

## WHAT TO DO WITH OUR FEELINGS?

By Marlene and Bob Neufeld

We cannot live in this world without having feelings. Invariably, something happens which takes us out of a sense of well-being. The big question is what to do with our feelings.

### **Make them wrong, try not to feel them**

Many of us have been raised that certain feelings were wrong and we shouldn't feel them. In fact, we call some feelings "negative". Who among us has not heard "don't be afraid (or sad... or angry)"? Some of us (ourselves included) have even said that to our loved ones or children or friends. However, telling someone not to feel an emotion is like telling someone not to feel hungry or tired.

In fact, it back-fires. WHAT WE RESIST, PERSISTS! This quote is attributed to Carl Jung, the Swiss Psychiatrist. However, it has become a truism. When we are resisting something, we are actually giving it more energy. Our pushing against it causes us to focus on it. Try not thinking about something. Just the act of trying not to think about it, makes us think about it.

Suppression never works. Emotions are energy, and if we suppress energy, it will condense. And sooner or later that energy will explode. We can't get rid of it. It is there.

### **Get caught in the story of them, believe they are justified**

Our minds latch onto something as the cause of the feeling.... the boyfriend, the wife, the job, or even the weather. But, who knows what the real reason is? Our minds are made to make sense of our emotions. However, they are not always accurate.

We try to think our way out of our feelings by working out what's gone wrong. We ask ourselves questions: "Why do I **always** react this way?" "Why can't I handle things better?" or "Why does s/he **always** react this way?" "Why can't s/he handle things better?" We go round and round the same hamster wheel. This does exactly the opposite of resolving problems: our ability to solve problems actually deteriorates markedly.

When we think we know the cause of the problem, we attack ourselves or someone else. We point out our own or someone else's faults with blame and criticism, often convincing ourselves that it is justifiable. We may add the words "I feel..." to our thoughts believing that this makes them more real or true. In our office, we have frequently had people defend their stories with a fervent "But, that's what I feel!"

Sometimes, we are afraid that what is going on says that we are bad people. Then we need to defend against that, because no-one really wants to admit that they are a bad person.

## **Act them out**

Another thing we do is lash out. We have heard that is not good to suppress our feelings, and that it is important to express them. We may be angry and we express it in a way that is hurtful or we may be afraid and we act out the fight response (fight or flight) of fear.. We do a variety of behaviours ranging from physical abuse to using sarcasm, insulting, name calling, raising our voices, intimidating, pressuring, threatening, lying, accusing, comparing, and basically not taking responsibility for our behaviour.

## **Honour them, feel them and make friends with them**

So what can we do? “What we embrace, dissolves” (also attributed to Carl Jung). Here are some steps to make friends with feelings.

1. Let go of “because...” (we don’t really know why we are feeling a certain way, we just think we do).
2. Drop the story and focus our attention on the physical sensations of our feelings. Sooner or later our feelings will inevitably fade on their own because we are no longer feeding them with our thoughts.

In the process, we shift from feeling powerless in their presence to having viable ways to be in relationship to them or anything else that arises.

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