me, you wouldn't love or accept me.
3. I can't depend on others to meet my needs; I have to meet them myself.
4. _____ (fill in your addiction of choice) is my greatest need.

Okay, so right now you might be thinking, *"So what?"*

"So what if I believe those things? I mean my life basically proves I'm a screw up. Why do my beliefs about myself matter in my recovery? Don't I just need to stop doing what I've been doing?"

Here's the thing. Your beliefs about yourself are absolutely, totally, and inextricably tied to your recovery.

Why?

Because recovery is only successful when we believe that we are valuable — that we are worth loving.

Because recovery is only possible when we dare to believe that others love and accept us, even when they know everything about us.

Because recovery requires us to trust others enough to ask for help.

And because recovery means we no longer have the need to escape from ourselves, since our greatest needs have been met in relationships with God and others.

So, if we are going to experience lasting change, we must face our shame and find freedom from it.

Time for a check in.

Which of these statements describe what you believe about yourself?

(Check all that apply.)

- I am uniquely screwed up.
- I am basically a bad, unworthy person.
- If you really knew me, you wouldn't love or accept me.
- I can't trust others to meet my needs. I have to meet them myself.
- Feeling in control is my greatest need.
- Feeling loved and desired is my greatest need.
- _____ is my greatest need.

How do you feel about that?

I feel _____

About believing these things about myself

Because _____

_____.

If you are like me, you are probably feeling shame for having shame.

At least you are not alone in that.

Huh. Maybe we are not so uniquely screwed up after all.

CHAPTER EIGHT

I guess it is only fitting that we end this booklet on emotions by asking the same question we started with.

How are you feeling today? (Check all that apply.)

- Weary because it takes so much work for me to identify my feelings.
- Frustrated because it doesn't come naturally for me.
- Overwhelmed because I'm not used to experiencing my feelings.
- Anxious because I don't like sharing my feelings.
- Skeptical because I don't think knowing and expressing my feelings is going to change anything for me.
- Hopeful because this is the first time I've worked on my problems from the inside out.
- _____ because _____
_____.

We've learned a lot together. Let's see how much you remember, and feel free to look back to find the answers if you need to. (It's an open-book quiz.)

We started with the first goal of recovery – recognizing and identifying my feelings. This is known as E_____ A_____.

We then talked about the second step toward healing – sharing my feelings with others in a way that allows them to feel emotionally connected to me. This is called E_____ I_____.

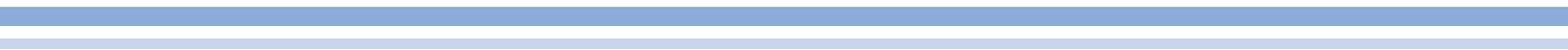
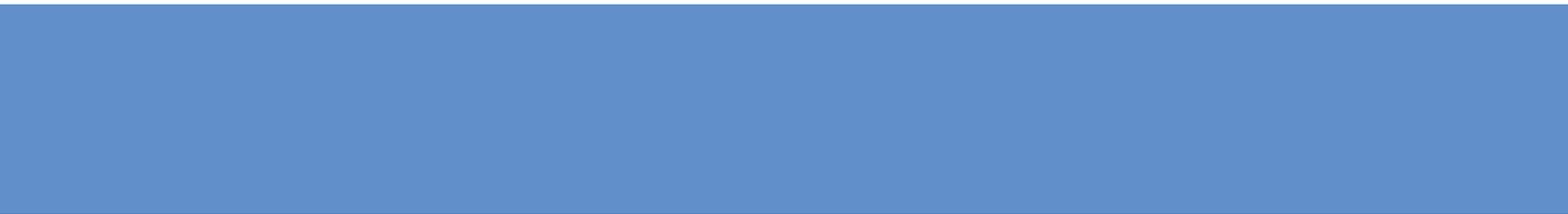
Next we covered the end goal when it comes to emotions. It has developed when I can acknowledge, accept, and identify my feelings, share my feelings with others in ways that strengthen relational connection, empathize with others about their feelings, and choose appropriate and healthy behaviors, even when I am experiencing intense or painful emotions. We call this E_____ M_____.

We then ended our time together by talking about three tricky emotions that can hijack our recovery process. These emotions are:

A _____

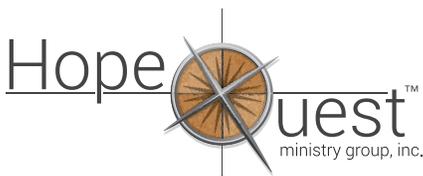
F _____

S _____





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