

How to Feel Your Feelings When You Were Never Really Taught

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Many of us never really learned how to feel our feelings. But we learned other things about emotions instead.

Maybe we learned that certain emotions were acceptable, while others were not. That is, we learned that happiness and excitement were fine, while anxiety, and even more so, anger were forbidden. And so, maybe you learned to swallow your rage, and shove it down further and further, deeper and deeper, to plaster a smile onto your face.

Maybe we learned that crying is for weak people who can't hold it together, and holding it together is a virtue we must uphold.

Maybe we learned that emotions are to be ignored, neglected, and glossed over. Maybe we learned that emotions are useless or downright dumb. Maybe we learned to judge and criticize ourselves for certain emotions.

We've likely learned many things about emotions—and maybe those things are steering us in the wrong direction, namely away from our emotions.

But the key in dealing with our feelings is, of course, to steer toward them. This is where creative activities come in. Writing and drawing are powerful tools to quietly and gently reconnect to ourselves, to listen, to acknowledge, and to explore.

As such, here are seven prompts to help you notice and name what you're feeling in a (hopefully) helpful and accessible way.

- Jot down the sensations you are feeling, and where you're feeling them. You might even draw an outline of yourself, and put stars by the various parts of your body.
- Draw the emotions you're experiencing as though they were a weather report.
- Write about what your emotion sounds, smells, tastes, and looks like.
- Close your eyes, take a few deep, gentle breaths, and write down what your emotion is trying to tell you. Maybe you literally ask your emotion: *What do you want me to know? What do you need me to hear?*
- Pick a crayon or marker that best represents the emotion you're feeling right now. Fill an entire page using that color. If you'd like, add other colors, as well.
- Draw a wave on a piece of paper. Remind yourself to let the emotion wash over you like a wave.

- Pretend you're a journalist gathering information for a story about your emotion. Jot down the various questions you need to know, which might be: What triggered this emotion? What does this emotion feel like? Does it feel like any other emotion you've recently experienced? Then write down your responses. Then maybe write that story. (It might only take 10 minutes.)

We're taught all kinds of lessons about emotions—explicitly and inadvertently. And sometimes we need to unlearn these lessons, because they undermine our ability to process our feelings. So, take some time to explore what you've been taught about emotions, what you think about “negative” emotions, and how you deal with emotions today.

Then the next time an emotion arises, feel it. Use a prompt that resonates with you from above. Or create your own prompt. Or simply start with: “I feel” and go from there.

The only requirement is that you're gentle with yourself.

Visiting uncharted territories like our emotions can be difficult, especially if you've never sailed before. But thankfully, sailing is a skill. So, keep going. Keep learning. Keep exploring.

This is how we care for ourselves. And this is how we care for others. Because if we can't sit with our own emotions, how can we sit with someone else's?

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