

DESCRIBING FEELINGS

SIGHT.....DOES YOUR FEELING HAVE A SHAPE? DOES YOUR FEELING HAVE A COLOR? DOES YOUR FEELING HAVE A FORM?

TEXTURE.....HOW DOES YOUR FEELING FEEL TO THE TOUCH? WHAT TEXTURE IS IT? ROUGH, SMOOTH, HOT, SOFT, HARD, WARM, COLD?

PHYSICAL.....WHERE IN YOUR BODY DO YOU FEEL YOUR FEELING? STOMACH? HEAD? NECK? BACK? SHOULDERS? ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY PARTS OF YOUR BODY THAT ACHE, FEEL TENSE OR UNCOMFORTABLE?

TEMPERATURE.....DOES YOUR FEELING FEEL HOT, WARM OR COLD? A SPECIFIC TEMPERATURE?

TASTE.....DOES YOUR FEELING HAVE A TASTE? FOOD-SWEET, BITTER, SOUR, SMOOTH, ROUGH, SOFT, HARD, SLIPPERY?

SOUND.....WHAT SOUND DOES YOUR FEELING HAVE? MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS? NOISY, LOUD, SOFT, HARSH, SQUEEKY, KNOCKING, CRACKING, SINGING?

SMELL.....DOES YOUR FEELING HAVE A SMELL? FOOD-YUM, SOUR, GOOD, FRESH, STINKS, PERFUMY (FLOWERS), SWEET?

AGE.....HOW OLD OR YOUNG DO YOU FEEL WHEN YOU EXPERIENCE THIS FEELING?

PAINT A WORD PICTURE TO HELP ANOTHER PERSON EXPERIENCE YOUR FEELING AS YOU EXPERIENCE IT.

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Directions for using the “Describing Feelings” handout.

This works well with ages 10 – adult. Younger children can use it in a more simplified format. Instead of providing a list of words to younger children, you can ask them to draw a face that shows their feeling or to just draw a picture of their feeling.

Ages 10-Adult directions: Put together a list of feeling words (adjectives) to hand out along with the “Describing Feelings” sheet. Explain to client(s) that you want them to use their five senses to describe a feeling they have experienced in the last twenty-four hours. If you are doing individual counseling, you ask the clients to describe the feeling to you. If you are doing group counseling, pair up group members to share their description. (If there are an odd number of group members, the leader can pair up with the odd person, or place the odd person in one of the pairs. Because this brings people to a more intimate level of sharing, I try to keep the participants in pairs as much as possible.) In either case, the person describing the feeling is prompted by the listener to describe each area on the handout. After describing an area, a prompt to tie the descriptor to a tangible object helps the listener to visualize what the describer is feeling. For example, if the feeling is jovial, the listener would ask the describer “does your feeling have a shape, a color, a form? And that shape is like what? And that color is like what? And that form is like?” They would proceed in this format through each area until the describer is confident that the listener understands their feeling.

At this point in a group situation, the pair would change roles and repeat the exercise for the other person. When they have completed their sharing, they signal to the group leader that they have completed the exercise. When all pairs have completed the exercise, the group processes their experience with the exercise. Many clients find that they are unable to describe their feeling in all the areas. This leads me to the next steps they can take.

After processing, I suggest methods for doing this exercise on an on-going basis. I recommend that clients start out by identifying a feeling each day and writing their responses to the descriptors in a journal. Once they feel comfortable with this step, I suggest they find a close friend (not their intimate partner) to practice sharing feelings. They need to let the friend know they are doing this and even provide them with the handout. After this process becomes comfortable, then they are ready to share with their partner and other family members. (By this time, they are very clear that feelings are their experience and someone else’s judgment is not valid.) Finally, I suggest that clients share their feelings with acquaintances and strangers.

This may seem odd since they are revealing themselves. Thus, I give them an example like the following. If I am talking to someone in a customer service position about a product problem, I might start the conversation by indicating that I am very disappointed with the product and would like to know what options I have in regards to the product. This approach is very uncommon and usually gets their attention. I continue to focus the conversation in this tone and usually end up with what I want the outcome to be. Modeling this usage helps group members to identify when and how to share feelings with others outside an intimate setting.