

## Feeling your feelings

Some of us hold strong beliefs about whether it's okay to feel or express negative emotions.

These beliefs can vary widely, and many people think it's unacceptable to acknowledge or show negative feelings.

This mindset can create real challenges. When we believe that certain emotions are "unacceptable," we might avoid them altogether. This avoidance makes it harder to truly understand ourselves and take care of our needs.

Often, these beliefs come from past experiences. For example, if someone grew up in an environment where showing sadness or frustration led to punishment or a lack of sympathy, they may have learned that it's better to suppress emotions altogether.

But you shouldn't blame anyone. Your parents, grandparents, siblings, and teachers were likely told the very same dysfunctional messages.

Another common belief is about whether emotions can change. Some people think that no matter what they do, they can't control how they feel. If you think your emotions are out of your hands, you're less likely to even try managing them. And because you don't practice regulating your emotions, it reinforces the idea that they're unchangeable.

On the other hand, if you believe emotions are manageable, you're more likely to take active steps to cope. Over time, these efforts prove to you that emotions ARE changeable, which strengthens that belief even further. This creates a positive cycle: the more you practice managing your feelings, the more confident you become in your ability to do so.

Addressing these underlying beliefs about emotions is a key part of improving emotional well-being. It helps people move from feeling stuck to building healthier, more empowered ways of coping.

Most women are not even aware of how often they swallow their emotions until they're asked to not do it anymore. So let's do some exercises to become more aware of your emotions and feelings.

**Exercise I.**

I want you to regularly check in with yourself.

What are you feeling now?

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What do you feel most often?

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Worried, sad, surprised, amused, tired, annoyed, loving, lonely, resentful, insecure, joyful, happy, hurt, helpless, jealous, glad, calm, excited, suspicious, angry, relieved, depleted, safe, comfortable, radiant, resentful, guarded, aroused, depressed?

**Several times a day check in with your feelings and say to yourself: I feel ....., and that's ok.**

It may feel silly and awkward at first, but this acknowledgement of your feelings will really help you quiet your self-critic, and help you stop suppressing your feelings with food, i.e. you'll stop eating your feelings. As an added bonus, it's easy to practice anywhere and anytime.

Don't judge your feelings. All emotions provide value to your life. Accept them and just let them be.

If you don't know what you feel use the Feelings Wheel, the Where We Feel Our Emotions and Emotion Meter infographics at the end of this workbook to identify your feelings.

**Exercise II.**

In this exercise, we will examine your basic assumptions about emotions: what emotions mean to you, what it means to express them, and what would happen if you allowed yourself to feel particular emotions. The purpose of this is to uncover any false or misleading beliefs that you have which may be having a negative impact on your eating habits.

For the purpose of this exercise, choose one particular difficult emotion to work with. Perhaps choose an emotional state you are struggling with at the moment.

First, write down the emotion you have chosen to work with.

Read through the below list of common false beliefs about emotions and see which resonate most with you.

Place a check mark next to those statements that ring true for you. Pay particular attention to those that sound familiar, as these may be thoughts that exist outside your awareness. Please add any personal beliefs that are not listed at the end. Then, write down your core beliefs about emotions under the emotion.

- If I lose control of my emotions in front of others, they will think less of me.
- I should be able to control my emotions.
- If I let myself feel this emotion, I will become overwhelmed by it.
- If I tell others how I feel, they will use it against me.
- If I tell others how I feel, they will think I am weak.
- Other people don't feel this way. There must be something wrong with me.
- Only an immature person would get so emotional.
- I should be able to cope with difficulties on my own without turning to others for support.
- To be acceptable to others, I must keep any difficulties or negative feelings to myself.
- This emotional state is not a normal response; I have to get rid of it.
- A happy person would not feel this way.
- That person responded differently than I did, therefore my emotional reaction is wrong.
- If I let myself feel this pain, it will kill me.
- Letting myself feel bad would mean falling to pieces, being a total mess, or wallowing in self-pity.
- If I show signs of weakness then others will reject me.
- Being an adult means not getting carried away by emotion; I'm supposed to be rational!
- Showing my emotions to others makes me look like a "drama queen."
- I'm stupid for feeling this way. I should just suck it up!
- I should not let myself give in to these feelings.
- Other:
- Other:

Now let's look at what happens as a consequence of holding these beliefs about emotions.

What impact do these beliefs have on how you feel, behave, and talk to yourself when faced with this emotion? Write down as many outcomes (positive and negative) as you can think of in the Consequences section after the beliefs.

Here is an example how to do this exercise:

EMOTION: anxiety

BELIEFS:

- If I let myself feel this emotion, I will become overwhelmed by it.
- If I tell others how I feel, they will use it against me.
- Other people don't feel this way. There must be something wrong with me.

CONSEQUENCES:

- I withdraw and isolate myself so that others don't find out how I feel prevents me from their emotional support.
- I am harsh and self-critical towards myself.
- I eat to comfort myself.

Now it's your turn!

This exercise can be done numerous times with different emotions, as we can hold different beliefs about different emotions. It may also be interesting to do the exercise with a positive emotion.

EMOTION:

BELIEFS:

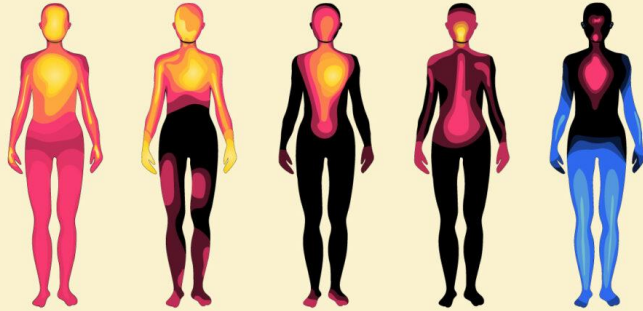
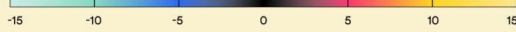
CONSEQUENCES:

- How was it to do this exercise?
- Looking at the consequences part of the exercise, how helpful is it for you to hold such beliefs about your emotions?
- What was easy or difficult about the exercise?
- What insights have you gained about your beliefs about emotions?

Feel free to share your thoughts in the Facebook group.



## WHEN WE FEEL EMOTIONS, WHERE DO THEY HAPPEN?



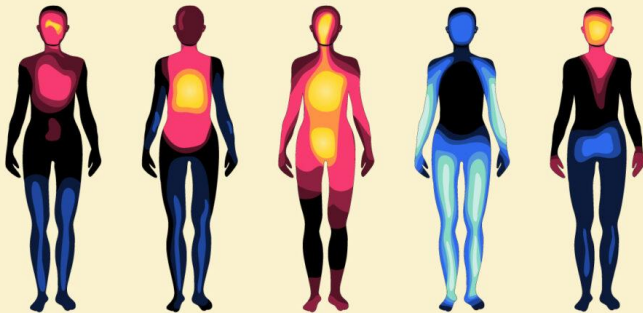
**HAPPINESS:** throughout the entire body

**ANGER:** upper half of the body and the arms; also some activation in the legs and feet

**FEAR:** upper half of the body, excluding the arms; also some activation in the feet

**DISGUST:** upper half of the body and the arms

**SADNESS:** the chest and head; decreased activation in the arms, legs, and feet



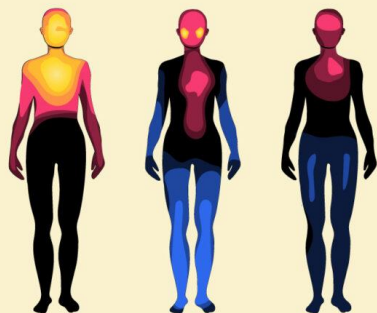
**SURPRISE:** the chest and head; decreased activation in the legs

**ANXIETY:** increased activation above the pelvis, excluding the arms; decreased activation in the arms, legs, and feet

**LOVE:** throughout the entire body, though not much in the legs

**DEPRESSION:** decreased activation in the lower body

**CONTEMPT:** the head and hands; decreased activation in the pelvic and leg areas



**PRIDE:** the torso, head, and arms

**SHAME:** the torso and head; decreased activation in the arms, legs, and feet

**ENVY:** the chest and head; decreased activation in the legs

**GREATIST**

**Appendix: The Emotion Meter**

